

Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

---

Theses and Dissertations

---

8-19-2015

## Community college transfer student identity, development and engagement: a constructivist grounded theory approach

Sheri Rodriguez

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Community College Education Administration Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you - share your thoughts on our feedback form.

---

### Recommended Citation

Rodriguez, Sheri, "Community college transfer student identity, development and engagement: a constructivist grounded theory approach" (2015). *Theses and Dissertations*. 369.

<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/369>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact [LibraryTheses@rowan.edu](mailto:LibraryTheses@rowan.edu).

COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENT  
IDENTITY, DEVELOPMENT, AND ENGAGEMENT:  
A CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

by

Sheri K. Rodriguez

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
Rowan University  
August 4, 2015

Dissertation Chair: Monica Reid Kerrigan, Ed.D.

© 2015 Sheri K. Rodriguez

## **Dedication**

*I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my husband, Shawn P. Rodriguez, who thought I could even when I didn't.*

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to my Dissertation Chair and Generalist, Dr. Monica Reid Kerrigan, for her help, guidance, and support during this research. She has served as a mentor and role model for me, and I look forward to taking the skills I have learned throughout this process and applying them to my future scholarly endeavors.

I would also like to thank my Methodologist, Dr. Ane Turner Johnson, who sparked my interest in and love for qualitative research. Her support and knowledge have been invaluable to me throughout this endeavor and helped shape my study.

In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Lucia Nurkowski, My Subject Matter Expert. Her expertise and perspectives regarding my topic contributed greatly to my research and to higher education overall.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Shawn P. Rodriguez, for his encouragement and patience throughout the years and with this research.

## **Abstract**

Sheri K. Rodriguez  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENT  
IDENTITY, DEVELOPMENT, AND ENGAGEMENT:  
A GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH  
2014-2015  
Monica Reid Kerrigan, Ed.D.  
Doctor of Education

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to explore community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions due to the lack of literature in these areas. Relational maps and interview questions were crafted as part of the research design to explore meaning making, painting a holistic picture of the population's experiences at four-year institutions and taking into account the intersections between identity, development, and engagement. Twenty five (n=25) participants were interviewed from two four-year institutions located on the eastern seaboard until data saturation was reached. Findings revealed three theories, suggesting that community college transfer students develop an alter ego, attempt to fit the entire four-year college experience in two years ("fitting four in two"), and use applicable engagement at their four-year institutions. These theories are the mechanisms that the population uses to cope with their feelings of conflict experienced at four-year institutions, leading to the desire for self-improvement over time. The results of this study are presented in two articles. Connections to the current literature, implications for policy, practice, and research, and the study's limitations are discussed throughout both articles.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	v
List of Figures .....	xiv
List of Tables .....	xv
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Problem Statement .....	1
Research Questions .....	3
Overarching Questions.....	3
Sub Questions .....	3
Study Rationale: The Need for Holistic Thinking .....	4
Significance of Study: Policy, Practice, and Research .....	5
Transfer Students and Background for Study: A Local Context .....	7
Scope of Study .....	8
A Grounded Theory Approach to Identity, Development, and Engagement .....	9
Parameters: Terms and Definitions.....	10
Limitations .....	11
Conclusion .....	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	14
Grounded Theory: The Constructivist Approach .....	14
Transfer Students and Community Colleges .....	15
The Evolution of Community Colleges and Their Missions .....	16
Transfer Initiatives and Processes.....	17
Today's Community College Students: Serving a Unique Population .....	18

## Table of Contents (Continued)

Challenges Prior to Transfer .....	20
Knowledge of Resources .....	21
Academic Preparation.....	21
Equity-Related Barriers .....	22
Institutional Selectivity .....	22
Major Selection and Vocational Choice .....	24
Challenges at Four-Year Institutions Upon Transfer.....	24
Acclimation to Four-Year Institutions.....	25
Complications During Transfer .....	25
Academic Unpreparedness and Remediation .....	26
Identity, Development, and Engagement: A Lack of Literature.....	27
A Theoretical Perspective .....	28
Transfer Student Identity .....	28
Transfer Student Development .....	30
Engagement Versus Disengagement of Transfer Students.....	32
Application of Current Theories .....	35
Intersections, Overlap, and Thinking Holistically .....	36
Overall Experiences and Meaning Making.....	37
Meaning Making and the Grounded Theory Approach.....	38
Conclusion .....	39
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	40
Role of the Researcher .....	40



**Table of Contents (Continued)**

Researcher Identity .....40

Previous Research.....43

Researcher Position and Paradigm.....43

    Constructivist/Interpretivist Paradigm .....44

        Constructivism and Meaning Making.....45

        The Three Assumptions of Constructivism and Personal Reflections.....45

        Biases, Assumptions, and Constructivism .....48

        Constructivism, Grounded Theory, and Meaning Making .....49

Purpose Statement and Research Questions .....50

    Purpose Statement.....50

    Research Questions .....51

    Overarching Questions.....51

    Sub Questions .....51

Methods Rationale .....52

    Strategy of Inquiry .....54

        A Note About Definitions.....55

Context of Study .....55

    Participants and Sampling.....57

    Participant Recruitment and Incentive.....58

    Data Saturation.....61

Data Collection .....61

    Graphic Elicitation as a Relational Map .....62

## Table of Contents (Continued)

Intensive Interview and Conversation .....	65
Instrumentation .....	68
Data Analysis .....	70
Theory Generation .....	75
Trustworthiness of Study .....	76
Confirmability .....	77
Dependability .....	78
Rigor .....	78
Transferability .....	79
Expectations: Power Relations, Researcher Control, and Timeline .....	80
Gatekeepers, Political Power, and Relationships .....	80
Researcher Control .....	82
Differences in Etic and Emic Perspective .....	83
Proposed Timeline .....	84
Ethical Considerations .....	84
Conclusion .....	86
Chapter 4: Answer to Research Questions .....	88
Overview of Data Collection and Analysis in Relation to Findings .....	88
Graphic Elicitation and Data Analysis .....	88
Intensive Interview .....	89
Data and Analysis .....	89
Research Journal, Analytic Memos, and Data Displays .....	91

## Table of Contents (Continued)

Answers to Research Questions.....	92
Overarching Questions.....	92
Sub Questions .....	95
Conclusion .....	99
Chapter 5: Grounded Theory Article .....	100
A Review of the Literature .....	102
CCTS Identity .....	104
CCTS Development .....	105
Engagement versus Disengagement of CCTSs.....	107
Application of Current Theories .....	108
Intersections, Overlaps, and Thinking Holistically.....	109
Overall Experiences and Meaning Making.....	110
Purpose of Study and Research Questions.....	111
Method .....	111
Rationale .....	111
Strategy of Inquiry .....	112
Procedures.....	113
Sampling .....	113
Setting and Participants.....	114
Recruitment and Incentive .....	115
Graphic Elicitation Activity .....	117
Intensive Interview.....	119

## Table of Contents (Continued)

Data Saturation.....	120
Journaling and Field Notes .....	121
Trustworthiness of Study .....	122
Data Analysis .....	123
Findings and Emerging Theories .....	124
Meaning Making: "A Better Person Coming Out Than Going In" .....	125
CCTS Identity: The "Alter Ego" .....	128
Strictly Business.....	129
The Neighborhood .....	129
The Alternate College Experience .....	130
Playing Nice in the Sandbox.....	133
CCTS Development: "Fitting 4 in 2" .....	134
Pathway Narrowing .....	135
Anxiety About the Future .....	138
"The Balancing Act" .....	139
"Kids" Versus Adults.....	140
The Native Advantage .....	141
CCTSs and "Applicable" Engagement .....	143
Major and Career Related Activities.....	144
Forming Coalitions .....	146
Natives as Mentors.....	148
"Putting Yourself Out There" .....	148

## Table of Contents (Continued)

Summary and Results .....	150
Discussion and Connection to Literature .....	150
Implications: Policy, Practice, and Research .....	153
Limitations .....	156
Conclusion .....	158
Chapter 6: Graphic Elicitation Article .....	159
Research Questions .....	161
Role of the Researcher and Perspective .....	163
Biases and Assumptions .....	163
Ethical Considerations .....	164
Using Graphic Elicitation in Grounded Theory Research .....	166
Graphic Elicitation as a Relational Map .....	166
Interview Questions .....	168
Method .....	168
Setting .....	168
Participants .....	169
Recruitment and Incentive .....	169
Data Collection .....	170
Data Analysis .....	174
Results .....	176
Meaning Making: "A Better Person Coming Out Than Going In" .....	176
Theory 1: "The Alter Ego" .....	179

## Table of Contents (Continued)

Theory 2: "Fitting 4 in 2" .....	182
Theory 3: "Applicable Engagement" .....	188
Limitations .....	191
Future Research .....	193
References.....	194
Appendix A: Recruitment Email to Students Detailing Study .....	205
Appendix B: Transfer Student Interview Protocol .....	207
Appendix C: Informed Consent.....	209
Appendix D: Dissertation Timeline.....	210

## List of Figures

Figure	Page
Figure 1. Graphic Elicitation Activity .....	63
Figure 2. Data Display: Identity, Development, and Engagement .....	75
Figure 3. CCTS Meaning Making Processes .....	93
Figure 4. Drew's Relational Map .....	118
Figure 5. Amy's Relational Map .....	132
Figure 6. Allison's Relational Map .....	136
Figure 7. Jonathan's Relational Map .....	138
Figure 8. Lana's Relational Map .....	143
Figure 9. Shelly's Relational Map .....	145
Figure 10. Mary's Relational Map .....	173
Figure 11. Oscar's Relational Map .....	178
Figure 12. Natalie's Relational Map .....	186

## List of Tables

Table	Page
Table 1. Research Questions Explored and Strategies Applied.....	69



## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Community college attendance is on the rise, especially for students looking to complete their first two years of general education requirements and then transfer to a four-year institution to complete a bachelor's degree (American Association of Community Colleges [AACCC], 2014a). This enrollment increase is due to factors such as rising four-year institution tuition rates, convenience of course delivery, and access to education for the general population (AACCC, 2014a). Today's community college students are a diverse group: 57% are women, 36% are first-generation, being the first in their family to attend college, 19% are Hispanic and 14% are African-American (AACCC, 2014b). This diversity feeds into the transfer student population at four-year institutions, creating a unique student body on college campuses.

### **Problem Statement**

The landscape of the four-year post-secondary institution is changing to include an increasing number of community college transfer students (Flaga, 2006; Handel, 2007; Laanan, 1996; Townsend, 2008). This group is different from traditional four-year students, for they are more ethnically diverse, tend to be first-generation college students, work either part-time or full-time, and are more likely to commute to campus (Chaves, 2006; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Silverman, Aliabadi, & Stiles, 2009). Community college students make up 47% of the total undergraduate population (Deil-Amen, 2011). One in five community college students transfer to a four-year institution (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012). Once at a four-year institution, 60% of those students persist and earn a bachelor's degree within a four-year timeframe (National

Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012). This is clearly an increase compared to the 23% of community college transfer students who earned a bachelor's degree within six years of attending a four-year institution back in 1995 (Peter & Cataldi, 2005). This number is expected to rise should America's College Promise, a proposal advocating to make the first two years of community college attendance free to students who meet certain conditions, is approved (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2015).

Despite this increase in the community college transfer student rate, services at four-year institutions are still geared toward native (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000), traditionally aged, college students, or those students who started at a four-year institution as freshmen and are therefore “native” to that college or university. This creates challenges, discrepancies, and inequities in services for community college transfer students at four-year institutions (Lipka, 2008). Bahr, Toth, Thirolf, and Massé (2013) write of this issue, "both the community college and the four-year institution share responsibility for the outcomes of community college transfer students" (p. 10). Four-year institutions need to start viewing transfer students as an integral part of four-year institutions, not just additional students, or separate entities, who enter four-year institutions with credits completed towards a bachelor's degree (Davies, 1999; Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2013; Lipka, 2008; Toblowsky & Cox, 2012).

Literature pertaining to the community college transfer student population addresses issues such as retention, academic achievement, equity, and graduation rates, with a gap in the theoretical literature pertaining to identity, development, and engagement. These three areas influence the college student experience and are evident in

the traditionally native college student literature (Schuh, Jones, Harper, & Associates, 2011; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whit, & Associates, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Investigating community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions will allow this population's unique voices and experiences to be heard. Looking beyond the issues already addressed in the transfer student literature will illuminate other ways they can be served. Moreover, filling this gap in the literature would provide further insight into this population's experiences, possibly giving way to further research in this area.

### **Research Questions**

In light of the lack of available literature regarding community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement, I posed the following overarching research questions and sub questions:

#### **Overarching Questions**

1. How does a community college transfer student make meaning of his or her identity, development, and engagement at a four-year institution?
2. What theory/theories will emerge from exploring community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement?

#### **Sub Questions**

1. How does a community college transfer student describe his or her identity after attending a four-year institution for one year?
2. How does a community college transfer student describe his or her development after attending a four-year institution for one year?

3. How does a community college transfer student engage with his or her four-year institution after attending a four-year institution for one year?
4. In what ways (if any) does a community college transfer student's engagement with his or her four-year institution after one year contribute to his or her college student development?
5. In what ways (if any) does a community college transfer student's development contribute to his or her identity after one year at a four-year institution?

### **Study Rationale: The Need for Holistic Thinking**

The aforementioned questions are worth studying due to a current lack of available literature regarding community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement. Looking at this group through these lenses can help those in higher education understand how to engage with them, how their identities are shaped as transfer students, and how they develop. Understanding this population can help them to be better served at four-year institutions. Transfer students experience these three areas differently from traditional college students while attending their respective community colleges (Bahr, 2010; Chaves, 2006; Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013; Ortiz, 1995). However, little literature exists indicating how they experience these areas at their four-year institutions.

This study investigated community college transfer students holistically through the intersecting lenses of identity, development, and engagement. These intersections serve as a way of thinking about college students, and how college lends itself to overall experiences with one's identity, development, and engagement. Baxter Magolda (2009) encourages those who interact with college students to construct "a holistic theoretical

perspective...rather than separate constructs" when it comes to understanding student thought processes (p. 621). She further suggests that "meaning making" can aid in exploring theoretical ideas pertaining to college students (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Such a shift toward thinking holistically about community college transfer student experiences, in relation to identity, development, and engagement, can aid in maintaining and/or increasing transfer student graduation rates at four-year institutions, as this population continues to evolve and have an ever-increasing presence at four-year institutions.

### **Significance of Study: Policy, Practice, and Research**

In addition to filling a gap in the literature, this study has significant implications for policy, practice, and research. According to Maxwell (2013) taking these areas into consideration when pursuing a study justifies one's research. Furthermore, these areas, and how they benefit various constituents involved, guided me in defending my research findings in subsequent chapters (Maxwell, 2013).

In terms of policy, this study's results directly benefit community college transfer students currently attending a four-year institution. It provides these students with an opportunity for their voices to be heard from the angle of their own identity, development, and engagement based on their experiences at four year institutions. Faculty, staff, and administration at these institutions can now have a better understanding of the experiences of this population, and in turn, design programs and activities that facilitate a smoother transition based on the results of this study.

Moreover, policy-driven initiatives can address equity issues that negatively impact community college transfer students. Community college transfer students tend to feel a lack of institutional ownership at four-year schools (Lipka, 2008). Perhaps policies

regarding scheduling, registration, and financial aid can be better tailored to address this population's needs. This study can help faculty and administrators in being mindful of transfer students as they implement programs and curriculum that impact all students at the institution.

Second, in regards to practice, new programs for transfer students can be introduced as a result of this study, and new ways to engage them with the four-year environment can be implemented since their development and identity would be understood. For example, one specific way this research could influence practice could be an overhaul of transfer student orientation programs at four-year institutions. Many orientation programs at these institutions tend to be freshman orientation programs repackaged for transfer students with minimal adjustments made (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Ortiz, 1995). The findings of this study could indicate it may be necessary to create specific orientation programs for transfer students. Since the identity, development, and engagement experiences of transfer students differ from native freshmen, orientation programs could be created to focus on the transition to the four year institution from a community college as opposed to a student entering college for the first time.

Finally, in terms of research, my approach to this qualitative study provides an opportunity to explore identity, development, and engagement using a research design consisting of semi-structured interviews and graphic elicitation techniques. This particular design is significant in itself and unique in its application to this particular topic. A review of the literature reveals that graphic elicitation activities have not been used to explore community college student transfer student experiences in identity,

development, and engagement. Such a holistic approach allows me to view this population through the lenses of these areas, understanding how they make meaning of their experiences at four-year institutions.

Furthermore, the results of this study will benefit researchers who could begin filling the gap in other facets of the transfer student literature in these three areas. Perhaps other studies using this design examining different populations could be conducted. For instance, the literature indicates that minority community college transfer student experience challenges in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Younger, 2009). Minority transfer students or transfer students pursuing these areas could be studied through the lenses of identity, development, engagement to further understand their experiences and needs (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Younger, 2009). Also, future research could explore other types of transfer students, including horizontal transfer students, or those who transfer from one four-year institution to another. Studies similar to this one that explore different subgroups within the transfer student population could facilitate higher education's overall understanding of community college transfer students.

### **Transfer Students and Background: A Local Context**

The two four-year institutions that were the focus of this study are located on the east coast and have large transfer student populations, predominantly made up of community college students. Transfer student rates at both of these institutions have steadily increased, as will be explained later in this chapter. However, we still know little about this population's college student identity, how they engage with the four-year institutional environment, and how they develop as college students. Exploring these

three areas further not only aid in maintaining and increasing graduation rates at these institutions, but also help those of us in higher education understand how to better serve this population and create an inclusive four-year environment.

### **Scope of Study**

The scope of this study explores identity, development, and engagement through the experiences of community college transfer students who attend one of two four-year public, suburban institutions located on the eastern seaboard. These experiences were investigated by focusing on these three areas, driven by the aforementioned research questions. Guided by a grounded theory approach, these three elements were examined through the lens of meaning making to paint a holistic picture of community college transfer student experiences.

The first institution, given the alias “Eastern Atlantic University” (EAU) is an institution with approximately 13,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The institution offers a combination of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs. According to the Carnegie Classifications (n.d.), EAU is categorized as a medium-sized, four-year public institution. EAU was selected for this study given that it serves a large number of transfer students on the mid-Atlantic seaboard. The institution enrolled approximately 1,800 transfer students in the 2013-2014 academic year, mostly from community colleges in the region.

The second institution where I conducted this study, given the alias “Coastal Plain University” (CPU), has approximately 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students, and enrolled about 1,000 transfer students in the 2013-2014 academic year. Like EAU, CPU



draws its transfer student pool from its surrounding community colleges. CPU is also designated as a medium sized, four-year public institution (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.).

Although there are many different classifications of transfer students according to the literature, my focus for this study was transfer students who transferred to a four-year institution from a community college, known as vertical transfer students (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007). Based on Carlan and Byxbe's (2000) definition of transfer students, participants in this study included students who attended two-year community colleges and then transferred to one of the aforementioned two four-year institutions with junior status, meaning they had earned at least 60 credits at their two-year institutions. For the purposes of theory generation, and to limit the scope of this study, students who participated were traditionally college aged, between 19 and 22 years old, and had spent at least two semesters (one academic year) at EAU or CPU. This timeframe provides students sufficient time to become entrenched in the four-year institution so they can fully speak to their experiences, but is still recent enough for them to reflect on their community college experiences. This sampling method limited the number of participants to be considered for this study given they were selected based on a specific set of criteria (Maxwell, 2013).

### **A Grounded Theory Approach to Identity, Development, and Engagement**

Overall, the lenses of identity, development, and engagement served as a mere guide to my research. My knowledge of these three areas provided insight into my research and contributed to the design of my instruments. Using the literature in this manner allowed data to emerge in the spirit of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

The grounded theory approach served as my framework and drove my research design for this study to answer my first two overarching research questions. This approach, or specifically what Charmaz (2006) refers to as the "constructivist" grounded theory approach, not only uniquely illuminated transfer student experiences, but also filled the gap in the literature pertaining to this population's identity, development, and engagement. While I explored the available historical and theoretical literature pertaining to transfer students as part of my literature review, I weaved my intention throughout the proceeding chapters to apply a grounded theory approach to this study. Introducing my research in this manner provided me the opportunity to acknowledge my familiarity with the literature in relation to my study while discussing my research design.

#### **Parameters: Terms and Definitions**

Typically, parameters, such as terms and definitions, are established early on in qualitative research so the study is situated in the appropriate context and research questions are thoroughly answered (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). While developing definitions for terms being used throughout a study is typically recommended (Fetterman, 2010; Rossman & Rallis, 2003), it should be noted that in the style of grounded theory, that definitions for identity, development, and engagement for this study were not fixed to take into account the flexible emergence of themes and categories as my research progressed. Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) assert that this type of openness leads to identifying additional gaps and prevents "superficial and random data collection" (p. 162). Also, many of the theories pertaining to college students in the areas of identity, development, and engagement have overlapping features. Understanding these areas in relation to my research design enabled me to capture all elements of transfer student

experiences within the three areas, preventing unanswered questions and ensuring credibility.

### **Limitations**

There were limitations to this qualitative study in terms of what areas and questions this study did not address and what my research was not designed to answer (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2008). First and as mentioned earlier, the scope of this study focused on traditionally aged community college transfer students and used grounded theory to build a theoretical foundation for future, more specific research. I focused solely on community college transfer students, not other groups of transfer students such as horizontal and swirling students (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education [CAS], 2012). Keeping this study focused on the rapidly growing group of community college transfer students allowed for specific and thorough theory generation.

Second, this study focused on identity, development, and engagement, and did not incorporate additional elements that are often part of conversations regarding transfer students, such as academic achievement, degree completion, and retention . These areas have already been repeatedly covered in the community college transfer student literature (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Melguizo, Kienzl, & Alfonso, 2011; Monaghan & Attewell, 2014; Scott-Clayton, 2011; Townsend, 2007). While some of these areas are briefly mentioned as they contributed to findings, they were not the focus of this study. These items could become part of a larger conversation for future studies.

Third, this study placed the student and their experiences at the center. It did not focus on university administration, politics, or institutional issues. If a student mentioned

anything related to the institution, I attempted to tie it back to the student's own experiences and how it related to his or her own engagement. These topics, though rarely mentioned, are addressed as part of implications regarding policy, practice, and research in terms of findings; this grounded theory study focused on emerging student theory.

Finally, to maintain the scope of this study, I did not address any race or gender-related issues regarding community college transfer students. Conversations regarding race and other community college transfer student demographics are discussed as part of the literature review. This study sought to understand traditionally aged community college transfer students' and their experiences at four-year institutions. While certainly intriguing, issues of equity surrounding this population are sufficiently covered in the literature whereas identity, development, and engagement are not (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Deil-Amen, 2011; Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008; Wassmer, Moore, & Shulock, 2004).

Although these limitations are specific to my study, an overall issue and limitation particular to qualitative research is that it cannot be “value-free”, with biases manifesting as part of the process that can be embedded throughout the study (Griffin, 2004). I acknowledged this particular limitation and worked to reduce it to the best of my ability. I maintained a reflective journal throughout the study. Consistent with Ahern (1999), bracketing my thoughts in this manner aided me in preparing for my research. However, I realize that I could not completely set aside my thoughts and experiences; hence my application of a constructivist grounded theory approach that is addressed in the forthcoming sections.

## **Conclusion**

Introducing this study, its rationale, and the need for change in how four-year institutions serve community college transfer students provides a solid foundation for a literature review. In the next chapter, I continue to introduce this study through a review of the literature and provide further background pertaining to the grounded theory approach and community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement. In Chapter 3, I discuss my methodology and provide details about my research paradigm, design, sampling approach, and ethical concerns regarding this study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

Given the lack of available literature pertaining to community college transfer students in the influential areas of college student identity, development, and engagement, I assert that this grounded theory study not only uniquely illuminated community college transfer student experiences, but also filled the gap in the literature pertaining to this population in these areas. While I intend explore the available literature pertaining to transfer students in this chapter, as mentioned earlier, I also incorporate my justification of applying a grounded theory approach to this study. Introducing my literature review in this manner provided me the opportunity to acknowledge my familiarity with these areas in relation to my study while introducing what Charmaz (2006) refers to as the "constructivist" grounded theory perspective.

#### **Grounded Theory: The Constructivist Approach**

The constructivist approach of grounded theory acknowledges that researchers cannot separate their familiarity of the literature and personal experiences from their studies (Charmaz, 2006). This is a variation from the original perspective of grounded theory, or the objectivist approach, which posits that researchers should conduct their empirical research with no knowledge of the topical area to develop a theoretical perspective solely based on the data (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Based on my own experiences with the transfer student population, my familiarity with the college student literature, and my previous research, I oriented myself and my study within the constructivist grounded theory approach. In this chapter, I provide a general overview of transfer students, their roots in the community colleges, the challenges they encounter at

two and four-year institutions as a unique group, and how they have evolved. I then review the available college student literature pertaining to identity, development, and engagement. I also identify overlaps within these three areas and further clarify the gaps in the literature in relation to transfer students.

### **Transfer Students and Community Colleges**

The community college context contributes to the unique nature of the community college transfer student population and the challenges they face at both two and four-year institutions (Silverman, Aliabadi, & Stiles, 2009). The roles and functions of community colleges are the fundamental underpinning of transfer student experiences, and influence how these students handle the transition to a four year institution. Moreover, looking at community colleges as well as the students they serve further anchors my research problem.

Before presenting my literature review, I would like to note that community colleges have been given various labels, such as "junior colleges", and "two-year schools" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Medsker, 1960). For the purposes of familiarity, consistency, and frequency within the literature, the term "community college" will be used in this chapter and throughout my study when referencing two-year institutions. Also, because four-year colleges and universities have various classifications based on the type of graduate degrees they offer (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.), I will use the general term "four-year institution" when discussing either entity unless I reference the name of a specific institution.

## **The Evolution of Community Colleges and Their Missions**

The original intent of community colleges was to house general education courses (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The transfer process, or "transfer pathway" became embedded in the fabric and missions of these institutions over time (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Medsker, 1960). The increase of enrollment in higher education and transfer opportunities yielded an increase in community college enrollment and options for transfer (Medsker, 1960). Dougherty and Townsend (2006) forecast that transfer-focused community college missions will continue to remain relevant due to a volatile economy and demand for baccalaureate degree attainment. Bass (2003) writes of "the current winter of despair", or the national financial downturn, which provided an opportunity for community colleges to evolve and facilitate the transfer process for students (p. 15). Economic drivers, coupled with the increased desire for a baccalaureate degree and limited seats in courses at four-year institutions, have been the primary cause for evolving community college missions (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006).

In addition to the national economy increasing the viable option of the community college transfer pathway, several national associations have worked toward increasing transfer opportunities and making the process seamless. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education's (CAS, 2012), whose mission is to "promote the improvement of programs and services to enhance the quality of student learning and development", established recommendations, standards, and guidelines for four-year institutions regarding successful pathways to transfer (p. 1). Such efforts have also been reflected in state-specific agreements, or articulation agreements, regarding the acceptance of transfer credit between community colleges and four-year institutions



(CollegeTransfer.net, 2014; Handel, 2007; Laanan, 2001; Medsker, 1960; Townsend, 2008; Wassmer, Moore, & Shulock, 2004).

### **Transfer Initiatives and Processes**

In accordance with community colleges and their transfer-oriented missions, the transfer articulation agreement is the most notable features of these institutions (Townsend, 2007; Laanan, 2001; Medsker, 1960). There are over 1,500 community colleges that have articulation agreements with public and private institutions in every state (CollegeTransfer.net, 2014). These agreements are intended to provide a smooth transition process for community college students to four-year institutions (CollegeTransfer.net, 2014; Handel, 2007; Laanan, 2001; Medsker, 1960; Townsend, 2008; Wassmer, Moore, & Shulock, 2004). Handel (2007) provides examples of states, such as California, that have articulation agreements and transfer processes in place, which he asserts can serve as a blueprint for developing effective transfer student processes across the country.

The majority of four-year institutions in the United States have developed initiatives for community college students to bridge the gap in the transfer process (Handel, 2007; Laanan, 1996, 2001). Laanan (1996), however, cautions that such programs, particularly those that include community college partnerships, can inadvertently interfere with a smooth transition and instead create dependency and anxiety among transfer students. In his qualitative study, the author examined the success of the California's Transfer Alliance Program (TAP), an honors community college program that allows students to fulfill prerequisites prior to transfer (Laanan, 1996). The results of the study suggest that many characteristics end up being similar for TAP and

non-TAP transfer students, with TAP students having issues adjusting to the culture, size, and academics at a four year campus (Laanan, 1996). This data suggest that initiatives intended to facilitate a successful transfer for students may actually hinder transfer student success at a four year institution (Laanan, 1996). Based on this research, recommendations for practice include workshops for transfers, solid partnerships between two and four year institutions, and mentorship programs at the four-year level (Laanan, 1996). Furthermore, programs need to be carefully designed to prevent dependency and facilitate a successful transfer to the four-year institution that results in degree completion and institutional acclimation (Laanan, 1996).

### **Today's Community College Students: Serving a Unique Population**

Decades after the inception of the community college, a result of the transfer function was the availability of higher education for a variety of populations who typically would not have had access to college (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). This increased access to education was considered the “democratization” of higher education, or the idea that college was increasingly accessible and no longer strictly for the mostly White, male upper class as originally intended in the early 1900’s (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Rouse, 1995). Due to this type of access, the community college student population has evolved to consist of a "disproportionate number of adult learners, women, and racially underrepresented populations" (Renn & Patton, 2011, p. 246).

Community college transfer students and native freshman have distinct backgrounds (Handel, 2007). As mentioned in the previous section, community college transfer students are highly likely to be first-generation students of color who commute to campus and work either part-time or full-time while attending college (AACC, 2014b).

These characteristics can be traced back to the community college level, and contribute to the diversity of the community college transfer student population as well as the challenges they face at four-year institutions.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2014), 63% of incoming students at four-year institutions for the 2012-2013 academic year were White, 14% were Hispanic, and 12% were African-American. White students were more likely to attend private, four-year institutions, making up 68% of the population at these schools for that academic year (NCES, 2014). The data also show that in terms of two-year schools, including community colleges, 55% of students who began in the 2012-2013 academic year were White, 20% Hispanic, and 15% African-American (NCES, 2014). Moreover, Deil-Amen found in her study that 60% of Hispanic students begin their college careers at community colleges (Deil-Amen, 2011). The statistics reveal that while the majority of populations at both types of institutions are White, more students of color attend community colleges with the intentions of transferring to a four-year institution (NCES, 2014).

Community college students also look different academically from native students (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012, November; Complete College America, 2012). Sixty percent of community college students are remediated and placed in basic skills courses upon beginning their college careers (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012, November). This is in contrast to 20% of native freshman who are remediated at four-year institutions (Complete College America, 2012). Such high remediation levels for community college students create challenges for them when they enter four-year institutions (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Handel, 2007; Hills, 1965; Tobolosky & Cox, 2012; Townsend, 2008).

Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) noted that transfer students' high level of diversity and their incorrect assumptions about how four-year institutions operate make them a difficult population to serve. Elements such as time constraints, course scheduling issues, misunderstandings about services provided, and articulation agreement challenges emerged from the authors' data (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). Based on the findings of their study, the authors, along with the faculty and staff interviewed, made several recommendations, including correctly identifying transfer students so they may be better served, tracking their academic progress once admitted, developing clearer articulation agreements, and increasing the availability of scholarships (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). This unique student population, and the challenges they face at four-year institutions upon transfer, has called into question how to facilitate successful outcomes at four-year institutions.

### **Challenges Prior to Transfer**

Knowledge of resources, academic preparation, equity-related barriers, institutional selectivity, major selection, and student career pathways are all challenges that play a part in community college students' educational attainment and outcomes even prior to transfer (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Darrow, 2012; Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008; Younger, 2009). In addition to looking at the community college context and overall transfer student challenges, understanding the issues this group encounters in these areas can further serve as the foundation in the conversation regarding community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement.

**Knowledge of resources.** The literature emphasizes the importance of resources, such as counseling and tutoring, at community colleges to facilitate successful transfer (Flaga, 2006; Handel, 2007; Silverman et al., 2009; Shaw & London, 2001). However, most community college students are either not aware of or do not seek out those who are considered "transfer agents", such as counselors, advisors, and administrators who provide guidance and options for transfer (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009). According to the results of the most recent Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE, 2013), less than half of community college students took advantage of on-campus services such as tutoring or counseling, indicating lower levels of engagement in these areas. Communicating the existence of these resources to students who are unaware of their options can aid in a smooth transfer process.

**Academic preparation.** Academic preparation also contributes to community college students' success. Wang (2009) found that community college students who attended high schools that had academic-based curriculums (as opposed to being vocationally focused) and expressed aspirations of earning a bachelor's degree during their senior year demonstrated higher rates of persistence. Overall, however, the biggest predictor in baccalaureate degree persistence was a student's community college GPA upon transfer to the four-year institution (Wang, 2009). Wang (2009) recommends that policy makers examine programs that can pinpoint traits influential to persistence; avoid labeling students due to the gender gap in degree persistence, and look at efforts to facilitate success in remedial courses.

**Equity-related barriers.** Due to the diversity of the population, issues of equity also contribute to and create challenges for community college transfer student outcomes. Bensimon and Dowd (2009) write of their interviews with Hispanic community college transfer students, "it is clear that the distribution of innate intelligence, talent, and potential is not correlated with social categories" (p. 634). Most of the students interviewed did not feel they had access to more selective institutions due to tuition rates and admissions requirements, reinforcing the equity gap (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009). The authors suggest examining what it means to have "elite status" or access to information regarding selective institutions and incorporating transfer agents into the fabric of two and four-year institutions to address the undergraduate degree deficiency, particularly among Hispanics (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009).

**Institutional selectivity.** The community college transfer status, coupled with low socioeconomic status, can limit institutional choices for community college students and progress towards bachelor's degree completion (Deil-Amen, 2011; Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008; Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Rouse, 1995). In her study, Deil-Amen (2011) found that "Latino/a students and low SES students are concentrated disproportionately in community colleges" (p. 5). The results of Rouse's (1995) study indicate that community college attendance increases the number of years and progress towards earning a baccalaureate degree, suggesting a sort of unspoken penalty for attending a community college. The author uses the terms "democratization" to describe the action of providing students who would not have had an opportunity to attend college an avenue to do so through attending a community college, and "diversion" to describe students who would have had the means and ability to attend a four year college but opted to attend a

community college (Rouse, 1995). Consequently, time spent at a community college can also result in overabundance inapplicable credits taken and applied to a four-year institutional degree (Monaghan & Attewell, 2014).

Furthermore, Dowd, Cheslock, and Melguizo (2008) suggest that community college transfer students from low income backgrounds are more likely to attend less selective four-year institutions than their middle to upper-income four-year native freshman counterparts. According to the authors, "the size of the low-income student population in community colleges is very large relative to the number of low-income students missing from elite institutions" (Dowd et al, 2008, p. 9). Such choices can negatively impact the transfer students themselves in terms of access to academic resources and reduce student diversity at elite institutions (Dowd et al., 2008).

The work of Crisp and Nuñez (2014) indicates that minority community college students are more likely to attend larger, more diverse community colleges that offer a high number of vocational and certification programs. Such selection has created a high concentration of low-income transfer students at less selective institutions, providing them with fewer institutional choices (Dowd et al., 2008). Contradictory research, however, suggests that marginalization and penalties due to transfer student status does not exist, especially when techniques to limit variables, such as propensity score matching, are used in analyzing transfer student data (Doyle, 2009; Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2013; Melguizo, Kienzl, & Alfonso, 2011). According to Doyle (2009), these results may be due to the student's own selectivity and the uniqueness of the transfer student population as a whole.

**Major selection and vocational choice.** Academic major and career choices also pose a challenge for community college students. Pathways to degree completion at the community college level can be challenging, particularly due to a loose two-year institutional structure and an overabundance of course options (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Scott-Clayton (2011) examines this issue through the lens of the structure hypothesis, which suggests that providing limited choices to students and less bureaucratic processes will increase program persistence. She states that a more structured environment with fewer, clearer choices for degree completion pathways would facilitate academic success and degree completion at the community college level (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Such conversations about structure and an excess of choices have resulted in an initiative to create guided pathways, or clearer, mapped out routes to degree completion, at the community college level (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). Efforts to implement guided pathways, along with more institutional transfer-friendly partnerships, amped up advising efforts, and more vocationally-focused curriculums, are currently underway in several states such as Arizona and New York (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015).

### **Challenges at Four-year Institutions Upon Transfer**

The issues listed above spill over upon a community college transfer student's arrival at a four-year institution as well. Other challenges continue to emerge after the student's arrival. Issues that impact a successful transfer for a community college student include acclimation to the four-year culture, a complicated transfer process, and academic difficulties and remediation at the four-year level (Flaga, 2006; Hills, 1965; Kuh, 2003; Renn & Patton, 2011, Townsend, 2008).



**Acclimation to four-year institutions.** Community college transfer student adjustment issues are well documented in the literature. "Transfer shock", a term coined by Hills (1965), occurs when a student initially transfers to a four-year institution and experiences a decrease in GPA during the first few semesters due to institutional adjustment. Kuh (2003) uses the term "transfer tremor" to describe the cultural transition transfer students make from their community college to a four-year institution. Townsend (2008) discovered during her student interviews that many transfer students "feel like freshman again", suggesting that despite being experienced with the college process, this group still wishes to have an inclusive and traditional college experience. This idea is also echoed in Lipka (2008), who interviewed transfer students that felt a lack of ownership at their four-year institutions.

**Complications during transfer.** An administratively unwieldy transfer process can impact the transfer process for community college transfer students (Townsend, 2008). Despite articulation agreements developed between two-year and four-year schools, credits that do not transfer and bureaucratic processes at large four-year institutions create discouragement among transfer students (Townsend, 2008; Monaghan & Attewell, 2014). Some state college systems have been working to address this issue over the years, attempting to create a smoother transfer process through articulation agreements and community college partnerships (Monaghan & Attewell, 2014). Handel (2007), for example, chronicles the evolution of the California community college transfer model and asserts that it can serve as a template for developing effective transfer student processes to prevent students from taking too many credits. He also discusses the seven habits of highly effective transfer processes, with the primary habit being

establishing a "transfer-going" culture, which makes transfer student admissions a priority, sets transfer admission targets, and builds strong relationships with community college counselors (Handel, 2007).

**Academic unpreparedness and remediation.** To continue the discussion from the previous section regarding academic preparedness, community college students encounter academic challenges post-transfer as well (Bahr et al., 2013). As indicated by the statistics presented earlier, this lack of preparedness begins at the community college level depending on remediation, as well as information provided to the student in terms of their own academic goals and outcomes (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012, November; Scott-Clayton, 2011). In addition to Hills' (1965) seminal work regarding "transfer shock", increases in academic expectations that impact community college student performance can manifest well after transfer (Monaghan & Attewell, 2014). After performing propensity score matching with national databases, Monaghan and Attewell (2014) found that the greater the loss of credits during transfer to a four-year institution due to courses taken for remediation, and the more unnecessary credits taken at the community college level, the less likely the student will persist to earn a bachelor's degree.

I have explored the community college context, and issues pertaining to community college students. I also addressed the challenges these students face before and after transfer to a four-year institution in comparison to traditionally native college students. I will now turn to a discussion of the literature on college student identity, development, and engagement.

## **Identity, Development, and Engagement: A Lack of Literature**

Presenting some background regarding community colleges and the challenges community college transfer students encounter before and after transfer all set the stage in investigating transfer student identity, development, and engagement. It also provides insight into the differences between native and transfer student populations.

Acknowledging my familiarity with the transfer student literature contributes to my grounded theory approach, while giving way to a discussion regarding college student identity, development, and engagement.

Little empirical literature is available pertaining to community college transfer student adjustment from a psychological, emotional, and developmental perspective (Chaves, 2006; Laanan, 2001). Learning about transfer student experiences as a whole through the three lenses of identity, development, and engagement can help in understanding the inter-workings of this diverse population while attempting to fill this gap in transfer student literature.

Before moving into the college student identity, development, and engagement literature, I would like to point out that there can sometimes be repetitive or overlapping terminology given how different authors interpret and label these three areas. These ideas are not always neatly categorized and clear cut. For this literature review, I provide my categorization of ideas within these three areas in relation to the college student literature. Furthermore, I offer that acknowledging and examining the murkiness of identity, development, and engagement contributes to applying a constructivist grounded theory approach to this study.

## **A Theoretical Perspective**

### **Transfer Student Identity**

According to Kegan (1994), an identity is a constructed point of view that is a result of life experiences and perceptions. Out of Kegan's (1994) definition of identity emerges the notion of self-authorship, the idea of meaning making and interpreting the outside world based on experiences (Kegan, 1994). As individuals grow, and are challenged, they develop their own identities, and tend to rely less on others when making decisions (Kegan, 1994).

Meaning making, and the interpretation of experiences based on identity, can be traced back even further to Perry's (1970) scheme or stages of cognitive and ethical development, or "the evolving ways of seeing the world, knowledge, and education, values, and oneself" (p. 50). According to Perry (1970), college students' identities evolve through nine stages, or positions, that are grouped into four categories, including dualism (received knowledge), multiplicity (subjective knowledge), relativism (procedural knowledge), and commitment (constructed knowledge). These stages can be repeated, occur out of order, and overall contribute to how a young individual comes to view and understand the world (Perry, 1970).

Baxter Magolda (2004) expanded on the idea of meaning making through the model of epistemological reflection. Young individuals, specifically college students, engage in meaning making and ways of knowing by moving away from interdependence through self-reflection, drawing conclusions from their experiences (Baxter Magolda, 2004). According to Baxter Magola (2004) this epistemological reflection and the ability to make meaning of the world at the highest level gives way to self-authorship. She

suggests that higher level thinking can be achieved through college experiences (Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Identity literature is also available for a range of college student subgroups based on various factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual preference (Helms, 1995; Josselson, 1996; Rypisi, Malcom, & Kim, 2009; Schuh et al., 2011). For example, Josselson's (1996) study of women's identity development was inspired by the gap in Erikson's (1950) research, which was based on White male experiences. Her longitudinal study of women several years after they graduated college indicates that women view relationships as a vehicle to make decisions about other aspects of their lives, including careers and families (Josselson, 1996). Helms (1995) investigated racial identity development, asserting that the idea of race is socially constructed, and that White people in particular move through several stages in which they evaluate the privileges they have. Helms' (1995) work has been used to point out the importance of creating awareness among White college students so they recognize the level of privilege they have, while further investigating how students of color use the college experience as a time to explore their own ethnicities further (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

These theories highlight the uniqueness of these populations in relation to their college experiences and the relationships they foster throughout their lives. Despite their uniqueness and diversity, discussion about community college transfer student identity is nonexistent. While Townsend (2008) asserts that the transition experience for transfer students can make the population "feel like freshman again", in that they have to become familiar with a new college environment upon transfer, little else is known about how transfer student identities evolve upon their arrival at their four-year institutions.

## **Transfer Student Development**

The literature regarding identity overlaps into the areas of development and engagement. While several definitions of development exist pertaining to the college student population, the term can be defined as how an individual changes and evolves over the course of the college experience (Schuh, Jones, Harper, & Associates, 2011). For instance, Chickering's (2007) theory chronicles college student development as an evolution and a combination of experiences that promotes growth within seven stages. He writes, "We cannot easily discern what subtle mix of people, books, settings, or events promotes growth. Nor can we easily name changes in ways of thinking, feeling, or interpreting the world" (Chickering, 2007, p. 1). Chickering (2010) asserts that facilitating student development in college will lead to "cultivating the intellect", encouraging critical thinking skills, and building the foundation for civic responsibility (p. 54).

The traditional timeframe in which students attend college, the late teens into early twenties, has been coined "emerging adulthood", a key time in one's development (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2000) suggests this time in a person's life is one of "profound change and importance" (p. 469). He goes on to say that cultural and industrial changes over the past century have redefined the role of emerging adulthood and how it plays out in society (Arnett, 2000). Many cultures that value higher education have prolonged the emerging adulthood period, allowing for further personal exploration. These college-going cultures emphasize independent decision making based on one's experiences (Arnett, 2000). These ideas are reflective of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), who

emphasize that attending college facilitates a reconsideration of worldviews and personal reflection.

Emerging adulthood, or development during the college years, evolved from Erikson (1950), where the age range of 18 to 35 is considered a phase in which individuals seek relationships and “settle down”, securing partners for intimate relationships. One thing that is consistent between Erikson’s (1950) stages of development and more contemporary development theories is the idea that during the late teens to mid-twenties, one moves away from relying on others, such as parents, to make decisions for them, and they begin making decisions on their own (Arnett, 2000; Chickering, 2007; Schuh, Jones, Harper, & Associates, 2011).

There is a lack of literature that speaks to community college transfer student development. Silverman et al. (2009) suggests that transfer students, like other non-native college students, are developmentally different than traditional students, but does not specify how they differ. Furthermore, some research indicates that this population experiences a lack of belonging, impacting their development as students on four-year campuses despite any growth or maturing they may have experienced as individuals at their community college (Townsend, 2008). Based on her individual interviews and focus groups with transfer students, Townsend (2008) has honed in on several issues pertaining to transfer students as they move from their "sending" institution (the previously attended community college), to their "receiving" institution (the four-year university) in two distinct phases, research and application, with four-year institutional attendance beginning with orientation. Between these two phases, disconnects occur, stifling their development as college students (Townsend, 2008).

Four-year institutions would have a difficult time determining if they are encouraging these same critical thinking skills within the transfer student population due to the gap in the literature regarding transfer student development. In addition to contributing to the literature, addressing transfer student development could be key in not only discovering intellectual-building techniques for them but also in maintaining degree completion rates and increasing academic success at four-year institutions.

### **Engagement Versus Disengagement of Transfer Students**

Kuh (2003) defines engagement among college students as, "the time and energy students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside of the classroom, and the policies and practices that institutions use to induce students to take part in these activities" (p. 25). Similar definitions have been used in the literature, emphasizing "educationally effective practices, both inside and outside of the classroom" (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 2). These effective practices, or activities, can take many forms, including classroom involvement, volunteerism, club, fraternities, or sororities, and other college campus organizations (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Ishitani & Mckitrick, 2013; Kuh, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1997). Such notions are indicative of Astin's (1984) engagement theory regarding student involvement as it relates to one's own development and the amount of time a student devotes to his or her college experience. He asserts that this is similar to the idea of "time on task" and the amount of time allocated to an activity determining the outcomes (Astin, 1984). A "highly developed student", spends his or her time accordingly between academic, social, and other college-related activities (Astin, 1984, p. 518).



Astin's (1984) original idea of engagement is partially influenced by Weiner's (1979) theory of motivation, which suggests that individuals explain successes or failures through internal or external factors, such as self-esteem and past experiences. Astin's (1993) model later evolved into the Input-Experience-Output Model, which indicates that a thorough evaluation of student success can only take place if outcomes are assessed based on student inputs and their educational environments. According to Astin (1993), inputs are considered student characteristics and qualities, environmental factors are the student's experiences while attending college, and the output, or outcome, is how the student's talents and skills have been developed upon leaving college.

The community college transfer student engagement conversation is further fueled by literature suggesting that these students are often either disengaged from their four-year institutions, or experience engagement differently at four-year institutions. According to Lipka (2008) transfer students do not perform in four out of the five areas to the level of their institutional native peers in the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE). The data indicated that transfer students were less likely to work with their classmates outside of the class and discuss their career plans with faculty members (Lipka, 2008). Moreover, students who do not engage with their four-year institutions from their initial arrival can feel disconnected and experience low levels of adjustment, often leading to their departure from the institution. According to Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye (2007), vertical transfer students, or students who transferred to a four-year institution from a two-year institution, who opted to not attend new transfer student orientation did not experience academically supportive campus environment conditions.

In contrast to Kuh's (2003) definition of engagement geared towards traditionally native students, there is emerging literature to support that transfer students experience a different type of engagement at four-year institutions. After conducting semi-structured interviews with transfer students at George Mason University, Lester, Leonard, and Mathias (2013) determined that participants experience a broad form of social engagement through family and community support networks outside of the four-year institution. Moreover, according to the authors, transfer students perceived engagement in a more academic context, with classroom-based interactions and experiences serving as engagement with their institution (Lester et al., 2013). While this study suggests that transfer student engagement manifests differently than traditional definitions of engagement, Lester et al. (2013) interviewed a combination of community college and four-year institution transfer students who ranged in age from 18 to 48. Such a diverse sample of transfers still does not provide a clear picture of specifically how traditionally-aged community college transfer students experience engagement at four-year institutions.

Engagement patterns at the community college level have also been explored (Saenz, Hatch, Bukoski, Kim, Kye-hyoung, & Valdez, 2011). The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE, 2013) reiterates the issues associated with student engagement at the two-year level, revealing the disconnect with four-year institutions once a community college student becomes a transfer student. Through a cluster analysis of CCSSE questions, Saenz et al. (2011), categorized community college students as high or low engagers, "with a broad set of diverse engagers in between" (p. 252). The results suggest that utilization of campus resources, such as tutoring and

counseling, lead to higher levels of engagement and four-year transfer (Saenz et al., 2011). The use of at least three campus services on a regular basis lead to higher levels of engagement, and females tended to engage at higher levels than males (Saenz et al., 2011). These findings imply that challenges with community college transfer student engagement can be due to engagement, or lack of engagement, patterns formed at the community college level (Saenz et al., 2011).

Marti (2009) emphasizes the need for continued research on community college student engagement. The author acknowledges the variety of demographics and academic goals of the population, offering that it will inform decisions at both two and four-year institutions (Marti, 2009). Bahr et al. (2013), emphasize the responsibility of two and four-year institutions to work together to improve elements such as engagement for community college transfer students. Despite these assertions, a lack of literature still exists regarding community college transfer student engagement.

### **Applications of Current Theories**

While there are no specific theories in the college student literature relating to community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement, certain theories have been applied to community college students. Chaves (2006) connects previous developmental and adult learning-related theories to the community college student population, but does not address these theories in relation to transfer students. Others have explored various categorizations, or typologies, of community college students. Typology models categorize a college student based on traits and characteristics, painting a picture of the student's identity (Evans, 2003). According to Bahr (2010), students who attend two year institutions can be categorized as transfer,

vocational, drop-in, noncredit, experimental, and exploratory. However, once again, these ideas have only been applied to the community college population and not transfer students.

### **Intersections, Overlap, and Thinking Holistically**

As mentioned earlier, identity, development, and engagement can overlap, with terms often used interchangeably in the literature. Out of this overlap, some intersections exist, giving way to newer theories in the college student literature. For example, theories regarding college student engagement also intersect with identity. Hu and Kuh (2011) use Evans' (2003) idea of typology models to highlight the "typologies", or identities, that emerge within college students based on their experiences and level of engagement at four-year institutions that have been developed over the years. It is interesting to note that transfer students do not fall under a specific typology within these models. It is possible, however, that transfer students would identify with one or several of these typologies once they become a student at a four-year institution.

Theories of development can also be viewed as interchangeable with identity. Identity and development in particular are rooted in psychology, therefore many theories use these terms in reference to overall personal growth (Kegan, 1994; Chickering, 2007). For instance, Chickering's (2007) student development theory overlaps with the idea of college student identity. The fifth stage of this theory, establishing identity, has its own set of embedded stages, including comfort with physical appearance, exploring self-concept, and self-esteem development (Chickering, 2007).

Finally, both Astin (1984) and Tinto (1997) have made connections between college student engagement and intellectual development. Involvement with faculty,

classroom activities, and integrated learning can all play a part in a student's educational experiences, contributing to his or her development as an individual (Tinto, 1997).

Moreover, participating in civic engagement activities during college, such as volunteerism, has been associated with ongoing community involvement and civic responsibility after graduation, contributing to a student's development in his or her adult life (Ishitani & Mckitrick, 2013).

### **Overall Experiences and Meaning Making**

These intersections serve as a way of thinking about college students, and how the college experience influences student identity, development, and engagement. As highlighted in my first chapter, the holistic approach of “meaning making” to explore experiences can aid in integrating theoretical ideas pertaining to college students (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Meaning making, or the act of understanding how we think, feel, and relate to others, originates with Kegan (1994). Kegan (1994) proposes that suffering through experiences and encountering challenges forces individuals to make decisions. He posits that mastering decision making contributes to a higher order of consciousness and the development of the personal self (Kegan, 1994).

Baxter Magolda (2009) proposes applying meaning making specifically, and holistically, to college students and their experiences, to examine how a student changes based on how they make meaning of their experiences. As college students develop, they increasingly rely on their own experiences and education, as opposed to the ideas of others, to guide them in their interpretations of the world (Seifert, Goodman, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2010). While meaning making has been applied to the traditional, native college student population, it has not been used to explore community college transfer

students. Jointly using the concepts of identity, development, and engagement can contribute to looking at community college transfer students from a holistic, or meaning making, perspective.

### **Meaning Making and the Grounded Theory Approach**

It was the lack of community college transfer student literature in the areas of identity, development, and engagement that has led me to this study and to pose my research questions. I began contemplating community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement, and wanted to set aside the typical literature regarding retention, academic achievement, outcomes, and efforts at the institutional level, to become familiar with the population as individuals with their own experiences.

Interacting with the students themselves using a grounded theory approach will guide me in further understanding this population.

Conducting this study from a holistic, meaning making perspective enabled me to explore how community college transfer students make meaning of their experiences as college students at four-year institutions based on their own identity, development, and engagement. Having already gone through at least two years of college, this population is developmentally different from native four-year students (Silverman et al., 2009). This developmental difference warrants further investigation, and will produce an all-encompassing, unique theoretical perspective regarding community college transfer students. Using constructivist grounded theory, I acknowledge my familiarity with the literature, and how these areas intersect. They will serve as a mere guide for my research questions and study as I explore community college transfer students and their experiences. Using meaning making as the underpinning for my research will allow me to

examine these areas within the context of the community college transfer student population.

### **Conclusion**

I have laid a foundation regarding community college transfer students by exploring the community college context, the challenges this population faces at the two and four-year institutional levels, issues of equity, and their overall experiences with the four-year campus environment. I have provided a review of the college student identity, development, and engagement literature while identifying gaps in these areas pertaining to community college transfer students. Also, I have suggested that viewing these three areas holistically can contribute to using a grounded theory approach to carry out my study. Taking the available literature in these areas into consideration, I will now provide an in-depth discussion regarding my research design, methodology, and data analysis techniques.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

I have provided an overview of the literature regarding community college transfer students and identity, development, and engagement in the previous chapter. I now turn a methodological discussion of this study. In the subsequent sections, my role and identity as a researcher and research paradigm are introduced, followed by my purpose statement and research questions. A rationale of the study's methods and strategy of inquiry in relation to the grounded theory approach will follow. The context of the study will then be discussed, along with an overview of its participants and sampling. I then provide details regarding data collection, instrumentation, and analysis techniques. The study's trustworthiness will be addressed, followed by a closing discussion of ethical considerations.

#### **Role of the Researcher**

Prior to embarking on this study, based on Ahern's (1999) recommendations, I understand it is important to examine myself within the role of the researcher and to engage in reflexive bracketing. Acknowledging and reflecting on my previous experiences, biases, own identity and role as a researcher will anchor my presumptions as I engage in data collection (Ahern, 1999). While I have maintained a reflexive journal for the purposes of this study to bracket my thoughts as suggested by Ahern (1999), I realize that I cannot completely set aside my thoughts and experiences (Griffin, 2004), hence my application of a constructivist grounded theory approach that is explained in the sections below.



## **Researcher Identity**

To understand myself within the context of this study, I examined my research identity through the layers that I feel define me as a researcher. This technique is often used when a researcher is attempting to position themselves in a particular setting in which they are culturally familiar or unfamiliar to better understand their participants (Jano, 2013). Furthermore, Birks and Mills (2011) suggest that identifying layers can be helpful in thinking about the multiple roles a researcher undertakes in his or her life. I offer that exploring my identity in this manner enabled me to make connections between my own experiences, my paradigm, and my interactions with community college transfer students. Identifying these layers lent itself to understanding how I make meaning of my own experiences, and prepared me to view my research through the lens of meaning making.

Looking at myself in relation to this study, I have three identifiable layers: Academic Advisor, first-generation college student, and the personal self. First, as an Academic Advisor at a four-year institution, I come into contact with students, native and transfer, on a daily basis and often hear about the challenges community college transfers student face. Second, given that I was a first-generation college student from a low-income background, like the majority of transfer students, I can relate to this particular population in terms of their desires to be academically successful for a better future. Finally, in terms of my personal self, I am motivated by my own moral obligation to ensure the well-being of others through high levels of assistance, empowering them to lead and function to the best of their ability. Such ideas are reflective of Sergiovanni

(1992), who suggests that moral leadership stems from service, leading to respect for others.

I wrote weekly entries in my research journal to make myself aware of other biases that emerge as I engage in my research, examine the layers of myself during the course of this study, and to help in establishing this study's credibility. These weekly entries allowed me to practice reflexivity and interpret what I witness during the course of the study, guiding me as I make sense of the world (Janesick, 1999; Ahern, 1999). While establishing my own biases is important and lends itself to this study's credibility, it was my primary goal to express my reactions to things that occur during the study through journaling, capturing thoughts and ideas that did not occur to me previously.

Parts of my research journal took the form of analytic memos, which are considered the "critical lubricant of a grounded theory machine" (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 40). Along with each actual entry, these memos became part my data, especially as I engaged in coding to generate theory. They are typically paragraphs at the end of my entry and look at a particular event I experienced pertaining to community college transfer students, or a thought that I had regarding the study. I took the opportunity to analyze what I experienced and asked myself open ended questions about it, exploring broader ideas pertaining to the event, considering what led up to the experience. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003) and Birks and Mills (2011), reflective journaling and analytic memos can lead to moments of clarity, furthering contributing to one's study as it unfolds.

## **Previous Research**

The majority of my previous research and work has been in the areas of persistence and access for first generation college students, commuter students, low-income students, and other disadvantaged student populations. I view research on transfer students as an extension of my previous work and my own experiences, as many community college transfer students fall into one of the aforementioned categories. Researching transfer student identity, development, and engagement provided me with additional knowledge in student experiences that are often misunderstood by four-year institutions, allowing me to continuously hone my research skills in working with various student populations.

## **Researcher Position and Paradigm**

As a researcher and throughout this study, I not only examined my biases, but also my views and assumptions of the world as part of my research process (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), our worldviews shapes our beliefs, our personal level of inquiry, and, for qualitative researchers in particular, how we approach research. This step is sometimes overlooked during the research process (Creswell, 2013), but can help the researcher and those who read the researcher's work understand where he or she stands on certain issues in relation to his or her study.

From a personal perspective, it is evident that I have my own interpretations and perspectives of the world based on the experiences I had as a college student. This process of self-examination can be accomplished through developing a researcher paradigm, or a set of ingrained beliefs that guide a researcher during the course of a study (Maxwell, 2013). My experiences, knowledge, current theories, previous research, and

own perspectives all contribute to my paradigm (Maxwell, 2013). Making use and being aware of all of these aspects of my own paradigm served as a foundation for my own research. In the upcoming sections, I outline and describe my own research paradigm in relation to this study, ways in which I identify with this paradigm, and how it shapes my view of the world and my research.

### **Constructivist/Interpretivist Paradigm**

My paradigm, or worldview, resides with the interpretivist, or constructivist, paradigm. According to Ponterotto (2005), constructivism “can be perceived as an alternative to the ‘received view’ or positivist paradigm”, and entails a more realist perspective (p. 129). The roots of the constructivist approach can be traced back to Kant's (1781/2010) work, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant (1781/2010) suggested looking beyond scientific fact for further meaning into one's experiences. I approach this study and my view of the world from this paradigm given that I tend to consider problems creatively, not scientifically.

I strongly identify with the features of the constructivist paradigm. My position is that psychology, cognition, and deep thinking all play a part into inquiry. I assert that thoughts and ideas can emerge through story-telling, reasoning, and conversations that go beyond calculations and statistics; hence my qualitative approach to this particular study. Moreover, I find common ground in Kant's (1781/2010) position that investigation should go beyond "a critical inquiry into the faculty of reason, with reference to the cognitions to which it strives to attain without the aid of experience" (p. 5).

**Constructivism and meaning making.** Exploring psychology-based ideas such as identity, development, and engagement through a constructivist lens will give way to critical inquiry of transfer student experiences at four-year institutions. I believe that my qualitative approach to this study and my own overall reasoning contribute to my affiliation with this paradigm, as well as examining community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement from the holistic perspective of meaning making. According to Baxter Magolda (2009), individuals change their perceptions and interpretations of the world based on changes in their environment. Taking a creative approach to this inquiry by using interviews and graphic elicitation allowed an in-depth exploration of these areas with community college transfer students, providing me with data that demonstrates how they interpret and perceive their four-year institutional environments.

### **The Three Assumptions of Constructivism and Personal Reflections**

The constructivist paradigm, as with other research paradigms, is made up of three primary assumptions: the ontological assumption, or sense-making; the epistemological assumption, that individuals determine the reality of a situation based on the information available to them; and the methodological assumption, making comparisons based on available information (Guba & Lincoln, 2001). The interaction between investigator and participant becomes central to the study itself, and deeper meaning emerges through interactions and reflections (Ponterotto, 2005). It is my position that these interactions contributed to exploring meaning making during my study.

Based on my own experiences, I, as a researcher, identify with the constructivist paradigm on several levels through its basic assumptions, further lending itself to my research and approach to this study. First, in terms of the ontological assumption, using qualitative inquiry to allow transfer students to make meaning of their experiences contributes to an overall understanding of this population. Traditionally aged community college transfer students can be considered a social group that interprets the world, such as a four-year institution, based on their previous experiences, such as attending a two-year institution. I, too, apply to my previous experiences to situations to make decisions regarding my future actions. Second, through the epistemological assumption, transfer students would be making meaning through the information provided to them by those at a four-year institution. This is a direct connection to meaning making and what I wish to explore in my study. As a first generation commuting college student, I deferred to the information provided to me at my undergraduate institution when making decisions given the lack of resources available to me. Finally, when looking at the methodological assumption, I assume that transfer students make various decisions (whether to attend a particular four-year institution, which major to choose, etc.), based on the world around them and how they are perceived by others as suggested by Baxter Magolda (2009). Such decisions can include institutional selection and major selection. For example, in my own experience as an undergraduate student, I selected a major that was popular amongst other students I met, with outside individuals encouraging me to select that major due to limited knowledge of other options.

Within the realm of constructivism resides two phases of evaluation: discovery and assimilation (Guba & Lincoln, 2001). During the discovery phase, a researcher may

ask what is taking place, using some means of information he or she already has access to or learned about previously to interpret the occurrence (Guba & Lincoln, 2001). Through this information-gathering comes an understanding of an issue to make further discoveries about it (Guba & Lincoln, 2001). Assimilation, according to Guba and Lincoln (2001) can occur parallel, or simultaneously, with discovery, and occurs when the researcher incorporates new discoveries into his or her current environment in order to explain a phenomenon.

The two phases of this paradigm contribute to my research design and are embedded in my identity as a researcher. In particular during the discovery phase in this study, I am inquiring about the nature of community college transfer student experiences as they relate to four-year institutions. The transfer students themselves most likely made these types of inquiries as they decided to transfer from a two-year to four-year institution. Such mindsets contribute to the idea of a qualitative, and more specifically, a grounded theory approach, where research is viewed as a joint, collaborative venture between the investigator and participant (Maxwell, 2013; Charmaz, 2006). The assimilation phase is of particular interest in relation to transfer students. As part of this phase, the student, based on their previous experiences, creates meanings based on processes in order to apply these meanings to the new environment, or the four-year institution (Guba & Lincoln, 2001). As an Academic Advisor who works with transfer students, I experience the transition with them through advising as I explain new policies and procedures, allowing them to make meaning of them based on their previous community college experiences.

## **Biases, Assumptions, and Constructivism**

Qualitative research is driven by the constructivist paradigm, which encourages researchers to embrace their biases as part of their research (Ponterotto, 2005).

Approaching research with this paradigm, combined with my worldviews, allowed me to acknowledge my biases and my participants to shape the study. Moreover, applying this paradigm to research contributes to the interaction with participants and the overall interpretation of the data (Ponterotto, 2005). Given my own interactions with transfer students, I knew I could not completely separate my own biases and assumptions from this study, which added to the dimensions and perspective of my own interpretation of the data. My most prominent assumption upon embarking on this study was that the majority of transfer students come from low-income, disadvantaged backgrounds, like myself, and often have family members and significant others who are unfamiliar with the college process. I found this to not be completely true during the course of my interviews. Also, I admit to making the generalization that these students are predominantly commuters and have outside responsibilities in addition to attending college, such as working part or full time or attending to family matters. Again, I too had similar circumstances while attending college, but discovered this assumption was not the whole true either. While these commonalities helped me to establish rapport with my participants through these experiences and create empathy, they did create biases during the course of my research, of which I remained cautious.

With these assumed combination of factors and challenges facing this population, it was and remains my belief that community college transfer students need assistance when navigating the four-year institutional culture, which initially sparked this study. The



inability to navigate the college environment, as I learned in my own undergraduate experience, can hinder academic progress and negatively impact learning, self-confidence, and the college experience overall. Furthermore, based on my own perceptions of the transfer student population, I automatically assumed this group is disengaged and chooses not to be immersed in the four-year experience. In some cases, perhaps I felt they intentionally distance themselves from their fellow native college peers. Again, the results of my study revealed a clearer picture of this population's experiences.

While I did journal and engage in reflexive bracketing during this study, I realized that I can never fully separate myself from the experiences that have created my biases (Griffin, 2004). I acknowledged my feelings up front, and realized that the data I gathered may not reveal the complete "truth" about the community college transfer student population. However, in alignment with constructivism, I take the position that on a personal level, I conducted this study as a search for deeper answers that go beyond retention and academic data. I explored the students' experiences from a holistic, meaning-making perspective. I desire to assist this population, as I often wish I was assisted while attending college, and eagerly interacted with these students and listened to their stories.

### **Constructivism, Grounded Theory, and Meaning Making**

The grounded theory approach lends itself to the constructivist paradigm, given that the constructivist paradigm supports viewing and accepting multiple realities that need to be discovered through naturalistic inquiry (Charmaz, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). However, because grounded theory also has a procedural nature to it through the Constant Comparative Method (CCM), and open, axial, and selective coding techniques,

it also has some features of the positivist paradigm (Charmaz, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). The positivist paradigm, with its roots in processes, objectivity, procedures, and hypothesizing, lends itself to quantitative methods, whereas post-positivism is more aligned with qualitative research due to its descriptive and flexible nature (Ponterotto, 2005). Post-positivism supports the examination of lived experiences to explore broader social issues more in depth, which gives way to qualitative research (Ponterotto, 2005). Anchoring my study in post-positivism, in addition to the grounded theory approach, contributed to meaning making and how transfer students articulated their experiences at four-year institutions. I explored transfer student experiences through a research design consisting of an interview and a graphic elicitation activity. The realities of the participants experiences emerged through these techniques, giving way to a potential new theory.

I have set the foundation for this chapter through a discussion of my role as researcher and my paradigm in relation to a grounded theory approach focused on meaning making. I now move onto presenting the purpose of my study and research questions. In this section, I also include a methods rationale and strategy of inquiry. Throughout the following section and the remainder of this chapter, I draw upon the literature pertaining to grounded theory and the constructivist approach.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, grounded theory study was to explore the identity, development, and engagement of traditionally aged community college transfer students attending two four-year public institutions located on the eastern seaboard. Moreover,

this study attempted to address the gap in the literature regarding community college transfer students in these three areas. I suggest that addressing this gap contributes to conversations regarding community college transfer students and how they are served at four-year institutions

### **Research Questions**

After demonstrating the lack of available literature regarding community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement, along with acknowledging my familiarity of the current literature in relation to this grounded theory study, I return to my overarching research questions and sub questions:

### **Overarching Questions**

1. How does a community college transfer student make meaning of his or her identity, development, and engagement at a four-year institution?
2. What theory/theories will emerge from exploring community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement?

### **Sub Questions**

1. How does a community college transfer student describe his or her identity after attending a four-year institution for one year?
2. How does a community college transfer student describe his or her development after attending a four-year institution for one year?
3. How does a community college transfer student engage with his or her four-year institution after attending a four-year institution for one year?

4. In what ways (if any) does a community college transfer student's engagement with his or her four-year institution after one year contribute to his or her college student development?
5. In what ways (if any) does a community college transfer student's development contribute to his or her identity after one year at a four-year institution?

### **Methods Rationale**

I applied a qualitative design to this study, as I explored "the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). In this case, the research problem is the lack of knowledge about community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement. This is a problem because the community college transfer student population on four-year campuses is rapidly growing, and since this group is different from the typical native college student population, they cannot be served or treated in the same manner.

This design enabled me to conduct empirical research through graphic elicitations and semi-structured interviews to work towards addressing this problem. In the style of Rossman and Rallis (2003), I approached this study by exploring the transfer student population and the issues they face, compared and contrasted this group's experiences through the description and interpretation of my results, and provided recommendations for policy, practice, and research.

It appears that a qualitative study using a grounded theory approach incorporating interviews and graphic elicitations has not been used to study community college transfer students. There is emerging research investigating the use of arts-based methods, such as self-portraits, to explore college student development and meaning making in the form of self-authorship (Welkener & Baxter Magolda, 2014), however, there is a still gap in this

area regarding community college transfer students. This provided a unique opportunity for me, as a researcher, to not only address a gap in the literature, but to embark on a new approach that could contribute methodologically to community college transfer student research. According to Bagnoli (2009), graphic elicitation techniques have been predominantly used in psychology-based fields. Thygesen, Pedersen, Kragstrup, Wagner, and Mogesen (2011) also point out that graphic elicitation is also used frequently in health care-related fields, specifically to track patient treatment progress. The authors encourage the application of graphic elicitation in other fields, suggesting it can provide a "snapshot" to understanding participant experiences while providing the participants with ownership of the interview since they are contributing to it through creating something (Thygesen et al., 2011). Moreover, Crilly, Blackwell, and Clarkson (2006), suggest that graphic elicitations can lead to theory generation through discussions with the participant about the graphic he or she creates. Since the literature on both identity and development have their roots in psychology, I offer that applying graphic elicitations in this manner lends itself to the origins of these two areas, providing opportunities for deeper exploration using the grounded theory approach. In addition to using a graphic elicitation activity, applying semi-structured, intensive interviewing techniques allowed me to have in-depth conversations with participants about their experiences while tying in the graphic elicitations that they have created. This method painted a holistic picture of transfer students and their identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions.

The exploration of these elements, along with my methodological approach, led me to develop this study's overarching research question about how transfer students

make meaning of the transition to a four-year university environment. Sub questions were created based on this question, reflecting the lack of available literature, as well as acknowledging the interconnections between identity, development, and engagement.

### **Strategy of Inquiry**

Applying a grounded theory approach to this study allowed me to anchor, or “ground” my emerging theory in my qualitative data, offering insight, understanding, and best practices to the research problem (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). According to Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) the application of grounded theory can be used as an underpinning in the research design, allowing the researcher to openly ask what is taking place in the setting without being tied to a specific theory or set of theories. I entered the transfer student’s environment with identity, development, and engagement literature as a mere guide to my research while being open to the emergence of new data that can aid in the development of a new theoretical approach pertaining to community college transfer students.

More specifically and as mentioned earlier in this chapter and my literature review, based on my familiarity with the transfer student and higher education literature, along with my preconceived notions about and experiences in higher education, my orientation in this study was rooted in specifically the constructivist grounded theory approach. According to Charmaz (2006), constructivist grounded theory focuses on the phenomena being studied and draws on participant experiences in the data to develop a "theoretical rendering" based on the researcher's interpretations in abstract terms. I offer that I was unable to fully separate myself from my presumptions as suggested in the objectivist grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). I interpreted the data

provided to me by the transfer students I interact with, and sought to understand transfer students through the elements identity, development, and engagement. The term "constructivist" as it relates to the grounded theory approach is used in a different context from my reference to the constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm was, and continues to be, part of my worldview as a researcher; while the constructivist grounded theory approach was incorporated into my research design.

**A note about definitions.** As mentioned in Chapter One, developing definitions for terms being used throughout a study is typically recommended (Fetterman, 2010; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). However, in the style of grounded theory, definitions for identity, development, and engagement for this study were not fixed so themes and categories can fluidly emerge as my research progresses. Many of the theories pertaining to college students in the area of identity, development, and engagement have overlapping features. Understanding these areas in relation to my research design without restrictions enabled me to capture all elements of transfer student experiences within the three areas, preventing unanswered questions and ensuring credibility (Charmaz, 2006).

### **Context of Study**

This study took place at two four-year public, suburban institutions located on the eastern seaboard. Both institutions have large traditionally college-aged community college transfer student populations who transferred at the junior level, in alignment with Carlan and Byxbe's (2000) definition of transfer students. Also, both are centrally located amongst several community colleges, creating access for large numbers of transfer students from these institutions.

The first institution, “Eastern Atlantic University” (EAU) is an institution with approximately 13,000 undergraduate and graduate students, and is my place of employment. The institution offers a combination of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs. According to the Carnegie Classifications (n.d.), EAU is categorized as a medium-sized, four-year public institution. EAU was selected for this study given that it serves a large number of transfer students on the mid-Atlantic seaboard. As mentioned in Chapter One, EAU enrolled 1,800 students in the 2013-2014 academic year. The second institution, “Coastal Plain University” (CPU), has approximately 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students, with approximately 1,000 of those students being transfers for the 2013-2014 academic year. Like EAU, CPU is designated as a medium sized, four-year public institution (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.), and also has a variety of undergraduate and graduate programs.

These institutions are similar in that they both serve a large number of community college transfer students. However, they have a few differences. CPU offers seminar courses specifically designed for transfer students, whereas EAU does not. These transfer student seminars are college courses for transfer students only, but transfers are not required to take them as part of their curriculum. In addition to the work associated with the course, the seminars include activities for the students so they can familiarize themselves with the institution, providing opportunities for engagement and to become acclimated with campus resources. While I did not specifically ask students during the interviews if they participated in these seminars, some students who were part of my sample did participate.



A second difference between these institutions is that they serve transfer students from community colleges located in different areas. EAU tends to draw their transfers from the southwest, middle, and northern part of the state. CPU, on the other hand, tends to attract students from the very southern part of the state. The demographics of the student populations from these community colleges differed, however, no distinctions among these areas emerged as part of my findings.

### **Participants and Sampling**

For the purposes of data collection, I engaged in criterion sampling. Maxwell (2013) states that criterion sampling is used to answer research questions geared toward a specific population. This type of sampling will allow me to focus on traditionally-aged, junior level community college transfer students, the most common type of transfer student according to the literature (Bahr, 2010; Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Handel, 2007). I also honed in on students who have spent at least two semesters (one academic year) at their four-year institutions, since they would be oriented as transfer students at that point and can fully speak to their experiences at both schools. Focusing in on this population will permit rigorous research and theory generation that is specific to the community college transfer student population.

As reflected in my definition of community college transfer students based on Carlan and Byxbe (2000), participants included students who attended two-year community colleges and then transferred to one of two four-year institutions with junior status, meaning they have earned at least 60 credits at their two-year institution, and for the purposes of theory generation, were traditionally college aged, between 19 and 22 years old. While having a sample of various age ranges would add a level of diversity to

the study, keeping the sample within the traditional college student age range aided in generating a theory comparable to traditionally aged, native college students, drawing parallels between the two populations. Moreover, the two institutions in my study have large populations of traditionally aged, community college transfer students who transfer to these institutions after two years (or earning at least 60 credits). Such a population lent itself to my research questions and design, as well as the context of my study.

In the spirit of grounded theory, having a specific sampling strategy guided me in maintaining my focus on the population being studied to fully explore identity, development, and engagement, and how a specific group engages in meaning making. Therefore, applying theoretical sampling as part of a grounded theory approach was necessary to engage in CCM (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Theoretical sampling is "driven by concepts derived from the evolving theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 203). I applied criterion sampling in order to keep my study specific to the population I wished to explore (Maxwell, 2013). However, I also used theoretical sampling in that I am not studying a specific group within the community college transfer student population (males, females, minority students, etc.) based on the grounded theory approach and for data collection purposes. Theoretical sampling helped me to remain grounded in my data and maintain the scope of my study, while acknowledging I researched an unexplored phenomenon in alignment with the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006).

### **Participant Recruitment and Incentive**

The number of participants recruited and interviewed for this study was contingent upon when saturation of data occurred. Participants were recruited via email blasts. I reached out to those individuals at EAU and CPU who played critical roles in

interacting with transfer students. Once I explained the purpose of my study and determined they agreed to assist with participant recruitment, I forwarded my recruitment email (see Appendix A) to EAU's Coordinator of University Transfer Services and CPU's Assistant Provost for Academic Support Services and requested that they forward it to community college transfer student mailing lists. To capture those students who had been at the institution for at least two semesters, blasts were sent to those students who entered either institution between fall 2013 and spring 2014, since data collection for this study spanned across fall 2014 and the beginning of spring 2015.

In my email detailing the study, I included my contact information and asked interested students to contact me directly to confirm that they met the criteria. Direct contact with participants builds the researcher-participant relationship from the very beginning of the study (Seidman, 2006). This initial contact also helps the participant in feeling comfortable with communicating with me and in asking any questions they have about the study prior to deciding if they are willing to participate (Seidman, 2006).

Once contact was established, I then correspond with the potential participants to confirm that they would like to proceed, fit my criterion sampling requirements, and determine dates and times that they would be available for an interview. Interviews took place at a time that was convenient for the participant; however, the location needed to be selected that is appropriate for conducting the interview. According to Varga-Atkins and O'Brien (2009) locations should be conducive to focusing on completing the graphic elicitation activity. Factors such as comfort and noise level were taken into account when scheduling interview locations. Locations included empty classrooms, group study

rooms, cafes during non-peak hours, and on-campus areas that were comfortable with low noise levels.

The length of the interviews varied based on the length of the conversations with participants, however, the average length of a recorded interview was 42 minutes. However, this time is actual recorded material, as students then spent between eight to ten minutes in addition to this completing the graphic elicitation activity that will be explained in more detail in the subsequent section. This time also does not include initially greeting the participant, walking him or her to the designated interview location, and casual conversation that took place before and after the interview itself. Seidman (2006) cautions that assigning the length as a unit of time, such as an hour, can lead to participants "watching the clock" and not being fully devoted to the activity (p. 20). Therefore my recruitment email stated that the interview could take approximately one hour, so the participant was not fully committed to a finite amount of time. It is estimated that between all of the items mentioned above that the entire interview process took the full hour.

As an incentive, students who participated in the study received a \$10 gift card to Wawa or Dunkin' Donuts. These stores were chosen given their numerous locations and accessibility throughout the region for busy college students. A gift card in this designated amount can be used multiple times for food, coffee, and other items at these establishments. While incentives are helpful in attracting participants and motivating them to participate in a study, Seidman (2006) suggests emphasizing the research-related benefits to the study. Striking the balance between a monetary incentive and contributions to the field will convey to the participant the importance of the research

without raising "undue expectations" during the course of the study (Seidman, 2006).

The incentive in this study was small enough as to not raise expectations or create a sense of entitlement, but served as a gesture to thank the participant for his or her time. All students but one accepted the incentive. The one student who declined said she was just interested in participating, and, as a Psychology major, interested in research.

### **Data Saturation**

Tied to my sampling and according to Rossman and Rallis (2003), striving for saturation as opposed to a specific number of participants generates "rich, thick descriptions" during the data collection process. Consistent with Charmaz (2006), saturation is the intent and ultimate goal for grounded theory data collection, giving way to theory generation as common categories emerge and are repeated. Birks and Mills (2011) suggest that theoretical saturation will occur when no new codes emerge from the data based on comparisons and when categories become clearly defined. For this study, saturation occurred through the application of CCM and the evolution of themes during the coding process, leading to theory generation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

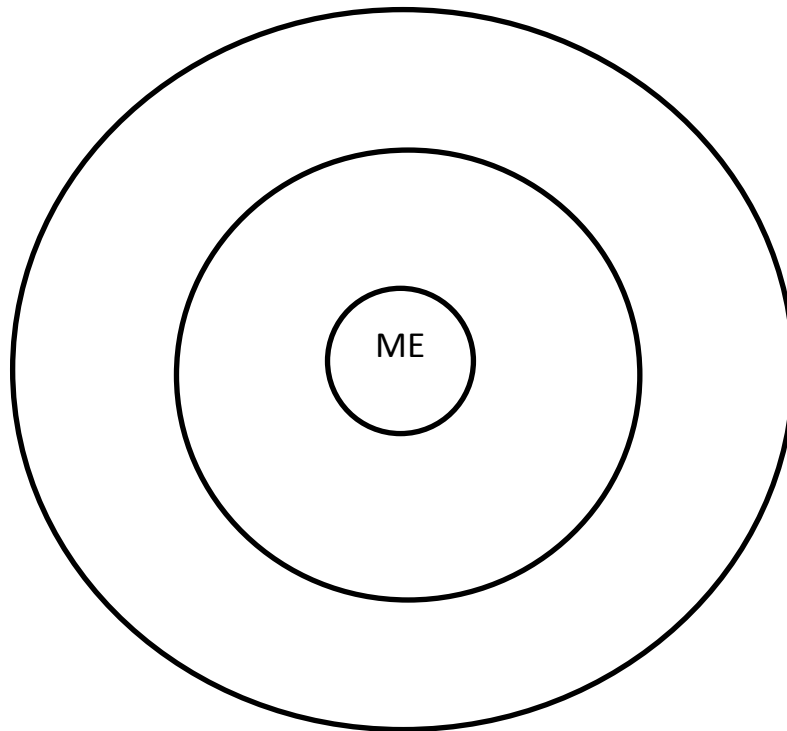
### **Data Collection**

The interview protocol and graphic elicitation activity for this study were designed around my research questions, honing in on identity, development, and engagement. This study included an intensive interview consisting of a graphic elicitation activity and a conversation regarding the student's identity, development, and engagement, occasionally referring back to the activity. Bagnoli (2009) writes that graphic elicitation is an arts-based technique that allows the participant to convey an experience that they may not be able to completely verbalize. According to Bagnoli (2009), "our daily experience is made of a multiplicity of dimensions, which include the

visual and the sensory, and are worthy of investigation but cannot always be expressed into words" (p. 547).

### **Graphic Elicitation as a Relational Map**

The specific graphic elicitation activity for this study was a relational map (see Figure 1), designed to explore transfer student identity and development during the interview. According to Bagnoli (2009) relational maps can help participants conceptualize the distance between ideas or items, with the most important items being closest to the participant, and the less important depicted as being farthest away. They can also help in recalling past experiences and knowledge, while addressing complex issues (Copeland & Agosto, 2012).



- Working from the inside out, write words (any nouns, adjectives, etc.) in the circle that you would consider being part of your identity as a college student, with items in the outer circles being the least important. The farther away you write the items from the center labeled “ME”, the less they are part of your student identity. You can even write items outside of the circle if you would like. There are no wrong answers!
- You have five minutes to complete this activity. Feel free to ask questions at any point.
- Here are some questions to help guide your thinking:
- What words would you use to describe yourself as a college student?
- What words would you use to describe your college experience?

*Figure 1.* Graphic Elicitation Activity

Varga-Atkins and O'Brien (2009) suggest verifying that the task given to participants is in alignment with the task and intended purpose of the graphic elicitation activity. This relational map activity was alignment in CCM given that these types of diagrams can help a researcher make easier comparisons across participants, and are structured enough to elicit responses to research questions (Varga-Atkins & O'Brien, 2009). Furthermore, graphic elicitation techniques have been predominantly used in psychology-based fields (Varga-Atkins & O'Brien, 2009). Since the literature on identity and development has its roots in psychology, applying graphic elicitations in this manner lent itself to the origins of these two areas, providing opportunities for deeper exploration.

As part of the relational map activity, participants were asked to write words that they feel are part of their own identities in Euler circles, with the center circle having the word "ME" to indicate proximity to one's identity. Euler circles within a diagram allow participants to cognitively recognize relationships between items, and the significance of those relationships based on their distance from each other (Mineshima, Okada, Sato, & Takemura, 2008). The farther away the participant writes the items from the center labeled "ME", the less they are considered part of the participant's identity. While, in alignment with grounded theory, no prompts, such as banks of preselected words, were used, it became clear due the pretesting phase that some general questions were necessary to guide the participants' thinking. Therefore, I provided some general questions at the bottom of the map under the directions. No other prompts were provided so participants could remain completely open and fill in words that speak closest to their identities. The graphic elicitation activity not only provided an opportunity for the participant to describe



something that he or she may not be able to verbalize (Bagnoli, 2009), but was also used as a tool to drive the semi-structured interview portion of the study.

Participants were originally going to be given five minutes to complete the relational map, however, during pretesting and as the study progressed, I realized that participants needed more time to process what was being asked of them, and time to orient themselves with the activity. I then increased the time to seven to ten minutes, asking them if they needed more time around the seven or eight minute mark. Most participants were satisfied with their work after seven or eight minutes, while others requested more time, taking the full ten minutes.

### **Intensive Interview and Conversation**

The semi-structured interview protocol allowed me to capture and interpret the stories regarding this population's experiences at their four-year institutions, while drawing from the relational map activity to create a holistic picture of the students' experiences and how they engaged in meaning making (see Appendix B). Conducting the interviews using this in-depth method provided me with an understanding of how this group interprets and makes meaning of their experiences at four-year institutions. Such an understanding contributed to theory generation, addressing my overarching research questions (Creswell, 2013).

Protocol questions were intensively designed with the college student identity, development, and engagement literature as a guide, and include elements of interview structures suggested by Charmaz (2006) and Seidman (2006). As suggested by Charmaz (2006) and in alignment with grounded theory, I applied four main principles when conducting my interviews. First, I will made my participant's comfort level with the

conversation priority. I accomplished this by making sure he or she understood the informed consent, was comfortable with being recorded, and could inquire about any questions on which he or she needs further clarification. Next, I listened without interrupting so the participant could fully express his or her thoughts. This allowed me to obtain as much data as possible for the purposes of developing a grounded theory. Third, I was empathetic and tried to understand what the participant has experienced through careful listening and repeating back any main points for clarification. Finally, I attempted to keep the interview upbeat as possible and ended on a positive note. This was accomplished through asking if the participant had any questions for me at the close of the interview as to not end it abruptly and providing him or her with an incentive, as a token of appreciation for his or her time. Charmaz (2006) also suggests monitoring the pace of the interview to make sure it returns to a casual social exchange by the end. I attempted to do this by wishing the student luck in his or her academic endeavors and inquiring if they had plans for the rest of the day to spark small talk as the interview concluded.

In the style of Seidman's (2006) interview model, I asked participants to provide details of their experiences with college student engagement and contemplate the meaning of their experiences, in alignment with the second and third phases of this model. Furthermore, questions provided opportunities to engage in deep conversation and for participants to elaborate on their experiences through probes, limiting their ability to answer "yes" or "no" to the questions (Seidman, 2006). Through these techniques, I gathered a vast amount of data while further exploring meaning making. However, unlike Seidman (2006) I did not interview my participants three times for several reasons. First,

the participants may or may not recall what was discussed in prior conversations if I were to conduct multiple interviews. The longer the time between interviews, the more distant the participant becomes from his or her experiences as a community college student, possibly impacting their responses and their ability to recall certain events. Also, those who have conducted graphic elicitation studies suggest conducting one interview to obtain the participant's initial responses to the activity, providing clearer explanation of the participant's creation and maintaining researcher control (Varga-Atkins & O'Brien, 2009; Zhang, 2008). Furthermore, given how busy college students are, it may be difficult to schedule multiple interviews with the same participant, prolonging the study and impacting its credibility by putting my data at risk for maturation (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

The opening interview question asked the participant to describe the relational map he or she had created. Zhang (2008) recommends using this technique to limit the risk of misinterpretation of graphic elicitations. Questions regarding the relational map explored the participant's feelings and how strong they identify with certain items. If I needed further clarification on an item a student wrote on the map, I would ask for further clarification, perhaps asking the participant to provide me with an example (i.e., "I see you wrote 'anxiety' close to the center of the map. Can you give you me an example of what makes you anxious or what you meant by that?"). College student identity and development was also addressed in the subsequent interview questions. I also incorporated opportunities for participants to tell stories and walk me, as the researcher, through certain events. According to Wolcott (2008) these "grand tour" questions are helpful in painting a picture of the participant's experience and keep the interview more

natural, creating more of a conversational than formal interview environment. Additional questions were related to engagement and how transfer students perceive on and off-campus interactions in accordance with the transfer student literature.

### **Instrumentation**

Table 1 outlines how my design addressed my research questions. I used all forms of my data collection, including interviews, graphic elicitations, and reflective journals with analytic memos, to help in answering my first two overarching research questions. My question regarding grounded theory drove my research, and all forms of data were necessary in answering this question since little is known about transfer student identity, development, and engagement. Furthermore, based on the research of Baxter Magolda (2009), meaning making has been predominantly explored through interviews; applying graphic elicitation techniques will allow me to further explore identity, development, and engagement. Definitions of identity and development can overlap, therefore using a graphic elicitation activity adds clarity to these areas and contribute to theory generation. In addition, through reflective journaling, I was able to make meaning of my own experiences, as well as the experiences of my participants, and provide moments of clarify as I interpret my data.

Table 1

*Research Questions Explored and Strategies Applied*

Research Question	Element(s) Explored	Strategy Used
Overarching Questions	Identity Development Engagement	Reflective Journal/Analytic Memos Relational Map All Interview Questions
Sub Question 1	Identity	Relational Map Interview Questions 1, 2, 3
Sub Question 2	Development	Relational Map Interview Questions 12, 13, 14, 17
Sub Question 3	Engagement	Interview Questions 4, 6, 6a, 6b, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
Sub Question 4	Engagement Development	Interview Questions 8, 17, 10a, 14a, 14b
Sub Question 5	Identity Development	Relational Map Interview Questions 5, 15, 15a, 16, 16a

The first sub question regarding identity was answered through the relational map activity and the opening interview question. The overlapping features of identity and development in particular imply complexity. A relational map provided further clarity to me and the participant while determining key items that are part of his or her identity.

The second sub question was answered predominantly through the semi-structured interview. However, the interview itself referenced the relational map, so some participants needed to expand their descriptions of their identity and development using the map. The integrative nature of the interview and the exploration of overlapping areas of the college experience through a holistic approach required the participants to refer back to the relational map as needed. For example, two of my participants, while discussing their goals and interests during the semi-structured interview, wanted to go back to the map and add something they did not have on it initially. I permitted them to do this since what they wanted to add seemed to be a critical part of their four-year college experience and was discussed in more depth throughout the interview.

The third and fourth sub questions, due to their interrelatedness, were answered through the interview questions referenced in Table 1. The interview data allowed me to interpret how the student has developed while attending and engaging with their four-year institution. The last sub question once again pulled from both the interview questions and relational map. The students had the opportunity to demonstrate their own development and identity at the four-year institution through the intensive interviewing process as well as the creation of a relational map.

### **Data Analysis**

In alignment with grounded theory and as mentioned in previous sections, I used Constant Comparative Method (CCM) for my data analysis. CCM can help in "generating theories of process, sequence, and change which pertain to organizations, positions, and social interaction" (Glaser, 1965, p. 444). This approach is systematic, and through joint analysis, permits vagueness and flexibility, giving way to creativity and

theory generation (Glaser, 1965). Furthermore, Strauss and Corbin (2008) suggest that by comparing one incident to another, the researcher remains grounded in the data.

I interviewed a total of 25 (n=25) participants for this study. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. Prior to analysis, I sent each recorded interview via email to a transcriptionist, who was not associated with this study, to be transcribed. For the purposes of continuity and consistency, I intended to hire and use the same transcriptionist to transcribe all of my interviews during the data collection process. However, I had to discontinue services with one transcriptionist after my seventh interview and was referred to another by a colleague, who I used for the remainder of my interviews. All participants were given an alias of my choosing to protect their identities, as indicated in the informed consent.

As I received each transcribed interview back from the transcriptionist, I stored it electronically in a file folder on my personal computer in my home office. I printed out each transcript so I was able to fully interact with my data and highlight the text by hand during the analysis process. Each paper transcript was stored in a pendaflex file folder in my home office. Using paper transcripts for analysis is my own personal preference for coding and interacting with my data.

I engaged in CCM, building on data from the previous transcript as I received each back from the transcriptionist, as well as my relational maps. In the style of Charmaz (2006) I fluidly interacted with my data as I compared my interview codes and emerging categories from my graphic elicitation activities. I compared them with the previously coded ones, along with my graphic elicitation data to build comprehensive categories. This was especially helpful given that I examined overlapping ideas such as

identity and development. CCM provided clarification in my data as I searched for ongoing repetition in categories related to these areas (Charmaz, 2006).

As I collected my interview and relational map data, I engaged in CCM on an ongoing basis, so I was constantly comparing codes and categories with previous incidents in the same category as they emerge. I included print outs of my weekly research journal with analytic memos entries as part of the coding process as well as I search for themes, ideas, and moments of clarity. During coding, when I noticed something emergent, striking, or if a theoretical idea emerged, I "stop[ped] coding and record[ed] a memo", as suggested by Glaser (1965, p. 440).

According to Charmaz and Mitchell (2001), analyzing data as the study progresses allows the researcher to compare the data at various stages. It enables the researcher to look for evolving patterns that can ultimately lead to theory generation (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). Therefore, within the CCM process, using coding techniques for my interview and reflective journal data with analytic memos enabled me to look for similarities, differences, causation, frequency, and occurrence in my data (Saldaña, 2009).

In alignment with grounded theory coding techniques, I coded within two phases within the CCM method, and then a third round of theoretical coding to ultimately generate a theory based on the data. I apply line-by-line and focused coding for my first round and axial coding for my third round to group categories in themes, using different color highlighters to indicate each round (Charmaz, 2006). Through these rigorous coding techniques, I remained open to new theoretical ideas related to transfer student identity, development, and engagement based on my relational map and interview data.



To fully engage in CCM with the data from the relational maps, in the style of Copeland and Agosto (2012) and suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), I created a series of spreadsheets to graph my findings: a separate one indicating the student responses in each level of the circles on the map ("ME" circle, second circle, third circle, and outside of circle), and another combining the most common responses from the participants. Although, as Copeland and Agosto (2012) indicate, that recording data in this manner is time intensive, it helped in compiling the responses so they can then be compared with each round of interview data. I was able to see all participant responses together on the spreadsheets, and group them together, creating a larger picture of community college transfer student identity.

As I coded my interview and relational data and note emerging concepts, I also created network data displays as suggested by Miles et al. (2014) to holistically analyze all forms of my data. Such an analysis also lends itself to my grounded theory orientation and chronicles the evolution of my data. Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) assert that grounded theory allows the researcher to create associations between categories and concepts. These data displays were critical in remaining organized as I visually made associations among the emerging themes. Moreover, the data displays guided me in clearly identifying and categorizing the elements of identity, development, and engagement, as well as looking for overlaps in these elements. These various data displays enable me to continuously compare and contrast my data, abstract themes, and look for new information as part of my grounded theory orientation.

Furthermore, visually displaying my data guided me in fully interpreting categories and codes as I abstracted themes and commonalities in identity, development,

and engagement among the transfer student population. Network displays according to Miles et al. (2014) holistically "display streams of participant actions, events, and processes" (p. 111). Based on the categories of identity, development, and engagement I explored patterns and commonalities within the visual displays. Because this was an evolving and fluid process, I engaged in several rounds of data displays and matrices during CCM until data saturation was reached. Figure 2 is representative of one of my later data displays, which I integrated into one of my later chapters to demonstrate how I reached theory generation.

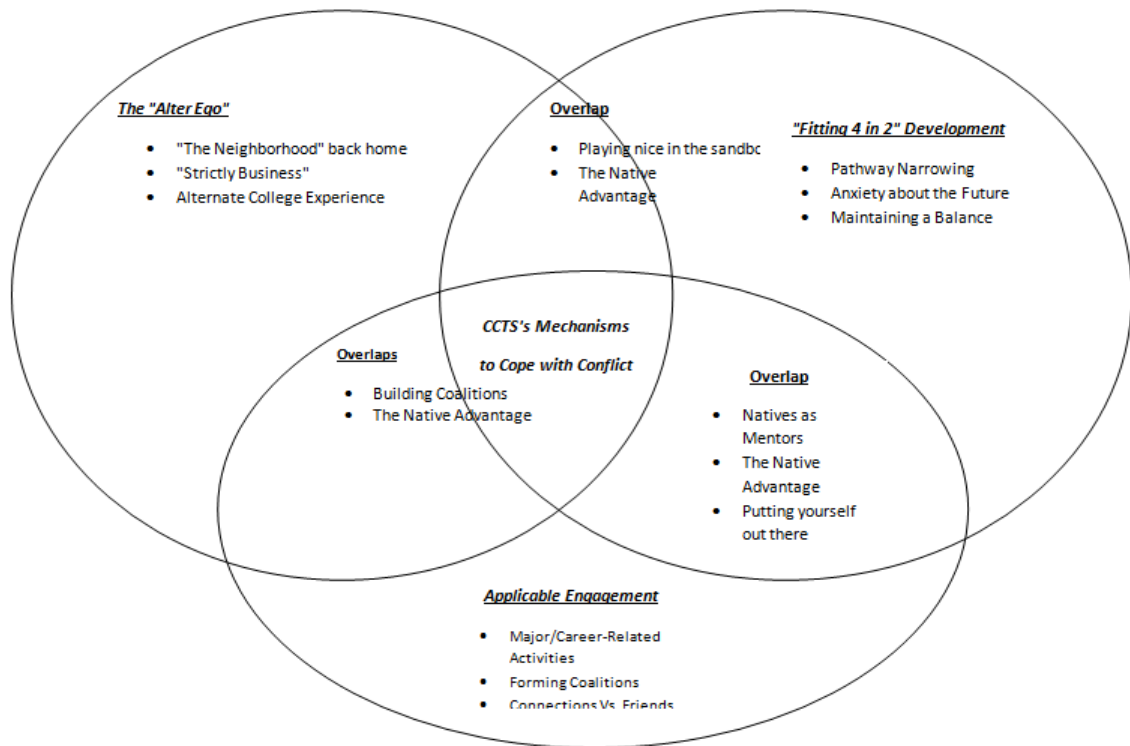


Figure 2. Data Display : Identity, Development, and Engagement

### Theory Generation

After achieving saturation with my data and abstracted main themes through coding and visual displays, I took steps to generate a theory regarding community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement. Charmaz (2006) writes that one must move from abstract "categories to major concepts" during the theory generation process (p. 154). Therefore, during my last round of coding, theoretical coding, I began formulating an argument in the style of Charmaz (2006). I used statements such as "the argument here is", "the reasoning is that", and "I support this argument by including the

following" to formulate my theory (Charmaz, 2006, p. 157). I embarked in several rounds of this until I achieved a sound argument.

After crafting my argument, as recommended by Birks and Mills (2011), I developed a storyline with the main ideas from my argument and the abstracted themes to explain and present my theory. I asked myself critical questions while reflecting back on my argument, and attempted to consider images associated with my data (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). This meant returning to my original data to review specific statements from participants as I searched for particular statements that contribute to my original argument (Birks & Mills, 2011). Once I achieved a storyline that explained the theory, I revisited my interviews and research journal to ensure that the storyline was applicable to my argument and across all of my data (Birks & Mills, 2011). This storyline technique allowed me to present the theory "in isolation of both extant theory and contemporary literature", since the storyline itself stood alone initially and then was discussed in relation to current theory and literature (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 134).

### **Trustworthiness of Study**

As a qualitative researcher, I considered the trustworthiness of my study, specifically in terms of confirmability, dependability, rigor, and transferability (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Looking at these areas guided me in conducting an effective study that contributed to the community college transfer student literature regarding identity, development, and engagement. Addressing these aspects prior to and while conducting my study assisted in making any necessary adjustments as my research progresses.

## **Confirmability**

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) state that triangulation occurs when using "multiple sources of data, multiple points in time, or a variety of methods are used to build the picture that you are investigating" (p. 69). For the purposes of this study and to engage in confirmability, I triangulated my research by comparing findings from my interview and relational map data. The similarities that emerged during data analysis played a part in triangulation as well as the study's trustworthiness.

Furthermore, I used my reflective journal in my triangulation efforts. For example, during an interview, one of my participants made a statement about interacting with a particular social group on campus. I then combed through my observations and other interviews to see if another reference was made to that group (there was no other reference to that group). I also looked back on my analytic memos within my journal to see if I had any previous thoughts about social groups. Searching for overlaps and consistencies in my data aided me in breaking my data into pieces (Rossmann & Rallis, 2003) while contributing to key findings in the areas of identity, development, and engagement among transfer students. Such notions are reflective of grounded theory, and can help the researcher hone in on specific findings (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001).

Another way in which I verified the trustworthiness of this study was to ask my participants to describe their relational maps as part of the interview. According to Zhang (2008) asking participants to explain their work and asking them clarifying questions prevents misinterpretations on my behalf. Such techniques demonstrated that I, as the researcher, did not making assumptions about the data, ensuring the study's trustworthiness.

## **Dependability**

To aid in the dependability of my study, I engaged in pretesting of my relational map and semi-structured interview protocols with four students who were not part of my sample. According to Turner (2010), pretesting or piloting qualitative protocols can help the researcher identify any flaws, issues, or weaknesses, while helping him or her become comfortable with conducting interviews. These pilot interviews provided me with experience in conducting interviews. Moreover, piloting the protocol helped me in tweaking the flow of my interview questions, craft guiding questions on the relational map, and determining that more time would be needed for filling out the map. I also shared my interview protocol with my dissertation committee, two of my doctoral colleagues, and the individual who served as my contact at CPU for additional feedback to confirm the protocol's dependability from a research perspective.

Related to dependability was my ability to fully apply CCM to this study to develop a theory grounded in data. Using a relational map as a graphic elicitation contributed to this. Per Varga-Atkins and O'Brien (2009), using diagrammatic forms helps to make "comparisons easier across cases" (p. 56). Furthermore, having the participants reiterate what they wrote in the relational map circles reduced the risk of misinterpreting findings, contributing to the study's dependability (Varga-Atkins & O'Brien, 2009).

## **Rigor**

Another factor to be considered related to the trustworthiness of this study is its rigor, verifying that the study is being sufficiently conducted (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In terms of my research, multiple institutions were used to contribute to this study's rigor, and, as suggested by Creswell (2013), moved the study beyond the workplace of the

researcher to obtain "multiple perspectives that range over the entire spectrum of perspectives" (p. 151). Conducting my research at both CPU and EAU increased my participant pool, enabled me to obtain multiple perspectives from two different institutions, and sufficiently saturated my data. Finally, my research questions indicated rigor in this study (Creswell, 2013). Having several, specific research questions, including one that addressed an emergent theory, allowed me to fully explore the little-known areas of community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement.

### **Transferability**

According to Boeije (2002) engaging in CCM lends itself to transferability as part of trustworthiness. Using sampling and CCM allows for generalization of concepts to the population being studied ensures transferability in future studies. Boeije (2002) writes, "the conceptual model can even be transferred to different substantial fields that show similarities with the original field" (p. 393). Creswell (2013) suggests that while qualitative data cannot be generalized, if sampling and analysis methods are held constant, a study with a similar population may be conducted to compare the results with the findings of the original study.

Given my grounded theory approach in exploring community college transfer students, the findings for this particular study could be applied to several new forms of research regarding this population, furthering understanding in how they make meaning of their experiences. For example, perhaps institutions can look at new ways to engage transfer students through activities, such as orientations that are tailored to them. Also, understanding the identity, development, and engagement of this population could help in recruitment and program design efforts.

### **Expectations: Power Relations, Researcher Control, and Timeline**

Due to the nature of this study, and that I worked with participants from two different institutions, I had to remain aware of perceptions of authority and my role in the researcher-participant relationship with transfer students. Moreover, there were several political and power-related balances, as well as differences in perspectives, that I needed to be mindful of. As a qualitative researcher, I researched the political hierarchies (at CPU and understood them within the context of EAU, my own institution), learning about the challenges of each institution prior to conducting my research. Such awareness aided me in preparing for any concerns presented. I was extremely fortunate during this study to work with individuals and entities at both institutions who supported my study, had the resources to assist me, and who wish to continue to learn more about transfer students themselves. Finally, I had an anticipated timeline that I referred to throughout this study to conduct my research in an efficient manner.

### **Gatekeepers, Political Power, and Relationships**

The most important relationships I established and maintained during the course of this study were my participants. I remained mindful of my role as a researcher and how I am perceived by the students in this study. Rossman and Rallis (2003) caution researchers to be cognizant of the shift in the balance of power between interviewer and interviewee during a study. Given my job as an Academic Advisor, I made sure the transfer students interviewed as part of this study understood that I was approaching the interview in my role as a doctoral student. I referred to myself as a doctoral student first and framed every conversation within the context of being a student. Not doing this and coming from a position of authority could have caused participants to feel powerless or,



even more alarming, believe that not participating in this study would have somehow impacted their academic careers at their four-year institutions. Therefore, in my email to my potential participants, I clarified that participation in this study was voluntary and there were no academic repercussions for those who did not participate.

Another issue, which fortunately, was a positive experience, was establishing contact with those individuals who had access to important information pertaining to my study, such as email addresses of transfer students, course information, and access to interview spaces. These individuals, according to Maxwell (2013) are typically known as "gatekeepers", and they can "facilitate or interfere with [one's] study" (p. 90). For the purposes of my study, the gatekeepers were the aforementioned individuals and entities at both institutions, including the Coordinator of University Transfer Services at EAU, the Assistant Provost of Academic Support Services and the Research Associate of External Affairs at CPU. While all individuals I approached for assistance with recruitment of participants for my study were extremely supportive, I was aware that there could be those in institutional management who may or may not support my research for various reasons. There were "informal gatekeepers" (Seidman, 2006), or students and those involved with campus clubs and organizations that have less formal relationships with students, but still communicate with potential participants for my study. For example, at the conclusion of two of my interviews, the participants told me that others who received my recruitment email were unsure if this study was "legit". They informed me that they would let these other students know that the study was legit, encouraging participation.

Such barriers give way to concerns regarding power relations, for those who are considered "influential actors" can make or break a study using their political power (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 82). For example, to prevent concern about my study, I shared my Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval paperwork with everyone I interacted with so they were aware that the research was approved by both EAU (who provided the initial IRB approval) and CPU (who approved my study pending approval of EAU and provided me with documentation indicating this). Making contact with gatekeepers during the early stages of my research and showing the appropriate credentials thoroughly explaining my study, and being transparent and open about my research with individuals alleviating any questions about my study's legitimacy (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2006).

### **Researcher Control**

Connected to power imbalances and authority in a study is the idea of researcher control (Seidman, 2006). It was my responsibility as the researcher to make sure no harm came to the participants and to establish rapport with them during my study (Seidman, 2006). At the same time, however, I had to maintain control of the interview process. Striking this balance as I worked with the participants in this study and maintained control, while communicating to them that no harm will come to them should they choose not to participate was vital to the success of the study (Seidman, 2006). Engaging in casual small talk prior to the actual interview (asking about the student's major, discussing the weather, and so on), and presenting the relational map activity as an "icebreaker", as suggested by Varga-Atkins and O'Brien (2009), helped in alleviating any tension that may emerge due to power imbalances. Allowing participants to talk about

themselves as part of the activity helped in establishing rapport and lessened the authoritative participant-research relationship (Varga-Atkins & O'Brien, 2009).

As mentioned earlier, according to Vargas-Atkins and O'Brien (2009), controlling the setting where the study takes place will keep the participants on task, for graphic elicitation activities in particular. Finding an appropriate setting to conduct the interview helped the participant focus on completing the relational map activity and answering the interview questions (Varga-Atkins & O'Brien, 2009). While this did not present an issue at EAU since I was familiar with the environment and knew areas of the campus that were conducive to conducting interviews, I had to research different locations for interviews and learn the peak times at CPU. This led me to arrive at the campus prior to the interview so I could find ideal interview locations, and also switching interview locations with two participants due to noise.

### **Differences in Etic and Emic Perspectives**

Another issue I remained aware of is the difference between insider and outsider perspectives. According to Wolcott (2008), the term "etic" refers to perspectives outside of a group and is typically used to make broad comparisons among groups, while "emic" refers to inter-group differences and perspectives (p. 48). These perspectives impacted my research in several ways. First, as an outsider to the transfer student population and one of the institutions being studied (etic perspective), I made sure that I attempt to represent the experiences of the participants (the emic perspective) through rigorous data collection. Second, I attempted to be mindful of the etic differences between the different populations on the two campuses being studied. For example, from an emic perspective and based on my own review of the literature, it is apparent that freshman and transfer

students attending the same institution have different experiences. Such differences in experiences speaks to the various emic perspectives existing in one community. I verified that my participants met the transfer student criteria I set for this study and remained vigilant of these potential differences to make sure that I did not mistakenly interview a student outside of the population, potentially tainting the data.

### **Proposed Timeline**

I adhered to my proposed timeline in completing this study (see Appendix D). While it was my goal to follow this timeline as closely as possible, various issues emerged, such as the length of time it took to obtain IRB approval, the differences in semester schedules between EAU and CPU, participant availability, full achievement of data saturation, and the delay in receiving interview transcriptions. Therefore, this timeline was adjusted and updated as needed throughout the course of my study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Sieber and Tolich (2013) state that researchers should ask themselves, “is this research *on* these people or *with* these people” when considering the benefits and risks of research (Sieber & Tolich, 2013, p. 25). I have asked myself this question, and offer that I did conduct this research *with* my participants for several reasons. First, I gave them the opportunity to create a relational map without word restriction, giving them ownership in their creation. Second, I engaged in intensive interviewing and using Chamarz’s (2006) techniques, which kept the interview on a conversational level. Third, I reiterated what the participants say to make sure I am fully captured their experiences, which stressed the importance of their contribution to my research. Finally, I made myself readily accessible before and after the interview to answer any questions they had. I also developed other

interviewing techniques (casual conversation, probing tactics, maintaining the flow of the interview, etc.) that helped in maintaining this joint researcher-participant relationship as well.

There are many facets of vulnerabilities that can be benefits and risks that create murkiness when considering the level of potential harm to a participant (Sieber & Tolich, 2013). For instance, researchers should also avoid exploiting participants for the sake of financial and/or academic gain (Seidman, 2006; Sieber & Tolich, 2013). While, as a researcher, I did not see harm in interviewing transfer students for this study, I also remembered that I should be conducting research *with* this population as opposed to *on* this population.

In addition to understanding the vulnerability of the population I am studying, I also took measures to ensure my participants were protected and aware that minimal risks were involved with this study. First, prior to conducting this study, I received the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Human Subjects training at my institution (CITI, n.d.). This training provided me with a certificate to conduct research on human subjects. Furthermore and as I already mentioned, I secured approval from the IRB to carry out this study. This required approval protected the participants in my study as well as made EAU and CPU aware of my intentions with this research and data collection. Also, to help in protecting my participants' identities, participants were given aliases during the interview process. This prevented their real names from being references in the study. Finally, all participants were asked to sign an informed consent (see Appendix C) form prior to being interviewed, verifying that they were comfortable proceeding with the study. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003) an informed consent

protects the participants' privacy, fully informs them about the study and their ability to withdraw from it at any time, and makes sure there is no deception taking place during the study.

### **Conclusion**

As I embarked on this grounded theory study, it was my hope that conducting interviews and applying graphic elicitation techniques would result in theory generation. Using rigorous grounded theory data collection and analysis techniques allowed me to constantly analyze and interact with my data on an ongoing basis, which will be explained in subsequent chapters. Engaging in coding, categorizing, and data displays guided me in interpreting themes that may contribute to an emerging theory. I also kept in mind issues of trustworthiness, and engaged in bracketing through keeping a reflective journal so my biases do not interfere with my research. Finally, acknowledging my biases and assumptions helped me to remain open as I proceed with this study.

My introduction to this dissertation study included my research problem of the lack of knowledge pertaining to community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement, demonstrating a need for institutions to begin recognizing the changing landscape of higher education. My literature review provided an overview of community college transfer students, the challenges they face, and the role they place at four-year institutions. I then pointed out the gap in the community college transfer student theoretical literature after summarizing the available literature pertaining to identity, development, and engagement in relation to traditionally aged, native, four-year college students. I also provided a detailed methodology of my qualitative, grounded theory study along with ethical concerns and issues of trustworthiness.

As will be made apparent in the upcoming chapters, this study contributed to the community college transfer student literature. This unique research design provided an in-depth exploration of community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement. Exploring these three areas in relation to transfer students introduced a new area of research, while further increasing the visibility of community college transfer students on four-year campuses.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Answers to Research Questions**

This chapter serves as a "bridge" between my first three chapters and my upcoming two chapters. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of my data collection, analysis, and findings to lay the foundation for my upcoming chapters, which are formatted as articles discussing my findings. I also discuss how journaling, writing memos, and creating data displays contributed to my findings, and provide answers to my research questions through the use of my proposed theories and their related themes. I then conclude with a brief overview of this section and introduce the main ideas that will be highlighted in the upcoming chapters. Moving forward in this chapter and in later chapters, I will abbreviate the term community college transfer student as "CCTS". This label further identifies the specific population I worked with for this study who met a certain criteria to participate

#### **Overview of Data Collection and Analysis in Relation to Findings**

The data collected for this study included the completed participant relational maps in addition to the interview questions that explored CCTS experiences with identity, development, and engagement at their four-year institutions. In the sections below, I provide an overview of my participant interviews, data collection processes, and my data analysis.

#### **Graphic Elicitation Data and Analysis**

As discussed in earlier chapters, the specific graphic elicitation activity for this study was a relational map (see Figure 1), designed to explore identity and development during the interview. After signing the informed consent form and discussing the details



of the study, I gave participants the relational map to complete. Participants were asked to write words that they felt to be part of their own identities in Euler circles, with the center circle having the word "ME" to indicate proximity to one's identity. The farther away the participant wrote the items from the center labeled "ME", the less they were considered part of the participant's identity. I provided some general questions at the bottom of the map to guide participants' thinking based on feedback received from my pilot studies.

### **Intensive Interview**

The semi-structured interview protocol enabled me to capture and interpret the stories regarding this population's experiences at their four-year institutions, and drew from the relational map activity to create a holistic picture of the students' experiences and how they engaged in meaning making (see Appendix A). Protocol questions were designed with the college student identity, development, and engagement literature as a guide, and included elements of interview structures in alignment with grounded theory. Questions regarding the relational map explored the participant's feelings and how strongly they identified with certain items. College student identity and development were also addressed in these questions. Additional questions were related to engagement and how transfer students perceive on and off-campus interactions in accordance with the transfer student literature.

### **Data and Analysis**

I interviewed a total of 25 (n=25) participants for this study, as data saturation was achieved after interviewing this number of CCTSs. Intensive interviews were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. All but four participants agreed to be audio recorded during the interview. In alignment with Constant

Comparative Method (CCM), data analysis began as soon as my first interview was completed, and was ongoing as I gathered relational map data and received interview transcripts. While waiting for the interview transcripts to be sent back to me, I entered the relational map data on the spreadsheets as described in chapter three and coded the interview notes from those interviews that were not recorded. In the spirit of CCM, I coded and analyzed each relational map in the style of Copeland and Agosto (2012). I used individual spreadsheets to list the words and phrases students wrote in each circle, and then based on the frequency of those words and phrases, I created a color-coded codebook to group them into categories. As will be discussed in the upcoming sections, these categories were then integrated into the spreadsheet with the theoretical codes from the interviews, contributing to the development of the CCTS identity, development, and engagement theories.

Although the relational map was meant to provide insight into identity and development in conjunction with the interview questions themselves, it also shed light on engagement. Therefore, I did not parse out individual findings from the maps and the interview questions but wove them throughout my findings to support the emergent theories in upcoming chapters. Moreover, as I suggested in earlier chapters, because identity, development, and engagement have overlapping features, these themes may be repeated across these areas, but are discussed as a whole before the three areas are addressed individually in upcoming chapters.

Once the interview transcripts were received, they were coded using the procedures also outlined in chapter three, which included listing line by line, focused, and axial codes on individual spreadsheets for each participant, and listing the axial codes on

one spreadsheet to determine emerging categories and to engage in Constant Comparative Methods (CCM). I grouped categories together through data displays in order to abstract themes from the data. The themes that emerged gave way to the theoretical codes that ultimately led to development of three theories, each pertaining to CCTS identity, development, and engagement, and an overarching theme suggesting how the population makes meaning of their experiences at a four-year institution through the lenses of these three areas.

### **Research Journal, Analytic Memos, and Data Displays**

As mentioned earlier, I kept a research journal about my experiences in the field with my participants in an attempt to set aside any biases so I could approach my research with as much objectivity as possible. This journal also served as a place to write my post-interview field notes, analytic memos, and describe any moments of "serendipity" as per Rossman and Rallis (2003). Every week, and as I coded, I would note my thoughts and experiences in this journal. I would also continuously expand upon any field notes that I had written at the conclusion of each interview, which helped me in developing the proposed theories I highlight in the upcoming sections.

Developing data displays also played a critical part in arriving at my theories. My initial data displays were simple charts of codes, categories, themes, and ultimately theoretical codes. However, as time progressed, I developed more in-depth data displays based on the themes that emerged from my data. These data displays allowed me to see the connections among my themes. For instance, one of my earlier displays guided me in conceptualizing overlaps with the areas of identity, development, and engagement (see Figure 2). The themes listed in this data display, that are tied to the theories pertaining to

identity, development, and engagement are discussed below in relation to my research questions.

### **Answers to Research Questions**

Below, I provide my answers to my research questions. As indicated in Chapter Three, the answers to these research questions were driven either by the relational map, interview questions, reflective journal, or all of these sources combined (see Table 1). The theories that emerged are also addressed and are presented in the form of theoretical arguments in upcoming chapters, as suggested by Charmaz (2006) to thoroughly discuss and present these grounded theory findings.

### **Overarching Questions**

1. How does a CCTS make meaning of his or her identity, development, and engagement at a four-year institution?

CCTSs experience conflict in all three areas of identity, development, and engagement. They work through these conflicts over time at their four-year institutions. As will be addressed in the upcoming chapters, I discuss my proposed theories that emerged from my use of a grounded theory approach for this study. My theories, including the CCTS "alter ego", having to fit "four in two", and applicable engagement can be considered coping mechanisms to deal with the feelings of conflict CCTSs experience during their first year at a four-year institution. These coping mechanisms are how CCTSs arrive at making meaning of their college experience.

Holistically and in terms of meaning making, CCTSs want to work through these conflicts to improve upon themselves at their four-year institution. Therefore, they make meaning of their experiences with identity, development, and engagement at their four-

year institutions as striving to be a "better person coming out than going in." This overarching theme provides a holistic perspective regarding how the population experiences these three areas at four-year institutions, ultimately leading to how they make meaning of them (see Figure 3).

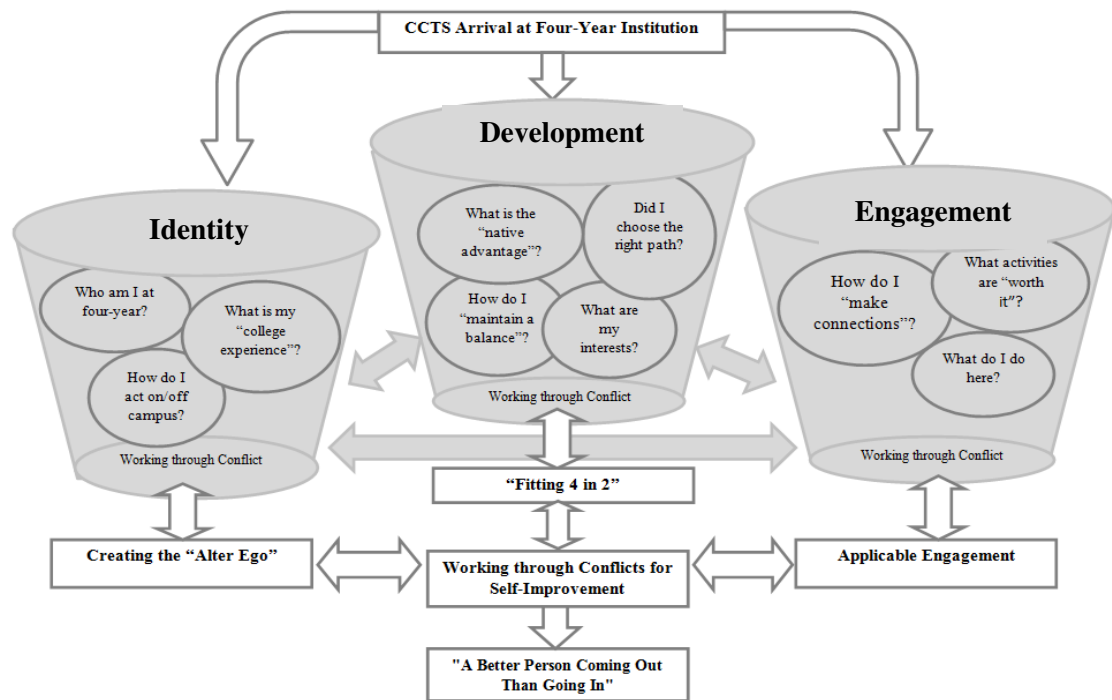


Figure 3. CCTS Meaning Making Processes

Even though CCTSs work through conflict during their first year at their four-year institutions, this is not to say that they, or college students in general, stop working through conflict after this period of time. Baxter Magolda (2009) suggests that working through personal challenges are part of a lifelong experience for any individual.

However, based on this data, which inquired about CCTSs experiences over the course of

a year specifically, working through the issues related to identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions can be considered part of their experiences as they strive to be "better coming out than going in." Furthermore, this overarching theme is what CCTSs perceive it to be, and I offer that they use the proposed theories as coping mechanisms to reach what they believe to be their own version of a "better person coming out than going in", which varies for every student. It is also worth noting that my research questions and findings address the process of meaning making for CCTSs, exploring the "how" of meaning making and not "what" the meaning actually is. Perhaps future research could continue to explore this aspect of CCTS meaning making.

2. What theory/theories will emerge from exploring CCTS identity, development, and engagement?

Based on the data collected, and after analyzing the codes from the relational maps and interviews, I propose three main theories pertaining specifically to CCTS identity, development, and engagement, and weave them into a story-like format as suggested by Charmaz (2006). I propose that CCTSs develop an alter ego at their four-year institutions, experience the challenge of fitting their four-year college development in two years ("fitting four in two"), and use applicable engagement at their four-year institutions to engage in activities related to their majors and future goals.

CCTSs experience feelings of uncertainty regarding their behaviors on campus and what the college experience is perceived to be, and therefore, develop an "alter ego" to cope with their uncertainty as they interact with students, faculty, and staff on-campus. They also feel they need to "play nice in the sandbox" with others on-campus to maintain relationships and to preserve this alter ego at their four-year institution. They are

uncertain of their goals even after attending community college and transferring to a four-year institution, so they have to information-gather, investigate, and seek out opportunities in an attempt to fit their four-year college experience in two years and narrow in on their interests over time, engaging in pathway narrowing. Furthermore, CCTSs want to engage in activities that benefit them academically and vocationally. They understand the importance of networking, and seek out applicable engagement opportunities, such as internships and clubs related to their major. These are activities that they perceive to be beneficial as they hone in on their future goals through pathway narrowing. They feel that native students have an advantage in terms of resources and opportunities, and are anxious and unsure of themselves as they seek out opportunities due to the perceived competition. However, they connect with these four-year natives, using them as mentors and, over time, "put themselves out there" to learn about opportunities that could benefit them. They also seek out like-minded individuals, such as other CCTSs, and build coalitions with them order to develop support systems, and obtain access to activities and resources.

### **Sub Questions**

1. How does a CCTS describe his or her identity after attending a four-year institution for one year?

Participants described their identities as college students in relation to their experiences at their four-year institutions and the interactions they have with those on and off-campus, as well as the activities they engage in on and off-campus. There appears to be an inner conflict between holding onto their past and defining themselves through their futures. CCTSs develop an alternate identity, or "alter ego" based on their experiences in their four-year institutional environments. This alter ego is based on their

perceptions of what is expected of them as college students and how they believe the college experience is portrayed. The alter ego appears to be professionally and academically driven, whereas the off-campus ego is less formal, typically manifesting with friends and family from home. Moreover, the alter ego incorporates elements of college life, including living on-campus or close to campus, attending parties, and engaging in other activities that this population perceives as being part of the college experience. Several students indicated that they "tried" certain aspects of the college experience, including going to parties or participating in Greek life, but then realized they were not interested in those activities. These attempts were part of CCTSs arriving at a four-year institution and their desire to enjoy what is perceived as being part of the college experience during their remaining two years, contributing to the alter ego.

2. How does a CCTS describe his or her development after attending a four-year institution for one year?

Participants described their development as college students in relation to their career pathways and future goals. Based on the relational map, CCTSs indicated that they value things related to their academics and the future, and that their academic goals have shifted and narrowed since attending their four-year institution for one year. The relational maps also suggested that the participants have matured over time. When discussing how the relational map would have changed if they had completed it during their first year at their community colleges, all students indicated that words that they had listed closer to the center of the circle would have been moved out, suggested a shifting a priorities over time.



Participants goals narrowed over time at a four-year institution. Interests that emerged from their community college experience do not appear to contribute to their decision making regarding major selection or career goals. This suggests that a CCTSs career path evolves over time through exposure to academic and personal experiences at a four-year institution, not necessarily at the community college level. Unlike their four-year native counterparts, CCTSs typically have a limited amount of time, two years or four semesters, to develop and narrow in on their interests before degree completion.

3. How does a CCTS engage with his or her four-year institution after attending a four-year institution for one year?

CCTSs make it a priority to seek out on-campus activities that serve a purpose in furthering them academically or vocationally, serving a function for them in achieving their goals and having an immediate return. They see these activities as applicable to their major and future goals. The student should be able to list the applicable engagement activity on a resume or use it as a networking tool, for example, to make connections for research opportunities. Some examples of applicable engagement include two biology majors interviewed who joined the pre-health club as part of their plans to later attend medical school, a law and justice student who aspires to become involved with law enforcement and is on the campus medical services, and an English major and aspiring author who writes for the campus literary magazine. These students, along with others, indicated these activities on their relational map in the second circle as part of the college activities category. This is in contrast to other extracurricular activities, such as attending parties or participating in more leisurely campus activities, that appeared on the outer circles of the

map. Themes related to this theory include major and career-related activities, "putting yourself out there" and building coalitions.

4. In what ways (if any) does a CCTS's engagement with his or her four-year institution after one year contribute to his or her college student development?

This question can be answered by looking at the themes that overlap with my proposed CCTS engagement and development theories. Applicable engagement has enabled CCTSs to hone in on their interests as they attempt to fit a four year experience in two due to feelings of conflict and uncertainty, specifically within their major, contributing to their development as college students. Oscar, for instance, indicated that he understood the importance of being a biology major for getting into medical school, but he also realized the importance of research and activity involvement as a gateway for that while attending his four-year institution. He also indicated his feelings of conflict and uncertainty upon transferring to EAU:

When attending [community college]I didn't know what was expected of a pre-med student. I knew I wanted to be a cardiologist. I knew that I had to work hard. I took a math class and got A's. It was like that the few classes of the semester, but then I didn't do as well when I first transferred. I wasn't worrying about research opportunities when I was a community college student. I'm in the pre-health club to try and do that more now.

As CCTSs engage with their four-year institutions through applicable engagement, they begin to develop a clearer career path and more specific goals that contribute to their development as college students. Also, CCTSs find themselves choosing between these applicable engagement opportunities over leisurely activities they may enjoy. This is due to choosing activities that are "worth it" to them as they attempt to "fit four in two".

5. In what ways (if any) does a CCTS's development contribute to his or her identity after one year at a four-year institution?

This question can be answered by looking at the themes that overlap with my proposed CCTS identity and development theories. Many students have indicated that attending a four-year institution has made them more mature or helped them to "grow up." This maturity has stemmed from balancing their academic and other activities, or "the balancing act" and appears to have developed while CCTSs attended their community colleges. From these time management skills that have improved over time, CCTSs have also mastered the "art of scheduling" by learning to maintain a balance in their lives, which began while attending their community colleges. Moreover, CCTSs view themselves as being juniors when arriving at their four-year institutions. They consider themselves adults, they view the freshman and native students as "kids". Their uncertainty with how to act on campus with the native students who appear to have several perceived "advantages" gives way to the development of a CCTS alter ego at a four-year institution.

### **Conclusion**

I have provided insight into my data collection and analysis, along with my proposed theories that emerged as a result. Furthermore, I have discussed these theories in relation to my research questions. My subsequent chapters discuss the content of my study and highlight my methodology in the form of articles. In Chapter Four, I present, in depth, my three proposed theories pertaining to identity, development, and engagement, and my use of the grounded theory approach in this study. In Chapter Five, the last chapter of this dissertation, I discuss the details of using graphic elicitation in a grounded theory study.

## Chapter 5

### Grounded Theory Article

This study explored community college transfer student (CCTS) identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions. The grounded theory approach was applied to develop CCTS specific theories. Relational maps and interview questions were included in the research design to explore meaning making given the intersections of identity, development, and engagement. Findings reveal that CCTSs develop an alter ego, attempt to fit the entire four-year college experience in two years, and use applicable engagement at their four-year institutions. These theories are the mechanisms that CCTSs use to cope with their feelings of conflict experienced at four-year institutions, leading to the desire for self-improvement. Implications for policy, practice, and research in addition to the study's limitations are also discussed.

**Keywords:** community colleges, transfer students, higher education, college student development theory, grounded theory

Community college attendance is on the rise, especially for students looking to complete their first two years of general education requirements and then transfer to a four-year institution to complete a bachelor's degree (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2014a). This enrollment increase is due to factors such as rising four-year institution tuition rates, convenience of course delivery, and access to education for the general population (AACC, 2014a). Today's community college students are a diverse group: 57% are women, 36% are first-generation, being the first in their family to attend college, 19% are Hispanic and 14% are African-American (AACC, 2014b). This diversity feeds into the community college transfer student, or CCTS, population at four-year institutions, creating a unique student body on college campuses.

The landscape of the four-year post-secondary institution is changing to include an increasing number of CCTSs (Flaga, 2006; Handel, 2007; Laanan, 1996; Townsend, 2008). This group is different from native four-year students, for they are more ethnically diverse, tend to be first-generation college students, work either part-time or full-time, and are more likely to commute to campus (Chaves, 2006; Cohen & Brawer, 2008;

Silverman, Aliabadi, & Stiles, 2009). Community college students make up 47% of the total undergraduate population (Deil-Amen, 2011). One in five community college students transfer to a four-year institution (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012). Once at a four-year institution, 60% of those students persist and earn a bachelor's degree within a four-year timeframe (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012). This is clearly an increase compared to the 23% of CCTSs who earned a bachelor's degree within six years of attending a four-year institution back in 1995 (Peter & Cataldi, 2005). This number is expected to rise pending approval of America's College Promise, a national proposal advocating to make the first two years of community college attendance free to students who meet certain conditions (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2015).

Despite this increase in the CCTS rate, services at four-year institutions are still geared toward native (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000), traditionally aged, college students, or those students who started at a four-year institution as freshmen and are therefore “native” to that college or university. This creates challenges, discrepancies, and inequities in services for CCTSs at four-year institutions (Lipka, 2008). Bahr, Toth, Thirolf, and Massé (2013) wrote of this issue, "both the community college and the four-year institution share responsibility for the outcomes of community college transfer students" (p. 10). Four-year institutions need to start viewing CCTSs as an integral part of their campus communities, not just additional students, or separate entities, who have credits completed towards a bachelor's degree (Davies, 1999; Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2013; Lipka, 2008; Toblowsky & Cox, 2012).

## **A Review of the Literature**

The community college context contributes to the unique nature of the CCTS population and the challenges they face at both two and four-year institutions (Silverman, Aliabadi, & Stiles, 2009). The roles and functions of community colleges are the fundamental underpinning of transfer student experiences, and influence how these students handle the transition to a four year institution. Moreover, looking at the dynamics of community colleges as well as the students they serve further anchors this study's research problem.

Literature pertaining to the CCTS population addresses issues such as retention, academic achievement, equity, and graduation rates, with a gap in the theoretical literature pertaining to identity, development, and engagement. These three areas influence the college student experience and are evident in the traditionally native college student literature (Schuh, Jones, Harper, & Associates, 2011; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whit, & Associates, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Because community colleges have been given various labels, such as "junior colleges", and "two-year schools" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Medsker, 1960), for the purposes of familiarity, consistency, and frequency within the literature, for this article I will be using the term "community college" when referencing two-year institutions. Also, four-year colleges and universities have various classifications based on the type of graduate degrees they offer (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.). Moving forward, I will use the over-arching term "four-year institution" when discussing colleges and universities unless I reference the name of a specific institution.

Community colleges, as a result of their transfer-oriented missions, have made higher education available to a variety of populations who typically would not have had access to college (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). This increased access to education was considered the “democratization” of higher education, or the idea that college was increasingly accessible and no longer strictly for the mostly White, male upper class as originally intended in the early 1900’s (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Rouse, 1995). The community college student population has evolved to consist of a "disproportionate number of adult learners, women, and racially underrepresented populations" due to this type of access (Renn & Patton, 2011, p. 246).

Furthermore, community college students are academically different from four-year native students (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012, November; Complete College America, 2012). Sixty percent of community college students are remediated and placed in basic skills courses upon beginning their college careers (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012, November). This is in contrast to 20% of native freshman who are remediated at four-year institutions (Complete College America, 2012). Such high remediation levels for community college students create challenges for them when they enter four-year institutions (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Handel, 2007; Hills, 1965; Tobolosky & Cox, 2012; Townsend, 2008).

Little empirical literature is available pertaining to transfer student adjustment from a psychological, emotional, and developmental perspective (Chaves, 2006; Laanan, 2001). Learning about transfer student experiences as a whole through the three lenses of identity, development, and engagement can help in understanding the inter-workings of this diverse population while attempting to fill this gap in the transfer student literature.

These three terms sometimes have overlapping concepts. Moving forward, I provide my own categorization of ideas within these areas in relation to the college student literature. Acknowledging and examining the murkiness of identity, development, and engagement contributes to using a constructivist grounded theory approach for this study.

### **CCTS Identity**

According to Kegan (1994), an identity is a constructed point of view that is a result of life experiences and perceptions. Out of this definition of identity emerges the notion of self-authorship, the idea of meaning making and interpreting the outside world based on experiences (Kegan, 1994). Meaning making, and the interpretation of experiences based on identity, can be traced back even further to Perry's (1970) scheme or stages of cognitive and ethical development, or "the evolving ways of seeing the world, knowledge, and education, values, and oneself" (p. 50). The stages can be repeated, occur out of order, and overall contribute to how a young individual comes to view and understand the world (Perry, 1970).

Baxter Magolda (2004) expanded on the idea of meaning making through the model of epistemological reflection. Young individuals, specifically college students, engage in meaning making and ways of knowing by moving away from interdependence and drawing conclusions from their experiences (Baxter Magolda, 2004). This epistemological reflection and the ability to make meaning of the world at the highest level gives way to self-authorship, a high level of thinking that can be achieved through the college experience (Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Identity literature is also available for various college student subgroups based on various factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual preference (Helms, 1995;



Josselson, 1996; Rypisi, Malcom, & Kim, 2009; Schuh et al., 2011). For example, Josselson's (1996) study of women's identity development was inspired by the gap in Erikson's (1950) research, which was based on White male experiences. Helms (1995) investigated racial identity development, asserting that the idea of race is socially constructed, and that White people in particular move through several stages in which they evaluate the privileges they have. Others have investigated how students of color use the college experience as a time to explore their own ethnicities further (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

These theories highlight the uniqueness of these populations in relation to their college experiences. Despite their uniqueness and diversity, discussion about CCTS identity is nonexistent. While Townsend (2008) offered that the transition experience for transfer students can make the population "feel like freshman again", in that they have to become familiar with a new college environment upon transfer, little else is known about how CCTS identities evolve upon their arrival at their four-year institutions.

### **CCTS Development**

The literature regarding identity overlaps into the areas of development and engagement. While several definitions of development exist pertaining to the college student population, the term can be defined as how an individual changes and evolves over the course of the college experience (Schuh et al., 2011). For instance, Chickering (2010) asserted that facilitating student development in college will lead to "cultivating the intellect", encouraging critical thinking skills, and building the foundation for civic responsibility (p. 54).

The traditional timeframe in which students attend college, the late teens into early twenties, has been coined “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2000) suggested this time in a person’s life is one of “profound change and importance” (p. 469). Cultural and industrial changes over the past century have redefined the role of emerging adulthood and how it plays out in society (Arnett, 2000). College-going cultures emphasize independent decision making based on one’s experiences (Arnett, 2000). Furthermore, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) emphasized that attending college facilitates a reconsideration of worldviews and personal reflection.

There is a lack of literature that speaks to CCTS development. Silverman et al. (2009) suggests that transfer students, like other non-native college students, are developmentally different than traditional students, but does not specify how they differ. Townsend (2008), for example, honed in on several issues pertaining to transfer students as they move from their "sending" institution (the previously attended community college), to their "receiving" institution (the four-year university) in two distinct phases, research and application, with four-year institutional attendance beginning with orientation. Between these two phases, disconnects occur, stifling their development as college students (Townsend, 2008).

There is a gap in the literature regarding CCTS development, therefore four-year institutions would have a difficult time determining if they are encouraging these same critical thinking skills within the transfer student population. In addition to contributing to the literature, addressing CCTS development could be key in not only discovering intellectual-building techniques for them but also in maintaining degree completion rates and increasing academic success at four-year institutions.

## **Engagement Versus Disengagement of CCTSs**

Effective engagement practices and activities can take many forms, including classroom involvement, volunteerism, clubs, and other college campus organizations (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Ishitani & Mckitrick, 2013; Kuh, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1997). Such notions are indicative of Astin's (1984) engagement theory, which regarded student involvement as it relates to one's own development and the amount of time a student devotes to his or her college experience.

Current literature suggests that transfer students in general are often either disengaged from their four-year institutions, or experience engagement differently at four-year institutions. Transfer students do not perform in four out of the five areas to the level of their institutional native peers in the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) (Lipka, 2008). Moreover, students who do not engage with their four-year institutions from their initial arrival can feel disconnected and experience low levels of adjustment, often leading to their departure from the institution. According to Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye (2007), vertical transfer students, or students who transferred to a four-year institution from a two-year institution who opted to not attend new transfer student orientation did not experience academically supportive campus environment conditions.

Emerging literature suggests that transfer students experience a different type of engagement at four-year institutions. After conducting semi-structured interviews with transfer students at George Mason University, Lester, Leonard, and Mathias (2013) determined that participants experience a broad form of social engagement through family and community support networks outside of the four-year institution. While this

study suggests that transfer student engagement manifests differently than traditional definitions of engagement, the authors interviewed a combination of community college and four-year institution transfer students who ranged in age from 18 to 48 (Lester et al., 2013). Such a diverse sample of transfers still does not provide a clear picture of specifically how traditionally-aged CCTSs experience engagement at four-year institutions.

Engagement patterns at the community college level have also been explored (Saenz, Hatch, Bukoski, Kim, Kye-hyoung, & Valdez, 2011). The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE, 2013) reiterated the issues associated with student engagement at the two-year level, and revealed the disconnect with four-year institutions once a community college student becomes a transfer student. The results suggest that utilization of campus resources, such as tutoring and counseling, lead to higher levels of engagement and four-year transfer (Saenz et al., 2011). Marti (2009) emphasized the need for continued research on community college student engagement, offering that it will inform decisions at both two and four-year institutions (Marti, 2009).

### **Applications of Current Theories**

While there are no specific theories in the college student literature relating to CCTS identity, development, and engagement, certain theories have been applied to community college students. Chaves (2006) connected previous developmental and adult learning-related theories to the community college student population, but did not address these theories in relation to transfer students. Others have explored various categorizations, or typologies of community college students. According to Bahr (2010), students who attend two year institutions can be categorized as transfer, vocational, drop-

in, noncredit, experimental, and exploratory. However, these ideas have only been applied to the community college population and not transfer students.

### **Intersections, Overlap, and Thinking Holistically**

Intersections among identity, development, and engagement exist, giving way to newer theories in the college student literature. For example, theories regarding college student engagement also intersect with identity. Hu and Kuh (2011) used Evans' (2003) idea of typology models to highlight the identities, that emerge within college students based on their experiences and level of engagement at four-year institutions that have been developed over the years. CCTSs specifically do not fall under a specific typology within these models, but could perhaps identify with several of these typologies upon transfer to a four-year institution.

Theories of development are also interchangeable with identity. Identity and development in particular are rooted in psychology, and many theories use these terms in reference to overall personal growth (Kegan, 1994; Chickering, 2007). For instance, Chickering's (2007) student development theory overlaps with the idea of college student identity. The fifth stage of this theory, establishing identity, has its own set of embedded stages pertaining to development (Chickering, 2007).

Finally, both Astin (1984) and Tinto (1997) have made connections between college student engagement and intellectual development. Involvement with faculty, classroom activities, and integrated learning can all play a part in a student's educational experiences, contributing to their development as an individual (Tinto, 1997). Moreover, participating in civic engagement activities during college, such as volunteerism, has been

associated with ongoing community involvement after graduation, contributing to a student's development in his or her adult life (Ishitani & Mckitrick, 2013).

### **Overall Experiences and Meaning Making**

These intersections serve as a way of thinking about college students, and how the college experience influences student identity, development, and engagement through the holistic approach of meaning making. This holistic approach can aid in integrating theoretical ideas pertaining to college students (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Baxter Magolda (2009) proposed applying meaning making specifically, and holistically, to college students and their experiences, to examine how a student changes based on how they make meaning of their experiences. As college students develop, they increasingly rely on their own experiences and education, as opposed to the ideas of others, to guide them in their interpretations of the world (Seifret, Goodman, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2010). While meaning making has been applied to the traditional, native college student population, it has not been used to explore CCTSs.

Conducting this study from a holistic, meaning making perspective enables me to explore how CCTSs' make meaning of their experiences as college students at four-year institutions based on their own identity, development, and engagement. Having already gone through at least two years of college, this population is developmentally different from native four-year students (Silverman et al., 2009). This developmental difference warrants further investigation, and will produce an all-encompassing, unique theoretical perspective regarding community college transfer students. Through my strategy of inquiry, I acknowledge my familiarity with the literature, and how these areas intersect.

These areas will serve as a mere guide for my research questions and study as I explore CCTSs and their experiences.

### **Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative, grounded theory study was to explore the identity, development, and engagement of traditionally aged CCTSs attending two four-year public institutions located on the eastern seaboard. This study attempted to address the gap in the literature regarding CCTSs in these three areas. Addressing this gap contributes to conversations regarding CCTSs and how they are served at four-year institutions.

The following overarching research questions were posed in light of the lack of available theoretical literature regarding CCTS identity, development, and engagement:

(a) How does a CCTS make meaning of his or her identity, development, and engagement at a four-year institution? (b) What theory/theories will emerge from exploring CCTS identity, development, and engagement?

### **Method**

#### **Rationale**

I applied a qualitative design to this study, as I explored "the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). In this case, the research problem is the lack of knowledge about CCTS identity, development, and engagement. My design enabled me to conduct empirical research through graphic elicitations and semi-structured interviews to work towards addressing this problem. All elements of my research design were also in alignment with my research questions and contributed to the answers to my research questions (see Table 1).

According to Bagnoli (2009), graphic elicitation techniques have been predominantly used in psychology-based fields. Crilly, Blackwell, and Clarkson (2006), suggest that graphic elicitations can lead to theory generation through discussions with the participant about the graphic he or she created. Since the literature on both identity and development have their roots in psychology, applying graphic elicitations in this manner lends itself to the origins of these two areas, providing opportunities for deeper exploration using the grounded theory approach. Furthermore, applying semi-structured, intensive interviewing techniques allowed me to have in-depth conversations with participants about their experiences while tying in the graphic elicitations that they have created. This method painted a holistic picture of CCTSs and their identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions.

### **Strategy of Inquiry**

Through grounded theory, I anchored, or “grounded” my emerging theory in my qualitative data, offering insight, understanding, and best practices to the research problem (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). I used grounded theory as an underpinning in my research design, so I could openly ask what is taking place in the setting without being tied to a specific theory or set of theories (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). I entered the CCTS's environment with identity, development, and engagement literature as a mere guide to my research. I remained open to the emergence of new data that aided in the development of a new theoretical approach pertaining to CCTSs.

More specifically, my orientation in this study was rooted in the constructivist grounded theory approach. According to Charmaz (2006), constructivist grounded theory focuses on the phenomena being studied and draws on participant experiences in the data



to develop a "theoretical rendering" based on the researcher's interpretations in abstract terms. I offer that I was unable to fully separate myself from my presumptions as suggested in the objectivist grounded theory approach due to my previous knowledge of CCTSs (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). I interpreted the data my participants provided to me, and sought to understand CCTSs through the elements identity, development, and engagement.

### **Procedures**

**Sampling.** I applied criterion sampling to this study, as Maxwell (2013) suggested using this type of sampling when investigating research questions geared toward a specific population. This study focused on traditionally-aged, junior level CCTSs, the most common type of transfer student according to the literature (Bahr, 2010; Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Handel, 2007). With a specific sampling strategy I was able to fully explore identity, development, and engagement, and how a specific group engages in meaning making. Applying theoretical sampling as part of a grounded theory approach was necessary to engage in CCM (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Theoretical sampling is "driven by concepts derived from the evolving theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 203). I also used theoretical sampling in that I am not studying a specific group within the CCTS population (males, females, minority students, etc.) based on the grounded theory approach and for data collection purposes. I remained grounded in my data and maintained the scope of my study, while acknowledging I researched an unexplored phenomenon in alignment with the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006).

**Setting and participants.** This study was conducted at two four-year public, suburban institutions located on the eastern seaboard. The first institution, given the alias “Eastern Atlantic University” (EAU) is an institution with approximately 13,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The institution offers a combination of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs. According to the Carnegie Classifications (n.d.), EAU is categorized as a medium-sized, four-year public institution. EAU was selected for this study given that it serves a large number of transfer students on the mid-Atlantic seaboard. The institution enrolled approximately 1,800 transfer students in the 2013-2014 academic year, mostly from community colleges in the region. The second institution where I conducted this study, given the alias “Coastal Plain University” (CPU), has approximately 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students, and enrolled about 1,000 transfer students in the 2013-2014 academic year. Like CPU, EAU draws its transfer student pool from its surrounding community colleges. CPU is also designated as a medium sized, four-year public institution (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.).

As mentioned earlier, based on Carlan and Byxbe's (2000) definition of transfer students, participants in this study included students who attended two-year community colleges and then transferred to one of the aforementioned two four-year institutions with junior status, meaning they had earned at least 60 credits at their two-year institutions. For the purposes of theory generation, and to limit the scope of this study, students who participated were traditionally college aged, between 19 and 22 years old, and had spent at least two semesters (one academic year) at EAU or CPU. This timeframe provides students sufficient time to become entrenched in the four-year institution so they can fully speak to their experiences, but is still recent enough for them to reflect on their

community college experiences. This sampling method limited the number of participants to be considered for this study given that they were selected based on specific of criteria and maintained the scope of the study (Maxwell, 2013).

**Recruitment and incentive.** Participants were recruited via email blasts. I reached out to those individuals at EAU and CPU who played critical roles in interacting with transfer students. Once I explained the purpose of my study and determined they agreed to assist with participant recruitment, I forwarded my recruitment email (see Appendix A) to EAU's Coordinator of University Transfer Services and CPU's Assistant Provost for Academic Support Services and requested that they forward it to their transfer student mailing lists. To capture those students who had been at the institution for at least two semesters, blasts were sent to those students who entered either institution between fall 2013 and spring 2014, since data collection for this study spanned across fall 2014 and the beginning of spring 2015.

In my recruitment email detailing the study, I included my contact information and asked interested students to contact me directly to confirm that they met the criteria. Direct contact with participants builds the researcher-participant relationship from the very beginning of the study (Seidman, 2006). Once contact was established with participants, I then determined dates and times that they would be available for an interview. Interviews took place at times that were convenient for the participants and locations selected were appropriate for conducting the interview. According to Varga-Atkins and O'Brien (2009) locations should be conducive to focusing on completing the graphic elicitation activity. Factors such as comfort and noise level were taken into

account when scheduling interview locations. Interview locations included empty classrooms, group study rooms, and cafes during non-peak hours.

My recruitment email stated that the interview could take approximately one hour, so the participant was not fully committed to a finite amount of time. Seidman (2006) cautions that assigning the length as a unit of time, such as an hour, can lead to participants "watching the clock" and not being fully devoted to the activity (p. 20). The length of the interviews varied based on the length of the conversations with participants; however, the average length of recorded material was 42 minutes. However, it is estimated that the entire interview process took a full hour.

As an incentive, students who participated in the study received a \$10 gift card to Wawa or Dunkin' Donuts. These stores were chosen because of their numerous locations and accessibility throughout the region for busy college students. Striking the balance between a monetary incentive and contributions to the field conveyed to the participant the importance of the research without raising "undue expectations" during the course of the study (Seidman, 2006). The incentive in this study was small enough as to not raise expectations or create a sense of entitlement, but served as a gesture to thank the participant for his or her time. All students but one accepted the incentive.

Prior to beginning the map activity and the interview, all students signed informed consent forms, and were asked if they were willing to be audio recorded. Twelve out of the sixteen EAU students and all nine CPU students agreed to be audio recorded. I took detailed notes during the interviews for those participants who declined to be audio recorded. At the conclusion of each interview, students were given the choice between gift certificates to the aforementioned establishments. After the participants left the

interviews, I completed field notes, which in the style of Rossman and Rallis (2003), included a summary of the interview, a description of the interactions with the participant, and analytic memos. Such note taking also contributed to the development of my theories regarding CCTS identity, development, and engagement.

**Graphic elicitation activity.** The specific graphic elicitation activity for this study was a relational map (see Figure 1), designed to explore identity and development during the interview. According to Bagnoli (2009) relational maps can help participants conceptualize the distance between ideas or items, with the most important items being closest to the participant, and the less important depicted as being farthest away. They can also help in recalling past experiences and knowledge, while addressing complex issues (Copeland & Agosto, 2012).

Participants were asked to write words that they felt to be part of their own identities in Euler circles, with the center circle having the word "ME" to indicate proximity to one's identity. The farther away the participant wrote the items from the center labeled "ME", the less they were considered part of the participant's identity. In alignment with grounded theory, no prompts, such as banks of preselected words were used, however, it became clear from the pretesting phase that some prompts were necessary to guide the participants' thinking. Therefore, I provided some general questions at the bottom of the map.

Participant completion of the map ranged from seven to ten minutes depending upon the participant, and each participant had a different level of content on their relational maps. One participant even provided me with an additional technique when filling out his map that I provided as an option to the remainder of my participants. EAU

student "Drew" used a different color pen from the one he used to initially fill the map, and drew circles and arrows to indicate what would move, disappear, etc. (see Figure 4). This technique contributed to the conversation in terms of CCTS development and provide more of a visualization of how the participants' maps changed over time. After "Drew's" interview, seven participants opted to use this technique.

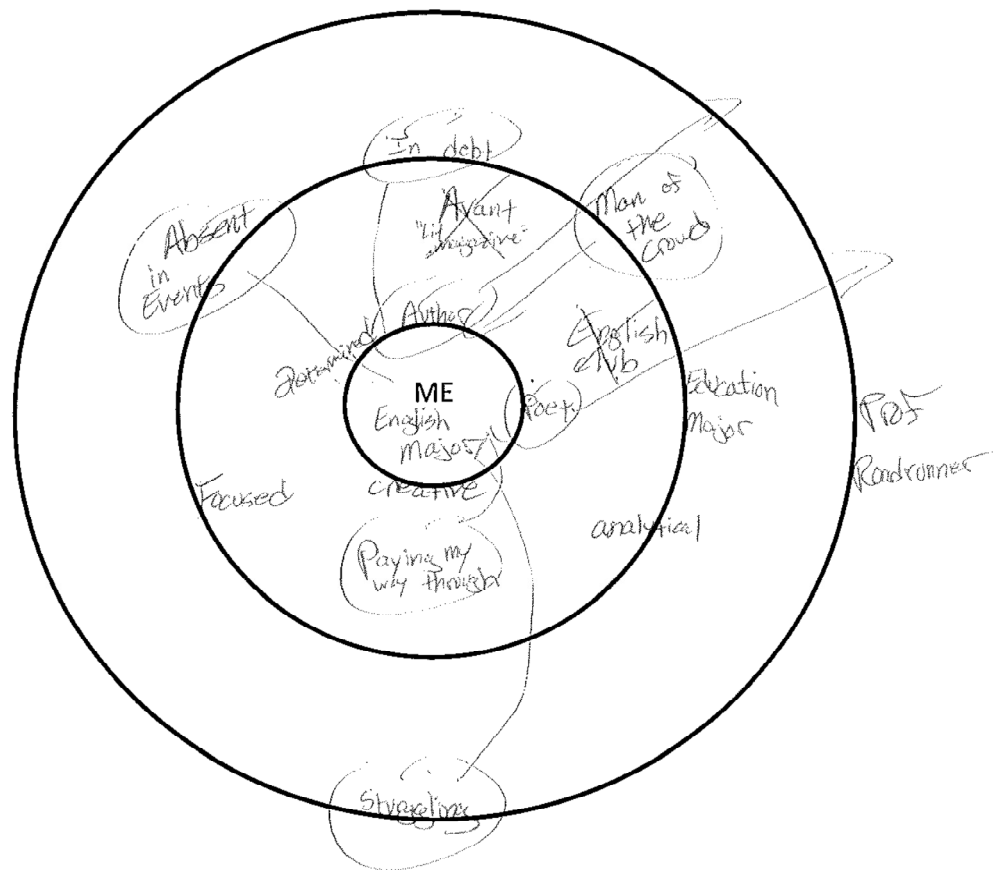


Figure 4. Drew's Relational Map

Upon completion of the map, I then asked each participant to explain to me, working from the inside out, what he or she wrote in the circles. In alignment with Zhang (2008), this technique provided me with an understanding of how this group interprets and makes meaning of their experiences at four-year institutions, and also prevented me from misinterpreting what was written on the maps. This understanding contributed to theory generation and addressed my overarching research questions (Creswell, 2013).

**Intensive interview.** The semi-structured interview protocol allowed me to capture and interpret the stories regarding this population's experiences at their four-year institutions, and drew from the relational map activity to create a holistic picture of the students' experiences and how they engaged in meaning making (see Appendix A). Protocol questions were designed with the college student identity, development, and engagement literature as a guide, and included elements of interview structures in alignment with grounded theory. For instance, in the style of Seidman's (2006) interview model, I asked participants to provide details of their experiences with college student engagement and contemplate the meaning of their experiences. Furthermore, questions provided opportunities to engage in deep conversation and for participants to elaborate on their experiences through probes, limiting their ability to answer "yes" or "no" to the questions (Seidman, 2006). Through these techniques, I gathered a vast amount of data while further exploring meaning making.

Interview questions regarding the relational map explored the participant's feelings and how strongly they identified with certain items. College student identity and development were also addressed in the subsequent interview questions. I also incorporated opportunities for participants to tell stories and walk me, as the researcher,

through certain events. According to Wolcott (2008) these "grand tour" questions are helpful in painting a picture of the participant's experience and create a conversational than formal interview environment. Additional questions were related to engagement and how transfer students perceive on and off-campus interactions in accordance with the transfer student literature.

**Data saturation.** Consistent with Charmaz (2006), data saturation is the intent and ultimate goal for grounded theory data collection, giving way to theory generation as common categories emerge and are repeated. Theoretical saturation will occur when no new codes emerge from the data based on comparisons and when categories become clearly defined (Birks and Mills, 2011).

Saturation occurred for this study through the application of CCM and the evolution of themes during the coding process, leading to theory generation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Data saturation was achieved after I interviewed 25 participants (n = 25), 16 participants from EAU and 9 from CPU. There were several indicators of data saturation. First, I used criterion sampling, limiting the scope of potential participants, and was able to achieve data saturation and ultimately, theoretical saturation, fairly quickly. Second, no new codes related to my research questions were emerging around the twenty-first interview, however, I wanted to continue to investigate the themes further to verify that saturation had been achieved. Yin (2014) suggested testing a theory, or proposition, during data collection to verify that the theoretical proposition is in fact based on the data. This was accomplished by asking the remaining participants specific questions about the emergent identity, development, and engagement theory. Second, similar themes were emerging from the relational maps that contributed



to the theory. Third, conducting interviews between two institutions demonstrated the rigor of my study and contributed to saturation of the data. Using two research sites helped me in achieving saturation by providing me access to CCTSs in multiple settings, indicating that saturation was occurring beyond just one institution and moved me beyond research at my own institution as suggested by Creswell (2013).

Fourth, using criterion sampling provided me with refined data. I was able to engage in theoretical sampling and develop categories from my coding until no new themes emerged (Charmaz, 2006). Fifth, the in depth nature of my interview protocol revealed detailed data that provided me with "rich, thick, data" to achieve data saturation (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Finally, my final sample size is in alignment with the recommendation of other researchers in achieving saturation, emphasizing the importance of concurrent data collection and analysis as opposed to conducting a large number of interviews (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Glaser, 1965; Guest, Bruce, & Johnson, 2006). I was cautious during the data collection process to sufficiently and thoroughly code all data to ensure saturation to prevent conducting an overabundance of interviews.

**Journaling and field notes.** I maintained a reflective journal throughout this study. Consistent with Ahern (1999), bracketing my thoughts in this manner aided me in preparing for my research. However, I realized that I could not completely set aside my thoughts and experiences; hence my application of a constructivist grounded theory approach. This journal also served as a place to write my post-interview field notes, analytic memos, and describe any moments of "serendipity" as per Rossman and Rallis (2003). Every week, and as I coded, I would note my thoughts as my data analysis

progress and experiences with interviews in this journal in the spirit of CCM. I would also continuously expand upon any field notes that I had written at the conclusion of each interview, which helped me in developing the proposed theories I will discuss in the upcoming sections.

**Trustworthiness of study.** I considered the trustworthiness of my study, specifically in terms of confirmability, dependability, rigor, and transferability (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). To engage in confirmability, I triangulated my research by comparing findings from my interview and relational map data. The similarities that emerged during data analysis played a part in triangulation as well as the study's trustworthiness.

Related to my study's dependability was my use of CCM to this study to develop a theory grounded in data. Using a relational map as graphic elicitation contributed to my grounded theory data (Varga-Atkins & O'Brien, 2009). Furthermore, I engaged in pretesting of my protocol with four students who were not part of my sample. Pretesting qualitative protocols helps the researcher identify any flaws or issues (Turner, 2010). Piloting the protocol helped me in tweaking the flow of my interview questions, craft guiding questions on the relational map, and determining that more time would be needed for filling out the map.

Multiple institutions were used to contribute to this study's rigor as suggested by Creswell (2013). Conducting my research at both CPU and EAU increased my participant pool, enabled me to obtain multiple perspectives from two different institutions, and sufficiently saturated my data. Moreover, by asking specific research questions, including one that addressed an emergent theory, I fully explored CCTS identity, development, and engagement.

Finally, engaging in CCM lends itself to my study's transferability (Boeije, 2002). Using sampling and CCM guides a researcher in the generalization of concepts to the population being studied. While qualitative data cannot be generalized, if sampling and analysis methods are held constant, a study with a similar population may be conducted to compare the results with the findings of the original study (Creswell, 2013).

### **Data Analysis**

In alignment with Charmaz (2006) and CCM, I began data analysis as soon as I began this study and starting acquiring data. While waiting for the interview transcripts to be sent back to me from the transcriptionist, I entered the relational map data on a spreadsheet and coded the interview notes from those interviews that were not recorded as soon as the interviews were finished. Reflective journal entries and field notes were also incorporated into the coding process.

Once I received the interview transcripts, I engaged in multiple cycles of coding, including line by line, focused, and axial coding. The codes from each round of coding were listed on individual spreadsheets for each participant, listing the axial codes specifically on a separate spreadsheet to determine emerging categories and to engage in Constant Comparative Method (CCM). The categories were grouped into themes that gave way to the theoretical codes that ultimately led to development of three theories, each pertaining to CCTS identity, development, and engagement, and an overarching theme suggesting how CCTSs make meaning of their experiences at a four-year institution through the lenses of these three areas.

I analyzed each relational map in the style of Copeland and Agosto (2012). I used individual spreadsheets to list the words and phrases students wrote in each circle, and

then based on the frequency of those words and phrases, I created a color-coded codebook to group them into categories. Thirteen color-coded categories emerged from the relational maps, and according to their frequency, they were: academics/major, future/career plans, feelings of stress/being overwhelmed, social interactions, responsibility, determination, college activities, leisurely activities, personal health/caring for self, working/having a job, money/finances, distance/transportation, and technology. These categories were then integrated into the spreadsheet with the categories from the interviews. The themes to the development of the CCTS identity, development, and engagement theories outlined in the upcoming sections. I also designed data displays at various phases of analysis to solidify codes and categories, enabling me to abstract themes from the data (see Figure 2).

Although the relational map was meant to provide insight into identity and development in conjunction with the interview questions themselves, it also shed light on engagement. Therefore, I did not parse out individual findings from the maps and the interview questions but wove them throughout my findings to support the emergent theories. Some themes spanned across two or all areas of identity development, and engagement, and are discussed as such in their respective sections. Also, in the style of Cox (2009), I used direct quotations from participants to illustrate themes that emerged from my data. This technique further anchored my data in my grounded theory findings.

### **Findings and Emerging Theories**

Based on the data collected, and after analyzing the codes from the relational maps and interviews, I propose three main theories pertaining specifically to CCTS identity, development, and engagement. I propose that CCTSs develop an alter ego at

their four-year institutions, experience the challenge of fitting their four-year college development in two years, and use a type of engagement at their four-year institutions that is applicable to their major and future goals. I begin this section with a discussion that incorporates these theories into an overarching theoretical argument regarding how CCTSs make meaning of their identity, development, and engagement at their four-year institutions. I then describe these theories in subsequent sections, along with their corresponding themes and categories that emerged during the coding process, and provide quotes from the interviews and relational map drawings to illustrate them.

### **Meaning Making: "A Better Person Coming Out Than Going In"**

Figure 3 is a representative data display depicting the proposed theories of CCTS identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions, along with their respective themes. CCTSs experience conflict in all three areas of identity, development, and engagement at their four-year institutions. Kegan (1994) discusses conflict in relation to an opposing view of relationships with an existence of expectations. Conflict manifests when there is a contrary or unexpected side that an individual did not prepare for (Kegan, 1994). In terms of CCTSs the conflicts they experience at their four-year institutions are in the form of uncertainty, as will be detailed below, and surface in their identity, development, and engagement.

CCTSs experience feelings of conflict regarding their behaviors on campus and what the college experience is perceived to be, and develop an "alter ego" to cope with their uncertainty as they interact with students, faculty, and staff on-campus. They are uncertain of their goals even after attending community college and transferring to a four-year institution, so they have to information-gather, investigate, and seek out

opportunities in an attempt to fit their four-year college experience in two years and narrow in on their interests over time.

CCTSs want to engage in activities that benefit them academically and vocationally. They understand the importance of networking, and seek out applicable engagement opportunities, such as internships and clubs related to their major, which they perceive to be beneficial as they hone in on their future goals. They carefully choose activities based on the perceived benefit, and oftentimes reject activities that they would enjoy for leisure. CCTSs feel that native students have an advantage in terms of resources and opportunities, and feel anxious and unsure of themselves as they seek out opportunities due to the perceived competition. However, they connect with these four-year natives, using them as mentors and, over time, "put themselves out there" to learn about opportunities that could benefit them. They also seek out like-minded individuals, such as other CCTSs, and build coalitions with them in order to build support systems and obtain access to campus resources.

CCTSs work through these conflicts over time at their four-year institutions, giving way to these emergent theories. Combined, the three CCTSs theories of the alter ego, "fitting four in two", and applicable engagement can be considered coping mechanisms to deal with the feelings of this population experiences during their first year at a four-year institution. The CCTSs changed themselves to fit the situation through these coping mechanisms. The conflicts CCTSs encountered existed prior to the relationship, since they had pre-existing expectations prior to the entering the four-year environment and those expectations were not met. According to Kegan (1994) when disconnect occurs due to conflict, individuals must "focus on the ways to let the

conflictual relationship transform the parties rather than the parties resolving the conflict” (p. 320). This is opposed to the CCTSs changing the conflicting situation itself through actions such as transferring to another institution or leaving the institution altogether due to the conflict.

The coping mechanisms mentioned above are how CCTSs arrive at making meaning of their college experience. Holistically and in terms of meaning making, CCTSs want to work through these conflicts to improve upon themselves at their four-year institution. Therefore, they make meaning of their experiences with identity, development, and engagement at their four-year institutions as "a better person coming out than going in." This overarching theme provides a holistic perspective regarding how the population experiences these three areas at four-year institutions in relation to conflict and explains the process of how they make meaning of them (see Figure 3). CCTSs work through these conflicts as they strive for self-improvement and to become "better" as they transition from their community colleges to their four-year institutions. EAU student "Oscar" captured the essence of this idea by using this phrase at the conclusion of his interview:

I remember my first semester at [community college]. I wasn't really involved at all. But now, I'm in the pre-health club and we do volunteer work. They also have research opportunities available that I'm interested in, because I'm trying to get into medical school. I want to be a cardiologist. By the time I graduate I know the type of person I want to become. I want to be a better person coming out of this than when I came into it if that makes any sense.

Even though CCTSs work through conflict during their first year at their four-year institutions, this is not to say that they, or college students in general, stop working through conflict after this period of time. Baxter Magolda (2009) suggests that working through personal challenges are part of a lifelong experience for any individual.

However, based on this data, which inquired about CCTSs experiences over the course of a year specifically, working through the issues related to identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions can be considered part of their experiences as they strive to be "a better person coming out than going in." Furthermore, this overarching theme is what CCTSs perceive it to be, and I offer that they use the proposed theories as coping mechanisms to become "a better person coming out than going in".

### **CCTS Identity: The "Alter Ego"**

CCTSs develop an alternate identity, or "alter ego" based on their experiences in their four-year institutional environments. They develop this alter ego based on their perceptions of what is expected of them as college students and how they believe the college experience is portrayed. I have adapted Schutz's (1970) definition of an alter ego to this study and am using it in relation to CCTSs. Schutz (1970) referred to an alter ego as another "individual with which one shares space and time" who coexists with the person, evolving and changing with him or her over time based on social situations (p. 180). My findings indicate that the CCTS alter ego, as an alternate version of the student, evolves over the course of time based on his or her four-year institutional experiences.

The CCTS alter ego appears to be professionally and academically driven, whereas the off-campus ego is less formal, typically manifesting with friends and family from home. It incorporates elements of college life, including living on-campus or close to campus, attending parties, and engaging in other activities that this population perceives as being part of the college experience. There were several themes that emerged to give way to this potential theory: "strictly business", "the neighborhood", and "the alternate college experience".



**Strictly business.** The theme "strictly business", indicates the inclination that students must have a formal demeanor when interacting with faculty, staff, and students on-campus. This theme supports the CCTS identity theory because these students behave a particular way on-campus. Categories associated with this theme include having a professional demeanor on-campus and limited interactions with others. EAU student "Natalie" described how she conducted herself on and off-campus regarding interactions with others. Her off-campus friends included her roommates and her sister, while she referred to those with interacts with on-campus as simply other students:

My classmates – mostly my lab partners – I'm very like I just want to get things done and I want to leave. And I think that's where it comes off where I don't really joke around with them because I want to get that stuff done. And I want to ... like I'm serious about my schoolwork, so I'm not joking around with them. I want to make sure everything's right.

"David", another EAU student, had a similar explanation of his interactions on-campus:

Since I don't know the people on campus as well, I'm more professional about how I conduct myself. Off campus, with my friends, I can...I'm more laid back and more relaxed about things.

The relational maps suggested that CCTS strongly identify with their major and academic achievement, as eleven participants listed their academic major in the "me" circle or the second circle, suggesting that they strongly identify with their major, driving their business-like behaviors. This association with their academic majors contributes to CCTS's "strictly business" attitude on-campus.

**The neighborhood.** In relation to an alter ego, "the neighborhood" theme suggests the different interactions that CCTSs have off-campus, or with those back at their homes or from high school, varied from those that they have on-campus. This theme

was derived from two categories: keeping high school connections and acting differently back home. These informal relationships off-campus include family and/or friends participants attended high school or grew up with back home, giving way to the theme "the neighborhood." "Jane", an EAU student, described her conflict with how she interacted with her friends at home versus on-campus:

I know this sounds weird but I feel like I'm not as much myself here as I am with, you know, with people on campus as I am off campus. I just feel like with my friends I was friends with through high school...I hang with them outside of school, so I'm more close with them so I feel like I'm not as held back. I'm not held back but I feel like I'm shy with people on campus.

Others indicated that having the alter ego worked to their advantage, allowing them scholarly expression on their four-year campuses that they did not have with those at home. CPU student "Karen's" statement below captures this flip side of the theme when I asked her if she felt conflicts with her identity as part of verifying data saturation and testing this theory in the style of Yin (2014):

We [friends back at home] don't have any of the decent conversations that we have here. The conversation here is a lot more meaningful. I feel like we get – I'm a social butterfly over here. Back at home, I'm just, eh. It's almost like, less compatible. Back at home, I can be bum ["Karen"] but over here it's like, I have to have a brain.

CCTSs display variations of alter egos depending on their experiences on and off-campus. Typically, they engage more formally with those on-campus than they do with individuals off-campus who they have relationships with. As the quotes suggested, this may make the CCTS feel "held back" or not like themselves when they are on-campus.

**The alternate college experience.** Participants appeared to have a particular image or perception of the college experience and wanted to obtain that experience at their four-year institutions, but either distanced themselves from it or were dissatisfied

with it, giving way to almost an alternate college experience. While several participants appeared to take part in activities that they felt were part of the "typical college experience," such as living away from home, the activities were simply perceived as being part of the college experience. For example, several CCTSs did not live on-campus at their four-year institutions, but lived in off-campus apartments with friends or significant others. These students wanted to keep a "safe distance" from campus while still attempting to have the experience of living away from home.

Furthermore, as part of another category, several students indicated that they "tried" certain aspects of the college experience, including going to parties or participating in Greek life, but then realized they were not interested in those activities. These attempts were part of CCTSs arriving at a four-year institution and their desire to enjoy what is perceived as being part of the college experience during their remaining two years, contributing to the alter ego. Nine participants wrote some indication of attending parties or participating in the college experience in the third and outer circles of their relational maps, suggesting these activities were not an important part of their college student identity. Several participants also indicated that they simply participated or acknowledged certain college activities because it was an expected part of the college experience for them. CPU student "Caroline", for example, admitted her dissatisfaction when she tried to live on-campus upon transferring and her perception of what was expected as part of the college experience:

And like just the college experience because I didn't really feel that I got that. I mean, I tried living on campus last semester but I just still wasn't liking it. You just see like on like social media, people... like their college experience and I feel like I kind of like I missed that part of the experience, because of being like a transfer ... like missing out on parties and stuff and just being involved in general.

CPU student "Amy" discussed her attempt to explore joining a sorority after writing "Greek life" on her relational map, which she also perceived as part of the college experience (see Figure 5):

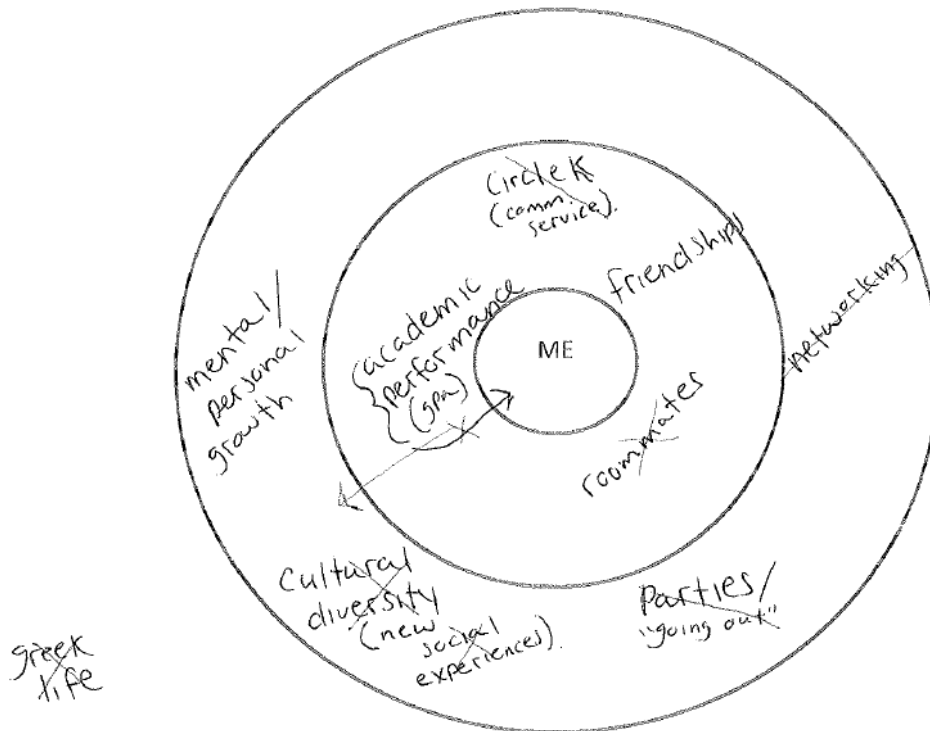


Figure 5. Amy's Relational Map

I did write down Greek life. I know a lot of people who are involved with that, but that's just not me. I feel like it's a big part of college and I looked into doing it, so I noted it, but –it wasn't for me.

Finally, participants felt that they had to battle with a perception that they were not viewed as actual college students because they attended community college. This caused participants to want to disconnect from their previous college experience and

develop a different identity, or alter ego, as a college student at their four-year institution. For instance, CPU student "Lana" describes her experience with being a community college student at a four-year institution. "You're still just as good as the other person who started here as a freshman," she stated. CPU student "Brad" explained how he perceived being a transfer from a community college at a four-year institution :

A lot of people don't like that they go to a community college. There is definitely a stigma of community college. Like, when you meet people that go to a university, you don't want to admit you go to community college. There is definitely a stigma like, "Oh, you couldn't get into anywhere else" or this was the only choice you had or you couldn't afford anywhere else. A lot of people don't like admitting where they go.

This perception of community college appears to be a primary driver in the desire to disconnect from what participants perceived to be the "stigma" of attending community college.

**Playing nice in the sandbox.** Several CCTSs described instances in which they had to behave a particular way when interacting with those on-campus during certain situations. Although I discuss this theme in relation to identity, it overlaps with engagement also, as CCTSs discussed their interactions with individuals on-campus. Six participants wrote some form of interactions with roommates on their relational maps. These codes became part of the social interaction category from the relational maps, but when combined with the interview data, were broken into two categories: roommate issues and being diplomatic.

In terms of identity, and an alter ego, specifically, "Amy" from CPU explains how she had to adjust to interacting with her roommates versus her family at home:

I would say overall –I'm more comfortable at home with family and friends that I've known for years, as opposed to the people here. For example, at home, if my sister was hogging up the shower, I'd bang on the door and tell her to get out – but if one of my roommates was doing that, I would probably be much more passive, would just let it go and wait. That fear of upsetting people...

"Amy" used her alter ego when interacting with her roommates, which for her, was what she labeled as being passive. Other participants, like "Oscar" from EAU, discussed the challenges of living with roommates while attempting to study and meet their academic goals. This theme suggests that CCTSs, in addition to dealing with a transition of attending a new institution, must adjust to life with others people through using an alter ego, if they decide to live on-campus or away from home.

The theory of the CCTS alter ego suggests that this population displays different characteristics on and off-campus, based on what they perceive the college experience to be. They struggle with how they interact with individuals in each environment. They feel particularly challenged when interacting with those on-campus, such as roommates. Although they attempt to take part in what they believe to be typical college student activities, such as attending parties or participating in Greek life, they may not necessarily be interested in them. Furthermore, they elect to keep a "safe distance" from campus, living an alternate version of college life.

#### **CCTS Development: "Fitting 4 in 2"**

In terms of development, CCTSs narrow their interests over time at a four-year institution. Interests that emerged from their community college experience do not appear to contribute to their decision making regarding major selection or career goals. This suggests that a CCTS's career path evolves over time through exposure to academic and personal experiences at a four-year institution, not necessarily at the community college

level. Unlike their four-year native counterparts, CCTSs typically have a limited amount of time, two years or four semesters, to develop and narrow in on their interests before degree completion. In terms of their own development, they also view themselves as adults and native students as "kids". The primary themes emerged that support this theory included pathway narrowing, anxiety about the future, "the balancing act", and kids versus adults.

**Pathway narrowing.** While the expectation may be that CCTSs know what their goals are upon entering a four-year institution due to having already completed two years of community college, this does not appear to be the case. CCTSs seem to struggle with their career pathways and major selection upon arrival at their four-year institutions, and engage in narrowing in on them over time. Examples of CCTSs narrowing in on their career goals include the Biology major who honed in on a particular research interest at her four-year and a Psychology major who considered graduate school after realizing her interests while also attending her four-year school. Other examples include participants who changed their major at different points after transferring. As part of the categories associated with this theme, CCTSs experience growth over time through new experiences at a four-year institution.

The CCTSs' goals evolved to be more specific as time went on based on their experiences at their four-year institutions, not their community colleges. "Allison" described her own pathway narrowing when she was contemplating attending graduate school for Psychology, as she indicated on her relational map (see Figure 6):

When I think of finding myself, as far as transferring to a university, it's narrowing down your actual interests... When I was at [community college], I was like, "Okay, four years of college and I'm done. Thank God". I didn't think of anything about Masters Degrees there. I didn't even know there were so many different types of roots you could do in Psychology. I thought it was one thing and that's it. So, I was really just uneducated in the subject, in the topic of Psychology.

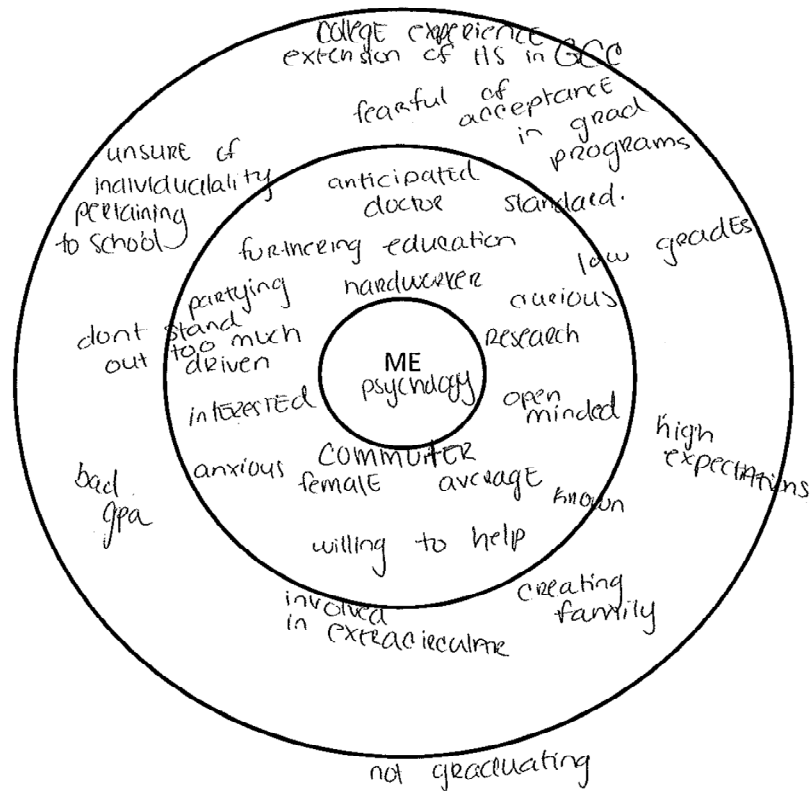


Figure 6. Allison's Relational Map

CCTSs appear to not fully arrive at a conclusion regarding their career paths until spending time at their four-year institutions. CPU student "Lana" decided to add a dual major in Biology during her next to last semester due to her changing and narrowing of goals. It appears that it takes CCTSs additional time to narrow in their goals upon arrival at a four-year institution due to having to be intentional and specific in areas such as



major selection and research, but have to fit this decision-making into a two-year timeline.

CPU student "Mary" discussed her conflict when deciding on a major, explaining how she felt unprepared to do so after attending her community college:

I was totally undecided after I went to [community college], I had no idea. I knew that I wanted to go into the science field but the science field is so broad. You can be a biologist, a marine biologist....it was so broad. I really didn't know anything, I was really up in the air. I went into [four-year institution] initially as a health major with an interest in physical therapy, and it wasn't until after shadowing in my junior year after I shadowed, I decided to just go for occupational therapy instead.

Another CPU student, "Charlotte" began her community college career as a nursing student and eventually switched to the major Holistic Health after her first semester at CPU, while EAU student "Abby" changed her major three times at her community college and changed it again upon her arrival at EAU.

Another category I simply labeled, "meh", or indifference, emerged from coding when participants appeared unmoved by an academic choice, such as selecting a major. Students who were indifferent, like "Caroline", indicated that they went with a major as a default since they were already exposed to certain courses at community college. In her case, she chose Psychology at CPU:

I had no clue. I was really just doing like a general studies, but then like coincidentally at the very last minute, like I just wanted to do... I wanted to get a degree other than general studies and I had already taken a few psych courses, so I was like I'll just continue with that.

These instances of indifference suggest that CCTSs may not have a clear idea of their major even after leaving their community colleges, something that will be discussed later on in terms of the implications of this research.

**Anxiety about the future.** Ten out of the 25 participants interviewed indicated some form of anxiety regarding their future career plans after graduation on their relational maps, as indicated in the categories listed above. This, when combined with the stressed category from the maps and the anxiety category from the interviews became the theme of anxiety about the future. Several of them alluded to this during the interview as well. "Jonathan" was very vocal about his concerns about what is in store with him after graduation and wrote "unknown future" on his map (see Figure 7):

Not in the sense that I want it to be over with, because if I could stay at college, I would, because I have no clue what's going to happen next. I'm structured; I do not like uncertainty. It's terrifying. If I knew going in, "Oh, you're going to do this," I'd be fine. I'd be like, I'll do that.

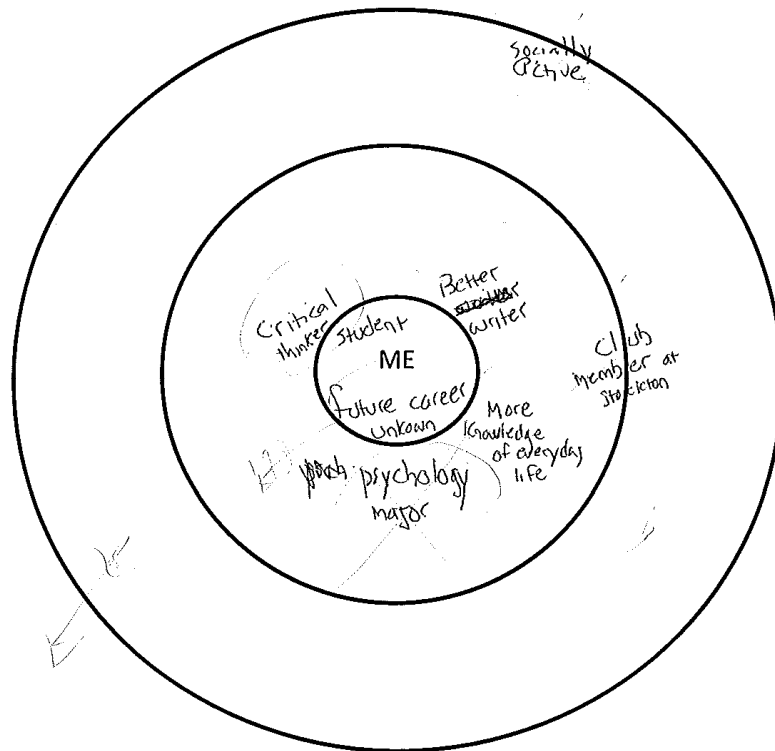


Figure 7. Jonathan's Relational Map

While anxiety about any new phase in one's life can lead to a sense of uncertainty, perhaps this type of anxiety is the result of the transition to a four-year institution and having to fit the full experience of it into two years.

**"The balancing act".** The category of "the balancing act," or maintaining a balance between going to class, studying, and other responsibilities suggests that CCTSs have mastered the ability to maintain a balance between school, work, and other responsibilities. This population has mastered "the art of scheduling", which seems to have manifested from their experiences at their community colleges. CPU student "Nora" touches on this when discussing how she has changed since attending her community college:

When I was going to [community college], my life was pretty much – I don't regret it. I went to school, was working crazy hours, and all I did was work at [retail chain], but I was working 35, 40 hours. So I'm definitely grateful, because all I did was go to work and then went to school, and it sounds pretty boring, but it definitely set me up for where I am now. So I'm happy, because it made me more mature.

Twelve participants alluded to "responsibility" and "balance" on their relational maps.

Many students discussed their ability to skillfully schedule their courses around their work and other responsibilities, along with their attempts to fit their college experience in two years at their four-year institutions. For instance, EAU student "Janet" discusses how she creates a balance from her desire to fit everything in, in two years. She explains, "It's always a balance, but school usually wins. I really want to get my college experience in. Everyone always talks about 'the best four years of their life', and I really want to get that in." This desire to experience college also overlaps with the alter ego that CCTSs develop given what they believe is the college experience.

"Natalie", who wrote "busy" and "involved" in the second circles on her relational map, discussed the "art of scheduling" and balance, explaining that learning how to maintain this balance at her community college translated to her four-year, where she became more involved in activities:

I wasn't really involved because I was mostly worried about my schoolwork. I didn't know that it was possible to balance anything. And I was working a lot in [community college]. So my involvement on campus wasn't a lot. But since then it's gotten better.

Maintaining this type of balance through scheduling appears to help with CCTS maturity, ultimately contributing to their growth as an individual and development over time. It may also put them on a path to explore and hone in on their academic and vocational goals as they attempt to do it in a limited amount of time at a four-year institution.

**"Kids" versus adults.** In terms of their own development, CCTSs perceive four-year native students as "kids", and they are the adults. Several students alluded to the natives, or "kids", who received what was perceived as special treatment. They themselves were the adults and did not receive the same services as the "kids". "Lana" indicated this feeling when she wanted to attend her institution's "welcome week", but then learned it was geared toward native freshman:

They pretty much set up events, like different barbecues, movies, casino nights, everything all day long for the entire first week that people move in. So that way you can go out and meet new people and make new friends and all that but I didn't know anyone and everyone actually left. So like, all the freshman, they have to go to those things. We, transfer students, didn't and, like we're on the upper classman side, no one is there. Everyone went home because no one wanted to be a part of it. So then that left me alone and I would have had to go play with the freshman and I was like, no. So I ended up actually going back home and I just skipped the entire first week.

EAU student "David" made reference to the "kids" in his class when discussing his

interactions on-campus. Furthermore, "Brad" used this terminology as well when discussing the challenges he faces as a long-distance commuter to his institution and accessing resources:

If a professor has office hours on a day you don't have classes, I don't feel like driving an hour just to speak with them for 15 minutes. And that's an advantage I guess kids that live on campus have access to the campus whenever they want. For me, I have to drive an hour.

EAU student "Eve" also perceived the native students on-campus as "kids" when comparing her experiences as a CCTS to others, "You see the kids here who are just, like their parents are paying for it and they just drink all the time and then they're not ready for anything." This labeling of students suggests that CCTSs tend to view themselves as adults as opposed to "kids", with a perception of a gap in maturity between themselves and the native students.

**The native advantage.** CCTSs indicated on their relational maps and interviews that native students are perceived to have an unspoken advantage at four-year institutions. The advantages came in the form of native-specific resources, knowledge of campus functions, and future career paths.

Moreover, CCTSs have to learn the "lay of the land" and how their four-year institutions functions, whereas natives already have this precious information. This theme also suggests CCTSs have a lack of knowledge of available resources and can have feelings of resentment towards that natives. "Natalie", for example, shared the challenges she faced when attempting to join the pre-health club. This was an on-campus organization she felt benefitted her major and career goal of attending medical school, which she wrote close to the center of her map:

It's hard to get involved when you're coming in your third year. They don't really make it easy because – especially in Biology. You kind of have to ask around and go to club meetings. Like for the pre-health club that I'm in – to get in you have to go to the meeting. And then to be in it you have to go to this many meetings. And you have to meet with the health advisor. And it's a lot of steps to stay involved.

CCTSs believe that natives having an unspoken advantage when it comes to access resources and understanding career paths. "Caroline" mentioned the native advantage as well in terms of resources and, due to this perceived advantage, indicating she identified more with her community college than CPU. She said, "Like you get here junior year and you're like well the freshmen that were here, they know the clubs, they know the ins and outs of things."

This theme also appeared on students' relational maps in the form of anxiety, under the stressed/overwhelmed category, as well as the college activities category. "Lana's" map (see Figure 8), for instance, echoed the feelings she mentioned above of native students having certain resources tailored to them, or having easier access to these resources. This creates a perceived sense of competitiveness among CCTSs, putting additional pressure on CCTSs to fit four years into two.

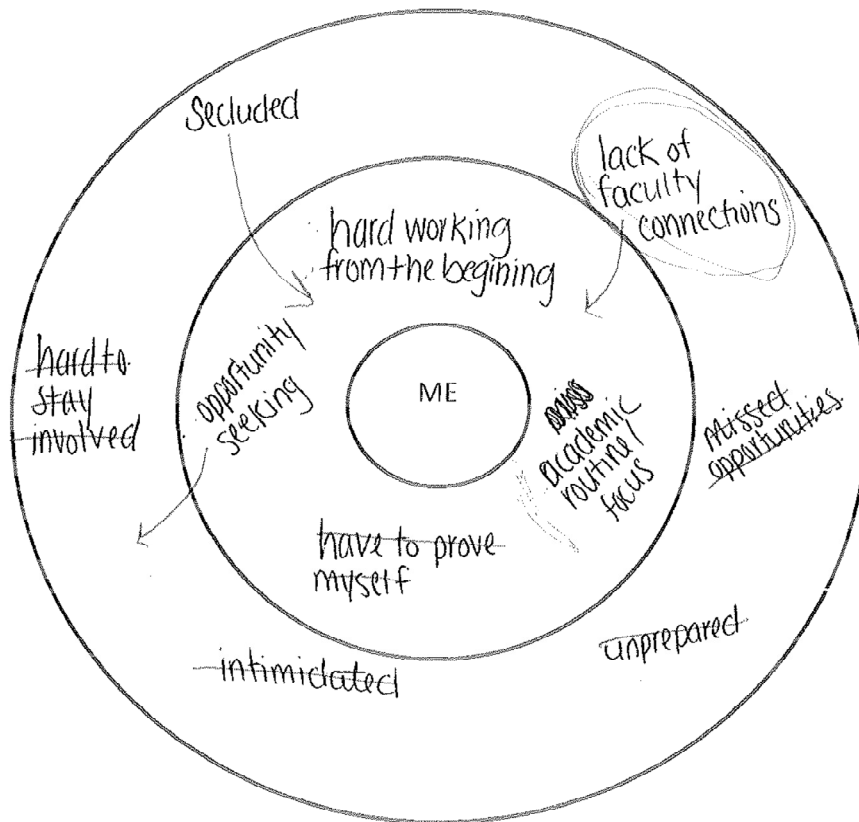


Figure 8. Lana's Relational Map

The theory of "fitting in four in two" suggests that CCTSs' interests narrow over time while they are attending a four-year institution. They struggle with their decision making processes as they attempt to fit a four year college experience into two years. They experience feelings of conflict regarding their major selection and career paths, and their experiences at the community college level do not appear to contribute to their decision-making processes at the four-year level.

### **CCTSs and "Applicable" Engagement**

An emergent theory, "applicable engagement" was revealed during data analysis. CCTSs make it a priority to seek out on-campus activities that serve a purpose in

furthering them academically or vocationally, serving a function for them in achieving their goals and having an immediate return. They see these activities as applicable to their major and future goals. The student should be able to list the activity on a resume or use it as a networking tool, for example, to make connections for research opportunities. Some instances of applicable engagement include two Biology majors interviewed who joined the Pre-Health Club as part of their plans to later attend medical school, a Law and Justice student who aspires to become involved with law enforcement and is on the campus medical services, and an English major and aspiring author who writes for the campus literary magazine. These students, along with others, indicated these activities on their relational map in the second circle as part of the college activities category. This is in contrast to other extracurricular activities, such as attending parties or participating in more leisurely campus activities, that appeared on the outer circles of the map. Themes related to this category include major and career-related activities, "putting yourself out there" and building coalitions.

**Major and career-related activities.** CCTSs, for the most part, look for activities that can be applied to their major and have a direct benefit for them, given the short time they have at their four-year institutions. Categories associated with engaging in major and career-related activities include return on investment and "what's in it for me?".

This theme became clear as explained by "Drew", an EAU English major who writes for the institution's literary magazine. When asked to discuss his involvement with the literary magazine that he listed on his map (see Figure 4), he compared how his sister, a native student at another four-year institution, experiences engagement:



My sister goes to [another university], in [another city], and she's like, you know, 'I'm a [university mascot], I'm in the band, and I go to football every day,' and yada, and I'm like, 'Yes. I, I don't know.' I don't. I'm not interested in that, extracurricular activities I don't see directly benefitting me. Like, I consider [university's literary magazine] to be beneficial because it is a creative output since I want to be a writer, and then English Club is a place for me to even go and I discuss my paper. So I'm still using it as a club to benefit what I'm doing in school and in the future.

Also, as mentioned earlier, others indicated their involvement in these applicable activities on their relational maps. For instance, EAU student "Shelly" indicated on her relational map that she wished to seek out these types of opportunities through shadowing at hospitals in the hopes of one day becoming a doctor (see Figure 9).

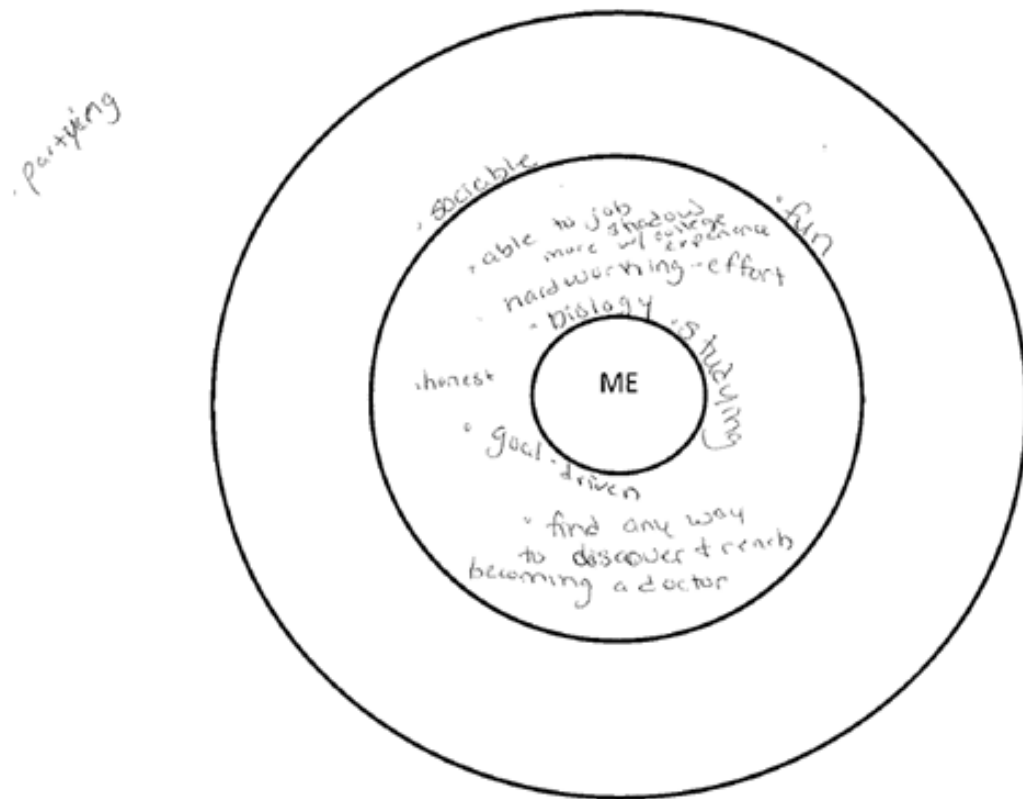


Figure 9. Shelly's Relational Map

These students also appear to opt for more applicable engagement-related activities when presented with a choice to join an activity that appeals to their own personal interests and one that is connected to their major or career plans. Music major "Edward" from EAU, for example, takes part in ensemble groups and wrote his primary instrument in the very center of the map, suggesting the importance of his craft. While "Edward" declined to be recorded, he explained that while he would like to join EAU's Anime Club given his hobbies and interests, but he would rather spend time practicing with his ensemble group to improve his skills, working toward his goal of one day conducting an orchestra.

**Forming coalitions.** When CCTSs make friends on-campus, they form tight-knit groups with like-minded individuals who are typically transfers as well. These tight knit groups can also be fellow peers from a lab group, those they know from an organization, or other students in their major. EAU student "Janet", for instance, discussed her involvement with her sorority and other campus activities on her relational map, explaining her close-knit relationships with other sorority students, who are mainly transfer students. "As a freshman it's easy to make friends, but as a junior it's kind of weird to make friends I feel like. There's a lot of us [transfers] in my sorority that felt that same way," she said. Other participants indicated that they mainly stayed with groups of friends they had made within their major, or roommates who were transfers. Like a coalition, many of these groups set out to serve a purpose, such as a study group, or in "Lana's" case, a group that wanted to make a change and help CCTSs have a different experience at her institution. She indicated this issue on her relational map as well when she wrote the term "secluded" (see Figure 8):

One of my roommates, she was also a transfer, and she was very upset when she transferred here because she kind of experienced a similar thing and she had been working on getting more things for transfers; bringing up the disadvantages there are of being a transfer. We kind of realized that it's going to be up to us to how we get our experience because they're not paying attention to us as freshman or un-bonded or however you want to state it.

CCTSs make friends on-campus, but these friends serve a purpose to fulfill some sort of activity, in "Lana's" case, to help make a change on-campus.

As part of coalition-building, participants interviewed indicated that they made "connections" and "contacts" on-campus as opposed to "friends". Although 14 participants wrote some sort of indicator of friendships, or making new friends, on their relational maps ("friends", "friendships", etc.), participants were more likely to discuss "making connections" and "networking" in relation to their campus involvement during the actual interview. Based on the categories associated with this theme, CCTSs seek out opportunities, such as internships and clubs related to their major, so they can make connections and network. They also build professional relationships with faculty and students on-campus. "Marc" elaborated on this when discussing his transition from his community college to EAU, suggesting the importance of making connections for the future:

At a four year institution you're like great, you have to start back at square one. So that struggle was for real like the first semester and a half. But it's about making connections. Because you're not going to do stuff and learn about things by yourself here.

Six students also referenced "networking" or "making connections" on their maps, suggesting that as CCTSs, they understand the importance of establishing professional relationships for future opportunities given that they only have two years to do so at their four-year institutions.

**Natives as mentors.** In addition to networking and making connections, CCTSs also seem to forge mentoring-type relationships with native students at their four-year institution. These natives, as the categories associated with this theme suggest, then served in a mentorship capacity to connect the CCTSs with campus resources, activities, and opportunities.

"Mary" discussed her process of using natives as mentors when she became involved in an environmental club on CPU's campus:

I got involved because of a girl that I have a class with and now we're friends. She lives two doors down from me. We became good friends and she's in that club, she told me about it. She said, "You should join," so I decided to join just last semester. I attended meetings, and we did beach sweeps and campus cleanups.

Several other instances of natives serving as mentors occurred, mainly pertaining to resources and activities on-campus. This particular theme straddles engagement and development, as the natives helped the CCTSs discover activities that benefitted them, serving as applicable engagement opportunities with the short amount of time they have at their four-year institutions.

**"Putting yourself out there".** Another theme that emerged during data analysis related to engagement, overlapping with development, is "putting yourself out there." This theme suggests that CCTSs, cautious and uncertain upon entering their four-year institutions, gradually become involved with activities after becoming acclimated to the environment and finding activities that were applicable. EAU student "Drew" discusses his process of putting himself out there. He was initially hesitant to join the literary magazine club, but gradually he became more involved after his first year:

I'm not sitting in my car anymore, which is – that's what – you know, first semester, I would sit in my car and eat lunch in my car, and be like, hmm. But

now that the clubs that are here, that are very adamant, even – they're adamant on getting me to join, which is still some kind of recognition of, no, we want to have you as an individual in our club. And so now I go to the office, and I eat there.

"Marc" an EAU student, compared his experience with engagement as "coming out of his shell", which was an initial category for this theme. He discussed his involvement with the Health and Exercise Club on-campus:

Since I'm starting to slowly transition and trying to do stuff like joining the [Health and Exercise] club and doing stuff, I feel like I'm starting to finally get away from that community college shell and like.....actually doing stuff a little bit. It's just hard. It's a hard transition. Like it probably would be easier if you would start off like a freshman or something.

This quote also demonstrates the theme of the native advantage. This theme has intersections with engagement and development, as these students had to "come out of their shell" over time to become engaged with the institution.

"Allison" summarized what student engagement means to her specifically by using the label of this theme:

When I think of student engagement, I think of somebody who puts themselves out there, who actually works to be known. Not somebody who kind of stands in the corner; somebody that shows an interest and shares close relationships with other people, speaking of professors and stuff.

Charlotte wrote "new experiences" close to "ME" on her relational map. When I asked why, she stated, "because you have to be willing to do that", indicating that she felt the need to "put herself out there" to be exposed to new experiences.

CCTSs seek out engagement opportunities that serve a purpose, and more specifically have an immediate return on their time. They prefer to spend their time with activities that they can put on a resume, that are relevant to their major, will enhance their career skills, or will provide networking opportunities. They prefer to make connections

over making friends and then use these connections to build coalitions that serve a purpose, and use natives as mentors to learn about campus resources. Over time, they "put themselves out there" as they become more comfortable with their institutions.

### **Summary of Results**

This grounded theory study demonstrates that CCTSs make meaning of their identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions by coping with feelings of conflict within these three areas, ultimately leading to a desire to become "a better person coming out than going in.". It also details mechanisms this population develops to cope with these feelings in the form of theories based on qualitative data. The conflict comes in the form of struggling with their college student identity, and therefore developing an alter ego. They feel uncertainty as they progress from their community college to their four-year institution and hone in on their career goals as they attempt to condense their four-year experience into two. Finally, they struggle with engaging with their institutions and learning to take part in applicable activities and forming coalitions. These processes occur over time and appear to manifest themselves during the student's first full academic year at the four-year institution, as the CCTS attempt to become a "better person coming out than going in," as they strive for self-improvement during their four-year experience.

### **Discussion and Connection to Literature**

While my three proposed theories fill a gap in the CCTS identity, development, and engagement literature, some aspects of each can be tied to the existing literature in the three areas. I frame my discussion of my findings by addressing each area below, and point out connections to the literature by tying them back to the themes that make up my

theories. I also discuss any differences between the literature in these areas and my theories.

Related to identity, CCTSs create their own alter ego based on their perceptions of what they believe a college student to be to compensate for the conflict they encounter at their four-year institutions. The concept of an alter ego has played out among other populations, who experience "multiple realities" and the multiple roles they have in their lives (Winfield, 1997). Based on Winfield's (1997) research on African American women, CCTSs have no self of sense due to their alter ego, as their version of the college experience usually plays out differently than what they expect it to be. The author wrote of this divide in relation to African American women, "Multiple dimensions of reality become more disparate rather than more integrated" (Winfield, 1997, p. 203). CCTSs appear to experience multiple dimensions of reality, such as being a student in-class, a student on/off-campus, a transfer student, a roommate, and their personas back home, and compensate for it through developing an alter ego.

In addition to negotiating between multiple realities, CCTSs negotiate between the two worlds of their four-year institution and off-campus, using the coping mechanism of the alter ego. The CCTSs create borders between these worlds. In these "borderlands", the CCTSs "learn to join with others and shift perceptions" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1997, p. 47). These borderlands are the "multiple cultures" CCTS live in and experience (Delgado-Gaitan, 1997, p. 47). Despite these borderlands, CCTSs are careful not to create barriers with those they can solve issues and can discover opportunities with, such as the native freshman. The idea of borderlands differs from my theory of the alter ego, in that CCTSs perceive preexisting barriers that they did not create themselves, such as those

that exist due to the “native advantage”, that they cannot necessarily navigate due to not having exposure to them prior to arriving to the four-year institution.

Furthermore, pieces of my developmental "fitting four in two" theory can be traced to the community college student literature. For instance, Cox's (2009) research on community college students suggests that students, specifically those that are considered non-traditional, can feel defeated and intimidated in a college environment given the high demands and expectations in and out of the classroom. These notions of self-defeat and intimidation are parallel to the anxiety CCTSs experience at their four-year institutions. Cox's (2009) data stemmed from community college students; my findings indicate that this "fear" can spill over into the four-year environment given the pressure for CCTSs to have tangible plans upon graduation. However, I suggest that CCTSs' use these coping mechanisms to manage their feelings of fear and anxiety at their four-year institutions, tools that they were not aware of at the community college level.

Finally, CCTSs use applicable engagement to explore and contribute to their future career goals. Some may view applicable engagement to be the same as vocational engagement, a term that has been used in reference to an employee's interactions with his or her work environment (Billett, 2002; Jolly, 2002). Vocational engagement has been defined as “a view of professions related to the discipline as fulfilling an individual's aspirations with a variety of longer-term rewards” (Jolly, Campbell, & Perlman, 2004, p. 6). I offer that applicable engagement is not the same as vocational engagement, but is its predecessor, since one has to explore his or her options prior to committing to a vocation. Applicable engagement occurs prior to employment. It involves using activities and connections to explore and hone in on vocational possibilities and opportunities for



preparation beyond degree completion at a higher education institution. In addition, my findings reveal that CCTSs are interested in an immediate return from applicable engagement opportunities (internships, jobs after graduation, graduate school, etc.), whereas vocational engagement is focused on long term outcomes, such as future promotions and professional development.

### **Implications: Policy, Practice, and Research**

There are several insights based on the findings of this study that have implications for CCTS policy, practice, and research. Some of these implications are recommendations that are already being investigated due to the changing landscape of higher education. Each of these implications pull from the proposed theories regarding CCTS identity, development, and engagement. However, as mentioned earlier, there are always intersections and overlaps within these areas, so I present these implications within the context of practical recommendations that span across the three areas.

Related to policy, Creating more pipelines and partnership programs between two and four-year institutions will help CCTSs hone in on their majors earlier so they do not regret their decision, add a dual major at the last minute, or switch majors after arriving at their four-year institution, as some of the participants in this study ended up doing. Such recommendations stem from Scott-Clayton (2011), and are already being researched. For instance, Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins (2015) posit that streamlining program choices in the form of guided pathways at community colleges keep students on track with degree completion and expedite the transfer process for those seeking admission into a four-year institution, facilitating their development. Such structure at the two-year level could help

reduce the amount of time it takes for CCTSs to narrow in on their goals and provide them with clearer pathways when entering a four-year institution.

While community colleges are taking such initiatives, four-year institutions should take ownership of the major selection issue as well and continue to work on clearer articulation agreements, creating a smoother and more expedient pathway to degree completion. Furthermore, these efforts will also most likely impact performance-based funding to higher education institutions. States and governmental agencies evaluate these institutions based on graduation rates and degree completion timelines and disseminate funding based on these metrics (Bailey et al., 2015). Continued and increased funding to these institutions would mean the creation of additional resources and services, ultimately benefitting students and facilitating their academic success or pathway narrowing.

Regarding practice, both community colleges and four-year institutions should continue to make an effort to coordinate internship and other vocational programs for students. Five students interviewed mentioned how internships and shadowing opportunities were not available to them at their community colleges and now experience pressure to fit them in during their time at their four-year institutions. Therefore, partnerships with organizations at the community college level could lead to more applicable engagement opportunities and exposure to career paths earlier on for CCTSs. Moreover, this would provide CCTSs with a better understanding of how the internship process works, preparing them for experiences at their four-year institutions.

Other possible implications of CCTS applicable engagement at four-year institutions are the potential development of and support for mentorship programs for

transfers and redesign of orientation for transfer students. First, given that CCTSs use "natives as mentors" to learn about activities and resources on-campus, a mentorship program would foster these relationships and provide access for any CCTS who wants to build a relationship with a native student. If a native to CCTS mentorship is not possible, then perhaps a CCTS to CCTS mentorship is an option. Encouraging these kinds of connections in a formal mentorship program would create awareness about campus resources.

The literature surrounding CCTSs frequently mentions how four-year orientations are typically tailored to native freshman (Flaga, 2006; Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Lipka, 2008; Townsend, 2008). Designing a CCTS orientation that focuses on applicable engagement opportunities such as internships and vocational-related resources, extra guidance during the major selection, and providing the students with an opportunity to establish an identity as a four-year student would alleviate the mechanisms this population uses to cope with conflict. Furthermore, given that the landscape of higher education is changing to include more CCTSs, such initiatives would only help in putting four-year institutions in a better position to serve their changing student populations.

The results of this study have implications for research as well, particularly in the area of CCTS meaning-making and identity. My proposed theories need to be tested and further researched for transferability. This research could be done with a similar participant population, or with another group of students within the CCTS context, such as CCTSs of color, to further understand if and how these students struggle with their identities and make meaning of their experiences at four-year institutions. Furthermore, the relational map activity itself could be used with various populations of college

students, helping the students understand their own identities and how they change over the course of time.

### **Limitations**

This study does not come without limitations, beyond the general and obvious limitations of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). First and as mentioned earlier, the scope of this study focused on traditionally aged CCTSs, and used grounded theory to build a theoretical foundation for more specific future research. I focused solely on CCTSs, not other groups of transfer students such as horizontal and swirling students (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education [CAS], 2012). Keeping this study focused on the rapidly growing group of CCTSs allowed for specific and thorough theory generation, but this research could certainly be expanded upon to include other college student populations.

Also, in relation to the scope of this study, my first overarching research question addressed how CCTSs making meaning of their experiences at a four-year institution. It is worth noting that my research question and findings address the process of meaning making, exploring the "how" of meaning making and not "what" the meaning actually is, or means, for CCTSs. Perhaps future research could continue to explore this aspect of CCTSs and investigate the implication of meaning making.

Second, this study focused on identity, development, and engagement, and did not incorporate additional elements that are often part of conversations regarding transfer students, such as academic achievement, degree completion, and retention . These areas have already been repeatedly covered in the community college transfer student literature (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Melguizo, Kienzl, & Alfonso, 2011; Monaghan & Attewell, 2014;

Scott-Clayton, 2011; Townsend, 2007). While some of these areas are mentioned in relation to the literature, they were not the focus of this study. Perhaps these items could become part of a larger conversation for future studies.

Third, this study placed the student and their experiences at the center. It did not focus on university administration, politics, or institutional issues. These topics are addressed as part of implications regarding policy, practice, and research in terms of findings; however, this grounded theory study focused on emerging student theory.

Finally, to maintain the scope of this study, I did not address any race or gender-related issues regarding community college transfer students. This study sought to understand traditionally aged community college transfer students' and their experiences at four-year institutions. While certainly intriguing, issues of equity surrounding this population are sufficiently covered in the literature whereas identity, development, and engagement are not (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Deil-Amen, 2011; Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008; Wassmer, Moore, & Shulock, 2004). It is also worth noting that 16 out of the 25 participants in this study were female, which some could argue have influenced the results of this study. Further research is necessary to determine if gender influences a CCTSs' experiences with identity, development, and engagement at a four-year institution.

Although these limitations are specific to this study, an overall issue and limitation particular to qualitative research is that it cannot be “value-free”, with biases manifesting as part of the process that can be embedded throughout the study (Griffin, 2004). I acknowledged this particular limitation and worked to reduce it to the best of my ability. I maintained a reflective journal throughout the study. Consistent with Ahern

(1999), bracketing my thoughts in this manner aided me in preparing for my research. However, I realize that I could not completely set aside my thoughts and experiences; hence my application of a constructivist grounded theory approach.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative study investigated CCTS identity, development, and engagement at two four-year institutions located on the eastern seaboard using the constructivist grounded theory approach. The data uncovered three theories relative to this population with an overarching connection to meaning making. It is my hope that others will continue to research this topic, expand on this study's findings, and make an overall contribution that will serve the changing higher education population. Such research will lead to conversations regarding further implications for CCTS policy, practice, and research, as well as theory development in this area.

## Chapter 6

### Graphic Elicitation Article

This study explored community college transfer student (CCTS) identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions using an interview protocol with a graphic elicitation activity in the form of a relational map. The primary purpose of the relational map was to explore the population's identity and development. Using graphic elicitation illuminated aspects of CCTSs that they may not have been able to otherwise verbalize, and was used in combination with interview questions designed to explore participants' development and engagement. A constructivist grounded theory approach was applied, given the lack of available literature pertaining to CCTSs in these areas. This study also investigated how CCTSs made meaning of these three areas at their four-year institutions. Twenty-five participants were interviewed until data saturation was achieved. Three primary theories emerged from the data. The limitations of this study are discussed in addition to potential future research using graphic elicitation techniques.

**Keywords:** qualitative research, graphic elicitation, grounded theory, transfer students, community college, higher education, student development theory

Community college transfer students, or CCTSs, are an ever-growing presence at four-year institutions (Flaga, 2006; Handel, 2007; Laanan, 1996; Townsend, 2008). One in five community college students transfer to a four-year institution (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012). Sixty per cent of those students persist and earn a bachelor's degree within a four-year timeframe upon transfer (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012). This an increase compared to the 23% of CCTSs who earned a bachelor's degree within six years of attending a four-year institution back in 1995 (Peter & Cataldi, 2005). Despite this population's growth at four-year institutions, there is little literature in the areas of identity, development, and engagement. These three areas have been well researched for the four-year, native college student populations, or those students who began as freshmen and are therefore “native” to that institution.

Campus resources continue to be tailored to native college students, creating challenges and inequities for CCTSs (Lipka, 2008). Investigating CCTS identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions will allow this population's

unique voices and experiences to be heard. Looking beyond the issues already addressed in the transfer student literature, such as retention, academic achievement, and the transfer process itself, will illuminate other ways they can be served. Moreover, filling this gap in the literature would provide further insight into this population's experiences, possibly giving way to further research in this area.

The purpose of this methodological article is to discuss the use of graphic elicitation in the form of a relational map, in conjunction with semi-structured interview questions, to explore CCTS identity, development, and engagement at a four-year institution in a grounded theory study. This article stemmed from a qualitative, constructivist grounded theory study that explored identity, development, and engagement of traditionally aged CCTSs attending two four-year public institutions located on the eastern seaboard. This study was conducted to address the gap in the literature regarding CCTSs in these three areas.

This article begins with introducing my study's research questions and their connection to grounded theory, followed by a brief discussion of my own background and biases as a researcher. Ethical considerations for this study are also addressed. I then provide a justification of using graphic elicitation, in the form of a relational map, to explore CCTS identity and development, in conjunction with interview questions that explored the population's engagement. I then present my methodological approach to this study, highlighting the use of the relational map activity, followed by my study's results. I also discuss how participants completed the relational maps, and how their use of the map contributed to the my study's findings. I then close with a discussion on limitations and how graphic elicitation techniques could be applied to future research in this area.



## Research Questions

The following overarching research questions were posed in light of the lack of available literature regarding community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement: (a) How does a CCTS make meaning of his or her identity, development, and engagement at a four-year institution? (b) What theory/theories will emerge from exploring CCTS identity, development, and engagement?

In addition to these overarching questions, I considered the following five sub questions: (a) How does a CCTS describe his or her identity after attending a four-year institution for one year? (b) How does a CCTS describe his or her development after attending a four-year institution for one year? (c) How does a CCTS engage with his or her four-year institution after attending a four-year institution for one year? (d) In what ways (if any) does a CCTS's engagement with his or her four-year institution after one year of attendance contribute to his or her college student development? (e) In what ways (if any) does a CCTS's development contribute to his or her identity after one year at a four-year institution?

The grounded theory approach served as my framework and drove my research design for this study to answer my first two overarching research questions. This approach, or specifically what Charmaz (2006) refers to as the "constructivist" grounded theory approach, not only uniquely illuminated transfer student experiences, but also filled the gap in the literature pertaining to this population's identity, development, and engagement. Constructivist grounded theory focuses on the phenomena being studied and draws on participant experiences in the data to develop a "theoretical rendering" based on the researcher's interpretations in abstract terms (Charmaz, 2006). The constructivist

aspect of this approach enabled me to acknowledge my familiarity with the literature in relation to my study while discussing my research design, enabling me to address my research questions.

My overarching research question regarding grounded theory drove my research. As will be discussed, the graphic elicitation and interview questions were necessary in answering this question since little is known about transfer student identity, development, and engagement. Furthermore, based on the research of Baxter Magolda (2009), meaning making has been predominantly explored through interviews; applying graphic elicitation techniques will allow me to further explore identity, development, and engagement. Definitions of identity and development can overlap, therefore using a graphic elicitation activity added clarity to these areas and contribute to theory generation.

The first sub question regarding identity was answered through the graphic elicitation activity and the opening interview question. The overlapping features of identity and development in particular imply complexity; therefore graphic elicitation provided further clarity to me and the participant while determining key items that are part of his or her identity. The second sub question was answered predominantly through the semi-structured interview, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

The third and fourth sub questions, because of their interrelatedness, were answered through the interview questions. Through the interview data, I was able to interpret how the student has developed while attending and engaging with his or her four-year institution. The last sub question once again pulled from both the interview questions and relational map. The students had the opportunity to demonstrate their own

development and identity at the four-year institution through the intensive interviewing process as well as the creation of a relational map.

### **Role of the Researcher and Perspective**

As an Academic Advisor at a four-year, public institution, I have struggled with how to effectively serve the ever-growing CCTS population on my own campus. My own personal challenge with being able to effectively serve this population was one of the primary drivers of conducting this study. The second reason is a little more personal: as a first-generation commuter college student myself in my undergraduate days, I see myself in a lot of these students. Although I was not a CCTS myself, I shared in a lot of their challenges in my own college experience, so I had to ask myself if I empathized with them, why do I have so much difficulty working with them? Such a question lies in the (lack of) CCTS literature as well as the extant literature that paints a picture of a population that faces uphill battles at every turn in their attempts to achieve success.

### **Biases and Assumptions**

Prior to embarking on this study, based on Ahern's (1999) recommendations, I engaged in reflexive bracketing. Acknowledging and reflecting on my previous experiences, biases, own identity, and role as a researcher anchored my presumptions as I engage in data collection. While I have maintained a reflexive journal for the purposes of this study to bracket my thoughts as suggested by Ahern (1999), I realize that I cannot completely set aside my thoughts and experiences for this study (Griffin, 2004).

Based on my familiarity with the transfer student and higher education literature, along with my preconceived notions about and experiences in higher education, my orientation in this study was rooted in the constructivist grounded theory approach. I offer

that I was unable to fully separate myself from my presumptions as suggested in the objectivist grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). I interpreted the data provided to me by the transfer students I interacted with, and sought to understand transfer students through the lenses of identity, development, and engagement. The term "constructivist" as it relates to the grounded theory approach is used in a different context from my reference to the constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm was, and continues to be, part of my worldview as a researcher; while the constructivist grounded theory approach was incorporated into my research design.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In terms of ethical considerations for this study, I have thought about my research and how it will impact my participants. Sieber and Tolich (2013) stated that researchers should ask themselves, "is this research *on* these people or *with* these people" when considering the benefits and risks of research (Sieber & Tolich, 2013, p. 25). I have asked myself this question, and I did conduct this research *with* my participants for several reasons. First, I gave them the opportunity to create a relational map without word restriction, giving them ownership in their creation. Second, I engaged in intensive interviewing and using Chamarz's (2006) techniques, which kept the interview on a conversational level. Third, I reiterated what the participants said to make sure I fully captured their experiences, which stressed the importance of their contribution to my research. Finally, I made myself readily accessible before and after the interview to answer any questions they had. I also developed other interviewing techniques (casual conversation, probing tactics, maintaining the flow of the interview, etc.) that helped in maintaining this joint researcher-participant relationship as well.

There are many facets of vulnerabilities that can be benefits and risks that create murkiness when considering the level of potential harm to a participant (Sieber & Tolich, 2013). For instance, researchers should avoid exploiting participants for the sake of financial and/or academic gain (Seidman, 2006; Sieber & Tolich, 2013). While, as a researcher, I did not see harm in interviewing transfer students for this study, I also remembered that I should be conducting research *with* this population as opposed to *on* this population.

In addition to understanding the vulnerability of the population I am studying, I also took measures to ensure my participants are protected and aware that minimal risks are involved with this study. First, prior to conducting this study, I received the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Human Subjects training at my institution (CITI, n.d.). This training provided me with a certificate to conduct research on human subjects. Furthermore, I secured approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to carry out this study. This required approval protected the participants in my study as well as made my research sites aware of my intentions with this research and data collection. Also, to help in protecting my participants' identities, participants were given aliases during the interview process. This prevented their real names from being revealed in the study. Finally, all participants were asked to sign an informed consent form prior to being interviewed, verifying that they were comfortable proceeding with the study. An informed consent protects the participants' privacy, fully informs them about the study and their ability to withdraw from it at any time, and makes sure there is no deception taking place during the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

## **Using Graphic Elicitation in Grounded Theory Research**

The grounded theory approach lends itself to the constructivist paradigm, given that the constructivist paradigm supports viewing and accepting multiple realities that need to be discovered through naturalistic inquiry (Charmaz, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). However, grounded theory also has a procedural nature to it through the Constant Comparative Method (CCM), via open, axial, and selective coding techniques, and also has some features of the positivist paradigm (Charmaz, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). Post-positivism, on the other hand, supports the examination of lived experiences to explore broader social issues more in depth, which gives way to qualitative research (Ponterotto, 2005). Therefore, anchoring my study in post-positivism, in addition to the grounded theory approach, contributed to meaning making and how CCTSs articulated their experiences at four-year institutions. Since I explored CCTS experiences through a research design consisting of an interview and a graphic elicitation activity, the realities of the participants experiences emerged through these techniques, giving way to new potential theories.

### **Graphic Elicitation as a Relational Map**

The specific graphic elicitation activity for this grounded theory study was a relational map (see Figure 1), designed to explore CCTS identity and development during the interview, and contribute to theory generation as part of the constructivist grounded theory approach. Relational maps can help participants conceptualize the distance between ideas or items, with the most important items being closest to the participant, and the less important depicted as being farthest away (Bagnoli, 2009). They can also aid

in recalling past experiences and knowledge, while addressing complex issues (Copeland & Agosto, 2012).

Varga-Atkins and O'Brien (2009) suggested verifying that the task given to participants is in alignment with the intended purpose of the graphic elicitation activity. This relational map activity was aligned with grounded theory and CCM given that these types of diagrams can help a researcher make easier comparisons across participants, and are structured enough to elicit responses to research questions (Varga-Atkins & O'Brien, 2009). Furthermore, graphic elicitation techniques have been predominantly used in psychology-based fields (Varga-Atkins & O'Brien, 2009). Since the literature on identity and development has its roots in psychology, applying graphic elicitations in this manner lent itself to the origins of these two areas, providing opportunities for deeper exploration.

As part of the relational map activity, participants were asked to write words that they feel are part of their own identities in Euler circles, with the center circle having the word "ME" to indicate proximity to one's identity. Euler circles within a diagram allow participants to cognitively recognize relationships between items, and the significance of those relationships based on their distance from each other (Mineshima, Okada, Sato, & Takemura, 2008). The further away the participant writes the items from the center labeled "ME", the less they are considered part of the participant's identity. While, in alignment with grounded theory, no prompts, such as banks of preselected words, were used, it became clear during the pretesting phase that some general questions were necessary to guide the participants' thinking. Therefore, I provided some general questions at the bottom of the map under the directions. No other prompts were provided so participants

could remain completely open and fill in words that spoke closest to their identities. The graphic elicitation activity not only provided an opportunity for the participant to describe something that he or she may not be able to verbalize (Bagnoli, 2009), but was also used as a tool to drive the semi-structured interview portion of the study.

**Interview questions.** Semi-structured intensive interview questions, designed as part of my protocol along with the relational map, allowed me to capture and interpret the stories regarding this population's experiences at their four-year institutions, while drawing from the relational map activity to create a holistic picture of the students' experiences and how they engaged in meaning making (see Appendix A). Conducting the interviews using this in-depth method provided me with an understanding of how this group interprets and makes meaning of their experiences at four-year institutions. Such an understanding contributed to theory generation, addressing my overarching research questions (Creswell, 2013). Questions were designed to explore development and engagement while pulling in the relational map for further conversations regarding identity.

## **Method**

### **Setting**

I conducted interviews for this study at two four-year public, suburban institutions located on the eastern seaboard. The first institution, given the alias "Eastern Atlantic University" (EAU), has approximately 13,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The institution offers a combination of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs. According to the Carnegie Classifications (n.d.), EAU is categorized as a medium-sized, four-year public institution. EAU was selected for this study given that it serves a large



number of transfer students on the mid-Atlantic seaboard, and enrolled 1,800 students in the 2013-2014 academic year.

The second institution where I conducted this study, given the alias “Coastal Plain University” (CPU), has approximately 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students, and enrolled about 1,000 transfer students in the 2013-2014 academic year. Like CPU, EAU draws its transfer student pool from its surrounding community colleges. CPU is also designated as a medium sized, four-year public institution (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.).

### **Participants**

Based on Carlan and Byxbe's (2000) definition of transfer students, participants in this study included students who attended two-year community colleges and then transferred to one of the aforementioned two four-year institutions with junior status, meaning they had earned at least 60 credits at their two-year institutions. Participants were traditionally college aged, between 19 and 22 years old, and had spent at least two semesters (one academic year) at EAU or CPU. This timeframe provides students sufficient time to become entrenched in the four-year institution so they can fully speak to their experiences, but is still recent enough for them to reflect on their community college experiences. This sampling method limited the number of participants to be considered for this study given that they were selected based on specific of criteria and maintained the scope of the study (Maxwell, 2013).

### **Recruitment and Incentive**

Participants were recruited via blanket emails written by me and sent out by departments at EAU and CPU that had high levels of interactions with CCTS. To capture those students who had been at the institution for at least two semesters, CCTSs were

contacted who entered either institution between fall 2013 and spring 2014, since data collection for this study spanned across fall 2014 and the beginning of spring 2015.

In my recruitment email detailing the study, I included my contact information and asked interested students to contact me directly to confirm that they met the criteria. Once contact was established with participants, I worked with them to schedule the interviews. Interviews took place at a times that were convenient for the participants and locations selected were appropriate for conducting the interview. As suggested by Varga-Atkins and O'Brien (2009), I made sure that locations were conducive to focusing on completing the graphic elicitation activity. Factors such as comfort and noise level were taken into account when scheduling interview locations. Interview locations included empty classrooms, group study rooms and cafes during non-peak hours. Students who participated in the study received a \$10 gift card to Wawa or Dunkin' Donuts as an incentive.

### **Data Collection**

Data saturation is the intent and ultimate goal for grounded theory data collection, giving way to theory generation as common categories emerge and are repeated (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical saturation, as it pertains to grounded theory for generating theory, occurs when no new codes emerge from the data based on comparisons and when categories become clearly defined (Birks & Mills, 2011).

Saturation occurred for this study through the application of CCM and the evolution of themes during the coding process, leading to theory generation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Data saturation was reached after I interviewed twenty-five participants ( $n = 25$ ), sixteen participants from EAU and nine from CPU. No new codes

related to my research questions emerged after that point and similar themes were emerging from the relational maps that contributed to the theory. Furthermore, using two research sites helped me in achieving saturation by providing me access to CCTSs in multiple settings, indicating that saturation was occurring beyond just one institution and moved me beyond research at my institution of employment (Creswell, 2013).

All students signed informed consent forms, and were asked if they were willing to be audio recorded prior to beginning the interview. Twelve out of the sixteen EAU students and all nine CPU students agreed to be audio recorded. I took detailed notes during the interviews for those participants who declined to be audio recorded. The length of the interview varied by participant, however, between speaking with the participant, explaining the relational map, and conducting the actual interview, it is estimated that the entire interview process took a full hour. After the participants left the interviews, I completed field notes, which in the style of Rossman and Rallis (2003), included a summary of the interview, a description of the interactions with the participant, and analytic memos. Such note taking also contributed to the development of my theories regarding CCTS identity, development, and engagement.

Participants were originally given five minutes to complete the relational map, however, during pretesting and as the study progressed, I realized that participants needed more time to process what was being asked of them, and time to orient themselves with the activity. I therefore increased the time to seven to ten minutes, asking them if they needed more time around the seven or eight minute mark. Most participants were satisfied with their work after seven or eight minutes, while others requested more time, taking the full ten minutes. Three students mentioned how it took them a few minutes

initially to think of things to write on the map, but then after a few minutes, they gained momentum with their thoughts.

When I conducted my pilot studies, I remained in the room while students completed their maps. However, during actual data collection, some of my participants seemed to have difficulty completing the maps initially. I did not want to hover and make them feel pressured, so, when I was able, I left the interview location and waited in a separate area for a few minutes. I told the participants I would be available if they needed anything, and then I returned a few minutes later. I felt that this made them more comfortable as opposed to me watching them. If this was not possible, for example at the coffee shop location, I would simply make sure I was giving them enough space so they were comfortable with completing the activity, such as choosing a table or area that was spacious enough so I did not appear to be hovering.

The completed relational maps varied in appearance depending on the participant. All participants had a different level of content on their relational maps when they were finished. Though it often took participants a few minutes to really gain momentum with filling the map in (some more than others), this graphic elicitation technique allowed participants to express aspects of themselves in ways that they could not verbalize (Copeland & Agosto, 2012). "Allison's" map (see Figure 6), for example, was very strong with abstract concepts, including her anxieties and fears, that she perhaps may not have been able to verbalize otherwise.

Participants wrote a variety of words and phrases in the circles of their maps, given that there were no parameters used in filling out the map. "Mary", for example, opted to write detailed phrases on her map (see Figure 10).

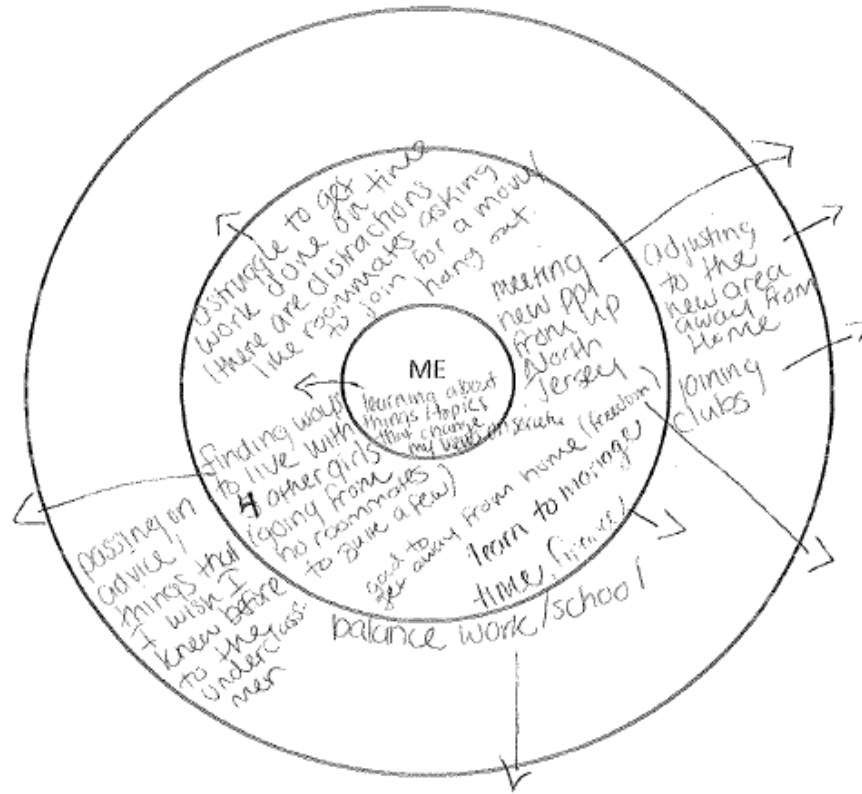


Figure 10. Mary's Relational Map

Furthermore, when asked how the placement of the words in the circles would change compared to their first year of attending community college, most participants confirmed verbally that the words written closest to the center would be moved to the outer circles or disappear altogether. To illustrate this, the twelfth participant, "Drew", went a step further and used a different color pen from the one he used to initially fill the map, and drew circles and arrows to indicate what would move, disappear, etc. (see Figure 4).

I felt this technique would be extremely helpful to the students as they explained how their map has changed, in addition to being helpful to me as I worked with the data, providing me with a visual of the map and how it changed over time, rather than having

participants discuss it. I then decided moving forward to provide this option to students. After "Drew's" interview, seven participants opted to use this technique.

Once the time frame to complete the map was over, I confirmed with the participant that they were finished and moved onto the interview questions. As part of the first question of the interview protocol, and in alignment with Zhang (2008), I asked each participant to explain to me, working from the inside out, what he or she wrote in the circles. Having the participants reiterate what they wrote in the relational map circles reduced the risk of misinterpreting findings, contributing to the study's dependability (Zhang, 2008). Once I had a conversation with the participant about what they wrote in their relational map circles, I then moved onto the remainder of the interview protocol questions.

### **Data Analysis**

Recorded interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. While waiting for the interview transcripts to be sent back to me, I entered the relational map data on a spreadsheet and coded the interview notes from those interviews that were not recorded. Once the interview transcripts were received, I engaged in three cycles of CCM coding. The codes from each round of coding were listed on individual spreadsheets for each participant, listing the axial codes specifically on a separate spreadsheet to determine emerging categories and to engage in Constant Comparative Method (CCM). The categories were grouped into themes that gave way to the theoretical codes that ultimately led to development of three theories, each pertaining to CCTS identity, development, and engagement, and an overarching theory suggesting how CCTSs make

meaning of their experiences at a four-year institution through the lenses of these three areas.

After each interview and in the spirit of Constant Comparative Method (CCM), I coded and analyzed each relational map in the style of Copeland and Agosto (2012). I used individual spreadsheets to list the words and phrases students wrote in each circle, and then based on the frequency of those words and phrases, I created a color-coded codebook to group them into categories. Thirteen color-coded categories emerged from the relational maps, and according to their frequency, they were: academics/major, future/career plans, feelings of stress/being overwhelmed, social interactions, responsibility, determination, college activities, leisurely activities, personal health/caring for self, working/having a job, money/finances, distance/transportation, and technology. These categories were then integrated into the spreadsheet with the categories from the interviews, generating theoretical codes and contributing to the development of the CCTS identity, development, and engagement theories outlined in the upcoming sections.

As my interviews progressed, I began to uncover the same themes that contributed to theoretical saturation around my twenty-first interview, however, I continued interviewing to verify that I had achieved saturation. This was accomplished through asking my remaining participants questions tied to my emerging theories as suggested by Yin (2014). Based on their responses, I determined that theoretical saturation had been achieved and ended the interview process so I could focus on crafting a data display to illustrate my theory (Maxwell, 2013) and write my findings.

Although the relational map was meant to provide insight into identity and development in conjunction with the interview questions themselves, it also ended up

shedding light on engagement. Therefore, I did not parse out individual findings from the maps and the interview questions but wove them throughout my findings to support the emergent theories. The relational map and interview questions worked in tandem, contributing to the development of my proposed theories pertaining to CCTS identity, development, and engagement. Below, I introduce my three emergent theories and highlight the themes that were primarily driven by the relational map data, using illustrations of participants' maps to demonstrate my findings.

## **Results**

### **Meaning Making: "A Better Person Coming Out Than Going In"**

Figure 3 depicts the proposed theories of CCTS identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions, along with their respective themes. CCTSs experience feelings of conflict regarding their behaviors on campus and what the college experience is perceived to be. They work through these conflicts over time at their four-year institutions, giving way to these emergent theories. Combined, the three CCTS theories, which will be introduced below, of the alter ego, "fitting four in two", and applicable engagement can be considered coping mechanisms to deal with the feelings of this population experiences during their first year at a four-year institution.

The CCTSs changed themselves to fit the situation through these coping mechanisms. The conflicts CCTSs encountered existed prior to the relationship; since they had pre-existing expectations prior to the entering the four-year environment and those expectations were not met. According to Kegan (1994) when disconnect occurs due to conflict, individuals must "focus on the ways to let the conflictual relationship transform the parties rather than the parties resolving the conflict" (p. 320). This is



opposed to the CCTSs changing the conflicting situation itself through actions such as transferring to another institution or leaving the institution altogether due to the conflict.

The coping mechanisms mentioned indicate how CCTSs arrive at making meaning of their college experience. Ultimately and holistically, CCTSs want to work through these conflicts to improve upon themselves at their four-year institution. Therefore, they make meaning of their experiences with identity, development, and engagement at their four-year institutions as "a better person coming out than going in." This overarching theme provides a holistic perspective regarding how the population experiences these three areas at four-year institutions in relation to conflict and explains the process of how they make meaning of them. CCTSs work through these conflicts as they strive for self-improvement and to become "better" as they transition from their community colleges to their four-year institutions. EAU student "Oscar" captured the essence of this idea by using this phrase at the conclusion of his interview and indicated his aspirations to attend medical school on his relational map (see Figure 11):

I remember my first semester at [community college]. I wasn't really involved at all. But now, I'm in the pre-health club and we do volunteer work. They also have research opportunities available that I'm interested in, because I'm trying to get into medical school. I want to be a cardiologist. By the time I graduate I know the type of person I want to become. I want to be a better person coming out of this than when I came into it if that makes any sense.

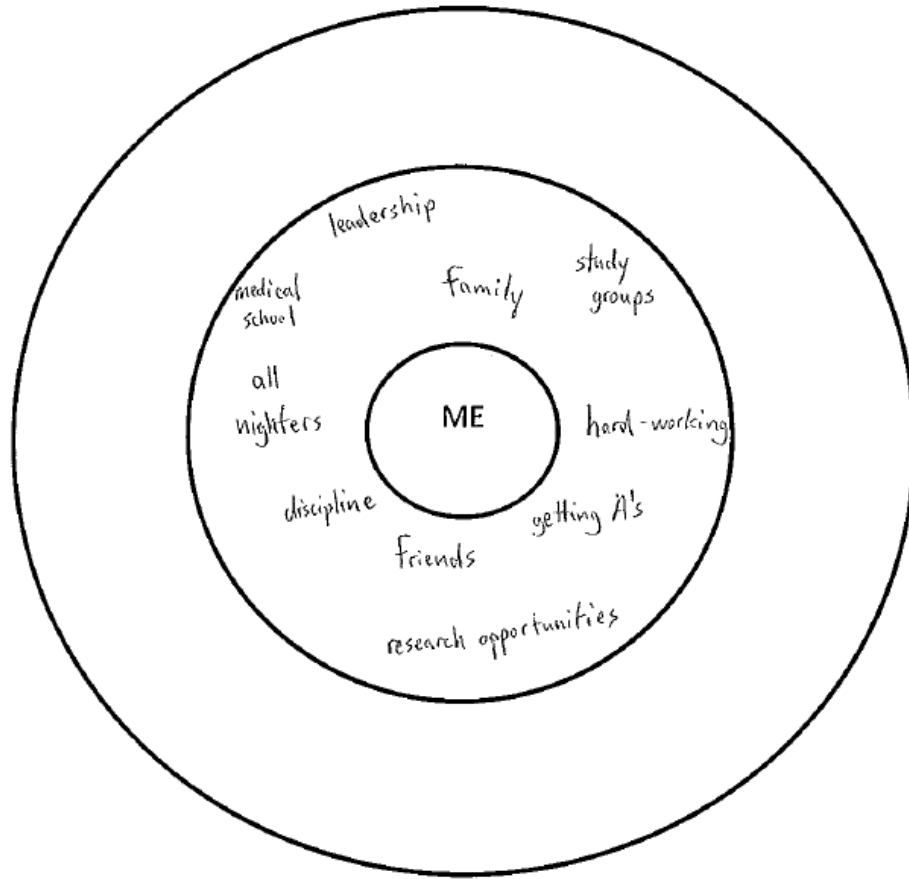


Figure 11. Oscar's Relational Map

Even though CCTSs work through conflict during their first year at their four-year institutions, this is not to say that they, or college students in general, stop working through conflict after this period of time. Baxter Magolda (2009) suggests that working through personal challenges are part of a lifelong experience for any individual.

However, based on this data, which inquired about CCTSs' experiences over the course of a year specifically, working through the issues related to identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions can be considered part of their experiences as they strive to be "a better person coming out than going in." This overarching theme is what

CCTSs perceive it to be, and I offer that they use the proposed theories as coping mechanisms to become "a better person coming out than going in".

### **Theory 1: The "Alter Ego"**

CCTSs develop an alternate identity, or "alter ego" based on their experiences in their four-year institutional environments. Schutz (1970) referred to an alter ego as another "individual with which one shares space and time" who coexists with the person, evolving and changing with him or her over time based on social situations (p. 180). I have adapted this definition to address this finding given that the CCTS alter ego, as an alternate version of the student, evolves over the course of time based on his or her four-year institutional experiences. The alter ego develops based on their perceptions of what is expected of them as college students and how they believe the college experience is portrayed. The alter ego appears to be professionally and academically driven, whereas the off-campus ego is less formal, typically manifesting with friends and family from home. Moreover, the alter ego incorporates elements of college life, including living on-campus or close to campus, attending parties, and engaging in other activities that this population perceives as being part of the college experience.

The relational maps suggested that CCTS strongly identify with their major and academic achievement, as eleven participants listed their academic major in the "me" circle or the second circle, suggesting that they strongly identify with their major, creating business-like behaviors that contribute to an alter ego. This association with their academic majors contributes to CCTSs "strictly business" attitude on-campus. For instance, EAU student "Natalie" described how she conducted herself on and off-campus regarding interactions with others. Her off-campus friends included her roommates and

her sister, while she referred to those who interact with on-campus as simply other students:

My classmates – mostly my lab partners – I'm very like I just want to get things done and I want to leave. And I think that's where it comes off where I don't really joke around with them because I want to get that stuff done. And I want to ... like I'm serious about my schoolwork, so I'm not joking around with them. I want to make sure everything's right.

"David", another EAU student, had a similar explanation of his interactions on-campus:

Since I don't know the people on campus as well, I'm more professional about how I conduct myself. Off campus, with my friends, I can...I'm more laid back and more relaxed about things.

Moreover, participants appeared to take part in activities that they felt were part of the "typical college experience," such as living away from home, the activities were simply perceived as being part of the college experience. For example, several CCTSs did not live on-campus at their four-year institutions, but lived in off-campus apartments with friends or significant others. These students wanted to keep a "safe distance" from campus while still attempting to have the experience of living away from home.

Several participants indicated that they "tried" certain aspects of the college experience, including going to parties or participating in Greek life, but then realized they were not interested in those activities. These attempts were part of CCTSs arriving at a four-year institution and their desire to enjoy what is perceived as being part of the college experience during their remaining two years, contributing to the alter ego. For example, CPU student "Amy" discussed her attempt to explore joining a sorority after writing "Greek life" on her relational map, which she also perceived as part of the college experience (see Figure 5):

I did write down Greek life. I know a lot of people who are involved with that, but that's just not me. I feel like it's a big part of college and I looked into doing it, so I noted it, but –it wasn't for me.

Nine participants wrote some indication of attending parties or participating in the college experience in the third and outer circles of their relational maps, suggesting these activities were also not an important part of their college student identity.

Finally, several CCTSs described instances in which they had to behave a particular way when interacting with those on-campus during certain situations, further contributing to an alter ego. Although I discuss this theme in relation to identity, it overlaps with engagement also, as CCTSs discussed their interactions with individuals on-campus. Six participants wrote some form of interacting with roommates on their relational maps. These codes became part of the social interaction category from the relational maps, but when combined with the interview data, were broken into two categories: roommate issues and being diplomatic.

In terms of identity, and an alter ego, specifically, "Amy" from CPU explains how she had to adjust to interacting with her roommates versus her family at home:

I would say overall –I'm more comfortable at home with family and friends that I've known for years, as opposed to the people here. For example, at home, if my sister was hogging up the shower, I'd bang on the door and tell her to get out – but if one of my roommates was doing that, I would probably be much more passive, would just let it go and wait. That fear of upsetting people...

"Amy" used her alter ego when interacting with her roommates, which for her, was what she labeled as being passive. EAU student "Andrew" also indicated his challenges in living with roommates on his map. Other participants, like "Oscar" from EAU, discussed the challenges of living with roommates while attempting to study and meet their academic goals. This theme suggests that CCTSs, in addition to dealing with a transition

of attending a new institution, must adjust to life with others people through using an alter ego, if they decide to live on-campus or away from home.

The theory of the CCTS alter ego suggests that this population displays different characteristics on and off-campus, based on what they perceive the college experience to be. They struggle with how they interact with individuals on and off-campus. They feel particularly challenged when interacting with those on-campus, such as roommates. Although they attempt to take part in what they believe to be typical college student activities, such as attending parties or participating in Greek life, they may not necessarily be interested in them. Furthermore, they elect to keep a "safe distance" from campus, therefore living an alternate version of college life.

### **Theory 2: "Fitting 4 in 2"**

In terms of development, CCTSs narrow their interests over time at a four-year institution. Interests that emerged from their community college experience do not appear to contribute to their decision making regarding major selection or career goals. This suggests that a CCTS's career path evolves over time through exposure to academic and personal experiences at a four-year institution, not necessarily at the community college level. Unlike their four-year native counterparts, CCTSs typically have a limited amount of time, two years or four semesters, to develop and narrow in on their interests before degree completion.

While the expectation may be that CCTSs know what their goals are upon entering a four-year institution due to having already completed two years of community college, this does not appear to be the case. CCTSs seem to struggle with their career pathways and major selection upon arrival at their four-year institutions, and engage in

narrowing in on them over time. The CCTSs' goals evolved to be more specific as time went on based on their experiences at their four-year institutions, not their community colleges. "Allison" described her own pathway narrowing when she was contemplating attending graduate school for Psychology, as she indicated on her relational map (see Figure 6):

When I think of finding myself, as far as transferring to a university, it's narrowing down your actual interests... When I was at [community college], I was like, "Okay, four years of college and I'm done. Thank God". I didn't think of anything about Masters Degrees there. I didn't even know there were so many different types of roots you could do in Psychology. I thought it was one thing and that's it. So, I was really just uneducated in the subject, in the topic of Psychology.

CCTSs appear to not fully arrive at a conclusion regarding their career paths until spending time at their four-year institutions. CPU student "Lana" decided to add a dual major in biology during her next to last semester due to her changing and narrowing of goals. Therefore, it appears that it takes CCTSs additional time to narrow in their goals upon arrival at a four-year institution due to having to be intentional and specific in areas such as major selection and research, but have to fit this decision-making into a two-year timeline.

CPU student "Mary" discussed her conflict when deciding on a major, explaining how she felt unprepared to do so after attending her community college. She indicated this struggle on her relational map, writing that she wanted to pass advice onto underclassmen that she had wished she had known when transferring (see Figure 10):

I was totally undecided after I went to [community college], I had no idea. I knew that I wanted to go into the science field but the science field is so broad. You can be a biologist, a marine biologist....it was so broad. I really didn't know anything, I was really up in the air. I went into [four-year institution] initially as a health major with an interest in physical therapy, and it wasn't until after shadowing in my junior year after I shadowed, I decided to just go for occupational therapy instead.

Students who were indifferent, like "Caroline", indicated that they went with a major as a default since they were already exposed to certain courses at community college. In her case, she chose Psychology at CPU:

I had no clue. I was really just doing like a general studies, but then like coincidentally at the very last minute, like I just wanted to do... I wanted to get a degree other than general studies and I had already taken a few psych courses, so I was like I'll just continue with that.

Indifference and uncertainty regarding career paths suggest that CCTSs may not have a clear idea of their major even after leaving their community colleges, something that will be discussed later on in terms of the implications of this research.

In addition to uncertainty of career paths, ten out of the 25 participants interviewed indicated some form of anxiety regarding their future career plans after graduation on their relational maps, as indicated in the categories listed above. Several of them alluded to this during the interview as well. "Jonathan" was very vocal about his concerns about what is in store with him after graduation and wrote "unknown future" on his map (see Figure 7):

Not in the sense that I want it to be over with, because if I could stay at college, I would, because I have no clue what's going to happen next. I'm structured; I do not like uncertainty. It's terrifying. If I knew going in, "Oh, you're going to do this," I'd be fine. I'd be like, I'll do that.



While anxiety about any new phase in one's life can lead to a sense of uncertainty, perhaps this type of anxiety is the result of the transition to a four-year institution and having to fit the full experience of it into two years.

Despite their uncertainty and anxiety, CCTSs have mastered the ability to maintain a balance between school, work, and other responsibilities as they engage in a "balancing act". Furthermore, this population has mastered "the art of scheduling", which seems to have manifested from their experiences at their community colleges. Tied to their ability to balance their lives, 12 participants alluded to "responsibility" and "balance" on their relational maps. Many students discussed their ability to skillfully schedule their courses around their work and other responsibilities, along with their attempts to fit their college experience in two years at their four-year institutions. For instance, EAU student "Janet" discussed how she created a balance from her desire to fit everything in two years. She explained, "It's always a balance, but school usually wins. I really want to get my college experience in. Everyone always talks about 'the best four years of their life', and I really want to get that in." This desire to experience college also overlaps with the alter ego that CCTSs develop given what they believe is the college experience.

"Natalie", who wrote "busy" and "involved" in the second circles on her relational map (see Figure 12), discussed the "art of scheduling" and balance, explaining that learning how to maintain this balance at her community college translated to her four-year, where she became more involved in activities:

I wasn't really involved because I was mostly worried about my schoolwork. I didn't know that it was possible to balance anything. And I was working a lot in [community college]. So my involvement on campus wasn't a lot. But since then it's gotten better.

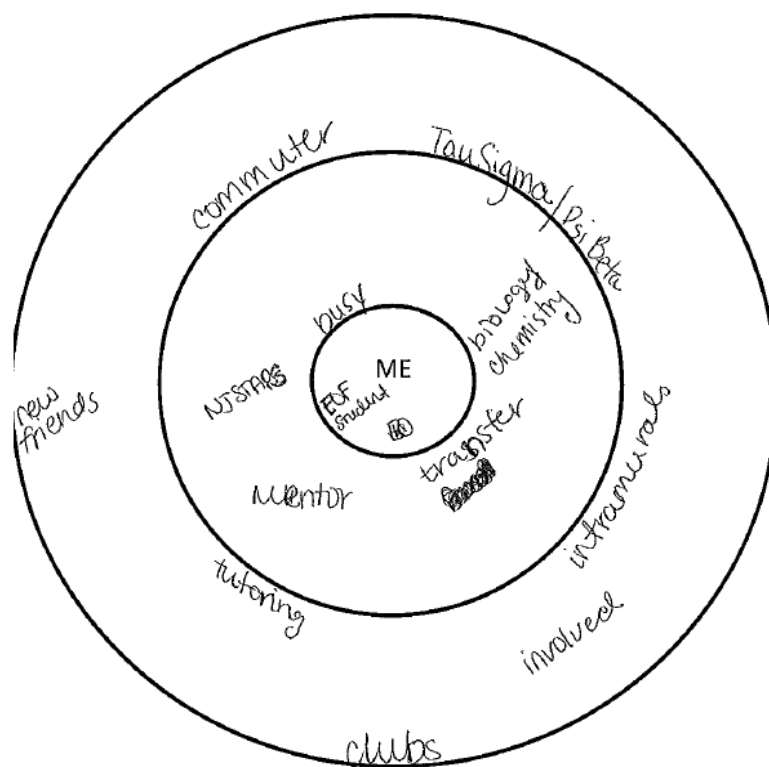


Figure 12. Natalie's Relational Map

Maintaining this type of balance through scheduling appears to help with CCTS maturity, ultimately contributing to their growth as an individual and development over time. It may also put them on a path to explore and hone in on their academic and vocational goals as they attempt to do it in a limited amount of time at a four-year institution.

Finally, as part of the "Fitting 4 in 2" theory, CCTSs indicated on their relational maps and interviews that native students are perceived to have an unspoken advantage at four-year institutions. The advantages came in the form of native-specific resources, knowledge of campus functions, and future career paths. "Natalie", for example, shared

the challenges she faced when attempting to join the pre-health club, suggesting this advantage (see Figure 12). This was an on-campus organization she felt benefitted her major and career goal of attending medical school, which she wrote close to the center of her map:

It's hard to get involved when you're coming in your third year. They don't really make it easy because – especially in biology. You kind of have to ask around and go to club meetings. Like for the pre-health club that I'm in – to get in you have to go to the meeting. And then to be into it you have to go to this many meetings. And you have to meet with the health advisor. And it's a lot of steps to stay involved.

"Caroline" mentioned this "native advantage" as well in terms of resources and, because of it, indicated she identified more with her community college than CPU. She said, "Like you get here junior year and you're like well the freshmen that were here, they know the clubs, they know the ins and outs of things."

This theme also appeared on students' relational maps in the form of anxiety, under the stressed/overwhelmed category, as well as the college activities category. "Lana's" map (see Figure 8), for instance, echoed the feelings she mentioned above of native students having certain resources tailored to them, or having easier access to these resources. This creates a perceived sense of competitiveness among CCTSs, putting additional pressure on CCTSs to fit four years into two.

Participant relational maps indicated that CCTSs experience feelings of conflict regarding their major selection and career paths. The population's experiences at the community college level do not appear to contribute to their decision-making processes at the four-year level.

### **Theory 3: "Applicable" Engagement**

My theory of "applicable engagement" posits that CCTSs make it a priority to seek out on-campus activities that serve a purpose in furthering them academically or vocationally, serving a function for them in achieving their goals and having an immediate return. They see these activities as applicable to their major, future goals, or as a resume builder and networking tool to make connections for research opportunities. Extracurricular activities, such as attending parties or participating in more leisurely campus activities, appeared on the outer circles of the map.

For instance, "Drew", an EAU English major, discussed his involvement with the literary magazine that he listed on his map (see Figure 4). He compared his type of involvement to his sister, a native student at another four-year institution:

My sister goes to [another university], in [another city], and she's like, you know, 'I'm a [university mascot], I'm in the band, and I go to football every day,' and yada, and I'm like, 'Yes. I, I don't know.' I don't. I'm not interested in that, extracurricular activities I don't see directly benefitting me. Like, I consider [university's literary magazine] to be beneficial because it is a creative output since I want to be a writer, and then English Club is a place for me to even go and I discuss my paper. So I'm still using it as a club to benefit what I'm doing in school and in the future.

Also, EAU student "Shelly" indicated on her relational map that she wished to seek out these types of opportunities through shadowing at hospitals in the hopes of one day becoming a doctor (see Figure 9).

These students also appear to opt for more applicable engagement-related activities when presented with a choice to join an activity that appeals to their own personal interests and one that is connected to their major or career plans. Music major "Edward" from EAU, for example, takes part in ensemble groups and wrote his primary

instrument in the very center of the map, suggesting the importance of his craft. While "Edward" declined to be recorded, he explained that while he would like to join EAU's Anime Club given his hobbies and interests, but he would rather spend time practicing with his ensemble group to improve his skills, working toward his goal of one day conducting an orchestra.

Tied to applicable engagement, CCTSs make friends on-campus, they form tight-knit groups with like-minded individuals who are typically transfers as well. EAU student "Janet", for instance, discussed her involvement with her sorority and other campus activities on her relational map, explained her close-knit relationships with other sorority students, who are mainly transfer students. "As a freshman it's easy to make friends, but as a junior it's kind of weird to make friends I feel like. There's a lot of us [transfers] in my sorority that felt that same way," she said. Other participants indicated that they mainly stayed with groups of friends they had made within their major, or roommates who were transfers. Like a coalition, many of these groups set out to serve a purpose, such as a study group, or a group that wanted to make a change and help CCTSs have a different experience at her institution. "Lana" indicated this issue on her relational map as well when she wrote the term "secluded" (see Figure 8):

One of my roommates, she was also a transfer, and she was very upset when she transferred here because she kind of experienced a similar thing and she had been working on getting more things for transfers; bringing up the disadvantages there are of being a transfer. We kind of realized that it's going to be up to us to how we get our experience because they're not paying attention to us as freshman or un-bonded or however you want to state it.

In addition, participants interviewed indicated that they made "connections" and "contacts" on-campus as opposed to "friends". Although 14 participants wrote some sort of indicator of friendships, or making new friends, on their relational maps ("friends",

"friendships", etc.), participants were more likely to discuss "making connections" and "networking" in relation to their campus involvement during the actual interview. Six students also referenced "networking" or "making connections" on their maps, suggesting that as CCTSs, they understand the importance of establishing professional relationships for future opportunities given that they only have two years to do so at their four-year institutions.

Finally, as part of applicable engagement, but also overlapping with development, CCTSs gradually become involved with activities after becoming acclimated to the environment and find activities that are applicable to their majors and goals, a process and theme I labeled "putting yourself out there". EAU student "Drew" discusses his process of "putting himself out there" over the course of time. He was initially hesitant to join the literary magazine club, which he listed on his map as mentioned earlier, but gradually he became more involved after his first year:

I'm not sitting in my car anymore, which is – that's what – you know, first semester, I would sit in my car and eat lunch in my car, and be like, hmm. But now that the clubs that are here, that are very adamant, even – they're adamant on getting me to join, which is still some kind of recognition of, no, we want to have you as an individual in our club. And so now I go to the office, and I eat there.

Charlotte wrote "new experiences" close to "ME" on her relational map. When I asked why, she stated, "because you have to be willing to do that", indicating that she felt the need to "put herself out there" to be exposed to new experiences.

CCTSs seek out engagement opportunities that serve a purpose, and more specifically an immediate return on their time. They prefer to spend their time with activities that they can put on a resume, that is relevant to their major, will enhance their career skills, or will provide networking opportunities. They prefer to make connections

over making friends and then use these connections to build coalitions that serve a purpose, and use natives as mentors to learn about campus resources. Over time, they "put themselves out there" as they become more comfortable with their institutions.

### **Limitations**

While this study does not come without limitations beyond the typical limitations of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013), there are specific limitations related to my design and the relational map activity itself. These limitations include the nature of the researcher-participant relationship impacting the content of the maps, the structure of the map itself, and finally the timeline in which the map was delivered. Perhaps future research, either in the area of CCTSs or through the use of graphic elicitation techniques, could address these limitations.

I remained mindful of my role as a researcher and how I was perceived by the students in this study. Rossman and Rallis (2003) cautioned researchers to be cognizant of the shift in the balance of power between interviewer and interviewee during a study. Given my job as an Academic Advisor, I made sure the CCTSs interviewed as part of this study understood that I was approaching the interview in my role as a doctoral student. I referred to myself as a doctoral student first and framed every conversation within the context of being a student. However, there is the possibility that this could have impacted participant responses on the relational maps and during the interviews. Perhaps participants framed their responses in terms of their academics due to my role at my institution. Although many of the relational map responses closest to the "ME" circle were related to the student's major, this could have been due to participants perceiving this study as academically-focused given my role at a four-year institution.

Also, the structure of the map itself could leave room for different interpretations. In the spirit of grounded theory, I left the map structure as unrestricted as possible to allow for generation of a variety of ideas. However, as seen earlier, participants completed the maps in numerous ways. "Shelly" for example, used bullet points to indicate words and phrases in her map (see Figure 9), while "Amy" put phrases in parentheses to clarify her ideas (see Figure 5). Although lack of restriction helps participants to express creativity in graphic elicitation activities (Copeland & Agosto 2012 Varga-Atkins & O'Brien, 2009; Welkener & Baxter Magola, 2014; Zhang, 2008), it could be argued that so many different maps with a lack of prompts could lead to a variety of interpretations of the task. Perhaps in future studies, mechanisms such as word banks or boxes within the circles could be part of the map to help with narrowing in on participant responses and providing general direction to participants.

Finally, the timing of the relational map activity itself is a limitation of this study. Thygesen, Pedersen, Kragstrup, Wagner, and Mogensen (2011) took the position that using graphic elicitation techniques generates a "snapshot understanding" of participant experiences based on their experiences at a particular time (p. 605). If this study were conducted longitudinally, for example immediately upon CCTSs' arrival to their four-year institutions and then again upon graduation, perhaps the maps would have generated different results. Having participants fill out the maps over time would further contribute to meaning making, as Baxter Magolda (2009) suggested that meaning making is a progressive process as individuals grow, change, and work through a variety of challenges. Asking in-depth interview questions and having the students indicate how their map would have appeared while attending community college still helps paint a



picture of CCTS identity, development, and engagement because they are recalling their past experiences and making reference to their maps. However, as the activity was completed only once, this particular study was indeed only a "snapshot" of CCTSs and their experiences.

### **Future Research**

It appears that graphic elicitation has not been used to explore CCTS identity, development, and engagement previously, therefore further research is needed in this area. This research could be done with a similar participant population, or with another group of students within the CCTS context, such as CCTSs of color, to further understand if and how these students struggle with their identities and make meaning of their experiences at four-year institutions. The relational map activity itself could be used with various populations of college students, helping the students understand their own identities and how they change over the course of time. Moreover, as I mentioned in the previous section, a longitudinal study of CCTSs using the map could chronicle their experiences with identity, development, engagement starting at transfer and through graduation. When looking at the various possibilities, it is clear that this research could be the beginning of further use of graphic elicitation in studies overall, and additional research exploring CCTSs specifically.

## References

- Abes, E.S., Jones, S.R., & McEwen, M.K. (2007). Reconceptualizing the model of multiple dimensions of identity: The role of meaning-making capacity in the construction of multiple identities. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(1), 1-22.
- Ahern, K. J. (1999). Ten tips for reflexive bracketing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 9(3), 407-411.
- American Association of Community Colleges. (2014a). Students at community colleges. Retrieved from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Trends/Pages/studentsatcommunitycolleges.aspx>.
- American Association of Community Colleges (2014b). 2014 fact sheet. Retrieved from [http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Documents/Facts14\\_Data\\_R3.pdf](http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Documents/Facts14_Data_R3.pdf).
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory from the late teens through the early twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469-480. doi: 10.1037//0003-066X.55.5.469.
- Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(4), 518-529.
- Bagnoli, A (2009). Beyond the standard interview: The use of graphic elicitation and arts based methods. *Qualitative Research*, 9(5), 547-570.
- Bahr, P. R. (2010). The bird's eye view of community colleges: A behavioral typology based on cluster analytic classification. *Research in Higher Education*, 51, 724-749.
- Bahr, P. R., Toth, C., Thirolf, K., & Massé, J. C. (2013). A review and critique of the literature on community college students' transition process and outcomes in four-year institutions. In Paulsen, M. B. (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer Science and Business Media. (p. 459-511). doi: 10.1007/978-94-007-5836-0\_10.

- Bailey, T. R., Jaggars, S. S., & Jenkins, D. (2015). *Redesigning America's community colleges: A clearer path to guided pathways*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bailey, T., & Morest, V. S. (2006). *Defending the community college equity agenda*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bass, D. (2003). From the foundations up: contexts for change in community college advancement. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 124(Winter), 15-26.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2009). The activity of meaning making: A holistic perspective on college student development. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 621-639.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2004). Evolution of a constructivist conceptualization of epistemological reflection. *Educational Psychology*, 39(1), 31-42.
- Bensimon, E. M., & Dowd, A. (2009). Dimensions of the transfer choice gap: Experiences of Latina and Latino students who navigated transfer pathways. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(4), 632-782.
- Beoije, H. (2002). A purposeful approach to the constant comparative method in the analysis of qualitative interviews. *Quality and Quantity*, 36, 391-402.
- Billett, S. (2002). Toward a workplace pedagogy: Guidance, participation, and engagement. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 53(1), 27-43. doi: 10.1177/074171302237202.
- Birks, M., & Mills, J. (2011). *Grounded theory: A practical guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. (2008). *The craft of research*. (3rd ed). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Carlan, P., & Byxbe, F. R. (2000). Community colleges under the microscope: An analysis of performance predictors for native and transfer students. *Community College Review*, 28(2), 27-42.
- Carnegie Foundation (n.d.). *Classification description*. Retrieved from [http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/ugrad\\_program.php](http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/ugrad_program.php).
- Carnegie Foundation (n.d.). *Institutional lookup*. Retrieved from [http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/lookup\\_listings/institution.php](http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/lookup_listings/institution.php).

- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. & Mitchell, R. G. (2001). "An invitation to grounded theory in ethnography". In: Atkinson, P. A. et al. (eds.), *Handbook of ethnography*, pp. 160-174. London: Sage.
- Chaves, C. (2006). Involvement, development, and retention. *Community College Review*, 34(2), 139-152.
- Chickering, A. (2007). The Seven Vectors: An Overview. Seven Vectors by Author Chickering. Retrieved from <http://www.cabrini.edu/communications/CarDev/cardevChickering.html>.
- Chickering, A. (2010). Our purposes: Personal reflections on character development. *Liberal Education*, Summer 2007, 54-59.
- CITI. (n.d.). *Collaborative institutional training initiative at the University of Miami*. Retrieved from <https://www.citiprogram.org/>.
- Cohen, A. M., & Brawer, F. B. (2008). *The American community college*. (5th ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- CollegeTransfer.net (2014). AskCT: Simplifying college transfer. AcademyOne, Inc. Retrieved from <http://www.collegetransfer.net/AskCT/WhatisanArticulationAgreement/tabid/3417/Default.aspx>.
- Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) (2013). 2013 *Cohort key findings*. University of Texas at Austin. Retrieved from <https://www.ccsse.org/survey/survey.cfm>.
- Complete College America (2012). Remediation: Higher education's bridge to nowhere. Retrieved from [http://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server\\_files/files/CCA%20Remediation%20ES%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/files/CCA%20Remediation%20ES%20FINAL.pdf).
- Copeland, A. J., & Agosto, D. (2012). Diagrams and relational maps: The use of graphic elicitation techniques with interviewing for data collection, analysis, and display. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 11(5), 513-533.
- Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2012). Transfer student programs and services. *CAS Standards and Guidelines*. [www.cas.edu](http://www.cas.edu)

- Cox, R. D. (2009). *The college fear factor: How students and professors misunderstand one another*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Crilly, N., Blackwell, A. F., & Clarkson, P. J. (2006). Graphic elicitation: Using research diagrams as interview stimuli. *Qualitative Research*, 6(3), 341-366.
- Crisp, G. & Nuñez, A. (2014). Understanding the racial transfer gap: Modeling underrepresented minority and nonminority students' pathways from two -to four- year institutions. *The Review of Higher Education*, 37(3), p. 291-320.
- Darrow, M. E. (2012). *Engineering transfer student leavers: Voices from the sidelines of the engineering playing field*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Accession Order No. AAT 3539353).
- Davies, T. G. (1999). Transfer student experiences: comparing their academic and social lives at the community college and university. *College Student Journal*, 33(1), 60-74.
- Deil-Amen, R. (2011). The "traditional" college student: A smaller and smaller minority and its implications for diversity and access institutions [PDF]. University of Arizona Center for the Study of Higher Education. Retrieved from [http://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/2011%20Deil-Amen%2011\\_11\\_11.pdf](http://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/2011%20Deil-Amen%2011_11_11.pdf).
- Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1997). Dismantling borders. In Newmann, A., & Peterson, P.L (Eds), *Learning from our lives: Women, research, and autobiography in education* (pp. 37-51). New York, NY: Teachers Colleges Press.
- Dougherty, K.J., & Townsend, B.K. (2006). Community college missions: A theoretical and historical perspective. In *Community College Missions in the 21st Century*. Dougherty, K. J., & Townsend, B. K. (Eds). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Dowd, A. C., Cheslock, J., & Melguizo, T. (2008). Transfer access from community colleges and the distribution of elite higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 79(4), 1-31.
- Doyle, W. R. (2009). The effect of community college enrollment on bachelor's degree completion. *Economics of Education Review*, 28(2), 199-206.
- Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton.

- Evans, N. J. (2003). Psychological, cognitive, and typological perspectives on student development. In S. R. Komives, D. B. Woodward Jr., & Associates (Eds.), *Student Services: A handbook for the profession* (4th ed., pp. 179-202). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F. M., Patton, L. D., & Renn, K. A. (2010). Racial identity development. In *Student development in college: Theory, research and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 260-261). Jossey-Bass.
- The Executive Office of the President, (2014). *Increasing college opportunity for low-income students: promising models and a call for action*.  
[http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/white\\_house\\_report\\_on\\_increasing\\_college\\_opportunity\\_for\\_low-income\\_students\\_1-16-2014\\_final.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/white_house_report_on_increasing_college_opportunity_for_low-income_students_1-16-2014_final.pdf)
- Fetterman, D. M. (2010). *Ethnography: Step by Step* (3rd Ed). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Flaga, C.T. (2006). The process of transition for community college transfer students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, (30), 3-19. doi: 10.1080/10668920500248845.
- Glaser, B.G. (1965). The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. *Social Problems*, 12(4), 436-445.
- Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Griffin, C. (2004). The advantages and limitation of qualitative research in psychology and education. *Scientific Annals of the Psychological Society of Northern Greece*, 2, 3-15. Retrieved from <http://www.pseve.org/Annals/UPLOAD/griffin2.pdf>.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2001). Guidelines and checklist for constructivist (a.k.a. fourth generation) evaluation. Evaluation Checklists Project. Retrieved from [www.wmich.edu/evalctr/archive\\_checklists/constructivisteval.pdf](http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/archive_checklists/constructivisteval.pdf).
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough: An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82. doi: 10.1177/1525822X05279903.
- Handel, S.J. (2007). Second chance, not second class: A blueprint for community-college transfer. *Change*, (September/October), 38-45.
- Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (2009). Beyond sameness, with engagement and outcomes for fall: An introduction. In Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (Eds). *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations*. (pp. 1-12). New York, NY, Routledge.

- Helms, J. E. (1995). An update of Helm's White and people of color racial identity models. In Ponterotto, J. G., Casas, J. M., Suzuki, L. A., & Alexander, C. M. (Eds). *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 181-198). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hills, J.R. (1965). Transfer shock: The academic performance of the junior college transfer. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 33(3), 201-215.  
<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-3/qid.pdf>
- Hu, S., Lindsey, K., & Kuh, G. D. (2011). Student typologies in higher education. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 5-15. doi: 10.1002/ir.413.
- Ishitani, T. T., & Mckitrick, S. A. (2013). The effects of academic programs and institutional characteristics on postgraduate civic engagement behavior. *Journal of College Student Development*, 54(4), 379-396. doi: 10.1353/csd.2013.0069.
- Janesick, V. (1999). A journal about journal writing as a qualitative research technique: History, issues, and reflections. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5, 505-524. doi: 10.1177/107780049900500404.
- Jano, D. (2013). Kosovar multi-layer identity: What is the same, different, and in common with Albanian identity. *Journal of European and International Affairs*, 1(1), 27-40.
- Jolly, Eric J. (2002). *Confronting demographic denial: Retaining relevance in the new millennium*. Washington, DC: ASTC Dimensions.
- Jolly, E. J., Campbell, P. B., & Perlman, L. (2004). Engagement, capacity, and continuity: A trilogy for student success. Minneapolis, MN: GE Foundation. Retrieved from [www.campbell-kibler.com/trilogy.pdf](http://www.campbell-kibler.com/trilogy.pdf).
- Josselson, R. (1996). *Revising herself: The story of women's identity from college to midlife*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kant, I. (2010). *Critique of pure reason*. Hazleton, PA: The Electronic Classic Series, Pennsylvania State University (Original work published in 1781).
- Kegan, R. (1994). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kirk-Kuwaye, C., & Kirk-Kuwaye, M. (2007). A study of engagement patterns of lateral and vertical transfer students during their first semester as a public research university. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 19(2), 9-27.

- Kohlberg, L., & Hersh, R. H. (1977). Moral development: a review of the theory. *Theory into Practice, 16*(2), 53-59.
- Kuh, G. (2003). What we're learning about student engagement from NSSE. *Change, (March/April)*, 24-32.
- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., & Associates (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Laanan, F. S. (2001). Transfer student adjustment. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 114*, 5-13.
- Laanan, F.S. (1996). Making the transition: Understanding the adjustment process of community college transfer students. *Community College Review, 23*(4), 69-84.
- Lester, J., Leonard, J. B., & Mathias, D. (2013). Transfer student engagement: Blurring of social and academic engagement. *Community College Review, 41*(3), 202-222.
- Lichtenberger, E. J., & Dietrich, C. (2013). *The community college penalty and bachelor's degree completion: Fact or fiction?* (IERC 2013-1). Edwardsville, IL: Illinois Education Research Council at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.
- Lipka, S. (2008). Survey finds transfer students disengaged, but some colleges are working to change that. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 55*(12), 1-4.
- Marti, C. N. (2009). Dimensions of student engagement in American community colleges: Using the Community College Student Report in research and practice. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 33*(1), 1-24.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Medsker, L. L. (1960). *The junior college: Progress and prospect*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Melguizo, T., Kienzl, G.S., & Alfonso, M. (2011). Comparing educational attainment of community college transfer students and four year college rising juniors using propensity score matching methods. *The Journal of Higher Education, 82*(3), 265-291.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, M. A., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. (3rd Ed). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.



- Mineshima, K., Okada, M., Sato, Y., & Takemura, R. (2008). *Diagrammatic reasoning system with Euler circles: Theory and Experiment Design*. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, 5223, 188-205.
- Monaghan, D., & Attewell, P. (2014). The community college route to a bachelor's degree. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.3102/0132373714521865.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2014). Characteristics of post-secondary institutions. *The Condition of Education*. Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_csb.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_csb.asp).
- National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2012). Snapshot report: Degree attainment. Retrieved from <http://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SnapshotReport8-GradRates2-4Transfers.pdf>.
- Ortiz, A. M. (1995). Enhancing student development in community colleges. *Community College Review*, 22(4), 1-7.
- Pascarella, E. T., Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research* (volume 2). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Perry, W. G. (1970). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years: A scheme*. Troy, MO: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
- Peter, K., & Cataldi, E. F. (2005). *The road less traveled? Students who enroll in multiple institutions* (NCES 2005-157). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED492633.pdf>.
- Ponterotto, J. G. (2005). Qualitative research paradigms in counseling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 126-136.
- Renn, K.A., & Patton, L.D. (2011). Campus ecology and environments. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, S. R. Harper, & Associates (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (5th ed., pp. 242-269). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Rossmann, G.B., & Rallis, S.F. (2003). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research* (2nd Ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rouse, C.E. (1995). Democratization or diversion? The effect of community colleges on educational attainment. *Journal of Business & Economic Statistics*, 13(2), 217-224.

- Rypisi, C., Malcom, L. E., & Kim, H. S. (2009). Environment and developmental approaches to supporting women's success in STEM fields. In Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (Eds). *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations*. (pp. 117-134). New York, NY, Routledge.
- Saenz, V. B., Hatch, D., Bukoski, B. E., Kim, S., Kye-hyoung, L., & Valdez, P. (2011). Community college student engagement patterns: A typology revealed through exploratory cluster analysis. *Community College Review*, 39(3), 235-267. doi: 10.1177/009155211416643.
- Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Schuh, Jones, Harper, & Associates (2011). *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (5th ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Schutz, A. (1970). Alfred Schutz on phenomenology and social relations. H. R. Wagner. (Ed). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Scott-Clayton, S., (2011). The shapeless river: does a lack of structure inhibit students' progress at community colleges? Community College Research Center Teachers College, Columbia Univ. (PDF)
- Scott-Clayton, S., & Rodriguez, O. (2012, November). Development, diversion, or discouragement? A new framework and new evidence on the effects of college remediation. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Study of Higher Education Conference, Las Vegas, Nevada.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Seifert, T.A., Goodman, K., King, P., & Baxter Magolda, M.B. (2010). Using mixed methods to study first-year college impact on liberal arts learning. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(3), 248-267. doi: 10.1177/1558689810374960.
- Sergiovanni, T.J. (1992). *Moral leadership: Getting to the heart of school improvement*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Shaw, K.M., & London, H.B. (2001). Culture and ideology in keeping transfer commitment: Three community colleges. *The Review of Higher Education*, 25(1), 91-114.
- Sieber, J. E., & Tolich, M. B. (2013). *Planning Ethically responsible research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

- Silverman, S. C., Aliabadi, S., & Stiles, M. R. (2009). Meeting the needs of commuter, part-time, transfer, and returning students. In Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (Eds). *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations*. (pp. 223-241). New York, NY, Routledge.
- Strauss, A. C., & Corbin, J. M. (2008). *The basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *The foundations of mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Thygesen, M. K., Pedersen, B. D., Kragstrup, J., Wagner, L., & Mogensen, O. (2011). Utilizing a new graphical elicitation technique to collect emotional narratives describing disease trajectories. *The Qualitative Report*, 16(2), 596-608.
- Tinto, V. (1997). Classrooms as communities: Exploring the educational character of student persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 68(6), 599-623.
- Tobolowsky, B.F., & Cox, B.E. (2012). Rationalizing neglect: An institutional response to transfer students. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 83(3), 389-410.
- Townsend, B. K. (2008). "Feeling like a freshman again": The transfer student transition. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 144, 69-77. doi: 10.1002/he.327.
- Townsend, B.K. (2007). Interpreting the influence of community college attendance upon baccalaureate attainment. *Community College Review*, 35(2), 128-136.
- Turner, D. W., III (2010). Qualitative interview design: A practical guide for novice investigators. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 754-760. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-3/qid.pdf>
- Varga-Atkins, T., & O'Brien, M. (2009). From drawings to diagrams: Maintaining researcher control during graphic elicitation in qualitative interviews. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 32(1), 53-67.
- Wang, X. (2009). Baccalaureate attainment and college persistence of community college transfer students at four year institutions. *Research in Higher Education*, 50, 570-588. doi: 10.1007/s11162-009-9133-z.
- Wassmer, R., Moore, C., & Shulock, N. (2004). Effect of racial/ethnic composition on transfer rates in community college: Implications for policy and practice. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(6), 651-672.

- Watson, L. W., Terrell, M. C., Wright, D. J., & Associates (2002). *How minority students experience college: Implications for planning and policy*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Weiner, B. A. (1979). Theory of motivation for some classroom experiences. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71(1), 3-25.
- Welkener, M. M., & Baxter Magola, M. B. (2014). Better understanding students' self-authorship via self-portraits. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55(6), 580-585.
- The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. (2015). Face sheet-White House unveils America's College Promise proposal: *Tuition-free community college for responsible students*. [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/09/fact-sheet-white-house-unveils-america-s-college-promise-proposal-tuitio>.
- Winfield, L. (1997). Multiple dimensions of reality: Recollections of an African-American woman scholar. In Newmann, A., & Peterson, P.L (Eds), *Learning from our lives: Women, research, and autobiography in education* (pp. 194-208). New York, NY: Teachers Colleges Press.
- Wolcott, H.F. (2008). *Ethnography: A way of seeing* (2nd Ed.). Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5<sup>th</sup> Ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Younger, T. K. (2009). *The case for degree completion: African American transfer students at a traditionally white university*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Accession Order No. AAT 3391357).
- Zhang, Y. (2008). Undergraduate students' mental models of the web as an information retrieval system. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 59(13), 2087-2098. doi: 10.1002/asi.20915

## Appendix A

### Recruitment Email to Students Detailing Study

Dear Student,

I hope this email finds you well and that you are having a great semester!

My name is Mrs. Sheri Rodriguez. I am a student in the Doctor of Educational Leadership (Ed.D.) Program at Rowan University. My dissertation topic is community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement.

I am contacting you because as part of my dissertation, I am currently conducting a series of one on one interviews to explore community college transfer student identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions. If you are a community college transfer student who transferred into (insert institution name here) one year (two semesters) ago, and are under the age of 22, I wanted to see if you would be willing and interested in being interviewed as part of my study.

The interviews I am looking to conduct will be approximately one hour long, and will be scheduled at your convenience, whether it's in the evening, during the week, or on a weekend. Questions asked during this interview pertain to your experiences as a transfer student. A five minute activity exploring your identity as a college student will also be part of the interview. The interviews can take place in any pre-determined public location that works for you and that has a fairly low noise level. Locations can include anywhere on campus, a local coffee shop, bookstore, classroom after a class is over, etc.

Should you choose to participate in this study, there are minimal risks involved with your participation. Also, please know that every effort will be made to protect your identity. Pseudonyms will be used for all names and location, as well as written on the activity. The interview will be audio recorded and then sent to a professional transcriptionist who is not associated with this study, for transcribing. My dissertation committee will be reading the results of these interviews as part of my dissertation. You can also the interview at any time for any reason, or decline to be audio recorded.

Students who opt to participate will receive a \$10 gift to Wawa or Dunkin' Donuts. Also, if you choose to participate, you will be contributing to a wider body of research being conducted regarding community college transfer students. Please also know that declining an interview will in no way impact any coursework, advising relationships, academic progress, or other factors pertaining to your studies.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you should you choose to participate in this study. Should you like to participate, have any questions about this study, or would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [856-256-4759](tel:856-256-4759), or email me at [barnes48@students.rowan.edu](mailto:barnes48@students.rowan.edu).

Additional Contacts:

Faculty Principal Investigator for this study: Dr. Monica Reid Kerrigan  
([Kerrigan@rowan.edu](mailto:Kerrigan@rowan.edu), 856-256-4500 ext 3658)

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you!  
Mrs. Sheri Rodriguez

## Appendix B

### Transfer Student Interview Protocol

1. Working from the inside out, tell me about what you wrote in the circles.
2. I see you listed (blank in the center/farthest out) circle. Tell me more about (blank).
  - 2a. How does (blank) make you feel, and why is it un/important to you as a college student?
3. If you had to choose one word from all of the words that you listed in the circles that describes you the most, which word would it be and why?
  - 3a. What does this word mean to you as a college student?
4. Think about the items you just listed in the circles. How do you think these items have impacted your experiences as a transfer student at this college/university?
5. Walk me through a typical day for you here at the college/university.
6. Describe your transition from your community college to your college/university.
  - 6a. Did you earn your Associates' Degree at your community college?
  - 6b. What was the transfer process like for you?
7. Who do you interact with on-campus? Off-campus?
8. How are your interactions with those you interact with on-campus different or similar from those you have with individuals off-campus?
9. How involved do you feel on this campus, in and out of the classroom?
10. Tell me about a campus activity/organization/club that you are involved in here at the university?

- 10a. How has your involvement in college changed, if at all, since your first year of attending community college?
11. What does student engagement mean to you?
12. What does your own development as a college student mean to you?
13. Describe yourself during your first few semesters at your community college. In what ways have you changed, if at all? Remained the same, if at all?
14. Let's look at the diagram again. Thinking back to the end of your first year of community college, in what ways would the placement of the items in these circles change, if at all?
- 14a. Would words be taken away or added?
- 14b. Do you think these changes are just part of your own maturity over time or are they due to attending college? Why?
15. What differences are there, if any, between the students at your university and the community college you previously attended?
- 15a. How do you view yourself when thinking about these two groups of students?
16. What are your goals once you graduate?
- 16a. How have these goals changed since the end of your first year of community college?
17. Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything else you would like to share with me pertaining to the activity you completed or what we just discussed?



## Appendix C

### Informed Consent

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand transfer student identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions. This study is part of a dissertation in the Doctor of Educational Leadership (Ed.D.) Program at Rowan University. During this project, Mrs. Sheri Rodriguez will be interviewing you to understand your own identity, development, and engagement at your four-year institution as a community college transfer student. The interview will consist of two parts: the first part involves a five minute activity, followed by a conversation with questions related to the activity. The second part of the interview will be audio taped for data analysis purposes only. The entire interview will take approximately one hour.

**Risks:** Your information and data for this study will be kept secure and confidential. You can end this interview at any time for any reason, and you can decline to be recorded during the interview. There are minimal risks involved with your participation.

**Benefits:** The information you provide will be contributing to a wider body of knowledge regarding the identity, development, and engagement of community college transfer students at four-year institutions. You will also be provided a small incentive in the form of a gift card to a local food establishment for your time.

**Extent of Confidentiality:** Please know that every effort will be made to protect your identity. Pseudonyms will be used for all names and locations, as well as written on the activity. This interview will be recorded and then sent to a professional transcriptionist, who is not associated with this study, for transcribing. My dissertation committee will be reading the results of these interviews as part of my dissertation.

**Freedom to Withdraw:** You can end this interview at any time for any reason, or decline to have the interview recorded.

Your signature below gives me permission to use the data collected from your interview for my dissertation. (You will also receive a copy of this form for your records). Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions after the interview at barnes48@students.rowan.edu or 856-256-4759.

**Additional Contacts:**

- Faculty Principal Investigator for this study: Dr. Monica Reid Kerrigan (Kerrigan@rowan.edu, 856-256-4500 ext 3658)
- Vice President for Research at Rowan University: Dr. Shreekanth Mandayam (Shreek@rowan.edu, 856-25-5150)

**Agreement to Participate:**

I have read this entire form, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

Participant Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Agreement to be Audio Recorded:** I agree to be audio recorded during this interview.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Dissertation Timeline

Based on my own research and plans, it is my hope to adhere to the following tentative timeline in completing this study:

- **November 2013: Prospectus Writing and Revision.**
  - Revise and hone dissertation prospectus.
  - Continue to read widely on topic.
  - Research IRB Process at both institutional sites and make contacts if necessary.
- **December 2013: Confirming Committee, Writing and Revising prospectus.**
  - Complete appropriate paperwork to confirm dissertation committee members.
  - Communicate with members on a regular basis.
  - Beginning literature review.
- **January 2014-February 2014: Proposal Writing.**
  - Begin to work on dissertation proposal, while continuing to read widely on topic and research design.
  - Work on expanding introduction and problem statement.
  - Expand on literature review.
  - Write full draft of methodology section.
- **March 2014: Proposal Revisions and Writing.**
  - Communicate with Chair regarding proposal progress.
  - Seek feedback and revise proposal as needed.
  - Continue to revise, edit, and read.
  - Research information and confirm plans for IRB submission.
  - Complete CITI training.
- **April 2014: Proposal Edits and Planning for IRB Submission.**
  - Continue to revise and edit proposal as needed.
  - Become familiar with IRB submission process.
- **May-June 2014: Revising Proposal**
  - Proposal Revisions
  - Sending draft of proposal to Chair on or around May 10th
  - Draft email to other committee members as to make them aware that I am working on my proposal and to get a sense of their availability (not sharing proposal with them) and review plan with Chair before sending
- **July 2014-September 2014: Completing benchmark II, IRB Submission/Revising, and Planning Logistics for Data Collection.**
  - Schedule benchmark review. Organize materials, PowerPoint, etc.
  - Complete Benchmark II and make necessary revisions.
  - Work with dissertation committee on proposal approval and submit to appropriate IRB's:
  - Submit proposal to "EAU" IRB for approval (rolling submission dates).
  - Email "AOC" IRB Chair with approved proposal from "EAU".

- Resubmitting and revising IRB application if necessary.
- Make plans for setting up interviews and observations.
- Working on establishing contacts and relationships with “gatekeepers” at institutions.
- Reaching out to set up interviews and observations if able.
- Searching for and hiring a transcriptionist.
- Begin reflective journal.
- **October 2014-March 2015: Data Collection.**
  - Scheduling and conducting interviews and observations at both institutions.
  - Submitting raw data to transcriptionist.
  - Analyzing transcribed data and observational data on a rolling basis.
  - Engaging in CCM.
  - Continue reflective journal.
- **March 2015-April 2015: Continued Data Collection and Analysis.**
  - Consider how to develop multiple chapters for manuscript format based on emerging data.
  - Continue to schedule interviews if necessary.
  - Continue to analyze transcribed data.
  - Outline and draft final chapters, revise previous ones as needed.
  - Meet with committee to discuss revisions and recommendations.
  - Start to develop multiple chapters for manuscript format based on emerging data.
- **April 2015-May 2015: Data Analysis and Writing Remaining Chapters.**
  - Share latest drafts with committee, obtain feedback, and revise.
  - Continue to develop multiple chapters for manuscript format based on emerging data.
  - Meet with Dissertation Chair frequently.
- **May 2015-June 2015 Writing Remaining Chapters and Planning for Defense:**
  - Sending draft of entire dissertation to committee.
  - Revise dissertation based on committee feedback.
  - Apply for Summer 2015 graduation.
- **July 2015-August 2015: Creating defense presentation and defending.**
  - Create and draft defense presentation.
  - Continue revising dissertation as necessary.
  - Create defense presentation.
  - Schedule defense date.
- **August 2015: Revisions, Program Completion, and Graduation.**
  - Defend dissertation.
  - Make final revisions.
  - Draft Abstracts for articles and make final arrangements as needed.