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An Unconventional Pathway: A Qualitative Inquiry Into the Experience of Racial Minority Transfer Students

Hanh My Mai Tran
San Jose State University

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AN UNCONVENTIONAL PATHWAY: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE
EXPERIENCE OF RACIAL MINORITY TRANSFER STUDENTS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Educational Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Hanh My Mai Tran

August 2022

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Dissertation Titled

AN UNCONVENTIONAL PATHWAY: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO
THE EXPERIENCE OF RACIAL MINORITY TRANSFER STUDENTS

by

Hanh My Mai Tran

APPROVED FOR THE EDUCATIONAL DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN
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Eduardo Muñoz-Muñoz, Ph.D.

Department of Teacher Education

Roxana Marachi, Ph.D.

Department of Teacher Education

Yim-Yu Wong, Ph.D.

College of Business, San Francisco State
University

ABSTRACT

AN UNCONVENTIONAL PATHWAY: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE EXPERIENCE OF RACIAL MINORITY TRANSFER STUDENTS

by Hanh My Mai Tran

Transfer students' success is increasingly being discussed in higher education. A large population of transfer students includes racial minority, low-income, and first-generation college students. Due to the multiple layers of students' identities, it has been difficult for educational leaders in institutions to grasp the essential elements needed to serve these students. As a result, this qualitative study contributes to this discussion and efforts to support the transfer student's success. In this study, qualitative methods, including interviews with 14 students from 4-year universities and community colleges and a survey, were used to identify the steps and resources associated with supporting transfer students. The critical race theory framework served as the central lens to determine how racial factors played a vital key in the students' post-transfer experience. The goal of this study was to ensure that the transfer students receive the essential resources and guidance from their institutions to have a successful transfer pathway to earning their degree.

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There is a saying that every mountain top is within reach if you just keep climbing. This quote describes my journey not only in this program but the process of completing this dissertation. It felt like I couldn't make it to the top, but through the encouragement of my friends, family, and self-perseverance, I have made it with a few bruises, but a knowledge that will last this lifetime.

I am extremely grateful to my amazing parents for the unconditional love they have shown me these past 32 years. You both are what makes me who I am. To my family and friends, I thank you for your words of encouragement and for believing in me. Thank you to my best friend and mentor, Noah Price, for pushing me to the finish line and being a part of this crazy journey with me!

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Finally, to the little girl who never felt that she was good enough, I want to tell her, "you made it, little one, you made it to the top!"

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LIST OF TERMS

Native students – Undergraduate students who are currently at an institution that started as first-year students.

Receiving institution – Institution that a student transfers to during a program or level of study; not the first institution where the student enrolled.

Sending institution – The institution of higher education of the most recent previous enrollment by a transfer student earned transferable academic credit.

Transfer shock – This refers to the tendency of students transferring from one institution of higher education to another to experience a temporary dip in grade point average during the first or second semester at the new institution.

Transfer students – Any undergraduate student who has received college credit from one or more institutions before earning their bachelor's degree.

Introduction

Each year, millions of underrepresented students attend community colleges in the United States (Xu et al., 2018). Minorities, first-generation (FG) students, veterans, international students, and working parents comprise the student population in community colleges (National Student Clearinghouse Report, 2021). Unlike traditional freshmen, transfer students often follow an unconventional pathway to earning a bachelor's degree. A crucial part of their unconventional pathway is that they do not begin their postsecondary education immediately after high school. Instead, some of these students enter the educational system later in life. As a result, there is a substantial difference between the levels of degree earned by native students and those acquired by transfer students. Transfer students have a 14.5% lower likelihood of achieving their educational goals within 9 years as compared to native students (Yazdani et al., 2021). As such, it is imperative that transfer students have support structures in place to maximize their chances of success (Daddona et al., 2021). Furthermore, institutional support structures become vital levers for student success, particularly for students who have been traditionally marginalized in higher education.

Several roadblocks can impede transfer students' academic success. The barriers range from insufficient finances to low academic performance to retention. Furthermore, being a racial minority often causes transfer students to experience these limitations because social systems in the United States tend to be structured around race, class, and gender. Such social systems can lead to bias and disadvantage (Edger, 2019). This can also be described as an *intersectional identity*, which reflects how “the overlap of an individual’s social identities impacts how he or she moves—and is regarded—in the world” (Edger, 2019, p. 59). Race,

socioeconomic status (SES), and/or being an FG college student compounds difficulties navigating higher education structures, particularly in the absence of institutional support. Socioeconomic status and first-generation status are significant features of meaningful institutional support for transfer students. Students of lower socioeconomic status who are first generation, likely face barriers and challenges in their academic pursuits that privileged white peers do not face (Edger, 2019; Yazdani et al., 2021).

When examining transfer students' learning experiences, interlocking social categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, cannot be considered independently from one another (Hiraldo, 2010). These categories are intertwined and affect students' learning experiences because the U.S. public education system has a history of policies and procedures that produce inequitable outcomes for racial minority students. The policies and practices of educational institutions feed on societal bias and perpetuate a vicious cycle (Clovis & Chang, 2021). For example, high-stakes testing is a well-documented practice that can limit minority students' classroom development and create an invisible barrier for these students (Savas, 2013). High-stakes testing is arguably a present-day form of segregation among Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and White students. Furthermore, high stakes testing privileges White students and presents a false narrative of their academic ability while discounting the academic ability and culturally diverse assets that historically marginalized students possess. High stakes testing skews evidence that White students are more successful than other minority students (Knoester & Au, 2015). These educational practices inadvertently undervalue the interests and needs of racial minority students within the framework of universities' policies and procedures.

The educational pathways of transfer students are unique and divergent from traditional 4-year academic trajectories of the dominant social groups. The success of transfer students requires that higher education institutions acknowledge the unique pathways of different students, reform systemic policies to ensure supports are in place and minimize barriers to academic achievement (Clovis & Change, 2021). Transfer rates for minority racial groups are low, with lower rates of success for Black, Native American, and Latino students. Smith (2021) noted that only 14% of Latino students and 9% of Black/African American and Native American students complete their transfer pathways. These transfer students still face more challenges navigating institutional structures once they are enrolled in their receiving universities (Taylor & Jain, 2017). Disparities in academic achievement between historically marginalized students and dominant student groups indicate the presence of problematic educational practices that require critical inquiry into how to mitigate such disparities. This dissertation aimed to reaffirm the importance of ensuring and supporting students in pursuing their educational success to align with the objective of public education—to produce equitable opportunities for all.

Background and Historical Context

Historically, since the early 1900s, community colleges have been geared toward helping students successfully transfer to a 4-year university, with 5,743,000 students enrolled from the very beginning (Baker, 2016). Community colleges have played a significant role in providing access to higher education for transfer students because community colleges are more affordable and provide increased tuition support for low-income students. The mission of community colleges was to democratize education and to serve every student regardless of

their background and/or academic preparation upon entry. Data in 2015 showed that about 80% of students who enter their first year at a community college transfer to a 4-year university (Chamely-Wiik et al., 2021). Community colleges offer several achievement levels, including certificates and associate degrees as well as an option to transfer to a 4-year university (Baker, 2016). Thus, community colleges are a path for economic mobility among students whose identity intersects with low-income, FG, racial/ethnic minority, and other historically underrepresented groups (Jenkins & Fink, 2015; Johnson & Mejia, 2020; Mullin, 2012).

The percentage of students who transfer to universities grows each year (Xu et al., 2018). In 2015, 40% of undergraduates in the United States were transfer students (Jenkins & Fink, 2015). In 2016, 49% of students who completed a bachelor's degree in the past 10 years had attended a community college (Sandelli, 2017). By the end of 2021, of the 12 million undergraduate students in the United States, about 1.3 million students were transfer students. Transfer student enrollment dropped by 9.2% from 2020, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic (National Student Clearinghouse Report, 2021). In addition, in March 2020, 1,050 community colleges served about 1.8 million students, representing 41% of undergraduates in the United States (American Association of Community Colleges, 2020). Of those 1.8 million students, 29% were FG students, 52% were Hispanic, and 42% chose the transfer pathway to start their undergraduate career (Chamely et al., 2020). These numbers show that racial minority students are pursuing higher education. In minority communities, community colleges provide viable opportunities for students who would

otherwise be unable to afford a college education to fulfill their academic and personal goals (Marling, 2013).

Equity-minded community college leaders understand and recognize the importance of minimizing real and perceived barriers or deterrents to entering a 4-year university. Leaders within higher education institutions in California, which has the largest transfer student population in the United States, discovered that one barrier impacting students' timeframe in their transfer pathway to university was the curriculum. A report by Johnson and Mejia (2020) discussed how the correlation between Math and English courses that students have to enroll in during their first year at a community college can impact how long it takes for the student to transfer to a 4-year university. These two courses are a part of the 4-year university admission requirements. Students who were unable to complete these requirements experienced delays in their transfer pathway. Success or failure in this early coursework can affect transfer rates between students. These gaps can delay a student's opportunity to transfer by 4 to 6 years, or even longer. As a result, community colleges altered their curriculum and advising practices to ensure that students enroll in 12 units of either math or English courses within their first 3 years of entering the school. This practice increases students' chances of transferring to a 4-year university because they become "transfer ready" earlier. Community colleges also changed, for example, their organizational practices to be more oriented toward helping students to transfer. This approach ensures that transfer students are prepared to transition to a 4-year university.

Once a student transitions to a 4-year university, one question that arises has to do with how does the 4-year university support the transfer student's pathway? There is limited

research regarding the lived experience of transfer students after they transfer. Daddona et al. (2021) discussed the importance of providing students with resources, such as transfer and advising and mentorship programs, that can help them adjust to their new campus. However, when resources are limited, supporting transfer students as they adapt to their new environment is more difficult (Ishitani, 2008). Furthermore, the lack of support can result in anxiety that impacts these students' academic and social performance (Ishitani, 2008). This discrepancy calls for university personnel to reevaluate pathways within the institution that affect transfer students after they enter a 4-year university. In particular, university leaders can focus on how to maintain transfer students' success rates and how to facilitate a smooth transition.

Furthermore, transfer students who intend to earn a bachelor's degree need support throughout the process. Researchers have found that only 14% of transfer students successfully earn their degree within 6 years of transferring to a university (Baker, 2016; Fematt et al., 2021; Jenkins & Fink, 2015; Mullin, 2012). Moreover, there is a deficit of transfer students who successfully complete their degree at the 4-year university level. Rarely have community colleges and 4-year universities worked together to develop strategies for the transition period after the transfer pathway. This dissertation aimed to fill this gap in the research literature by evaluating the transfer student's journey and narrative to a 4-year university.

Study Purpose

This qualitative study aimed to discover and better understand the elements that contribute to a successful pathway for transfer students to a 4-year university. This study

focused on racial minority students and how their identity impacts their experience at their receiving institution. It also examined the experiences of racial minority transfer students during their transition to a 4-year university and deconstructed how their identity intersects with their experience during the transitional period.

I applied Critical Race Theory (CRT) to frame my research questions and to examine my data. CRT is a theoretical framework that dissects inequalities within social structures that result in racism (Lynn, 2002). CRT has been used in higher education to uncover disparities in BIPOC students' experiences at universities (Hiraldo, 2010) and to better understand racial inequalities between student groups. CRT provides a framework to understand how BIPOC students' identity and race, family background, and social status affect their university experiences. The framework is often used to uncover and challenge power and oppression dynamics between racial groups (Ladson-Billings, 2005). By applying CRT, I inspected the subject with an equity and social justice lens to identify challenges transfer students experience during their transitional period to the 4-year university. Do the barriers related to racial and equity matter or simply due to the lack of preparation or knowledge on serving transfer students by the 4-year university? As part of my analysis, I examined community colleges' support of the transfer student path to better understand what students need to be successful at their receiving university. This analysis, in turn, can be used to inform administrators at both community colleges and 4-year universities to change their policies and procedure for transfer students. To that end, 4-year universities and community colleges need to work together to support transfer students from the beginning to the completion of their transfer pathway.

Finally, another purpose of this research was to call attention to the post-transfer narrative that is lacking in research literature regarding the transfer students' experiences. Often the post-transfer narrative is centered around the start of students' enrollment in the community colleges, with few narratives focusing on the struggles and the accomplishments of students who make their way to the receiving university. As such, more information is needed regarding transfer students who transfer to a 4-year university. Moreover, this research adds to discussions of the post-transfer experience, and it can be used to inform educators about the struggles transfer students experience known as *transfer shock*. Transfer shock refers to a lack of sense of belonging for racial minority students at their new campus (List & Nadasen, 2016; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Thus, a transfer student's journey does not end once they enroll in their receiving university. Rather, for such students, that is only the beginning, and more concrete structures are needed to support these students during their transition period.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand how transfer students can have a positive and equitable experience once they transition to the university level. It is an exploration of students' reflections on their experiences related to the supports they received during their transfer process. Moreover, this dissertation fills a gap in the research literature related to transfer students' pathways; these topics are not discussed enough from the perspective of the 4-year university and its collaboration with community colleges. To that end, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do transfer students' experiences of services, support, and barriers differ between a community college and a 4-year university?

This first research question addressed transfer students' shift in environment during their transitional period to the 4-year institution and how that shift may impact their learning environment. Data from this question illustrated the similarities and differences between the two institutions and how the continuity of services may be essential in a student's development and transition to their new campus. Transfer students spoke about their experiences during their transfer pathway and their transitional period. This question also addressed how the two organizations can collaborate to develop a more supportive structure for transfer students.

2. How can the 4-year university improve its organizational practices to support racial minority transfer students achieving a successful transition to a 4-year university?

The purpose of the second question was to describe policies and practices by 4-year institutions and how such policies and practices affect transfer students' success. The question addressed the main objectives behind a university's social and systematic structure for transfer students, particularly students who identify as racial minorities. That is, does their identity make them particularly vulnerable to the social construction of the campus? Furthermore, the question addressed what preparations or actions are required to create a successful pathway for transfer students to meet their goal of pursuing their degree. The question was intended to reveal what student services and other support systems are available to transfer students during their transitional period.

3. How can a 4-year university align its academic advising services and resources to bridge the gap for racial minority transfer students with an equitable outcome?

The last research question addressed how to close the gap between the services provided to racial minority students and their White peers. It was designed to encourage administrators to use an intersectionality framework to understand how transfer students' multilayered identity impacts their campus experience. From there, institutions can design their services to fit the diverse needs and identities of transfer students.

Research Design

This qualitative research study used interviews as the primary method of data collection. A survey was also used to supplement information from interviews. To ensure diverse perspectives on transfer, study participants were drawn from community colleges and 4-year universities. Therefore, data from both subpopulations were used to address the research questions and gain insight into the transfer pathway for students.

Summary

The unique educational pathways transfer students take may be a result of the intersection between a student's race, class, and gender, and institutional practices that are not aligned with students' various academic trajectories (e.g., mismatched advising services or cocurricular support programs). As a result, community colleges and 4-year universities must address the basic needs that intersect with the students' backgrounds. University leaders can start by not viewing the students collectively but to understand the diversity of their transfer pathway. This research can help to bring communication and collaboration from both institutions to ensure that the students will have a successful path. Furthermore, this qualitative study strove to discover the elements that accomplish this notion of understanding

the challenges of the student's transition to a university. In the next chapter, I discuss transfer students and their essential needs for success.

Literature Review

This literature review describes the elements that encompass transfer students' identities and their transition from a community college to a 4-year university. In this study, CRT was utilized to provide a deeper understanding of transfer students' experiences and their learning outcomes after their transition to a 4-year university (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Furthermore, four essential elements of transfer students' experiences are examined in this chapter. The first two components are a transfer student's identity and their academic background and preparedness level for higher education. Then, there is an analysis of the differences between transfer students at community colleges and those at 4-year universities. The third element is the role and the importance of advising to help transfer students achieve success. The final element has to do with the need for universities to systematically analyze their organizational cultures, policies, and procedures to fit the needs of transfer students. Finally, this chapter concludes by describing how the CRT framework is applied to determine how racial inequity impacts transfer students during their transition.

The Identity of Transfer Students

This section examines how transfer students establish their student identity at 4-year universities as well as the impact of their presence at these universities. The mobility of general transfer students' academic careers is an important element of their identity as transfer students. Researchers have found that it is not unusual for undergraduate students to switch institutions during their undergraduate careers. About 25% of students will transfer more than once before settling into their undergraduate career (Chamely-Wiik et al., 2021; Marling, 2013). As a result, transfer students are often defined as attending one or more

institutions before earning their bachelor's degree (Handel & Williams, 2012; Townsend, 2008; Yazdani et al., 2021).

Transfer students make up about 40% of the student population at 4-year universities (Chamely-Wiik et al., 2021). In 2011, 37.6% of students started at a public 4-year school, with almost 3.6% coming from private colleges and 16.8% coming from nonprofit colleges, before transferring to their receiving university (NCES, n.d.). Transfer students' diverse academic paths are different from traditional first-year students (Clovis & Chang, 2021). According to both Marling (2013) and Townsend (2008), first-year transfer students do not follow one pathway in their undergraduate careers. Many students do not enter a 4-year university right out of high school. Transfer students can attend multiple colleges before transferring to their receiving institution. Community colleges are convenient and affordable and give students the opportunity to seek a "best fit;" thus, they may attend one or more institutions before completing their undergraduate degree (Marling, 2013). Transfer students also have different levels of university exposure, which is important for receiving institutions to account for when serving transfer students during the transition period. Researchers have found that while some students have completed some form of university coursework, others have not (McGuire & Belcheir, 2013; Sandelli, 2017; Townsend, 2008). The diversity of transfer students' experiences requires a diverse support system to help them achieve success in their academic careers. When institutional leaders fail to recognize the diverse needs of transfer students when providing support services, students' transition to their receiving institutions may be mishandled.

Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) emphasized that many universities tend to lump students into one model and construct their student services around that; this approach inadvertently ignores the transfer student. This model of service tends to focus more on traditional first-year students, which Townsend (2008) argued is a mistake in the university's mindset. In one case, university leaders assume transfer students are familiar with policies and procedures on their own. In the other case, transfer students are viewed as first-year students with no college experience. According to Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) and Townsend (2008), these assumptions do not serve the needs of the students. Therefore, diverse support is extremely important for this group of students, and universities should categorize transfer students based on their individual experiences and individual journeys before transferring to a 4-year university (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Townsend, 2008).

Researchers have also emphasized the importance of universities recognizing the multiple layers of transfer students' identities and experiences (Townsend, 2008). McGuire and Belcheir (2013) developed four categories to classify a student's college readiness level students based on their preparation and experience at a 4-year university. The first group, "old hand at transfer," consists of students who have attended multiple institutions, including a 4-year university. These students have familiarity with university programs and practices. Their receiving institution can rely on these students quickly adjusting to its norms. Another group is "taking care of basics", they are students who have transferred credit for developmental courses such as English and Math courses. They are students who most likely have completed their general education courses and is transferring to complete their major requirements at their new campus. Then there are students known as "quick return to a 4-year

institution”, which are students who took some time off after entering at their previous institution. This group of students tend to be the one with the lower transfer GPA when entering their receiving institution. Overall, students in these two groups earned some college credits from a 4-year school but never completed their bachelor’s degree. They are the students who left their university after taking one or more courses. Students in the final category, “community or technical college group,” have no experience attending a 4-year university. The researchers emphasized that not only do the students have different experiences, but they also have diverse needs to succeed (McGuire & Belcheir, 2013). According to McGuire and Belcheir (2013), students in the community or technical college group struggle the most during their first semester after transferring. The researchers suggested that one reason for their struggles is their inexperience navigating the structure of a 4-year institution. This inexperience can negatively impact their GPA such that they see a decrease in their GPA compared to the previous term at their community college. As such, students in this group need the most support from their receiving university during their first semester . Furthermore, McGuire and Belcheir (2013) emphasized the importance of learning about transfer students before developing services to meet their central needs.

Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) cited the importance of having receiving universities account for transfer students’ varied backgrounds and providing the proper support. Umbach et al. (2018) and Walker and Okpala (2017) likewise described the uniqueness of transfer students who bring diverse elements and experiences to their receiving institutions. The component goes beyond transfer students’ level of university readiness and connects to the

diversity of the transfer student's racial identity. This component may also explain why many of these students choose community colleges as sending institutions (Jenkins & Fink, 2015).

The Diversity of Transfer Students

The section shifts focus from students' various levels of college readiness to their racial identity, which is just as diverse as their experiences. Data from the Community Colleges in California show evidence of transfer students' diversity (Johnson & Mejia, 2020). California has the most extensive postsecondary system in the United States. In California, 69% of Latinos and 65% of African American students begin their postsecondary education at a community college as compared to 60% of White and 42% of Asian American students (Gándara et al., 2012). Transfer students also generally fall into one or more of the following categories: underrepresented minorities; military personnel, veterans, and their families; low-income and FG students; and individuals seeking higher education (Sandelli, 2017).

Racial minority transfer students are more likely to encounter academic and social engagement barriers in community college life, including working full time, being financially independent, and having children or other dependents (Crisp & Nuñez , 2014). Researchers have noted that the intersectionality of SES with race, gender, family, and finances plays a major role in transfer students' academic success and experience (Powell et al., 2021; Sandelli, 2017). For transfer students, these social categories may impact how they interact with their learning environments. According to Crisp and Nuñez (2014), this relates to the affordability of education and preparation for college readiness. Also, the lack of support and guidance outside of the institution (e.g., parental support) can directly impact a student's

success. This element is crucial for higher education administrators when they discuss student services for all transfer students, especially FG transfer students.

First-Generation College Transfer Students

Radunzel (2018) explained that FG students are often discussed in terms of their parents' education level; low parental education makes them the most at-risk students during their transitional period. According to Coston et al. (2013), only 56% of FG students earned a credential or remained enrolled 6 years after their initial entrance to the university. Thus, FG students are 74% less likely to earn their degree than their peers under the continuing generation (CG) category. Status as an FG student presents a degree of vulnerability that receiving higher education institutions must consider. Mobley and Brawner (2019) argued that student success is related to campus social networking opportunities because such opportunities influence academic motivation and educational attainment. As such, a receiving 4-year institution may offer programmatic support that encourages strong peer networks and can also serve as a surrogate family support structure. Furthermore, community colleges offer an affordable educational pathway. Coston et al. (2013) claimed this affordability influences a student's decision to forgo the 4-year university as an initial option.

Transfer Students at Community Colleges

Transfer students often attend community colleges because they cannot afford tuition to a 4-year university immediately after graduating from high school (Baker, 2016; Jenkins & Fink, 2015; Mullin, 2012). They rely on community college as a pathway to transfer to a 4-year university to reduce the increasing burden of education expenses. According to Jenkins and Fink (2015), community colleges are the fastest growing postsecondary avenue, serving

over 40% of United States undergraduate students each year. Community colleges have also become a destination for many underserved students, including low-income, FG, and racial/ethnic minority students. Approximately half of the student population enrolled at community colleges are Hispanic, and about one-third identify as Black or African American (Xu et al., 2018). The growing number of admissions led community colleges to develop strong structures to serve their students (Lee & Schneider, 2017), with a focus on FG college students.

Jenkins and Fink (2015) discussed how community college administrators who understood the crucial elements of transfer students designed their support services to accommodate these students' particular needs, such as family and social obligations. Jenkins and Fink (2015) further found that 80% of students at community colleges intend to earn a bachelor's degree after transferring. Maliszewski and Hayes (2020) and Wheeler (2019) similarly noted that community colleges model their student services and campus structure to meet the primary goal for the students, which is to transfer to a 4-year university.

According to Umbach et al. (2018), the majority of community college administrators have created an interactive culture for transfer students to meet the students' goal of transferring to a 4-year university. These colleges have maintained small classroom sizes to promote supportive faculty/student interactions. As Walker and Okpala (2017) indicated, transfer students placed high importance on their interactions and relationships with their faculty. The sense of familiarity with their professors promoted an encouraging environment for students to seek help when help was needed. Students indicated that individual attention was the key to successfully completing their coursework (Walker & Okpala, 2017).

According to the researchers, community colleges understand their student population and their diverse needs. As a result, faculty are encouraged to consider their students' situations and provide flexibility within the classroom. For example, faculty can consider accepting late assignments from working students or students that have other family obligations. In this way, community colleges provide a nurturing environment that accommodates the needs for students to be successful and transfer to a 4-year university (Xu et al., 2018).

According to Sandelli (2017), community colleges have also structured their student services to lead students through the transfer process. Their main priority is to ensure that students do not encounter major obstacles during their time at the community college. Among the services offered by community colleges is the transfer center, where students are provided with advising, course planning, and anything else related to the transfer process. They are also provided with step-by-step instructions on every policy and procedure. Community colleges provide these supports to reduce structural barriers that keep students from succeeding. In contrast to the transfer center approach, Allen et al. (2014) argued that community college staff provide students too much support and use a "handholding" approach. However, this could potentially leave students unable to independently operate once they transfer to a 4-year university. In other words, the nurturing environment at community colleges can actually harm a student's cognitive ability and negatively impact their self-efficiency (Allen et al., 2014). Despite disagreement among researchers on the role of student services at community colleges, most transfer students noted that they appreciate their support at the community college level.

Students have also expressed appreciation for the social engagement provided at community colleges. Ishitani and Mckitrick (2010) discussed how community colleges facilitate that social engagement and bring a sense of belonging to the students. Transfer students value social engagement and having a sense of community helps them succeed with their coursework. Furthermore, social engagement fosters positive relationships between the students and faculty. Lee and Schneider (2017) referred to Tinto's interactionalist model to clarify this gesture from the school. Tinto's interactionalist model combines "... academic and social integration to describe the pattern of students and the members of institutions" (Lee & Schneider, 2017, p. 79). They used this model to explain how social engagement creates and boost a student's desire to transfer. This is achieved through social events such as transfer week, where community colleges invite 4-year university representatives to campus to provide information on the transfer process. These are informational events for students and encourage students who have not thought about transferring to do so. Events such as transfer week highlight the overall purpose of community colleges, which is to assist students with transferring to a 4-year university. The following section illustrates the different pathways for transfer students once they decide to transfer to 4-year universities.

Destination for Transfer Students' Receiving Institution

According to Jenkins & Fink (2015), 80% of the students at a community college intended to earn their degree from a 4-year university. About 25% of that population successfully transferred to a 4-year university within 5 years. The report also showed that about 72% of students transferred to a public 4-year institution, 20% transferred to nonprofit universities, and 8% transferred to private for-profit universities. The high number of

students who chose public universities was related to the number of coursework units accepted by public universities. That is, public universities accept more units transferred from community colleges than private institutions. Moreover, not accepting transferred units delay students from graduating on time.

The main priority for transfer students is to graduate within 2 years of transferring from their community college (Baker, 2016). Furthermore, students who transferred with all their community college credits are 2.5 times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than those who transferred with half of their credits. The students who earned an associate's degree have a higher chance of finishing their bachelor's degree than those who do not earn an associate's degree (Jenkins & Fink, 2015; Maliszewski & Hayes, 2020; Mullin, 2012; Wheeler, 2019). This explains why some students choose to extend their time at a community college and why preparation is so critical to ensuring a successful transition to a 4-year university. Unfortunately, even a successful transfer from a community college does not guarantee success at a 4-year university, so support during their transitional period is imperative to the student's success.

Transitional Period

For transfer students, the *transitional period*, which describes their first semester after transferring, is crucial to earning their degree (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Many transfer students encounter difficulty succeeding during that period. The obstacles these students face can be separated into two categories: academic challenges and social anxiety (List & Nadasen, 2016; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Whang et al., 2017). Within the category of academic issues, transfer shock describes a decrease in transfer students' GPA during their

first semester at the new university. The shock stems from the student's reaction to their new environment and the heavy workload of a 4-year university. This adjustment can affect their work–life balance and family obligations. Researchers have found that about 79% of the students experienced this dilemma, making it a common theme that affects transfer students everywhere (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Clovis & Chang, 2021; Ishitani, 2008; Wheeler, 2019; Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018).

Shapiro et al. (2015) discussed that one solution is for the students to not overload on units during their first semester. However, this is not an option for some students who fear not graduating on time. As noted, about 62% of the students take 6 years or more to earn their degree, and 8% remain unfinished (Moser, n.d.). This may result from the obstacles and anxieties students encounter during their transitional period. That anxiety is a part of the social challenges that the students face after transferring. The idea that the community college was their safety net magnifies these social challenges even more. A survey conducted at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, in 2011 showed that transfer students experienced large-scale rejection by native students. This stigma ties closely to derogatory attitudes toward a community college education in general because a community college education is perceived as inferior to a 4-year institution. According to Handel and Williams (2012), feeling rejected by native students leads transfer students to experience social anxiety, academic failure, and to even drop out of their 4-year university after the first semester. The researchers concluded that social challenges and transfer shock will continue to be problematic for the students without intervention from the university.

Financial Barriers for Transfer Students

One of the reasons why lower-income students choose community colleges as postsecondary options is their affordability (Baker, 2016; Jenkins & Fink, 2015; Mullin, 2012). Transfer students at junior colleges can afford a full-time course load with four classes. However, transferring to a 4-year university introduces financial barriers. Walker and Okpala (2017) described these kinds of barriers as nonacademic obstacles that may impede a transfer student's success, including the cost of living and higher tuition. Students may find that they can no longer afford to be a full-time student with the extra financial burden, which, in turn, can delay the student's graduation and perpetuate social anxiety. Transfer students also may move away from home and relocate after transferring to a 4-year university. The cost of living at a 4-year university or its surrounding area may be much higher than that of the community college. These elements can contribute to the multiple obstacles transfer students encounter at the university level (Clovis & Chang, 2021; Maliszewski & Hayes, 2020; Wheeler, 2019).

Sandelli (2017) argued that there is a lack of financial support for transfer students. Unlike at community colleges, 4-year universities do not offer funding support for transfer students other than federal grants or student loans. There are some scholarship opportunities. However, transfer students are usually unaware of these options due to a lack of communication regarding resources during their transitional period (Yazdani et al., 2021). This example reflects the university's expectation that transfer students can independently navigate institutional structures. Moreover, this expectation is the basis for services provided to transfer students. Many 4-year universities operate on a one-model service and expect

every student to fit into this single model approach. However, Handel and Williams (2012) and Townsend and Wilson (2006) have demonstrated the failure of the single model for these students.

One-Size-Fits-All: Students Services at 4-year Universities

McGuire and Belcheir (2013) emphasized that the difference between a community college and a 4-year university is their perception of the transfer student. Community college administrators comprehend the whole picture of a transfer student and their diverse identities. In contrast, 4-year universities overlook the individual identities of transfer students and fail to recognize that the diversity of transfer students. Rather, universities expect transfer students to fit within the traditional model they developed for their native students. Walker and Okpala (2017) argued that this false perception by university leaders translates to a lack of proper support for students. For example, the university expects transfer students to navigate various policies and procedures on their own and with little guidance.

According to Lockhart (2019), transfer students are often unfamiliar with a 4-year institution's tools or platforms because of their inexperience in university settings. In contrast, students receive tremendous guidance from their community college before transferring. The community college setting provides a sense of comfort because students know who to seek help from and where to find it (Lee & Schneider, 2017). However, universities rely heavily on informational websites to provide information to their students (Sandelli, 2017). This difference can leave students feeling isolated and it can perpetuate transfer shock and anxiety during the transitional period.

Exposure to new policies regarding course enrollment and completion is another factor in transfer shock and anxiety. McGuire and Belcheir (2013) stated that traditional policies that work for native students do not work for transfer students. For example, add/drop limitations or extra charges for taking 120 credits are new concepts to transfer students. Major structural and policy differences exist between community colleges and 4-year institutions, ranging from how institutions are funded to how such institutions are governed by policy. Transfer students may experience transfer shock because educators and advisors at receiving institutions are immersed in institutional practices specific to the 4-year institution. This can result in communication or advising gaps. Furthermore, financial aid operates very differently at the community college versus the university level. Whereas at some community colleges transfer students are not required to apply for financial aid, at 4-year universities they may be required to do so (Xu et al., 2018). At the university level, the students must apply and accept their financial aid awards. Hence, these policies and procedures are new concepts to transfer students. Ultimately, they may be dropped from courses due to nonpayment, which can cause further distress during their first semester (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012).

According to Whang et al. (2017), many students have a hard time recovering from their setback during their transitional period. They can be placed on academic probation and ultimately even drop out if they are unsuccessful. Academic probation maybe the result of transfer shock and one reason for transfer students' low retention rates. Sandelli (2017) argued for a sense of urgency on the part of 4-year universities to change how they serve transfer students (Sandelli, 2017). Townsend and Cox (2012) emphasized that the one-size-

fits-all approach makes it difficult for transfer students to succeed. Therefore, transfer students need special programs that focus on their navigation skills during transfer period.

Interventions for Transfer Students

Educational experts tend to agree that universities should change their approach to support services for transfer students. Institutions can better support transfer students by attending to the following areas: institutional structures and policies, personal perception and intervention, and internal and external environmental conditions (Lockhart, 2019; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Umbach et al., 2018; Wheeler, 2019). Based on their survey of 257 transfer students, Daddona et al. (2021) concluded that universities need to provide services that will meet the personal and academic needs of their students. The services should include childcare assistance and a flexible schedule to accommodate the multiple demands students face that may hinder their ability to complete their education.

Lukszo and Hayes (2020) suggested that universities develop partnerships with community colleges to better serve their incoming transfer students. Furthermore, the receiving institutions should create a sense of community by developing a first-year program that encourages social inclusion (Lukszo & Hayes, 2020). According to Townsend and Wilson (2006), universities should create a classroom environment similar to community colleges that offers both academic and social engagement. Furthermore, there should be a central location for the students to seek help when needed. Thomas et al. (2018) calls this student service a community learning model because it creates a sense of engagement for the transfer students. Social engagement helps transfer students to feel connected to the university, which is key to their success (Thomas et al., 2018). Thomas et al. (2018) further

argued that the university use an assessment model and plan known as the transfer student learning community (TSLC) to improve the experience during their transitional period.

The overall purpose of the TSLC model is to foster social engagement and to reduce feelings of alienation and isolation. The sense of isolation stems from a lack of interaction between the students and faculty. By applying the TSLC model, universities can group transfer students into cohorts to help them build a sense of community. The TSLC model also includes a first-year experience program that can help transfer students to navigate academic and social expectations at their 4-year university. Furthermore, the model encourages faculty to work with students and establish more dynamic interactions. This model echoes the message of Townsend and Wilson (2006) and Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) in that the TSLC model focuses on the importance of social engagement for transfer students and emphasizes student services in and out of the classroom. Thomas et al. (2018) asserted that the TSLC approach can end the one-size-fits-all approach and help transfer students to form a network of faculty who can provide them with better guidance during their transition period. Furthermore, this model addresses individual students' needs by establishing a student/faculty connection. Lastly, the TSLC addresses the importance of student advising. The model strongly encourages universities to enforce mandatory advising for transfer students during their first and second semesters.

Advising for Transfer Students

Thomas et al. (2018) discussed that academic advising is critical to a transfer student's success. The advisor serves as a guiding figure who is more accessible than general faculty members or professors. Allen et al. (2014) found that advising can help the university better

understand individual students' goals. Based on student goals, university leaders can create more programs focused on the needs of students. This approach is the method the community colleges adapted. Walker and Okapla (2017) argued that the advisor is the liaison between the university and the students who educates students around policies and procedures. Having an advisor helps transfer students to stay well-informed. As such, advising is a critical element of a transfer student's success and universities must invest in this resource (Daddona et al., 2021).

Allen et al. (2014) encouraged university personnel to revisit their advising services as transfer students often voice a sense of dissatisfaction with university-level advising. Students recalled feeling disconnected from their advisors as well as experiencing miscommunications with their advisors regarding degree planning (Allen et al., 2014). This discrepancy creates a ripple effect on their coursework and can delay a student's graduation timeline and increase the burden of existing financial hardships (Walker & Okpala, 2017). Allen et al. (2014) and Ishitani and Mckitrick (2010) encouraged universities to train advisors to be aware of current curriculum policies and procedures. This effort reduces instances of misadvising and better serves the students.

Critical Race Theory and Transfer Students

CRT is a theoretical framework used to examine inequalities within social structures. CRT originated from critical legal studies field in the 1970s with the purpose of transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power in the post-Civil Rights era (Ladson-Billings, 2005). The framework of CRT helps researchers to connect elements of racial inequality and how those elements influence social structures in the United States (e.g., laws

and policies, public education systems, and other public facilities; Ladson-Billings, 2005).

Central to CRT is the idea that racism is embedded within many policies and procedures. The framework of CRT allows researchers to draw attention to race and racism in the public education sphere when it is applied to higher education (Lynn, 2002).

Bernal (2002) used CRT to draw attention to Chicana students' treatment compared to their White peers. Through a CRT lens, he contrasted treatment of the two student groups and connected it to the history of racism toward Latinos and other minority groups. As Chase et al. (2014) stated, CRT helps researchers connect and recognize the history of racial bias toward minority students with color-blind policies. Overall, researchers use CRT to challenge traditional education systems and to deconstruct the White-dominant ideology of those in power (Savas, 2013). This sentiment serves as a foundation and creates a sense of urgency to improve the policies and procedures that directly oppress minority students, especially for the transfer student's narrative experience.

Jain et al. (2011), Yosso (2005), and Castro and Cortez (2017) explained that CRT provides a framework for researchers to explore and center the experience of racial minority transfer students as a racialized phenomenon. CRT challenges the dominant ideology by repositioning the transfer trend as the responsibility of the community college and 4-year university. Through CRT, the transfer becomes a social justice tool (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Jain et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005). CRT centralizes experiential knowledge and creates a framework to improve services for transfer students within public 4-year institutions. Furthermore, the utility of CRT's framework becomes apparent when the relationship between community colleges and universities is examined with a racialized lens. The

theoretical perspective of CRT and the transfer process become a dual commitment between the sending and receiving institutions to form a “transfer receptive culture” (Jain et al., 2011). Therefore, the concept of a transfer receptive culture may inform institutional practices in a collaborative, bidirectional flow between the sending and receiving institutions to facilitate the success of historically marginalized and minoritized students. Opportunities exist for administrators at both types of institutions to develop this collaborative culture through partnerships in advising models, articulation, cocurricular programs, and peer and social network development. These elements are crucial to supporting transfer students’ success.

Sólorzano et al. (2005) highlighted that the lack of persistence from transfer students is often placed on the student rather than on existing institutional barriers. Savas (2013) and Jain et al. (2011) argued that blaming the students instead of recognizing the need for change is a typical response from those in power. Savas (2013) and Ladson-Billings (2020) argued that institutional power structures that perpetuate the status quo, bias, and marginalization necessitate the incorporation of a CRT lens in the analysis of or inquiry into the experiences and perceptions of minoritized transfer students.

Minoritized students face considerable disadvantage as compared to their White peers because they are minoritized by the institutions themselves. To understand the effect of marginalizing institutional practices on transfer students, a CRT-informed survey grounded in contemporary understandings of race and racism within a historical context is needed. This historical context demonstrates the mistreatment of minority students due to racism in the United States. Hiraldo (2010) stated that “institutional power further reinforces the notion that being White is more valuable and important than being a person of color” (p. 55). It is

about redefining standard social structures in the United States and which racial groups are deemed as valuable over another. Townsend (2008) and Ladson-Billings (2020) argued that administrators should recognize this perspective for racial minority transfer students and how much their identity impacts their experience during the transition period. Acknowledging this notion is the first step to positive changes to programs and services as it gives the students a sense of belonging (Townsend, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2020).

When 4-year receiving institutions use a CRT lens to inform institutions structures and operate with inclusive goals that promote a welcoming learning environment, minoritized students may experience a greater sense of belonging and enjoyment of their campus climate. Mobley and Brawner (2019) used the theory of community cultural wealth and experiential capital to discuss the experience of minority FG transfer students during their transfer pathway.

Community Cultural Wealth

The community cultural wealth model was developed by Tara Yosso (2005), She challenged the traditional interpretation of cultural capital that is often presented in the dominant perspective of white people. They frequently often view racial minorities as a disadvantaged position in our society. Nonetheless, Yosso (2005) argued that one should not be focusing on marginalizing or minority students in a negative light. Cultural wealth carries significant value within the identity of these students, and she identified six forms of cultural such as capital aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant. As Yosso (2005) explains, cultural capital consists of the values and behaviors of minority students that produce knowing and being. Del Real Viramontes (2021) highlighted minority students'

cultural capital when he described Latino transfer students and the cultural wealth, they bring in their journey from the community college or the 4-year university. In addition, students reported using their cultural and social capital to navigate through their receiving institutions' policies and procedures. The author concluded that transfer students' experiences rely on their cultural capital and ways they can negotiate with capitals in their new environment.

Mobley and Brawner (2019) explored the idea that transfer students, especially FG students, bring their cultural capital wealth into the classroom to adapt to their new environments. They conducted a qualitative study between fall 2011 and spring 2013 with 68 students at five Midfield institutions. In the study, about 15 first-generation students at the community colleges provided insights into their experiences as transfer students and highlighted essential elements such as community cultural capitals. The cultural capital of each community has its own significance and ties to the identity of the students. Students' community cultural capital was familial and aspirational. Each community's cultural capital wealth has meaning and ties to the identity of the students. First, *familial capital* is about cultural knowledge and connection to family history. This capital connects the identity of transfer students and the culture that they can bring to classroom discussions. This form of capital embraces family culture and knowledge as solid assets. Mobley and Brawner (2019) stressed the importance of creating a curriculum or programs that help develop these students' assets. Second, *aspirational capital* describes a students' internal, individual level of motivation and resilience as well as a culture of belief that it is possible to succeed against all odds. Racial minority transfer students develop through many setbacks and routines to transfer to their receiving campus. Higher education administrators can foster a stronger

sense of belonging for students by recognizing student attributes that come from cultural capital wealth (Mobley & Brawner, 2019). Moreover, these administrators need to develop a platform to allow students either to develop existing capital or to form new capital. It is a part of creating a sense of belonging that gives students a space to be themselves.

Conclusion

Jenkins and Fink (2015) revealed data that shows an increasing number of transfer students each year and with a focus on their narrative experiences. The authors deconstructed existing systems and how to improve transfer student services within the higher education. Jenkins and Fink (2015) found a dearth of literature regarding transfer students' experiences in a 4-year university. Rather, most research has focused on transfer students' experience at community colleges (Jenkins & Fink, 2015). This finding may help explain why most university leaders are unaware of the transfer students' needs at the 4-year university level (Sandelli, 2017). Thus, transfer students need support from both institutions to be successful in their transition from a community college. Furthermore, communication and partnership are key elements in bringing the two organizations together. Universities should be aware of transfer students and how their experience affects their success. The methodology for the current study is explained in detail in Chapter 3.

Methods

This chapter covers the methodology used to address the research questions of this research. This study compared transfer students' experiences at 4-year universities and community colleges to services offered at their new campus. CRT was used to frame transfer students' perspectives and social structures that intersect with their experiences and identities when adapting to a new environment. This qualitative study was conducted using narrative data collection methods. The following sections describe the research design, methodology, participants, procedures, analysis method, ethical considerations, and the researcher's positionality.

Research Design

The research method for this study was a qualitative design. The qualitative approach was chosen because qualitative methods move beyond numerical relations and contextualize data by providing a narrative behind the findings. In general, data in qualitative research are objects, pictures, or detailed descriptions focused on accounts of participants' experiences (Hatch, 2002). Qualitative methods are valued because they allow researchers “to explore; to robustly investigate and learn about the social phenomenon; to unpack the meanings people ascribe to activities, situations, events, or artifacts; or to build a depth of understanding about some dimension of social life” (Leavy, 2014, p. 9). This description of qualitative methods emphasizes the importance of capturing human experiences, which Leavy (2014) argued cannot be quantified but rather can be observed through narratives and actions. Furthermore, it can prompt researchers to delve deeper and ask about “how” and “why.” This method also

has the potential to produce a richer understanding of the human experience and the world around them as compared to strictly quantitative methods.

Qualitative methods are appropriate for this study because I explored the narrative of transfer students' experiences as they adjust to new learning environments within the confines of university policies and procedures. Data reflected their experiences transitioning from multiple institutions and navigating different institutional structures. This study aimed to learn about participants' perseverance as transfer students and as racial minority individuals navigating a higher education system that has been historically discriminated against them. During interviews, transfer students had the opportunity to express their feelings, perceptions, and attitudes toward their surroundings by examining their lived experiences with the CRT framework (Jain et al., 2011).

The following research questions were used to investigate the systematic provision of services to transfer students and how the services are distributed across the racial groups. Furthermore, the questions sought to ascertain whether transfer students had similar experiences at the two institutional organizations. The narrative data collected in this study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do transfer students' experience services, support, and barriers differ between a community college and a 4-year university?
2. How can the university improve its organizational practice to support racial minority transfer students to achieve a successful transition to a 4-year university?
3. How can a 4-year university align its academic advising services and resources to bridge the gap for racial minority transfer students with an equitable outcome?

Participants and Population

Participants in this study were transfer students with diverse backgrounds regarding age, ethnicity, parents' education, and socioeconomic standing. They enriched the study with their lived experiences. Using two subpopulations from community colleges and 4-year universities, this study examined differences in services for transfer students between community colleges and 4-year universities. The two student groups (i.e., transfer students from community colleges and transfer students from 4-year universities) are described in detail in the upcoming sections. To protect participants' confidentiality, the names of their institutions were not revealed but rather their location and student body.

Study participants self-identified as one or more of the following minorities: Black/African American, Asian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and multiracial. To be included in the study, students had to be between the ages of 20 and 50 years. The purpose of selecting those specific age and demographic groups is because they reflect the core elements of transfer students' identity. That is, transfer students tend to be older than traditional first-year students and often identify as racial minority students (Sandelli, 2017). Furthermore, as noted in the literature review, community colleges offer an opportunity for racial minority groups to access education, resulting in a higher proportion of minority transfer students (Clovis & Chang, 2021). Therefore, the specific age and demographics of the participants provided a frame of reference for the interview method and how their identity as minority transfer students impacted their experiences. This information was crucial in the data collection process and influenced the outcomes for examining the transfer process.

Group 1: Transfer Students from Community Colleges

Participants in the first group were transfer students enrolled in one of the many community colleges in California's Bay Area. California has the highest number of transfer students in the United States, there are 1.8 million students enrolled in 116 community colleges (Johnson & Mejia, 2020). Hence, transfer students from a California community college were chosen as participants to reflect California's current transfer student population. The rationale is to bring the authentic lived experience of the students into my research.

Community college participants were in their last semester before transferring to a 4-year university. Through interviews and a supplemental survey, the students provided insight into the support they received from their community colleges during the previous semester and any barriers they anticipate encountering before transferring to the 4-year university. University settings revealed the needs of the student body population and how universities are serving them. Each community college serves approximately 50,354 students, with a diverse student population comprised of Black/African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, and multiracial students as well as a smaller number of White/Caucasian students. Most of the sample students are FG college students who have received financial aid for their tuition; many are also the first in their family to attend college and need financial assistance. These participants provided the community college level's narrative and navigation toward the 4-year universities' application process.

Group 2: Transfer Students from 4-year Universities

The second group of participants were transfer students came from 4-year universities who were in their second semester after completing their first semester at the receiving

institution. These participants served the purpose of determining whether they received support from campus staff and faculty during their transition to a 4-year university. This group of students provided transfer students' narratives regarding their experiences at the university level from two California state university (CSU) campuses. Both campuses accept about 3,000 transfer students each semester and serve a diverse student body population, including a high percentage of students belonging to either the Latino or Asian groups. This group of students also included FG college students who were receiving financial aid. Each campus was located in a small city in California. The campus locations played a central role in the students' narrative when they discussed their sense of belonging at their receiving campus. One potential drawback is that urban universities sometimes fail to offer a close-knit campus culture because the center of the school's social scene is in a big city and off-campus events. This can isolate transfer students who have a hard time in connecting with their campus and peers. This isolation was another essential element in discussions of practical implications to help transfer students transition to their receiving campus.

Recruitment Procedures

Recruitment for this study started in August and ended in October 2021. The participants were recruited through reference and may be considered a convenience sample. First, I used my existing professional networks and colleagues from my doctoral program, who are working professionals holding administration positions at Bay Area colleges, to recruit participants. I emailed my colleagues asking them to find five to 10 transfer students in their last semester. My colleagues forwarded my email and flyer to multiple advising departments and transfer centers on their campus. The email and the flyer included information about the

scope and the purpose of the research, the demographic and age groups needed for the participants, and the point of contact if they were interested. I also recruited participants from the 4-year university where I work as a student service professional and as a member of the advisory board for transfer students. Other members of the board were also student service professionals who worked directly with transfer students daily. They helped distribute the email distribution to their transfer students' network. See Appendix A for a copy of the recruitment flyer, email, and consent notice.

I also visited campus classrooms, where I gave a short presentation about my research to a group of students via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, I visited the business classroom and the educational opportunity program's (EOP) transfer students' orientation. The EOP provides low-income and FG college students with financial support. For the EOP, the student population matches the general transfer student population. Typically, they come from FG groups and are members of minority racial groups. As a result, they fit my target population.

Each presentation took about 10 minutes. I outlined the purpose of my research and asked the transfer students to tell their stories to help to improve services for transfer students throughout the university. I ended the presentation by providing my contact information for those interested in participating in the study. As a final step, I handed out flyers to student success centers that offer advising and other services to students on campus so they could include my flyer in their weekly newsletters during the fall 2021 semester. The flyer provided information about my research and my contact information. The newsletter was sent to students in the College of Education.

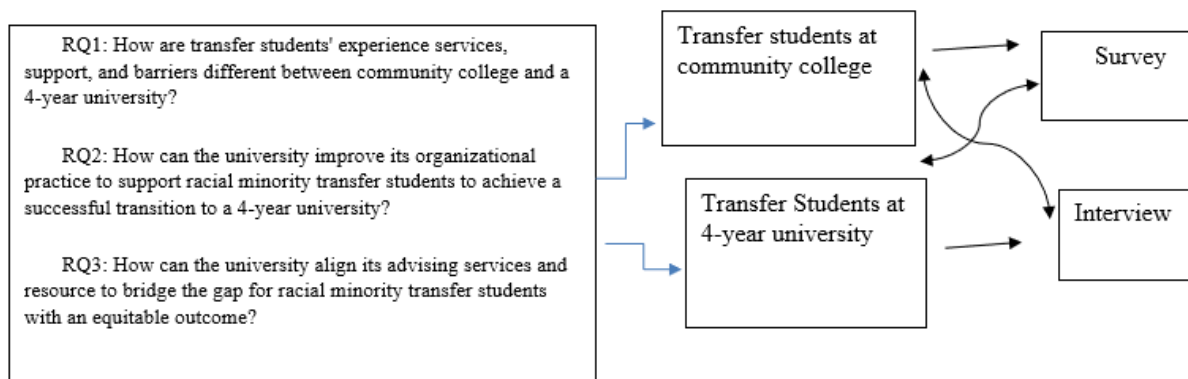
The last step in the recruitment process was communicating with students who were interested in participating in the study. Once the students agreed, I sent an email introducing the research and establishing a connection. Each participant received a consent notification about the research, and they were given information about their full rights, including protection of their identity and contact information for the dissertation chair. After reading the consent notification and agreeing to participate, I established a meeting time between myself and the participants. The final email sent before the actual interview included the Zoom link and the interview questions to help participants prepare for their interview session and to establish a flow for the data collection sessions. The email communication is included in Appendix A.

Data Collection

The study used qualitative methods of interview and survey. More details on data collection procedures are described in this section. Figure 1 illustrates how the methods were used to address the research questions for both groups of participants. The data I collected included the transfer students' narrative experience of the critical events in their transfer pathways, such as the application process to their receiving university and their approach to adapting to their new university's environment and culture. Finally, I explored the essential services that 4-year universities can offer to transfer students through the instruments of interviews and a survey.

Figure 1

Methods and Procedures for Data Collection



Interview

As the primary data collection method, I conducted 14 interviews with transfer students so that I could learn more about their experiences. The method focuses on the “engagement factor” between the researcher and the subject (Rapley, 2004). This factor was important when discussing the narrative experience of the transfer student and how they recalled the obstacles they encountered during their transition in their voice and memory. I, as the interviewer, was the observer of their interview. The method allowed each participant to tell their stories and highlighted the aspects that were meaningful to them. Moreover, the interview process resembles storytelling, emphasizing the human narrative of lived experiences (Powell et al., 2021). This is why the interview method was suitable for my study. By conducting interviews with my participants, I learned about their stories, their aspirations, and their challenges encountered during their transfer pathway. It was an inspirational experience for me as a researcher.

Interviews for the fall 2021 semester began in August. This timeline was intended to capture a critical time for the 7 transfer students' sample at community colleges before they switched to a 4-year university. This approach reflected the university application process and students' feelings before their transition. In addition, the data provided information about what services were available to students at the community college level. The interviews with the 7 transfer students' sample at the 4-year university level occurred after their first term in spring 2020. This strategy ensured that the students could reflect on their experience because it was recent and fresh on their minds.

All 14 interviews were conducted virtually on Zoom due to COVID-19. Unfortunately, that prevented the human interactions and engaging factors that are usually necessary to make an interviewee comfortable (Replay, 2014). Nevertheless, as the interviewer, I prioritized creating a sense of comfort for my interviewee before starting the interview process. I made small talk to get the conversation going and used a friendly tone at the beginning. It was important to let participants know how much I appreciated their time. We talked about their day and other current events that they had going on. Participants were asked to go through the interview process after they felt comfortable.

Interview questions focused on transfer students' transition to a 4-year university as well as their identity as a racial minority student and how it affected their experience as a transfer student. The interview began with 6 questions that served as a foundation for discussion. The interview questions were open-ended but did not constrain the interviewee's responses. Therefore, students had more freedom to leave scripts and participate in semi structured interviews. Interviews with semi structured questions enable researchers to learn about

participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a particular topic and to explore deeply sensitive and sometimes personal issues without restriction (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Using this approach, I gave my participants the flexibility to present what they felt was necessary to highlight in their narratives as transfer students.

The students spoke about their background stories and how they got to their transfer pathway. Then, the semi structured questions detailed their transition to their new campus and their expectations as new transfer students. Through specific questions, students could share their experiences as transfer students and what meant for them to hold that identity. When the questions related to personal information, such as their racial identity or social status, students were free to stop the discussion if they became uncomfortable. However, none of the participants felt it was necessary to do so. The interviews lasted about 30 minutes on average, and they were recorded via Zoom for data. The length of interviews varied based on participants' comfort level and what information they wanted to share with the study.

Survey

In addition to interviews, the survey method was utilized to reach a larger population of transfer students. A survey was necessary to create a numerical indicator of transfer students' satisfaction with multiple community colleges and university-level student services. Fowler (2014) suggested a survey was a suitable approach for producing a numerical description of an element in a large sample. This survey evoked a numerical report that enhanced my data collection from the interviews.

The survey was conducted on the topic of transfer students and the services that are available to them at community colleges and universities. Moreover, the survey was designed

to determine whether students received enough resources and support during their first semester at their receiving university and their level of satisfaction with the assistance. The survey was administered through Qualtrics, a free survey software that people can use online. The software collected all the questions I intended for the study and programmed them into a link that could be distributed. The survey was designed to gather data on the services available to students through the transfer process. In August 2021, after the interviews were conducted, I emailed the questionnaire to a different group of participants by providing the link to my professional network at community colleges and universities. This questionnaire was designed to learn about the experience racial minority transfer students. Therefore, I made sure that my professional network was aware of the target population for the survey and that they only forwarded the email to the intended group.

There were 11 questions in the survey that participants rated the on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Using this approach, students had various choices to report satisfaction with their experience at their institutions. Moreover, it avoided participants being overwhelmed or losing focus by asking them to agree or disagree with statements instead of questions. The survey style allowed respondents to answer more precisely. At the start of the survey, participants were asked to self-identify their academic level, race/ethnicity, age, and if they received financial support from their university. This approach helped me to categorize students and address the research questions relating to the services given to racial minority transfer students.

I divided survey questions into two parts. The first set of questions addressed the services given to the students at their institution. The second set of questions focused on whether the

students felt welcome at their campus. The rationale behind the design relates to transfer shock, which often occurs as a result of both academic pressures and a lack of sense of belonging for students at their campus (Daddona et al., 2021). I also wanted to determine whether students knew where and who they should go to when they faced a setback during their transfer pathway. This was important because it is not always about providing resources, but also about making services accessible to navigate.

Data Analysis

Analyzing qualitative research data consists of three steps: (a) identifying patterns, (b) categorizing interactions, and (c) analyzing their interactions (Saldana, 2011). I followed this approach coding my data. That is, I identified common responses from each interviewee and linked them to the overarching theme to create a narrative. Using a program called MAXQDA, I explored the data using the coding system and determined a common theme from the interviews and surveys that related to the students' experiences. I started by looking for a pattern between the interviews with community college and university participants. Then, I analyzed the survey data and compared it with the interview data.

The process started with transcribing interview recordings and reviewing my interview notes. Important themes that emerged from my coding included individual challenges, institutional supports and barriers, and students' racial identity. Next, I explored the survey data using Qualtrics on Microsoft Excel, and I coded participants' demographics and question responses. I also used IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) to visually present survey results in graphs and chart figures. Then, I analyzed both interview and survey data together to understand the collective narrative from my sample. I also looked for themes that reflected

the bigger picture about the current stage of the transfer pathway. I discuss these themes in my findings and recommendations.

My data analysis was based on deductive coding from my literature review. I pieced together patterns related to how transfer students coped with institutional barriers, student services, and expectations for their first-semester performance. The materials allowed me to connect the transfer students' lived experiences in community colleges and 4-year universities to the interview data. In the end, I addressed the research questions regarding the treatment of transfer students and the university by using the codes from my data analysis. The method also helped me pinpoint the crucial elements of the transfer student's struggle to cope with academic challenges, personal challenges, and other social anxieties.

The framework of CRT was also used to analyze the relationships between the patterns of topics. For example, the framework has been used to analyze racial identity and how it affects an individual's environment (Powell et al., 2021). The framework is practical in its application to racial minorities and their learning experiences. By using the framework, I related students' racial identity to their experiences based on their ability to adapt to policies and procedures that potentially placed them in disadvantaged positions. The data demonstrate a need to reexamine policies and procedures that place racial minority transfer students in positions for equitable outcomes as compared to their peers.

Credibility

There are many actions a researcher can take to assure the trustworthiness and credibility of their research. First, *credibility* is "the extent to which others perceive the study's findings to be convincing and worth taking seriously" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p.25) One way to

accomplish this goal was to have a member check. This approach ensured that results were correct and conceivable. Second, I communicated with my participants to quality check throughout my research and assured them that the findings correlated with their lived experiences. This approach also allowed the participants to clarify their interview answers and check for errors as well as to provide additional information when it was necessary. I also relied heavily on the technology I was using to accurately collect data. Due to COVID-19, the interviews were recorded via Zoom, which provided useful transcriptions and reduced obtrusive speech for notetaking and coding. The final step that I took to ensure credibility was using peer debriefing with colleagues who are familiar with transfer students' experiences. Peer debriefings helped me identify other perspectives and eliminate bias during the analysis. In transfer advisory board meetings, my research was discussed among student service professionals to receive feedback on maintaining truth in my data analysis.

Limitations

Although I tried to produce a well-rounded study, there were limitations to my research. First, findings from this study should not be generalized across all transfer students. The research was conducted with a small sample of transfer students and was limited in scope because my study was focused on services provided to transfer students. As such, findings from this study can contribute to the beginning of an open dialogue on the lived experiences of transfer students.

The nature of COVID-19 meant that interviews could not be conducted in-person, which limited the human interaction between the researcher and the participants. My goal was to create an engaging environment for the participants via Zoom with small talk between

questions or at the beginning of interviews to prepare the interviewee for the conversation. The policy changes for transfer students during the pandemic also impacted the transfer student experience. For example, starting in the fall 2021 semester, most CSU universities accepted low-division transfer students. This change meant that students did not need to have the requisite 60 units to transfer, and it shortened the timeline of when transfer students transition to 4-year universities. This limitation was a part of the data that demonstrated how the university was willing to support transfer students during COVID-19 and contributed to diverse data findings.

A second limitation was the limited number of survey participants from community colleges. My goal was to obtain a diverse sample of transfer students from community colleges and 4-year universities in order to capture the whole transfer process. Although my professional networks distributed the survey to students at their community college, there was little response. As a result, more transfer students at 4-year universities responded to the survey than students from community colleges. However, I believe that the interview sessions with the seven community college students filled in this gap in the survey data regarding the community college experiences of transfer students. See Appendix J for a copy of my coding.

Ethical Considerations

Before starting data collection, I submitted a proposal for the approval of human subject's research to the institutional review board (IRB) at San José State University. The purpose of the IRB review is to identify potential risks that could affect the subject. There was a level of accuracy regarding the research material. I developed and worked closely with my

dissertation committee chair to submit the necessary documents to the IRB. Additional paperwork was forwarded to other institutions for their approval in order to recruit the participants. The IRB application was approved in May 2020, and data collection started in August 2020.

Positionality

For 7 years, I have worked in higher education in various student service professional positions. I hold a Master of Art in equity and social justice in education and am currently a doctoral candidate for leadership in education. My educational and professional experiences gave me the knowledge and the credibility to interact with participants in such a way that they felt comfortable having an open dialogue about higher education and social matters in public education.

My identity also impacted my stance on supporting transfer students' success. I am a part of a minority group and empathize with minority students. Their success often depends on internal and external factors, such as their background and family circumstances. As Cousin (2010) discussed, it is not about separation but positional reflexivity, which addresses “...concerns about examining the place, biography, self, and others to understand how they shape the analytic exercise” (Cousin, 2010, p. 11). I am also an FG college student and have a firsthand understanding of the hardship of navigating through an institutional organization on my own. For example, my parents barely spoke English when I started my undergraduate career; hence, they could not support me through the process. I relied solely on support from university staff. As a result of these elements, I have developed a critical lens for understanding institutional structures as presented in this research.

When conducting my study, I avoided using my own values as the only reference source when collecting and analyzing the data. I used my literature review to support my examination and analysis of the data collection. This approach ensured that my investigation was grounded in research and was not solely based on my personal experiences and opinions on the subject. Additionally, I considered the effect of my role as an advisor with ties to a CSU university and the participants' perceptions. Although my position could have influenced respondents' answers and altered the data, I ensured that dialogue happened before the interview to avoid this outcome. This initial discussion of my positionality allowed participants to understand my stance, to help build rapport, and to communicate the importance of truthful answers. This approach created a partnership between me and the participants. I acknowledged that my identity and passion may lead to conflicts for this study. Nevertheless, I took many precautions in this qualitative research method to preserve its integrity. This practice served my overall purpose—to promote more equitable outcomes for all transfer students to succeed in their studies.

Findings

In this chapter, the results from interviews and surveys are described in detail. The first half of this chapter describes how data were analyzed based on narratives from interviews with 14 participants. In the second half of this chapter, results from the survey conducted with 83 participants in 4-year universities and community colleges are discussed. Analytical concepts related to intersectionality (Eager, 2019) and cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) were used to investigate the results from the two data sets. Moreover, the concepts were based on CRT and served as the basis to explore and unpack educational policies and procedures related to power and oppression for minorities (Powell et al., 2021). Using the CRT lens, I illustrate how transfer students' lived experiences are shaped by various internal and external factors related to their identity. A CRT framework sharpens a lens on potential institutional structures and tradition that maintain racial inequity, where such structures and practice function to maintain a status quo and maintain inequitable policies and procedures that do not account for the lived experiences, intersectionality, and personal assets or elements that each student possess. Intersectionality is a characteristic of these transfer students, evident in high percentages of transfer students that are from minority groups, low-income and first-generation college students (FG), and continuing college students (CG) (Mobley and Brawner, 2019). External factors included policies and procedures in community colleges, 4-year universities, or legislation concerning racial minorities.

A transfer student's experience in their transfer pathway is heavily influenced by both internal and external factors, either as a part of their identity or as a result of circumstances beyond their control. Regardless of the classification, these factors impact a student's

learning experience. As a result, the success rate for transfer students differs by racial group. Black students have the lowest transfer rates at only 9% and Latino students have the lowest graduation rates at only 10% (Smith, 2021). My research aimed to discover transfer students' needs during their transition to a 4-year university to bridge these gaps among the group.

Interview Data

Seven transfer students from universities and seven students at community colleges were interviewed for this study. The students provided a variety of perspectives on their experiences as transfer students. Each story illustrated how the sample transfer student population is more likely to come from one or more disadvantaged backgrounds that adversely affect their transition to college. Their backgrounds ranged from being an FG college student to low SES and poor academic performance, which influenced their transfer pathway. The intersection of SES with racial and gender characteristics, family issues, and financial concerns plays a significant role in transfer students' academic performance and experience (Powell et al., 2021; Sandelli, 2017).

Common themes that emerged from the interviews included individual, social, and academic challenges. These themes encompass a story of each participant's journey, their challenges, and their adjustment to the transfer process. The conversation started with the students' biographies and continued with their experiences as transfer students. Table 1 provides demographic information about participants. Pseudonyms were used in lieu of participants' real names. Interview questions for 4-year transfer students can be found in Appendix B and interview questions for community college students can be found in Appendix C.

Table 1*Participant Profiles*

Participant	Level	Age Group	Race	Gender	Generation
Adan	CC	35–40	Filipino	M	First
Asha	4-year	25–30	Indian	M	Second
Ava	4-year	35–40	Mixed race	F	First
Cat	CC	18–20	Latino	F	First
Chen	CC	25–30	Chinese	M	First
Clare	4-year	25–30	Filipino	F	Second
Malia	4-year	25–30	Hawaiian	F	Second
James	4-year	18–20	Filipino	M	Second
Ken	4-year	25–30	Multiracial	M	Second
Keyla	CC	25–30	Black/African American	F	First
Kim	4-year	25–30	Filipino	F	First
Luna	CC	35–40	Filipino	F	First
Sarah	CC	25–30	Latino	F	Second
Tam	CC	25–30	Afghan	F	Second

Findings from Interview Data*Immigration Status*

From the interview sessions, I learned that transfer students’ life experiences and their multilayered identities are essential to their stories. The general transfer student population typically falls into one of the following categories: underrepresented minorities; military personnel, veterans, and their families; low-income and first-generation students; and students looking for an opportunity to pursue higher education (Fematt et al., 2021; Sandelli, 2017). The first three participants’ narratives captured the intersectionality of being immigrants, FG college students, and low-income students. Although the participants’ stories may share a similar theme related to an immigrant’s experience, their narratives captured meaningful nuances in their outlook and disposition toward the experience.

Adan is a 35-year-old transfer student at a community college in Concord, California. He identifies as an FG immigrant, and he works full time to pay for school while studying computer science. Adan hoped to be able to transfer to a CSU with a strong computer science program in the spring semester. He expressed that he would like to transfer to a UC university, but he may be unable to do so. Adan was worried about not meeting admissions requirements and how much UC tuition would cost him. Adan's concerns regarding financial issues when applying to a UC was a common theme for transfer students in my study. Such students are hindered by an institution's tuition, which makes it difficult for them to study full time without working (Sandelli, 2017). These students also have to balance other responsibilities, including their families and friends. Often, they take care of their families and responsibilities outside of school. According to Adan, he carried multiple responsibilities in his life, one of which was work obligations. I met him on one of his busiest days because he had to finish at school and head back to work. Although he spoke rapidly because he felt rushed, the conversation was still meaningful. I learned about his struggles when he first migrated to the United States:

Yes, oh definitely [I'd] say that because like both of my parents live in Nepal right now, I'm all by myself here. When I first came here, it was hard to adapt to the society here because what kind of a behavior we used to have over there is not normal over here. You know, like hugging and being normal here, and wearing shoes inside the house like that are different things.

This excerpt explored Adan's culture shock as an immigrant during his first months in the United States. In Nepal, he revealed, people do not habitually show open affection to each other or wear shoes inside the house. Adan's experience made it hard for him to adjust to his new environment at the beginning and resulted in him feeling lonely at times and as though

he did not have any friends or family around. He remembered being “pretty lonely at the beginning because you feel like you're all by yourself. You know, like at the beginning it was like you don't know anybody, and then you don't feel connected with a lot of people.”

As an immigrant, he discussed the difficulty of not having a support network around him, such as his parents and friends, in the United States. In looking at his recollections as an immigrant and a transfer student, it is evident that Adan had difficulty adjusting in his new environments. Furthermore, he is affected by internal factors such as his immigrant status and having to leave both his country and parents for a new life. Trying to balance his work and social life, he said, made it difficult at first to make friends.

Socialization is a priority for the students, which exacerbates isolation but often transfer students choose to work in order to maintain their tuition (Lee & Schneider, 2017). Transfer students tend to benefit from socializing, but unfortunately, this takes a backseat to their work due to having to support themselves and pay for school. Students are under pressure to balance school and work, and they have little time to socialize with their peers. These students are working adults trying to support themselves in school. Adan discussed what he felt like working and attend courses at the same time:

Yes, I work full time. It's not like 40 hours but like 36 hours is still a lot and it's mostly packed in the weekends, and then I go to college and the weekdays and then do my assignments. My free time at the weekend. I mean, because of the pandemic it got easier because you don't have to go all the way to the college and come back all the way, and then there were like a lot of classes that you can manage by yourself. I would say, like it is a little difficult because, sometimes your work, then you know that you have an assignment that is due in two days, and then you work for those two days as well.

As a low-income student, Adan works full time during the week and attends evening classes. According to him, he is unable to rest during the weekend. Although most students

get a break from their schoolwork on the weekends, those who work full time spend their weekends doing their homework. Despite all the hard work and challenges, students like Adan persist in achieving their goals. It is a testament to the strength and identity of immigrants and FG students, along with the knowledge of the privileges they have, that they to attend school in the United States where education is a part of freedom. In this sense, the goals of transfer students are a form of aspirational cultural capital in which minority students have hopes and dreams, despite their many challenges (Yosso, 2005). The more setbacks the students encounter, the more they develop the ability within themselves to achieve their goals. Generally, transfer students' aspirations stem from their desire to transfer to 4-year universities so they can enter the job market and support their families at home (Baker, 2016). I saw this theme emerge in my next two participants who were also immigrants with the intersectionality of FG and low SES.

Luna is a student at the same community college as Adan. She is also an FG immigrant living alone in the United States while supporting her mother and sister in the Philippines. Luna is currently studying to become a nurse and she has many goals for her transfer process. She wants to transfer to either a UC, a CSU, or a private institution for nursing. Luna was aware of the competition to get into nursing programs, so she just wanted to be accepted to any program that will make her happy. Luna is currently researching her ideal program, which demonstrated her aspirational capital and her desire to succeed so she can support her family back home. According to her:

So, the transfer experience, I personally found very challenging and overwhelming. I do not have a lot of role models around me because I'm the first generation in college so researching was very time-consuming and also difficult.

Like taking a major, which is very impactful. I had to do a lot of research about different universities' requirements, so it was very time-consuming.

Luna described the experience of the application process for an FG without having a role model to guide her. She became sad when she realized that she was very much alone in the process. She was overwhelmed by expectations to become her own expert and conduct her own research for majors and universities. Luna's FG transfer experience can be viewed as a theme for FG transfer students and the obstacles they must face as the first ones in their families to attend college. This is an additional setback that FG transfer students have to overcome to be able to transfer. Transfer students' persistence is often affected by the growing burden of family responsibilities increases (Berger & Malaney, 2003). According to Luna in her interview:

I'm paying for my own expenses for sure and I'm also supporting my mom who is in Philippines. There's nobody who is paying for my education and nobody's supporting my mom, so I just have, double job, not just paying for my rent and you know college. I had to support my mom so that's pretty challenging and so I had to work a lot of hours honestly besides studying. I have too many hours to support them to meet those needs. So that definitely was challenging.

In this excerpt, Luna discussed the challenges she faced both as a student and as the primary income provider for her mother back in her country. Luna's experience showed her selflessness as she works two jobs while trying to balance her studies not just for herself but also for her mother too. "I just have to," she repeated twice in the narrative, as a statement of her own responsibility for her mother and herself. This also demonstrates the burden that transfer students carry with them into the classroom: to earn enough money to support their family back home. It is a multilayered burden that transfer students, in general, must shoulder on their own. Although financial aid and scholarships can help alleviate students' financial

hardships, these resources are often inaccessible or unknown to students. Luna explained that she would have applied for scholarships, but she was unaware of them until her second year on campus. Many FG transfer students struggle with this issue because they are navigating institutional structures on their own. Their experiences become a series of trials and errors. Additionally, FG students become a resource for each other because they all share similar experiences. According to Luna in her interview:

At the end of the second year, I applied for school scholarships, and I was so happy that I got so many resources. So definitely applying for scholarships. I was the one thing that I learned, but I learned pretty late so right now, like, I said to all my friends if you're eligible for a scholarship please sure you know to apply for it because it's like literally you get pretty much a big amount. So, when I go to the university, I'm definitely going to try all the scholarships that I'm eligible for because, you know, I have a financial problem, and I think if you made a scholarship that's a great opportunity. The school advertises about applying for scholarships, and there was one of my classes, so one of the students was telling me, "Oh, you should apply for a scholarship because I applied and I've got a few," but I was still not paying attention because you know, sometimes when you have my stuff on your plate you get distracted so easily, and I was like putting in a lot of effort just working, I think I was not thinking smart.

Luna shared the time she did not know there were scholarships available to transfer students until her second year when her classmates told her about it. In the process, she realized she had access to other resources on campus, but she had to pay attention to them or ask someone for help. Luna developed a motto from it: "Working smarter, it wasn't always hard work; it was also about being mindful of your surroundings and using resources when you could." This quotation depicted the continuing theme of trial and error for the transfer students. Despite these kinds of setbacks, transfer students became self-sufficient and learned not to repeat them. Luna eventually applied for a scholarship, which alleviated some of her

concerns about her income and gave her time to actually enjoy her experience as a transfer student. She joined her school's soccer team and took time for herself.

Luna also decided to use her learning experiences as a teaching tool so that she could help those who came after her, which included her nieces and nephews back in her country.

I think when you are a first-generation college student, you know you didn't come from a background where people went to college right, so you do not see sometimes you feel very discouraged because it's very difficult to study and work at the same time. But I think sometimes coming from a very difficult situation also gives you motivation. I'm like a more optimistic person so I was telling myself I should study and get a degree, you know. People who are coming behind me like my niece and nephew might be inspired you know, and they will continue their studies in the future because I didn't really have someone in my family to look up to. I wanted to create inspiration role for my niece and nephew or people who are coming behind me so definitely was not challenging but being positive about it, I think, will motivate you.

It is important to understand Luna's intersectional identity as a racial minority transfer student and what it means to be an immigrant student who values paying it forward and teaching others who come after her. Collectively, immigrants understand the journey in pursuing their education given their experience. As a result, they want to make things easier for their successors. They want to be one another's social cultural capital, which is a network of people and resources (Yosso, 2005).

Ava, another participant, identifies with Luna's belief system and immigrant background, as well as the struggles with supporting her family. Ava is currently in her second year at a 4-year university in the Bay Area in California. In contrast to Luna and Adan who are documented immigrants, Ava is an undocumented immigrant who is enrolled in her school as a *Dreamer* student. A Dreamer student is defined as a student who is undocumented or who has status from the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. During the

past decade, several laws were passed that helped these students receive an education. The most important one relates to the Obama administration's DACA executive order, which allowed undocumented immigrants who came to the United States at a young age to avoid deportation and to work for a two-year period that could be renewed (Klobodu et al., 2021). Regardless of this window of hope, many Dreamers remain hidden or cautious to self-identify for fear of consequences. Ava, however, was not one of those students. She spoke with a sense of pride and sadness as she recalled her experience as an undocumented immigrant student since high school:

A lot of my shortcomings have to do with number one I'm an undocumented immigrant, so I didn't qualify for financial aid when I first graduated high school. The law had just passed for the AB 540, where I could pay in-state tuition rather than being a foreigner. So that would have added more cost, and which is why I ended up in that very early on, delaying my degree, so I didn't even go in touch with any of the dreamers.

Due to the passing of DACA, Ava would have been eligible to apply to college as soon as she graduated high school, but the counselor who assisted her with her application made a mistake by marking her as a U.S. citizen. She then had to provide documentation to prove her citizenship status, but her undocumented status prevented her from obtaining that document.

In a conversation with her counselor, Ava realized how different her life would be if the incident had not occurred:

The counselor said was kind of frustrated because he's like, you had the grades. The momentum, but I don't know what they did with your file because I told him when I applied for the scholarships during that time. They were either denied because I didn't have a social security number or because erroneously that counts, they've marked me as being a citizen.

I followed up and asked if she was angered when her timeframe for earning a bachelor's degree had changed. She was not angry, but she emphasized that counseling must be tailored

to FG students, especially if they are Dreamers like her. According to Ava, the process is time consuming:

It is trial and error, sometimes, and then transferring out if you're going to a different counselor every time because depending on who's available it's just so many people trying to access them that you sometimes don't even get the same one back-to-back. By the time I was ready to transfer I couldn't get the same counselor. It was a different counselor, so a lot of the research is individual. More time consuming and at the same time, you have to like in my case, if you're a dreamer you have to work because you petition for a work permit when to be able to be considered you have to prove that you need income, so you have to be in school, you have to have certain things.

The theme of trial and error was presented again, but this time the error was the result of someone else's actions. In Ava's narrative, although misadvising was an external factor not within her control as a transfer student, it was a costly one. In addition, Ava emphasized that advising transfer students must be done with accuracy and care because for students like Ava, their time at university or college is limited by DACA and how long Dreamers are permitted to spend receiving their education.

The primary purpose of DACA was to provide equal opportunities for students to gain access to education and to employment. To access employment opportunities and benefits, applicants are required to submit paperwork that includes a record of financial aid and other resources (Klobodu et al., 2021). When looking at social structures through the lens of CRT, such policies and practices impact marginalized students. For example, Dreamers and undocumented students face uncertainty about their citizenship because of our immigration policies. When a new president of the United States is elected, there is the possibility that new executive orders will drastically change their status. In some situations, students become exhausted and stressed about the next day because they have not received any documentation

or paperwork proving their status. This was illustrated by Ava when she discussed what it meant to apply for a job permit under DACA, which grants students such as herself employment opportunities:

To be able to reapply and to be able to have this opportunity given to you, so you also have to use your work permit obviously so you're always having to work and if you're going to school, it just adds another layer and that's not even counting if you have family situations were to need to support them or when will be our next meals. At some point, it just becomes too much.

This excerpt demonstrated the emotions and anxiety that Dreamer students go through each time they reapply for work permits. She explained that once a student is granted a work permit, there is a deadline for getting a job; if a Dreamer does not find a job, the work permit process might be delayed the next time. In general, there are many uncertainties surrounding DACA, and, as Ava explained, Dreamers are not only worried about their ability to work again but also about their families. Adan, Luna, and Ava shared a common theme of being immigrants and the struggles they faced due to their low income and financial difficulties. Students' experiences are determined by their racial identity, in accordance with society's definition of a subject (Savas, 2013). DACA policies and demands impacted Ava's experience and for her, it was unbearable to deal with. Despite this adversity, Ava remained optimistic about her future and believed that she will be successful in sharing her stories with others:

Until you experience it on your own, then you know okay well, maybe this will be useful for the next person after me. Um but until I get there until I get my degree, then I can be like, Okay, it took me like these 6 years of a journey, but I did it, this is how you can do it easier, you know so I think there's a book waiting for me at some point, so I can just be like the how to help others after me.

This quotation demonstrated again how important social capital is for transfer students, especially knowing that the students following behind them will also face great adversity. They want to be each other's community and offer a sense of belonging and their resources as a form of paying it forward. Ava wanted to make sure that other Dreamer students have a smoother transfer pathway compared to the 6 years it took her to earn her degree. When I spoke to Ava, she was in her last year and was applying for graduation. She wanted to bring a sense of solidarity for others after she was given a chance to be successful. Her story is inspirational and illustrates the perseverance and courage of a Dreamer. Others may likewise be inspired by her story.

In the next section, I focus on more stories from the interview data. This group of participants self-identify as FG and CG students, and how the intersectionality of the identity categorization impacts their students' experiences. My analysis further showed that there were similarities and differences in the experiences of FG and CG.

First-Generation Transfer Students

Students interviewed were both first- and second-generation college students. These participants shared some similar experiences due to the overlap of low SES, racial minority, and social status as FG students. When I asked specific questions about their identities pertaining to FG or CG status and how those identities impacted their experiences, their answers varied. In their assessments, FG students reported that not having resources and outside agencies contributed significantly to their difficulties. In contrast, most CG college students attributed their success to having parents who attended college and who could guide

them through the transfer process. The difference in guidance between FG and CG was a major factor affecting their success.

FG students are 74% less likely to be successful than second-generation college students (Coston et al., 2013). Additionally, FG students report difficulties with time management skills and study skills as well as achieving a work–life balance (Gibbons et al., 2019). As a result, the students developed the perception that they might not be good enough. Several researchers have examined this topic when discussing FG college students from minority groups. The result of this is self-doubt and expecting the worst events in their journey (Mobley & Brawner, 2019). In my study, three FG college students discussed their experiences independently navigating institutional structures and how that impacted their college experience. A common theme among FG students was coping with institutional and personal challenges.

The first student, Cat, transferred to a CSU in the Bay Area from a Southern California community college. She self-identifies as an FG college student and comes from a family of Latino/Hispanic, Guatemalan, and Salvadoran immigrants. We began our conversation by discussing how Cat's experiences as a racial minority student and as an FG impacted her experience and outlook on life:

So, I'm Latino or Hispanic and I'm Guatemalan and Salvadoran. I think just from seeing throughout the years I feel like there's always been an issue regarding race and how we're so how far we're supposed to succeed in life.

Although she did not delve into specific race-related incidents that were sensitive to her identity, she did speak at the beginning of the interview about growing up in a violent neighborhood. These neighborhoods often have lower performing schools and very low rates

of college-going students. From the CRT perspective, the students in the community were not given a fair chance because of a lack of resources and in-classroom support. This resulted in students losing motivation to pursue a 4-year education, and their parents were often working-class individuals with no educational background to provide academic support. Despite this, parents can motivate their children by providing guidance. Throughout her childhood, Cat's parents motivated her by instilling a sense of the importance of education, and they encouraged her to reach her full potential. They wanted her to go far in her life. Though they could not help Cat with some aspects of her schooling, the motivation that they gave her meant so much to her:

My mom and my dad actually only went to a two-year degree and never went beyond that and then my aunt did get a bachelor's degree in social work as a social worker. But I feel like all through my life, they've always told me, I need to do what we have done and do better for myself, even my dad. He's like I know I could have gone further in life. And you should do that because I wasn't given the opportunity, and I know a lot of families were the same.

Cat's narrative revealed another theme of aspirational capital. Her parents emphasized this capital, which is setting goals and striving for higher achievement despite childhood setbacks. Cat also realized how different her transfer pathway experience would have been if she had not been born in the United States. According to her:

To some people who are undocumented are some people who are under DACA it's much harder and I understand it, and especially as a citizen I'm just like I have the ability to go farther than a lot of people can. And even though it's hard for us and there are always issues regarding either race or things that are going on in the world like I want to push forward, regardless of who I am. Because I just want to get my education and, especially, be able to provide for my family, but also for myself. I know, like my sister wants to go to college and she just graduated high school.

Cat's aspirational capital was not reserved just for her but also for those around her. In addition to Cat, several other participants confirmed how hardships helped them succeed, not only as transfer students but also within their families. She expressed her desire to be a role model for her younger half-sister and to provide for her family. A common theme among FG transfer students in my study was their desire to serve as role models for others because they did not have one. In addition, Cat's narrative emphasized the importance of familial capital, which Yosso (2005) defined as the importance of family and maintaining a connection to one's cultural heritage. Cat's family played a vital role in her life transfer pathway. She even gave up her dream of attending school in the Bay Area when her grandfather fell ill just before she left home. As she said, she sacrificed her dreams for the sake of her family:

So, I knew coming to the city was expensive, and I was supposed to come here the moment I graduated high school. But the issue that I kept having all is that my grandpa back at home got sick in December of my senior year and we didn't expect it to be as bad as it came out and money was becoming a big issue because he went to the hospital, we took him to the emergency room. And he stayed there for over an amount and then he ended up going into a convalescent home to get therapy or physical therapy, to be exact. And then he got better for a while, but still, money was tight, especially with all the medical bills and my mom was the only one, making any form of income at home and things started getting better because he started improving there is days, where yeah, we have to take him to the doctor's appointments, but things were looking up.

Like Ava, Cat was supposed to start college straight out of high school. However, her grandfather's hospital bills prevented her from attending, so she chose the transfer route. Community colleges offer many opportunities for underrepresented individuals such as low-income students to earn a degree. Her plan almost changed again when another tragedy hit her family, but she was finally able to transfer to the Bay Area. According to Cat :

And then, this year again literally, two years later around the same time it got much worse, and we had to take them to the hospital and then they told us that he

needed to get dialysis, and then right after I found out and my family found out that he has tumors in his liver. So, a lot of expenses started coming out of our pockets and it just made me feel guilty coming here because there's not enough money that we have to put me through school but they're still trying.

The second time Cat learned about her grandfather's health problems; she was going to give up. However, her family encouraged her to continue. In her interview, Cat confessed to feeling guilty about leaving her family behind to attend school. Cat's narrative expresses the common theme of hardship that transfer students carry with them into the classroom. Their experience has been negative and, for some, has resulted in dropping out because it is hard for them to succeed in their transfer pathway. It is not just about them, but also about their family. As such, it is important for transfer students to receive institutional support. Many FG participants stressed that they did not receive sufficient support during their transfer to 4-year universities.

Keyla is a 25-year-old transfer student at the city college who is preparing to attend a CSU university. As an FG college student, she identifies herself as African American. She described the hardship as an FG entering community college right after graduating high school:

I would still be first-generation um. I feel like at first it hard because, like you're just trying to get a sense of a feel of what are you supposed to do, it's not like high school. They give you the homework and then you have maybe a couple of days to do it, sometimes you may only have like one or two days to do it. These are some of the questions that I had when I first started.

Transfer students are often misunderstood by staff and faculty regarding their ability to navigate an institution's structure. This occurred more at 4-year universities than at community colleges because university leaders assume that these students have some college experience (Townsend, 2008). Nevertheless, based on Keyla's narrative, these assumptions

are also made at the community colleges. Professors also seem to assume that students know what to do with assignments or what to do in class. Transfer students come with a variety of levels of knowledge, and it is important to meet them where they are. Keyla expressed frustration that no one explained the simplest things to her, such as when to turn in assignments or when to buy textbooks. FG transfer students find it difficult to access this kind of knowledge. Keyla recounted her first semester mishaps:

I didn't really like my first semester. I bought all the textbooks, which I did not need to do, and like it was kind of like a big miscommunication and I remember buying all the books from the bookstore and they're like oh yeah when you're done with them either Semester, we will buy them back from you. And I paid for some of these books for over \$100 and then I brought them back at the end of the semester. I brought back at least three or four books and they tried to maybe give me like \$10 for all three of them. And then, one of the staff members was like, oh well, we're actually not going to be using this book in particular next semester, and next semester rolled around, and I saw in the bookstore like they were still selling it. So, I think that it has to do with the first-generation thing.

As with most transfer students, Keyla has a low-income status, meaning that she works while attending school. Working and meeting ends is of utmost importance to these students given they are on a budget. In her narrative, she expressed her frustration with buying textbooks and the expectation that she would know to return them for a refund. In light of this, it is important to be transparent with students and to ensure that information is delivered correctly because FG students generally rely on institutional support as their only source of information. Keyla also voiced frustration with the faculty's unclear textbook requirements:

There are things that they don't tell you like you know professors will tell you this is the required textbooks they don't normally enforce like, Oh well, you should buy it, you shouldn't buy it, telling you that you should, so that's what you do, but then you never end up opening the textbook or maybe open the textbook one time for the whole semester.

For Keyla, the lack of transparency during the transfer pathway discouraged her and undermined her trust in the staff and faculty in her community colleges. Without a mentor to guide her through the challenges of being a transfer student, Keyla relied heavily on campus resources, faculty, and staff for assistance in navigating policies and procedures.

Furthermore, when situations for FG are not positive, students may end up distrustful of their campus and those around them (Coston et al., 2013). Keyla continued by discussing how misadvising led to her being delayed in the transfer process to a 4-year university:

So, they're just like small things where you know you kind of don't need certain things. Like I remember there was this one class because I also went to another community for a semester, and there was one class my counselor told me, I had to take, and everything. And then, in the middle of the semester, some math courses, the professor was like we have to sign this petition to get this fast counted as a GE because if it's not then you guys are just going to be taking this class for nothing. Then, in the end, it ended up not counting so this wasted like a whole semester and a whole class.

Keyla is emphasizing here the fact that she was advised to take math courses by one of her advisors, which led to her wasting a semester after finding out the course didn't count toward her major or general education requirements. Unfortunately, these types of mishaps occurred often for transfer students, which can delay their transfer pathway. For an FG student like Keyla, accurate advising was essential because there was no one else to verify whether she was taking the right courses apart from staff and faculty she already trusted. The once again highlighted the disadvantages FG students have in their transfer pathway and how it is essential that students are provided with accurate and transparent information.

My next participant, Kim, had similar experiences to Cat and Keyla. Kim also has FG status, which resulted in multiple setbacks and hardship during her first year at her receiving university. Kim enrolled at a CSU as a second-year student. She self-identifies as Filipino

American. We talked about her first two semesters at her university and the difficulty of her transition to the university. As the first member of her family to attend college, Kim had limited knowledge of how to navigate institutional policies. Additionally, her first semester began during COVID-19, so she was more isolated than students usually are from their university. Due to her lack of support and help, Kim was put on academic probation after her first semester. Kim's experience reflected transfer shock (Wheeler, 2019), which is when transfer students experience temporary drops in grade point average during their first semester:

I started in fall of 2020, but I feel like I didn't fully engage myself until like this year. Any help actually I did on my own it's mainly because I did not know that I could go to the counseling office to probably ask for help, but I guess I independently did it at the same time. I guess I didn't know who exactly to pinpoint and ask for help. I mean I could find it, but if it wasn't as easy in front of my face, or I could just be like oh, I know who, that is.

Kim had access to a service to ask for help but she was unsure of where to begin, given that everything was virtual during her first semester due to COVID-19. Given transfer students' limited knowledge of their new campus, it is vital that university leaders make services and things accessible to them. The university sent Kim emails about the services, but the tone of the emails intimidated her, or they did not seem relevant to her. The email was generically written and most likely auto-populated to reach general students. In turn, she ignored the emails and did not attend advising during her first semester, which resulted in her being put on academic probation the following semester. According to her:

I feel like they may have been emailed on Outlook, but because those seem generic to me, I didn't really know which one to go to. I read one email that felt more personal, I think it was a female advisor and Albert for my academic probation but those felt like personal emails like someone's really reaching out to me, to make sure that I know how to get on top of my stuff. Right, so that's where

I was like okay, I'm going to get on this. They even sent me a link, which made it really easy for me to get it done.

All Kim needed was a friendly approach from the staff to help her cope with the feelings of loneliness and culture shock that comes with transferring to a new university.

Unfortunately, the appointment did not come until after she was placed on academic probation. Additionally, she noted that the instructions for booking her probation appointment were very detailed and advisors had to contact her. According to her, the female advisor's email tone was more friendly than the male advisor's tone. Also, it was helpful that the instructions were very detailed on how she could book an appointment for her academic probation. These points are important because FG students are not as knowledgeable to their new environment as their CG peers. As such, FG students may require step-by-step instructions on how to find their way around the campus. Also, it is important to approach these students gently and without judgment since their setbacks might cause them to feel shame to ask for help (Holden et al., 2021). When speaking with Kim, as our conversation turned emotional when we discussed her FG identity and her parents' education level:

I'm a first-generation college student. Yeah, I am. It feels really isolating sometimes. My parents, they oh my God, I didn't know I'm getting emotional. I wish I had a role model like people, I'm familiar with those who have graduated college. Yeah, you have to be really independent and do it yourself, most of the time growing up. I wouldn't say so, because I'm already used to it, but like talking about it out loud, I'm so sorry I don't mean crying while talking about it, I didn't know how much it affected me. I don't really know. I only know one member of my family who graduated college, it is like my cousin. Everyone else I like growing up, wants it to be like a nurse or whatever, but most of my family are like you know, like retail food.

Kim's emotional reply about her family background is representative of FG transfer students and their journey as students. Her life was so hectic, and she was going through the

motions of working and starting at a new university that she did not have time for reflection. This also relates to the burden that FG transfer students carry with them each time they enter the classroom, which could distract them from their studies. This is evidence from Kim being placed on academic probation. Her emotions arose from her realization that she has been very much alone throughout her transfer journey and only has herself to rely on. This demonstrated again the importance of providing FG students with the emotional support and resources they need during their transition to their receiving university (Maliszewski & Hayes, 2020).

The three FG participants all shared the hardship of being alone in their transfer pathway. However, Cat was motivated by her FG status and her parents to succeed as a provider for both her and her family. In contrast, Keyla encountered hardships as an FG student because she was misinformed by her community college about textbooks and advising requirements. Without guidance from her receiving university, Kim experienced transfer shock and she had to develop a strong sense of self-reliance. The students may feel emotionally burdened by reflecting on their journey through mishaps. According to these participants' experiences, it is essential to pay close attention to FG transfer students because they require many resources to succeed as students. In the next section, I discuss the experiences of CG transfer students as compared to FG students.

Continuing Generation Transfer Students

I spoke with six CG transfer students, and their experiences were different from those of the FG students. Generally, each narrative described few challenges CG students experienced during their time at either community colleges or 4-year universities. The students were able

to navigate resources and had a smooth transition to their receiving university. As a first-semester student, Clare already knew where to turn when she needed support. Clare self-identified as Filipino and a CG student. Her older sister and parents all attended college, so they helped her with the application process, and she credited her success to the academic advising she received from her business department. After completing two semesters, Clare described her experience so far at her receiving university:

It wasn't as hard as I thought. I guess it was pretty smooth, yeah. I guess the application of it all was pretty smooth just transferring all my transcripts and making sure everything is aligned and everything that I need or that I've completed at past schools was covered. Because I have other schools transferring from Santa Rosa junior college to Santa Barbara city college.

Clare's answer illustrates the importance of parental support for students. The resources that CG transfer students obtain from their families makes it easier for them to navigate university resources. Institutional affirmation of alternative forms of capital such as familial and aspirational capital and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), becomes a recognition of the talent and assets historically marginalized students do possess. For the FG students, institutional recognition of various forms of capital or assets is an area worthy of consideration in education practices. Institutions could re-center practice that develop a transfer student's navigational capital with an understanding of the assets and potential they already possess (Yosso, 2005; Mobley and Brawner 2019). This underscores the importance of institutional support for FG students as they may not have the same access to information or experiences with institutional norms and practices as CG students. For example, Clare knew about the importance of advising in relation to her experience at her 4-year university during her first semester. According to her interview:

Oh yeah, they're super, they're very clear, advisors in the success center are very clear and precise of what you need, and they will write it down send you it and it's so clear you can't miss what else you need. The advisors are very clear with their instructions on what else you need to graduate and your options. If you don't take something in the summer and then you need to take it next semester, they can make sure that you can still graduate if you want to graduate at this time, this is the plan you stick to it.

Clare's answer stressed the importance of advising for transfer students, as it gives them proper guidance and steps needed to meet their degree requirements. Kim's narrative about her first-semester experience as an FG student is consistent with how most transfer students are unaware of advising services on their campus; students like Clare are fortunate to have older sisters or parents who have been through the process and are able to help lead the students there. Likewise, Asha is a second-year student at a CSU. Asha self-identifies as a CG student and as an Indian American. Both his parents hold bachelor's degree, and he attributed his seamless transition to his receiving university to them:

So, my parents, my father graduated from. SAC state and my mom graduated from the University of Punjab in India. I'd honestly say through a lot of colleges any question that I've ever had in regard to, especially my GE courses my parents were always there to answer. You know a few courses that were major-specific that they weren't able to answer some questions, but you know, for the most part, growing up, if I had liked math history English. Questions that they were generally there and offered me some help.

Asha's answer illustrates the divide between CG students and FG students that can be created by *navigation capital*, which is the ability for students to maneuver through institutional policies and procedures (Mobley & Brawner, 2019; Yosso, 2005). Students without support from outside the university need extra assistance from the university. Further, this notion contributes to the importance of familial cultural capital for CG students in my sample; they depended on their parents or older siblings for assistance with navigating

the institutional setup. CG students who are estranged from their families have experience similar to those of FG transfer students. This was exemplified by two of the CG participants, James and Ken, who both identified as Asian American and CG. Despite their CG status, they did not have parental support given their strained relationship with their parents. They learned to navigate life on their own or to rely on other sources to make up for what they lacked in parental support. According to James, he did everything once he was on his own, including completing school applications:

This is gonna dive into some personal issues and, like family issues but uh there's a lot of strain between me and my family, so I don't ever ask them for support. They're very overbearing. I feel like if I wanted to support, I could get it from them, but that's not my preference. I would rather get support from friends, peers, counselors, stuff like teachers and professors. Yeah, I think I did basically everything on my own there are like some points where it has.

Ken also mentioned how his conflict with his father affected his identity as a CG student:

In all honesty, my mother, my father divorced when I was one. So, I don't necessarily have the closest relationship with my dad. You know I see him every once in a while, but, you know, he lives in the East Bay, so I don't get a chance to see him too often. I've talked to him um, so it wasn't necessarily that like first-generation kind of college, you know.

The two comments highlighted how distant the participants feel from their parents and how they do not ask for their help. Despite belonging to the CG classification, James does not benefit from his CG status; as such, James could be classified as an FG student. Edger (2019) emphasized the importance of transfer students' intersectional identities and how each of component can affect their experience. To properly serve students, it is crucial that every part of their identity be taken into consideration. Ken and James demonstrated this notion without navigation capital, such as familial capital; they shared the same experiences as FG students and needed the same guidance in resources. In order to determine what services are

appropriate for the students, schools must attend to their various identities. In the last section of the interview data analysis, I discuss themes related to institutional support that participants thought were either helpful or absent.

Institutional Support at Community Colleges

As part of the interview sessions, each participant had the opportunity to reflect on the kinds of institutional supports that would have been helpful to them at both community colleges and 4-year universities. Their answers were based on their experience and what they felt could be greatly improved. The common themes were mentorship, advising, and support groups that meet the needs of the older students.

Starting with Luna, who believed that transfer readiness courses were the most beneficial support from her community college. The courses offer course content that helps students at the college who are interested in transferring. According to her interview:

The class called ensuring transfer success. Those two classes give me a lot of information, but still, you know the guidelines for us. I still had to do my own research about universities and that was pretty hard.

Luna stated that her college offered two courses that served as the foundation for students interested in transferring and the school also offered courses for students wishing to transfer to a CSU and a UC institution. Students like Luna, an FG college student, and students from immigrant families who were unfamiliar with the college application process benefited from the courses.

At his city college, Ken reported that services available to him and his classmates to help with the transfer process were unclear. Most community colleges have a transfer center that provides resources and guidance on how to transfer to a 4-year university. In addition, the

centers work with most universities to provide transfer students at community colleges with information about the university through outreach and campus visits. Unfortunately, Ken did not learn about the center until he left the institution and heard it from this friend:

There is a little flyer that has anything to go to the transfer center but then when you're ready to transfer. I was at the city college for 6 semesters. I think about the only time I ever really heard about the transfer center. Other than that, I hear about it after transferring.

Moreover, Ken mentioned how the college did not provide enough information to students about the associate degree of transfer (ADT), which is a degree designed to streamline the transfer process for students. It guarantees admission to either a CSU or a UC university for transfer students in California who completed general education requirements (Baker, 2016). Rather than advertise the degree, Ken believed that the school was trying to deter students from pursuing it:

In a sense, I don't know if you hear this from other students but maybe in a sense, it's a rumor but it says it's kind of believable from my point of view. At least from our college what I heard, they were just trying to push out people with just associate's degrees, not even like I didn't know what an associate's degree with the transfer as I have never informed him that I was just told, oh hey, you did these classes, here's your associate degree, you don't go do whatever you want. Um, I was never told what an associate's degree for transfer was until my girlfriend who went to skyline what she told me about and it's like oh, I could have done that, and it would be like faster process. But yeah, I kind of like you know I went to talk to the counselor at my college, you know after waiting like a month or two to wait for that appointment.

According to Ken's narrative, he was disappointed that he was not given a chance to pursue an ADT, which is a fast-track to earning a bachelor's degree within two years of transferring. The degree is efficient in the sense that courses are planned for students. Furthermore, transfer students who remain in the same major at their receiving university receive the ADT incentive. As a result, students can take fewer credits at their new campus

because fewer credits are required. More than half of transfer students with the ADT have a higher chance of earning a bachelor's degree within 2 years (Gallegos, 2022). When the degree is applied appropriately, the general population of transfer students has the advantage of staying on track for transfer. Unfortunately, Ken did not have the opportunity to earn an ADT because of the lack of advertising on campus. Ken's experience underscores the importance of making sure services are visible to students. Colleges can accomplish this in most cases, and many participants discussed the resources available to them, including mentorship from former students, to guide them through the transfer process.

Tam, a student at a community college in Concord, discussed mentorship that helped her with the application process. Tam describes herself as an Afghan American and she is in her second year of college. At the time of our interview, she had been admitted to UC Berkeley, which she credited to the mentorship program her college had with UC Berkeley; this program enabled her to speak to former transfer students to receive mentorship. One challenge, however, that she encountered during the application process was the essay. The essay portion was difficult for her, and she did not receive much assistance from the school:

The biggest challenge for me was the essays, like what do they really want. For us to write about what should I not write about, because I know that there's that as well, but of course, I didn't want to just write what they want me to write. I want it to be, you know my own experience, my own application, but at the same time, I knew that there were certain things that you probably shouldn't write that could impact your application process, so I really had to do tons of research on my own. I went over them, I think I started a month in advance, or so and I just kept continuously changing.

Tam's narrative reflects the anxiety transfer students experience during their application process. Although colleges may provide mentorship to help students prepare for the transfer process, colleges may fail to help with application writing requirements. Because only UCs

and private institutions required transfer students to do the writing portion in their application, 20% of students at community colleges transferred to a UC and more than 32% applied to CSU (Gallegos, 2022). Thus, colleges do not emphasize assisting students with the essay portion of the application, which involves multiple prompt questions. The essay portion can be difficult because there are different topics that students must review with prompts to show their qualifications for admission. Tam asked for students to receive diverse services when it comes to the application process.

Sarah identifies as Latino American, and she is a second-generation college student. At her community college, she was referred to a group called that Transfer Alliance that was helpful and checked in on her throughout her stay there. According to her, “the Transfer Alliance project definitely has helped me along the way, just double-checking me throughout my time on campus.” Sarah attributed her success to them because they were supportive of many significant events during her time at the college. At UC Berkeley, students are paired with other students as part of a mentorship program that helps them with the transfer process. Through the mentorship program, she gained an understanding of what university life was like. As a result of her involvement with the group, Sarah hopes she will be admitted to the university for the fall semester.

According to Sarah, her college valued the importance of providing a sense of belonging to students from day one. Moreover, a sense of belonging is crucial for transfer students because the transfer pathway can be isolating for FG students (Coston et al., 2013). To the students, belonging to a community or group is what gives them a sense of belonging. The Transfer Alliance gave Sarah that feeling since day one, which provided her with a strong

foundation for her to be successful and eventually led to the transfer process. Students who feel a sense of belonging to their campus are more likely to succeed compared to students who feel disconnected (Shaw et al., 2018). The transfer students in my study did not experience a sense of belonging once they arrived at their receiving universities. Many participants discussed this during their interviews, most of whom were older students. In the next paragraphs, I discuss the common theme of transfer students feeling a lack of sense of belonging at their 4-year university. I also address other services that the participants desired from their institutions during their transition to the university.

Institutional Support at the 4-year University

During the interview sessions, I spoke to seven students who completed their first years at the 4-year university, and they had a lot of feedback regarding the services they received during their transition. The students' appreciation for orientation at their receiving campus was the first common theme. Students felt well-informed and welcomed by their receiving campus. This notion highlights the importance of attending to students' needs and welcoming them to receive positive feedback. Orientation events took place among departments within the college major. At these events, students had the opportunity to learn about advising programs and course requirements. James was particularly enthusiastic about the event and said it made him more excited about his program. According to him:

The event was the one that helped me out in a sense of welcoming, where they said congratulations, you got accepted, and here's what we do next. There was one for business school orientation and I got to meet the advisors. So that was one thing I actually really appreciated.

In his comment about orientation, James emphasized how important it was to welcome transfer students on their first day on campus. Even though a year had passed, he still

remembered the event clearly, which indicates the effect the event had on him. Many institutions host orientation events because they believe that establishing familiarity will ease transitions. Typically, the session includes meeting with advisors and providing information on tools and resources for transfer students. Most universities lack the bandwidth to conduct orientation over multiple days, so orientation usually only lasts a day. Although orientation is memorable for transfer students like James, once the semester begins, most students have difficulty retaining information from the event. As a result, Clovis and Chang (2021) recommended that universities make use of their faculty and staff as allies to their students. Additionally, they recommended maintaining positive momentum for students. However, most participants in 4-year programs expressed dissatisfaction with their faculty, staff, and service.

Malia, a Hawaiian and second-generation student, expressed frustration about the service at her university. As a part of our interview, Malia mentioned that the lack of consideration given to older students like herself was one of the reasons she was dissatisfied with on-campus services. As an unconventional student, Malia is much older than most students in her class, and she feels lonely at times because she did not make any connections with other students. She stated that most of the other students in her class are first-year students.

According to her, that makes it difficult to make friends:

To be frank, it's been a few though um I would say the average age, in one of my classes are freshmen. They are like 18, 19 to 20 is usually the age range that I'm finding most of my peers and most of the people who I'm associating with. I don't know that I mean like yeah that's cool you're close-ish to my age, but where are my people who can go to bars with me and go drink and stuff like that. But you know, so the age range is a little bit younger, and it does feel a little awkward.

Students like Malia have asked universities to be sensitive to older students. From her perspective, older transfer students are underrepresented on their own campus. According to data from 2008, approximately 27.3% of transfer students aged 25 and older are on the transfer pathway to earning their degree (Shapiro et al., 2015). Although older students make up a small percentage of campus attendance, they do require significant services that address the multiple facets of their identity. They also have additional responsibilities associated with their age. Therefore, they require support and assistance from the university. Malia asked for social support because her classmates were much younger than her, which made it difficult to form friendships with them. She wants her university to create a group or a space where other students closer to her age can form alliances and meet new people.

Then there are students like Ava need both social and academic support. Due to her many obligations, Ava says being an older transfer student can be challenging. As a result, sometimes the responsibilities can be a distraction from the learning:

It's draining every time we have to select classes, we have to think about how they're going to fit into our lifestyle, personal responsibilities we have, work and familywise, especially if you're the oldest, you don't get the freedom. That you would want to just to explore every possibility out there and then you have to have time because if you're younger you have more opportunities for more time to figure things out; if you're not you have to consider well what's realistic and what isn't. So yeah, we carry our identity and our personal baggage all through the entire process of getting our degrees.

In her statement, Ava talked about the difficulty of selecting courses because meeting times conflicted with childcare, work, and other obligations. Ava wished that administrators made it easier for students to select courses and that the university was more inclusive of older students who are unable to be on campus until the evening due to their morning responsibilities. These students also need social support because they are trying to balance

other life obligations with their schoolwork. Their obligations also get in the way of having time to socialize with their classmates. This gap between the students can be difficult. Malia alluded to the age gap when she discussed the average ages of her classmates. Ava felt similarly:

I think my gap in terms of social interaction is because I relate more to my professors than I do with my fellow students. Finding people my age was very difficult, in fact, when I did find one or two, I get overjoyed because they understand where you're coming from. But interacting with younger people it's very difficult to bring your perspective and have it be accepted because you're the oddball in the group. What you're thinking might not be what is relevant to them and so it's difficult I think if one of the questions was like if there is anything that can bridge that gap, would be to have. A sort of sense of community for just people around my age. Between maybe 25 to 35 maybe even 27 to 35 and older I've seen.

Ava and Malia advocate for campus social groups to encourage social interaction between students ages 25 to 40 years due to the difficulty of forming connections between older and younger students. Their narratives summarize the need for institutional support to go beyond mere academic support. For the 4-year university to provide social support, they need to ensure that students have a platform to engage with their peers. Participants from my study outlined suggestions to improve services, such as a new organization group or weekly evening events for the students. This relates to how important a sense of belonging is for transfer students on their receiving campus (Viramontes, 2021). In the absence of belonging, students may experience serious issues such as transfer shock, which has a long-term impact on academic performance. It was evident that Kim was put on academic probation because she had no support group and felt very isolated during the distance learning. By creating social capital for students, a sense of belonging is cultivated among each other. In the next section, I analyze survey data and discuss how the findings related to my research questions.

Survey Data

A survey of transfer students' satisfaction with their institutions was distributed to students and disseminated through my professional networks between August 2020 and October 2021. There were 11 questions in the survey, six of which were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Likert scales allow respondents to indicate their stance toward a statement, which, in this case, was about their satisfaction with their institution. The other five questions covered demographic information regarding race/ethnicity, age, and financial aid status. Table 2 presents respondents' demographic information. The rationale behind asking about participants' demographics was to determine whether the survey participants identified with the general transfer student population. The general transfer student population typically belongs to one of three categories: underrepresented minorities; military personnel, veterans, and their families; and low-income and FG members (Fematt et al., 2021; Sandelli, 2017). Furthermore, Questions 1-5 helped me understand how each participant self-identified and how that may have affected how respondents rated their satisfaction with their university. The survey is included in Appendix D.

It is important to note that this survey was conducted during the first year of COVID-19, in the summer of 2020, and ended in Fall 2021, when the pandemic had been ongoing for 2 years. During the initial COVID-19 outbreak, schools, including universities and community colleges, scrambled to switch to a distancing learning model. Furthermore, student services and classrooms were transferred to Zoom. Over time, COVID-19 and the learning model became the "new normal." Zoom has continued to serve as a major platform for the last three years since COVID-19 began (Lederman, 2020). As a result, survey data were heavily

Table 2*Survey Participant Demographics*

Variable	n	%
Current enrollment		
University	45	83
Community college	9	16
Ethnicity/race		
Black/African American	4	7
Asian	19	35
Hispanic/Latinx	19	35
Multiracial	7	13
Other	5	9
Age group		
20–30	42	77.7
30–40	9	16.7
40–50	3	5.6
Financial aid recipient		
Yes	37	68.5
No	17	31.5

influenced by the COVID-19 and how the respondents felt about distance learning or the new normal. As such, survey results may not represent the students' feelings if the pandemic did not happen. Moreover, respondents' assessment of the services, staff, and faculty could have been affected by their feelings about distance learning and not the standard services they would have received before COVID-19.

Table 2 shows that very few survey respondents were from community colleges; rather, the majority of survey respondents were from 4-year universities. The survey results are, therefore, more representative of 4-year university transfer students. Furthermore, my research aimed to understand the services provided to transfer students during their transition period, so I focus on the 4-year perspective for this section. Nonetheless, I also present an overall view of respondents' race/ethnicity, age, and financial aid status to understand how

each demographic category affected students' views. Tables and charts that summarize the results of the combined survey from both institutions are in Appendices E to I.

The response rate for this survey was 41.5%, and among those who started the survey, 65.5% completed the survey. The sample was comprised of nine respondents from community colleges and 45 respondents from universities who were transfer students. As a result, perspectives from transfer students at universities were more heavily represented in the survey data.

Self-reported survey results were essential because they gave a snapshot of the components of respondents' identity. In the context of transfer students, these social categories can impact how they interact with their learning environments (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014). Findings from survey data indicated that self-identified social categories correlated with how respondents assessed services and support at their universities. To that end, in the next section I discuss how each category impacted respondents' answers to questions regarding student services.

Findings from Survey Data

Q6: "My Institution Provides Services to My Needs"

This question assessed how satisfied students were with frontline student services at their schools. Typically, these services are provided by advising, Bursars, Financial aid, and other offices that interact with students daily. I developed this question to determine if students felt that their universities met their needs as transfer students. McGuire and Belcheir (2013) argued that one-size-fits-all services do not meet students' needs because universities are unable to meet the various individual needs of each student based on their identity. The needs

can be classified as supporting class registration, advising, payment processing, and financial guidance.

Among respondents at 4-year universities, 55.56% agreed with the statement that their institution met their needs (see Tables 3 to 6 in Appendix E); only 4.4% disagreed that campus services met their needs. In addition, 22.2% felt neutral about campus services. COVID-19 could have been a contributing factor because distance learning became the predominant model and prevented students from attending classes on campus when my survey was conducted. As a result, some students may not have even been using campus services when they completed the survey. Neutral answers could also indicate a lack of confidence in the subject to either agree or disagree with the assessment.

Respondents' demographic information was considered regarding how demographics might have influenced their answers. That is, the intersectionality of SES with race, gender, and family concerns plays a major role in transfer students' academic success and experience (Powell et al., 2021; Sandelli, 2017). For example, about 68.5% of participants reported receiving financial aid from universities. Within that group, 51.4% expressed satisfaction with services provided to them on campus. Students may have been satisfied with financial support, such as scholarships and other forms of aid, to meet their financial obligations. With financial aid, students can take a full course load without worrying about conflicts with their work schedule. This is what researchers are referring to when they discuss meeting the needs of the students. Based on Q6, it appears that students are most satisfied when universities cater to their individual needs as challenges such as finances can inhibit students' learning.

Q7: “I Felt Welcome by the Staff and on Campus”

This question assessed students’ perceptions of their interaction with staff on their campus. It provided information regarding the central role that the staff play in transfer students' transition to 4-year universities. Campus staff can create an environment where students feel comfortable and welcome. Furthermore, this question related to the ongoing discussion of how to provide student services to transfer students and what type of model should be used by universities. Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) emphasized that many universities tend to place all their students into a one-size-fits-all model. However, such models of student services tend to work best for traditional first-year students. In most cases, transfer students are assumed to be independently familiar with university policies and procedures or they are viewed as freshmen with no college experience. It is essential to meet the students where they are because students bring different levels of exposure to universities. Therefore, the one-size-fits-all model does not work for transfer students.

In response to Q7 regarding feeling welcomed by staff, 55.6% of respondents were satisfied with their interactions with the staff on campus, and 9.5% strongly agreed that the staff made them feel welcomed (see Appendix F for Tables 7 to 10). However, 33.3% were neutral about their staff interaction. Thus, students seemed to be relatively satisfied with their interaction with staff on campus.

Of the 55.6% of respondents who agreed that they felt welcomed by staff, 36.8% were Hispanic/Latinx and 75% were Asian. Based on these results, minority transfer students sampled in this study appeared to be satisfied with their transition receiving campus. To contextualize these findings, it is helpful to operationalize what it means for transfer students

to feel welcomed, especially for racial minority students who often feel overlooked by the university policies and procedures. According to Hiraldo (2010), the feeling of value with each interaction and a sense of belonging on campus is beneficial for racial minority students. Institutional power can reinforce this notion and how the students can be made to feel valued (Hiraldo, 2010). As a result, racial minority students such as Asian and Hispanic/Latinx students indicated a sense of satisfaction with the staff on their campus in this survey.

Something worth noting is the number of responses to Q6 and Q7. For both questions, there was equal agreement in the level of satisfaction, with both questions receiving 55.6% of participants reporting being satisfied with services and staff. This may indicate that student satisfaction can come from feeling happy with services meeting their needs or satisfaction can come from staff interactions. One explanation for this is that perhaps the students who responded to this survey had attended a university with a student services model that met their diverse needs.

Q8: “I Felt Welcome by the Faculty on Campus”

The purpose of this question was to clarify the interaction between faculty members and transfer students. This assessment goes beyond the instruction and assesses whether faculty impacted transfer students by creating a welcoming environment in their classroom. Creating a welcoming classroom environment for transfer students is aligned with a Transfer Students Community Learning (TSLC) model. This model addresses how to foster a climate both inside and outside the classroom that allows transfer students to socially engage with others during their transitional period (Thomas et al., 2018). Another part of the model is that

faculty build engagement factors into their curriculum. Furthermore, this question evaluated if faculty at the 4-year universities followed this model and student's assessment of it.

Students' responses are shown in Tables 11 and 14 in Appendix G.

Data showed that 44% of respondents agreed that the faculty on their campus made them feel welcome, and 17.8% of participants strongly agreed with the statement. Only 2.2% of students disagreed that the faculty made them feel welcomed, and 35.6% of respondents reported being neutral about their interaction with faculty on their campus. These results indicate that, overall, transfer students do not seem to have a positive view of their interactions with faculty on campus. This could mean that faculty have limitations when creating a TSLC model in the classroom. Another explanation could be that there are some restrictions in the curriculum for the faculty to accomplish this model. It could also mean that more training is needed for faculty to foster a welcoming learning environment for transfer students. Implementing a TSLC model does not necessarily have to start with the classroom; it could begin with interactions between faculty and students.

TSLC models address the importance of faculty changing the dynamics in relationships with students, which can be difficult because some faculty can come off as intimidating to students due to the power, they have in grading policies and procedures (Thomas et al., 2018). However, faculty presenting themselves as an ally for students during their transitional period to a new campus could help harvest their relationship for a long-term partnership.

Q9: “I Know Where to Go on Campus When I Need Help”

This question was designed to have better understanding on how students navigate campus when they need assistance from staff and faculty. This question also centered on the importance of navigation capital (Yosso, 2005) for transfer students, which was also a theme in the interview data. Navigation capital describes students’ knowledge of how to move through institutional structures, including policies and practices. Universities need to assist students by increasing their capital through knowledge and skills so students can navigate services effectively and independently. This question is also about building trusting relationships with students, so they know that they have someone to turn to during stressful times (Castro & Cortez, 2017). See Appendix H (Tables 15-18) for a breakdown of responses to Q9.

When it comes to knowledge of their campus resources, 20.0% of respondents agreed that they knew how to get help when it was needed on campus. Meanwhile, 57.8% of participants expressed feeling neutral about their campus navigation skills. Lastly, 12.41% of respondents strongly disagreed that they knew where to find information on campus while 7.41% did not agree. Across the six survey questions, Q9 had the most disagreement in terms of satisfaction when assessing their experience on campus. This could mean more work and development to improve the result.

Results from Q9 indicate that students were not as familiar with the resources on campus. This could be related to the group of students responding to these questions. As noted in the literature review, transfer students’ exposure to institutional structures varies depending on their experiences (McGuire & Belcheir, 2013). For example, students in the community or

technical college group who have never attended a university often does not have the necessary skills to navigate university resources. According to McGuire and Belcheir (2013), one way to address this issue is to make certain services more visible to students through school websites and email communication. These things are a part of developing and increasing navigation capital for the students. Lastly, the results could also reflect limitations of distance learning as resources and services were often provided virtually during COVID-19. The changing educational landscape might be challenging for students when they need to find assistance. This is something universities could consider when preparing for future pandemics.

Q10: “I Feel a Sense of Belonging Toward My Institution”

As a continuous assessment, this question measured students’ satisfaction with their campus and their connections to their campus, staff, and faculty. The sense of belonging for transfer students is a critical factor in their transfer pathway, as revealed by the interview data analysis. Older students such as Malia and Ava described their disconnection from their younger classmates, which can affect students’ learning experience. As a result, universities can help students by making them feel like they have an on-campus support system and that they are a part of a community (Shaw et al., 2018). It is also about creating an inclusive space on campus for the students to feel welcomed.

This question asked about two types of belonging: the physical space and the connection students feel toward it. Feeling accepted by their peers, staff, and faculty can help students feel a sense of belonging to their university (Lee & Schneider, 2017). These results can be

used to determine students' satisfaction with campus services, both academically and socially. Results from Q10 are shown in Appendix I (Tables 19 to 22).

Among the survey respondents, 33.3% agreed that they have a sense of belonging toward their campus. Meanwhile, about 51.1% of participants felt neutral about their sense of belonging on campus, indicating that many students felt indifferent about their campus. Therefore, students may need more help with forming a connection to their university or more needs to be done to change this perspective from the students. However, results could also be attributed to the lack of engagement for students in the classroom or social engagement opportunities across campus. As Ishitani and Mckitrick (2010) explained, one of the critical factors in creating a sense of belonging for students is social engagement between staff, faculty, and peers. Social engagement amongst peers and faculty is a critical aspect of student success and academic pursuits, more so for those students who are marginalized. Higher education co-curricular programs must be relevant and must nurture genuine peer and faculty engagement and relationship building.

Another reason why so many respondents could have selected neutral is because the students themselves did not have time to engage with their campus. Among respondents who disagreed with Q10, about 56.8% were financial aid recipients. As such, it is reasonable to argue that these participants are working students who might not have time to engage with activities on campus to help them develop a sense of belonging. Perhaps, this is why they chose to be indifferent due to not having time to engage in the campus activities. This would suggest that universities need to plan their events or activities that can accommodate for the working students' population.

Overall Assessment of the Survey

Based on the overall assessment of the survey, it appears that most transfer students feel somewhat positive toward their institutions. For example, student responses to the first two questions regarding services meeting their needs and their interactions with staff showed a positive trend, with 55.56% of respondents agreeing that services and interactions met their needs. This finding suggests that universities are making positive changes toward the staff and services that transfer students receive during their transition.

When it comes to other aspects of their experiences, transfer students who completed the survey reported feeling indifferent about those experiences. Neutral was the most frequently selected response by respondents to questions regarding faculty interactions, sense of belonging, and knowledge of campus services. This is a sign that more work needs to be done by universities to make sure that students have positive feelings toward their faculty and their learning environment. As the literature illustrated that developing a sense of belonging for transfer students is a matter of creating engagement factors and a matter of making a space where the students feel that they can be themselves (Lee and Schneider 2017).

Conclusions for Interview and Survey Data

When the interview and survey data were combined, they revealed some aspects of the stage of the transfer pathway. As a result of how some students positively evaluated their experiences in both data sets, the path was not as inadequate as in the literature review. However, issues related to COVID-19 may have influenced the survey. That is, participants' responses were influenced by the learning distance model, which some respondents had an adverse reaction to while other respondents found it generally acceptable. Therefore, survey

data were only used to support findings from the interview data because survey data do not provide as much context in comparison to interview data; interview data allowed me, as the researcher, to follow up for more in-depth assessments of their answer.

The participants positively evaluated advising services at the 4-year university and transfer readiness courses at the community colleges; both helped students with the transfer process and transition period. Furthermore, more insight was gleaned from the interview data when assessing transfer students' experiences. In contrast, the survey data provides a small snapshot of students' satisfaction with their experience. Based on the data, the transfer pathway requires consideration of transfer students' multilayered identities. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I explore this further.

Summary

The qualitative methods of interviewing and surveying were presented in this chapter. The themes developed from the literature sources and data about the transfer students' experiences were analyzed through deductive coding. Themes related to personal, social, and academic challenges were heavily influenced by the student's identity and how it constructed their ability to move and to adapt to their surroundings in both life and school (Edger, 2019). In the interview data, transfer students' narratives provided an understanding of their transfer journey and pathway to 4-year universities. The data highlighted many positive and negative aspects of the transfer pathway for transfer students in this sample. Participant interviews also revealed that students' experiences were mainly defined by trial and error. However, despite setbacks, most participants managed to persevere, which was evident in how they developed aspirational and social capital for themselves and others.

The survey data were analyzed from a qualitative perspective, which is about me, as the researcher attempting to provide a narrative to accompany the numerical results. Results were also influenced by COVID-19 and distance learning. In Chapter 5, I use results from the two research methods to answer the three research questions about how to enhance student services for transfer students. Finally, I propose recommendations that will assist with making those changes possible.

Conclusion, Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

In this chapter, I explore key findings from the interview and survey data. In addition, I deepen my understanding of the findings and transfer students' needs during their transition to a 4-year university. A small sample of transfer students participated in both the survey and interviews to provide their lived narrative and assessment of the services and supports available to them during their transfer pathway. Results are used to make recommendations for future practices and programs regarding transfer students' services at 4-year universities.

This qualitative study aimed to explore the services and supports available to transfer students during their transfer pathway, which begins at the community college and ends at the receiving institution. In addition, I focused on racial minority transfer students and components of their identity to better understand the systemic inequities that these students often face. The framework of CRT (Ladson-Billings, 2005) served as the lens for analyzing the findings from the data collection.

Through the data analysis, I provided details about disparities that are established in the data and reinforced the previous reference. Educators within the public education system must work to ensure that all students achieve equitable results. As the mission of community colleges was to create opportunities for racial minority groups (Clovis & Chang, 2021), this study was intended to address this process and uncover the lived experiences of racial minority transfer students. I hope that this research leads to changes in services offered to transfer students and more collaboration between 4-year universities and colleges to create a better student experience through action plans.

Summary of Key Findings from Research Question 1

Research Question 1 addressed similarities and differences in the lived experiences of transfer students with regards to supports offered by community colleges and 4-year universities. The question captured whether transfer students receive consistent services from colleges and universities. Findings indicated that the sampling participants from community colleges and universities somewhat shared similar experiences based on their shared intersectionality in identities. Furthermore, the sampled FG transfer students encountered more academic challenges than their CG peers. This is consistent with research showing that racial minority transfer students are most likely have academic and social engagement barriers in transfer process (Nuñez et al., 2011). Data from my study also showed that community colleges offer more services to prepare transfer students for their pathway than are offered by 4-year universities during the transition period. Transfer students are motivated to be one another's social capital after their own experiences. In the following, I further explore each of these points.

Racial Minority Transfer Students

Students at community colleges and universities who are racially and ethnically diverse with multiple, intersectional identities (i.e., immigrant students, low SES individuals, and FG students) shared many similar experiences. Their difficulties relate to academic, social, and individual barriers. For example, Luna, Ava, and Adan all work and attend school while trying to establish a social life. Given how these students have difficulty maintaining a social life due to their work schedule, more financial aid is needed through the transfer system at both community colleges and 4-year universities (Yazdani et al., 2021). Support and

assistance could come in the form of scholarships, grants, and/or tuition waivers; such support can relieve students' financial concerns that prevent them from socializing or adapting to their learning environment.

Issues related to financial hardship were evident with Ava who is in her last year at the university while having to work to provide for her family. She often worries about her next meals, and she faces challenges to obtaining stable employment due to her limited work hours as she is an undocumented immigrant. Because she is undocumented, she has to continue to reapply to DACA and await approval. The anxiety she experiences while waiting for approval hinders Ava from fully concentrating on her schoolwork. Her narrative demonstrates the additional hardship transfer students experience outside the classroom that often goes unrecognized at most institutions. Her story reflects the general transfer student population, which is made up of working-class individuals who struggle with balancing school and work (Edger, 2019; Yazdani et al., 2021). Factors outside the classroom need to be considered when discussing improvements for transfer students. A part of the improvement is providing student support that goes beyond academic support and helps students to cope with challenges outside the classroom.

First-Generation and Continuing Generation Transfer Students' Experiences

According to the interview data, the sampling FG students are experiencing complications when navigating the institutions. For example, one of the participants, Kim, self-identified as an FG student and was placed on academic probation after her first semester. Kim brought many assets to her receiving university as an FG student, such as aspirational capital and perseverance. However, the key ingredient missing for Kim to

succeed is the university's support to develop her navigational capital. As an FG student, she was timid in asking for assistance from faculty and advisors. Kim is thus at a disadvantage against her peers, who have support outside of the classroom.

Consequently, she is more prone to experiencing transfer shock (Ann Clovis & Chang, 2021; Berger & Malaney, 2011; Ishitani, 2008; Wheeler, 2019; Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018). The setback Kim experienced during the first semester was interpreted as academic probation. Transfer shock can be reduced by recognizing students need assistance, creating a safe space, and bringing engagement where students feel comfortable asking for help when needed.

Keyla also demonstrated similar experiences in her community colleges before transferring to her current 4-year university. She is an FG student who went straight to community college after high school and had no idea what college was like. She encountered misadvising from faculty, staff, and advisors regarding policies and procedures, courses, and textbook requirements. Keyla's experience reflects the need for institutions to be consistent with their FG transfer student advising and services as transfer students rely on these services to survive. Meanwhile, the CG transfer students reported positive experiences during the transfer process because they had prior knowledge of the procedure from their family members.

CG students such as Clare and Asha had a seamless transition to their reviving institutions. A transfer student's ability to adapt to a new campus is enhanced when older siblings or parents support them. Because these students engaged campus resources such as advising, they stayed on track to graduate within 2 years. In contrast, CG students without

parental resources encountered difficulties related to their transfer transition. This shows that additional support agents can facilitate a smoother transfer student pathway.

Transfer Students Services Throughout the System

Transfer students experience an uneven distribution of services and support throughout the transfer system. According to survey data from this study, 55.56% of transfer students agreed that their school offers them the services they need. Based on the interview data, it is evident that 4-year universities are lacking services to assist transfer students when they arrive at their new campus. Across interview participants, only orientation events were remembered as a helpful service at the beginning of their first semester. In addition to orientation, other long-term services need to be created for these students. Without more visibility, transfer students may be unaware of services available to them during their first semester.

At the community college level, the students have a different experience with services. In some colleges, students can take courses that serve as a foundation for the transfer pathway and prepare them for the application process. The colleges also use a mentoring model that allows transfer students at community colleges to be paired with university students to learn more about the transfer process. For example, the Transfer Alliance program mentioned in one of the interview sessions gives transfer students a sense of community and support at the community college level.

Summary of Key Findings from Research Questions 2 and 3

Research Questions 2 and 3 shared common themes, including the importance of accounting for transfer students' racial identity. Therefore, I discuss the two questions

together. Data from participant interviews revealed that students' identities are multilayered and intersectional and often require specific needs for each component (i.e., FG, low SES, and marginalized racial groups) (Edger, 2019; Yazdani et al., 2021). A critical lens facilitates an understanding of how each identity component affects students' ability to learn and adapt to the campus environment. CRT is known for that aspect in higher education by fostering diversity and inclusion (Hiraldo, 2010). To emphasize this idea even further, universities need to view the components as interlocked. Therefore, having a clear understanding of students' identities and the various components of their identity can provide knowledge about how to better serve them. For example, with students like Ava who is both a Dreamer and an FG student, these two parts of her identity require emotional support to help her cope with the stigma of her citizenship status as well as helping her develop navigation capital for the process of earning her university degree.

Meeting Students' Central Needs

Based on interview findings, FG transfer students are often unfamiliar with the institutional structures and procedures at their universities. Additionally, external resources such as parental or mentorship are often unavailable to them outside their institution. At the beginning, it is vital for the 4-year university to offer a platform for students to receive information about resources. According to the interview data, students at the university level desire long-term support (i.e., beyond just orientation day) to enable them to retain information about their receiving institutions.

A second point for universities to consider is that most of the transfer students have had to work to either support themselves or their families. These students usually work in the

morning and attend classes in the evening. However, the times that evening courses are offered are often restricted. Thus, the students have to wait until the next semester to fit into the university schedules. Ava emphasized that it is important to offer courses that fit into students' schedules, so they maintain the same graduation timeline as other students who do not take courses during their working hours.

Social Capital for the Transfer Students

Participants in my study shared aspirational cultural capital that is associated with perseverance despite adversity during the transfer period (Yosso, 2005). The students representing the majority of transfer students inspire other students to develop their own aspirational capital. They emphasize the importance of building connections among themselves. Social capital for transfer students has to do with establishing a network of people who can provide both instrumental and emotional support during the transfer process (Mobley & Brawner, 2018; Yosso, 2005). Participants like Ava and Luna both expressed the importance of paying it forward to their successors, as they themselves have experiences of feeling isolated. Furthermore, they want to make sure that others have a smoother transfer pathway compared to their own. Malia and Ava are also advocating to increase social capital for older transfer students. Both expressed feeling disconnected from their younger classmates, and they wanted a platform to meet other classmates their age. This finding highlights the importance of providing social support along and academic assistance for the students. The two elements are vital to the transfer student's success as they serve as the foundation for students to adapt to their new campus. By providing social and academic support, the universities are eliminating transfer shock and creating a sense of belonging to

the students (Berger & Malaney 2003; Clovis & Chang 2021; Ishitani, 2008; Wheeler, 2019; Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018).

Implications for an Action Plan

Implications from this study suggest the need for changes in the experiences of racial minority transfer students who are transitioning to 4-year universities. In the following sections, I outline a plan that universities across California can adapt as a part of the push to improve the transfer pathway. These changes can be implemented in the upcoming years because there are ongoing movements led by UCs, CSUs, and California community colleges for the state to reevaluate the transfer process across the system. Systemic improvements across the three systems could make the transfer process simpler and help students build their self-efficacy. I believe my plan can help this movement accomplish these goals, and my plan will enable transfer students to learn more effectively during their transitional period.

Creating Partnerships

At present, community colleges and 4-year universities work separately to serve transfer students (Baker, 2016; Jenkins & Fink, 2015; Mullin, 2012). Due to that, students have been misinformed at times about transfer requirements. Moreover, the application process was not properly explained to them as evidenced in the interview data. Partnerships between community colleges and 4-year universities are necessary to provide consistency across services for transfer students and to make sure they know what is required of them. Mary J. Alvarado, executive vice chancellor of education service for California Community College, pointed out that educators are only complicating the transfer process for students. In her words, “the students bear the burden of understanding the structure in our system and

navigating the maze that we have created” (Gallegos, 2022, p.1). Thus, both organizations need to be in constant communication to provide clear information to students in the transferring process and to provide support throughout the transition period. This will involve a central communication line that both organizations can access when needed. The action item for the development plan is to establish monthly meetings between leadership groups, such as chancellors, deans, and presidents, from both institutional organizations to keep each other informed of all the changes to policies and procedures surrounding transfer students.

Supporting Program for Transfer Students

The second component of my plan is for universities and community colleges to create a supporting program that focus on the transitional period for transfer students. This will provide students with valuable information about applying to universities as well as learning about universities before they apply. Such plan could be modeled after programs offered at the community college level, such as the Transfer Alliance group. Furthermore, the program will include services such as mentorship where students can learn from each other, the transitional period will be seamless as they know what to expect during their first semester. In particular, FG transfer students need extra assistance and resources to navigate a four-year university during a transition period (Coston et al., 2013). Therefore, the program can also provide emotional support for transfer students who may have a hard time adapting to their new campus. Mentors in the program will be trained to address important matters such as transfer shock, low motivation, and any other factor could hinders students from having a successful transfer pathway. The supporting programs could provide social and academic

support for the students, then that will ensure that every transfer student has the resources needed to succeed in their first semester.

As part of this program, schools can pair students at community colleges with transfer students who just completed their first semester at 4-year universities. It will be a valuable learning experience for community college students before they transfer to universities. The outreach department at universities could assist with the recruitment of transfer students who just completed their first semester. Student mentors can work with these students for about a semester, though students could continue the mentorship after their first semester. By pairing students, social capital (Yosso, 2005) will be increased for transfer students throughout the system. Because the mentorship can help to establish a strong network among students, this action plan may eliminate the transfer shock that students may feel. A social group that meets the needs of all students would be formed and would include older and FG college students, among others. This action plan will hopefully foster stronger partnerships throughout the California transfer system to ensure the success of transfer students.

Recommendation for Future Studies

The research I conducted only scratches the surface of the lived experiences of transfer students. Further work is needed to support their success. It is essential to explore the differences in experiences between FG and CG students in future research. My data illustrate similarities and differences in the student groups, and how the students are deeper than their labels suggest. For example, interview data revealed that familial capital can affect students' experience because CG without familial capital experience the same things as their FG peers. A deeper exploration of the relationship between the two groups and the concepts of

navigation and familial capitals (Yosso, 2005) will be an enriching topic that could help bring light to the conflicts surrounding the transfer student's pathway.

Transfer students' experiences at 4-year universities also need to be continuously studied. Based on my research over 3 years, I find the narratives of transfer students to be limited and more focused on community college transfers. For there to be improvements in transfer students' experiences, there needs to be more focus on 4-year universities. Furthermore, if educational leaders in California are serious about improving the collective transfer student experience, research needs to be conducted equally across groups to ensure that the voices of transfer students are heard from the start of their journey to the completion of their degree. Data need to be collected for students and how they adapt to their new environments. Given that my research only focused on transfer students during their first semester at the university, further research is needed to understand how to support students in their third and fourth semesters with meeting their central goal of earning their bachelor's degree.

Conclusion

This qualitative study was designed to understand the lived experiences of racial minority transfer students and to facilitate their transition to a 4-year university. Initially, I hypothesized that universities could do more to improve their own performance. This assumption was based on the transfer shock that occurred for students following their transfer. Nevertheless, the results of this study helped me to see that it will require a collective effort from everyone within the system. As sending institutions, community colleges play an important role in assisting transfer students as they prepare to transfer and as they integrate into their new academic environment. Data from my interviews and survey

provide further evidence that community colleges have attempted to prepare their students for transfers to their receiving colleges. The process involves transfer readiness courses and mentorship around the application process. Collaboration between the two organizations is needed to educate students about more than just the application process. Additionally, it is crucial to help transfer students understand what to expect during the post transfer period so that they have a smooth transition.

In their role as receiving institutions, 4-year universities should invest in and learn about transfer students. One starting point to understand the needs of racial minority transfer students and to determine how to best serve them. There are signs that 4-year universities are taking notice, and discussions around improving the transfer pathway in California are gaining momentum. I hope that this momentum continues. Moreover, I hope the CSUs, UCs, and community college system continue to work collaboratively to create a sustainable and inclusive transfer pathway for transfer students. Once this notion is achieved, this research will serve its purpose of advocating for equitable results for all transfer students.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Flyer, Email and Consent Notice

Transfer Students Needed!



Dissertation Research Recruitment
Looking for Transfer Students who :

- Getting ready to transfer to a four-year university
- Identify as racial minority students.
- Belong in the age group from 20-40.

Share your story and be a part of the discussions and solutions in achieving transfer students' success. For more information, contact Hanh Tran at hanh.m.tran01@sjsu.edu



Transfer Students Needed!



Dissertation Research Recruitment
Looking for Transfer Students who :

- Completed their first semesters at a four-years university.
- Identify as racial minority students.
- Belong in the age group from 20-40.

Share your story and be a part of the discussions and solutions in achieving transfer students' success. For more information, contact Hanh Tran at hanh.m.tran01@sjsu.edu



Greeting Students,

I hope that you have a fantastic start to your Fall 2021 semester. My name is Hanh Tran, and I am an academic advisor for the Lam Family College of Business and a doctoral candidate in the Ed.D program at San Jose State University. I am looking for transfer students who just transferred to a four-year university to learn about their student's experiences through interviews and surveys.

The survey should take no longer than 10 minutes. You can access the survey by going to the link here: https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8ksylzdboO3Y15Y

If you are interested in sharing your story for this research and be part of the interview, you can contact me directly at hanh.m.tran01@sjsu.edu. Thank you so much for your interest and participation.

Best regards,

Hanh

Hanh Tran
Doctoral Students
San Jose State University

CONSENT NOTICE for Transfer Students

TITLE OF STUDY: A qualitative inquiry into racial minority transfer students

NAME OF RESEARCHERS

Hanh Tran , Ed.D student at San Jose State University. Dr. Eduardo Munoz as faculty supervisor.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to uncover the steps and resources in supporting the transfer students during their transition to a four-year university. The goal of this study to ensure that the transfer students receive the essential resources and guidance from the institutions to have a successful transfer pathway to earning their degree.

PROCEDURES

You will be participating in a 30-minute zoom interview about your experience as transfer students. The interview is semi-structured with follow-up questions. The interview will be recorded for Transcribe purposes. The interview will take place during the month of May 2021.

COMPENSATION

There is no compensation for your participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

No one will have access to your information beside myself as the researcher and my faculty supervisor. Your name and identity will not be revealed in the written-up report. Pseudonyms will be given in the report. Your institution will not be associated with your responses. Please note that as mandator report of the California State University, if any information disclose are possible Discrimination, Harassment, or Retaliation, I will have to report it.

YOUR RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University or your institution. You also have the right to skip any question you do not wish to answer.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Please feel free to contact either me or Dr. Eduardo Munoz if you have any questions about this research. We can be reach at eduardo.munoz-munoz@sjsu.edu , (408) 924-4066 and (510) 418-2443, hanh.m.tran01@sjsu.edu

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

Your completion of the study indicates your willingness to participate. Please keep this document for your records.

Appendix B

Interview Questions for 4-year Transfer Students

<p>How would describe transfer students and their identity as students?</p>	<p>Has the interviewee explained why their description of the students ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -talk about first-generation college students -ask them if they were a transfer student themselves -should the students be considered as transfer students or regular students -does the label “transfer student” matter in how you serve the student
<p>In your perspective, what makes transfer students different compared to other students?</p>	<p>Ask the interviewee how much they interact with Freshmen and does it impact their perspective of transfer students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -do you think you have
<p>How does your role connect to supporting transfer students during their transition to the university?</p>	<p>Name one program that support freshmen that you wish were given to transfer students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -central needs for transfer students
<p>What do you know about the concept known as “transfer shock”?</p>	<p>Provide some examples for transfer shock:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - social anxiety and lack of sense belonging -do you notice any challenges from the students -what else you wish to learn about the transfer students before serving them
<p>Based on your interaction with transfer students, what you would consider is the most challenging part about their transition to the university?</p>	<p>What do you think is the root of these challenges come from?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -does race play a factor -does economic status factor -or being first generation college student -does it matter when if they come from a com
<p>How can the university start by supporting transfer students?</p>	<p>How can we get people on campus to be on board with this idea?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -should we start will campus engagement for the students -would creating a center for just transfer students make a different -would budget play a factor for the campus lack of support for the students - how can you start with your current role to help the student

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Community College Students

<p>How would you define your transfer student experience?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -ask the interviewee about their choice in adjectives - follow up on their story. -Talk about one memorable of your experience. -Talk about how the participant feels about the labeling of “transfer students” -why did you choose to apply to this university
<p>2.What type of institutional support that you felt was helpful during your transitional period?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Follow up with the things that were not helpful about the system. -Give examples if the participant is not able answer the questions -Which support was helpful in term of socially or academically
<p>3.What were some of the challenges that you encounter during your transition to the university?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What factor could have made a different during those time -looking what would you had done differently -do you think it was more of socially or academically -were these challenges something that you anticipant before your transition to the university
<p>4.How was your interaction with the faculty and staff at the institution?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -how are the interaction difference from each other? -Compare it to the community college -did you share the same race as the staff and faculty -do you think that would have made a different
<p>5. what race or ethnicity do you identify with?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> _Ask if they identify as first-generation college student. -Discuss the multiple layers of transfer students -discuss about first generation college -low income
<p>6.How has your identity impact your transfer pathway?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -what other factor could have changed their experience -negative elements -positive elements Did you notice it among your peers ?

Appendix D

Survey for Transfer Students

Please indicate your support for the following statement regarding student services at your institution. By using the scale of 1 to 5 to show support.

- 1- disagrees
- 2-strongly disagreed
- 3 -neutral
- 4-agreed
- 5- strongly agreed

I am current a transfer student at a _____ (4 years university or community college)

I belong to the age group _____(20-30 or 30-40)

I am currently receiving financial aid at my school _____(Yes or No)

I identify with the following racial demographics _____(please list your racial/ethnicity identity)

1. My institution provides services to my needs as a transfer student.

1 2 3 4 5

2. I felt welcome by the staff on campus.

1 2 3 4 5

3. I felt welcome by the faculty on campus.

1 2 3 4 5

4. I knew where to go on campus when I needed help.

1 2 3 4 5

5. I feel a sense of belonging toward my institution.

1 2 3 4 5

6. Please provide any additional information for any statements above .

Appendix E

Tables for Survey Q6

Table 3

Q6 My Institution Provide Services to My Needs (Institution Types)

Scale	4-Year	CC
Agreed	55.6%	55.6%
Strongly Agreed	17.8%	11.1%
Neutral	22.2%	22.2%
Disagreed	4.4%	0
Strongly Disagreed	0	11.1%

Table 4

Q6 My Institution Provide Services to My Needs (FA Recipients)

Scale	Yes	No
Agreed	51.4%	64.7%
Strongly Agreed	2.7%	11.8%
Neutral	24.3%	17.6%
Disagreed	2.7%	5.9%
Strongly Disagreed	0	2.7%

Table 5

Q6 My Institution Provide Services to My Needs (Ethncity/Race)

Scale	African American/Black	Asian	Hispanic/Latinx	Multiracial	Other
Agreed	50%	68.4%	36.8%	42.9%	5.5%
Strongly Agreed	50%	15.8%	15.8%	14.3%	0
Neutral	0	15.8%	36.8%	28.6%	0
Disagreed	0	5.3%	5.3%	14.3%	0
Strongly Disagreed	0	5.3%	5.3%	0	0

Table 6*Q6 My Institution Provide Services to My Needs (Age Groups)*

Scale	20-30	30-40	40-50
Agreed	57.1%	44.4%	66.7%
Strongly Agreed	11.9%	44.4%	0
Neutral	23.8%	11.1%	33.3%
Disagreed	4.8%	0	0
Strongly Disagreed	2.4%	0	0

Appendix F

Tables for Survey Q7

Table 7

Q7 I felt Welcome by the Staff on Campus(Institution Types)

Scale	4-Year	CC
Agreed	55.6%	55.6%
Strongly Agreed	13.3%	11.1%
Neutral	28.9%	33.3%
Disagreed	4.4%	0
Strongly Disagreed	2.2%	0

Table 8

Q7 I felt Welcome by the Staff on Campus (FA Recipients)

Scale	Yes	No
Agreed	54.1%	58.8%
Strongly Agreed	16.2%	5.9%
Neutral	27%	35.3%
Disagreed	0	0
Strongly Disagreed	2.7%	0

Table 9*Q7 I felt Welcome by the Staff on Campus (Ethnicity/Race)*

Scale	African American/Black	Asian	Hispanic/Latinx	Multiracial	Other
Agreed	75%	57.9%	36.8%	85.7%	60%
Strongly Agreed	25.0%	15.8%	15.8%	0	0
Neutral	0	26.3%	47.4%	14.3%	20%
Disagreed	0	0	0	0	0
Strongly Disagreed	0	0	0	0	20%

Table 10*Q7 I felt Welcome by the Staff on Campus (Age Groups)*

Scale	20-30	30-40	40-50
Agreed	57.1%	55.6%	33.3%
Strongly Agreed	9.5%	33.3%	0
Neutral	33.3%	11.1%	33.3%
Disagreed	0	0	0
Strongly Disagreed	0	0	0

Appendix G

Tables for Survey Q8

Table 11

Q8 I felt welcome by the Faculty on Campus (Institution Types)

Scale	4-Year	CC
Agreed	44.4%	55.6%
Strongly Agreed	17.8%	22.2%
Neutral	35.6%	22.2%
Disagreed	2.2%	0
Strongly Disagreed	0	11.1%

Table 12

Q8 I felt Welcome by the Faculty on Campus (FA Recipients)

Scale	Yes	No
Agreed	40.5%	58.8%
Strongly Agreed	21.6%	11.8%
Neutral	35.1%	29.4%
Disagreed	0	0
Strongly Disagreed	2.7%	0

Table 13

Q8 I felt Welcome by the Faculty on Campus (Ethnicity/Race)

Scale	African American/Black	Asian	Hispanic/Latinx	Multiracial	Other
Agreed	50%	47.4%	31.6%	57.1%	80%
Strongly Agreed	50%	15.8%	21.1%	14.3%	0
Neutral	0	36.8%	47.4%	28.6%	0
Disagreed	0	0	0	0	0
Strongly Disagreed	0	0	0	0	20.0%

Table 14

Q8 I felt Welcome by the Faculty on Campus (Age Groups)

Scale	20-30	30-40	40-50
Agreed	50%	33.3%	33.3%
Strongly Agreed	14.3%	44.4%	0
Neutral	35.7%	22.2%	33.3%
Disagreed	0	0	33.3%
Strongly Disagreed	0	0	0

Appendix H

Tables for Survey Q9

Table 15

Q9 I Know Where to go on Campus When I need Help (Institution Types)

Scale	4-Year	CC
Agreed	20%	22.2%
Strongly Agreed	4.4%	11.1%
Neutral	57.8%	33.3%
Disagreed	8.9%	33.33
Strongly Disagreed	0	0

Table 16

Q9 I Know Where to go on Campus When I need Help (FA Recipients)

Scale	Yes	No
Agreed	21.6%	17.6%
Strongly Agreed	2.7%	11.8%
Neutral	62.1%	35.3%
Disagreed	2.7%	17.6%
Strongly Disagreed	10.8%	17.6%

Table 17

Q9 I Know Where to go on Campus When I need Help (Ethncity/Race)

Scale	African American/Black	Asian	Hispanic/Latinx	Multiracial	Other
Agreed	0	21.1%	10.5%	57.1%	20%
Strongly Agreed	25%	10.5%	21.1%	0	0
Neutral	75%	47.4%	68.4%	14.3	60%
Disagreed	0	0	10.5	14.3	0
Strongly Disagreed	0	15.8%	0	0	0

Table 18*Q9 I Know Where to go on Campus When I need Help (Age Groups)*

Scale	20-30	30-40	40-50
Agreed	19%	22.2%	33.3%
Strongly Agreed	7.1%	0%	0
Neutral	52.4%	66.7%	33.3%
Disagreed	0	0	33.3%
Strongly Disagreed	11.9	11.1	0

Appendix I

Tables for Survey Q10

Table 19

Q10 I feel a Sense of Belonging toward my Institution (Institution Types)

Scale	4-Year	CC
Agreed	33.3%	33.3%
Strongly Agreed	6.7%	11.1%
Neutral	51.1%	33.3%
Disagreed	0	22.2%
Strongly Disagreed	4.4%	0

Table 20

Q10 I feel a Sense of Belonging toward my Institution (FA Recipients)

Scale	Yes	No
Agreed	41.2%	29.7%
Strongly Agreed	2.7%	8.1%
Neutral	29.4%	56.8%
Disagreed	0	5.4%
Strongly Disagreed	11.8%	0

Table 21

Q10 I feel a Sense of Belonging toward my Institution (Ethncity/Race)

Scale	African American/Black	Asian	Hispanic/Latinx	Multiracial	Other
Agreed	50%	66.7%	80%	57.1%	50%
Strongly Agreed	0	0	0	0	0
Neutral	50%	47.4%	16.7%	43%	50%
Disagreed	0	0	0	0	0
Strongly Disagreed	0	15.8%	0	0	0

Table 22

Q10 I feel a Sense of Belonging toward my Institution (Age Groups)

Scale	20-30	30-40	40-50
Agreed	38.1%	22.2%	0
Strongly Agreed	7.1%	0%	0
Neutral	40.5%	66.7%	95.5%
Disagreed	9.5%	0	0
Strongly Disagreed	4.8%	11.1	0

Appendix J

Coding for Themes

Participants	Academic	Social	Individual
Adan	FG, Tuition, working obligation	Adapting and cultural shock	Self-sufficient, working obligation, immigration experience, aspirational capital, FG
Asha	CG, Advising , faculty interaction	Covid and distance learning	Familial, Navigation capitals ,and CG
Ava	FG, Transfer readiness, misadvising, mental health, and scheduling of courses	Needs for older students, social capital	Self-sufficient, working obligation, immigration experience, aspirational Capital and Dreamer, FG
Cat	FG, Tuition, delay of transferring due, and advising	Leaving familiar environment and social capital	FG, financial barriers, Familial , aspirational capitals , racial identity
Chen	Classes load, transfer credits not accepting, advising	Social capital ,Adapting and cultural shock	FG, financial barriers, Familial , aspirational capitals , racial identity
Clare	Advising, CG experience with environment	Social capital	Familial, Navigation capitals ,and CG
Malia	Advising, student services out of reach	Older student experience and social capital	GC experience, navigation capital
James	Advising, orientation, faculty interaction, ADT	Social capital	GC experience as FG, needs familial capital for nag aviation capital
Ken	Advising, orientation, faculty interaction, ADT	Social capital	GC experience as FG, needs familial capital for nag aviation capital
Keyla	Misadvising, tuition, FG, interaction with faculty and staff	Social capital for FG	FG, financial barriers, Familial , aspirational capitals , racial identity, navigational capital
Kim	Academic probation, advising, FG experience, transfer shock	Work life balance with social life	FG, financial barriers, Familial , aspirational capitals , racial identity
Luna	Scholarship, advising, transfer readiness courses, application research	Balancing work and social life	Self-sufficient, working obligation, immigration experience, aspirational capital, FG
Sarah	Advising, application challenges, mentorship , transfer readiness, faculty interaction	Sense of belonging and social capital	CG, aspirational and navigational capital
Tam	Advising, application challenges, mentorship	Social capital through mentorship	CG, aspirational and navigational capital