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Addressing the equity gap in California community colleges' transfer pathways: a transfer center guide for supporting underrepresented student success

Nune Mikayelyan

Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

ADDRESSING THE EQUITY GAP IN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES'

TRANSFER PATHWAYS: A TRANSFER CENTER GUIDE FOR SUPPORTING

UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENT SUCCESS

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Nune Mikayelyan

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Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

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Nune Mikayelyan

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Doctoral Committee:

Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D., Chairperson

Gabriella Miramontes, Ed.D., Co-Chair/Committee

Maria Brahme, Ed.D., Co-Chair/Committee

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EDUCATION

Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

California State University, Northridge
Master of Public Administration: Concentration – Public Sector Management and Leadership

California State University, Northridge
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology

Los Angeles City College
Associate of Arts, Social and Behavioral Sciences

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Umoja/Genderversity Coordinator
Los Angeles City College, Los Angeles, CA

Transfer Center Director
West Los Angeles College, Culver City, CA

Student Services Assistant
Los Angeles Mission College, Los Angeles, CA

Senior Secretary
Los Angeles Pierce College, Woodland Hills, CA

ABSTRACT

California Community Colleges (CCC) are integral in ensuring student enrollment, persistence, and subsequent higher education degree attainment. As one of the most affordable institutions of learning, community colleges symbolize access to various degree and certificate completion options, transfer opportunities, vocation and remedial education, as well as workforce training. However, a high percentage of students, especially from underrepresented backgrounds, systematically falls short of the set institutional guidelines and do not complete a degree or transfer within the expected timeframes. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the effective strategies utilized by CCC transfer center directors (TCDs) for supporting underrepresented student transfer efforts. Several dimensions of the transfer process were examined through an equity lens, including institutional and individual factors, as well as policy implications in the established transfer center functions. The interviews conducted with study participants revealed the challenges and opportunities associated with facilitating transfer efforts on-campus and revealed best practices for new practitioners coming into the field. Some of the main themes that emerge, such as lack of awareness regarding available resources, negative self-perception, and financial implications can act as perceived and real barriers in the pursuit of transfer success. Providing holistic support programs and comprehensive services in terms of transfer exploration and preparation can greatly mitigate these roadblocks, especially for underrepresented community college students.

Keywords: community college, student success indicators, transfer center, underrepresented student groups, Guided Pathways

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Community colleges are at the forefront of providing postsecondary access to more than 40% of all undergraduate students in the nation with continued projections of growth in the coming years (Baker, 2016; Baker et al., 2018; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020; Velez et al., 2018; Yu, 2017). In addition to open access, these degree-granting institutions of higher education have also been a gateway to social mobility for historically underrepresented student groups, who comprise a sizeable portion of the overall enrollment (Baker et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2014; Romano & Eddy, 2017). Zamani-Gallaher and Chouhuri (2016) provide the breakdown of community college enrollment: 36% first-generation students, 33% Pell Grant eligible (numbers can vary drastically per region), 45% students of color, and 17% single parents. These enrollment trends are often directly tied to the open system's admission policy, lower cost, remedial academic support, and local availability (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Grubbs, 2020; Nakajima et al., 2012; Romano & Eddy, 2017). Grubbs (2020) has also emphasized various pilot programs and scholarship opportunities geared towards offering free tuition to community college students as a way of increasing post-secondary attainment.

However, despite the clearly outlined benefits of community colleges, some scholars have discussed the role these institutions play in further reinforcing higher education's unequal structure (Grubbs, 2020). For example, the mere expectations set forth for students' postsecondary attainment are based on perceived social advantages (Bozick et al., 2010). According to this perspective, students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds elect university and other premier programs, while disadvantaged students attend community colleges. In fact, a

comparative analysis conducted by the NCES (2018) indicates more non-traditional students attending 2-year public colleges compared to 4-year universities.

For example, about 60% of the student body were independent, and about one-third had dependents themselves or took a gap year after high-school completion. Further examination of postsecondary enrollment trends and degree attainment has shown significant disparities based on race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and parents' education level (Baber, 2018; Bailey et al., 2015; Wyner et al., 2016). Advisors, faculty, and support staff tend to play an integral part in encouraging the pursuit of university-level undergraduate opportunities instead of promoting realistic expectations for historically underrepresented students (Grubbs, 2020). So, a significant concentration of public 2-year colleges is tied to the improvement of labor market outcomes, which tend to be higher for individuals who possess college degrees (Baker et al., 2018; Umbach et al., 2019). Further discussion about supporting students will examine this topic in greater detail.

When conceptualizing community college student success from the persistence, completion, and transfer to 4-year institutions perspective, the aforementioned statistical implications become particularly salient. Baker (2016) noted that two-thirds of first-time community college students do not obtain a degree or credential within six years, while the staggering majority (around 80%) had indicated transfer as their primary educational goal. Transfer students, for the purposes of this context, are students who have attempted and/or completed more than 12 units of transferable college-level coursework since high school graduation. The discussion will predominantly pertain to vertical transfer or students who transfer from a 2-year public institution to a 4-year university (Crisp & Delgado, 2014). Though, it is important to note that completion and transfer are not merely outcomes that happen in a

vacuum. Transfer student success is rather a combination of methodical processes that comprise the student experience from beginning to end. The myriad of academic and/or external challenges faced by these non-traditional students who aspire to transfer is often accompanied by various institutional hurdles, resulting in low attainment (Baber, 2018; Davidson & Wilson, 2017). Thus, scholars and professionals of higher education have brought forth the importance of understanding community college student needs and developing evidence-based services for supporting their academic goals (Baber, 2018; Romano & Eddy, 2017). This emphasis on completion and vertical transfer focuses on scaling up high-impact practices that engage stakeholders at various levels of the institution by careful analysis of student success courses, learning communities, first-year experience workshops, and various support/co-requisite courses (Hatch & Bohlig, 2016).

Equity considerations in community college research are far-reaching, especially in underrepresented student vertical transfer rates to 4-year undergraduate institutions (Cortez & Castro, 2017). Baker (2016) argues that transfer pathways tend to be one of the most complex outcomes to navigate. Not only do students need to familiarize themselves with the structural components of community college transfer opportunities and agreements but also university requirements outlined for program admission. Thus, labor market demands and lower than expected transfer or baccalaureate completion rates often entail the need for effective support systems and services for students who intend to transfer (LaSota & Zumeta, 2015). As discussed, there is a greater chance of successful degree completion and transition when student background and pre-college characteristics (e.g., race, high school GPA) are taken into account. Though, Yu (2017) and Baker (2016) also emphasize the importance of institutional characteristics, such as size or tuition rates, as well as overall student college experience (e.g.,

attendance or work hours). Therefore, the following discussion will address CCCs' overall mission, enrollment trends in terms of retention and completion, labor market implications on program offerings, and an overview of the transfer center function at 2-year institutions. This conversation will set the stage for effective strategies in transfer pathway implementation and practices in supporting underrepresented or non-traditional students transition to 4-year institutions.

Historical Context

Grubbs (2020) noted that the development of community colleges has played a crucial role in providing equitable higher education opportunities and might even embody the egalitarianism of the entire system. The American community college got its roots at the beginning of the 20th century and served as a catalyst for developing a more trained workforce in the growing industries (Cohen et al., 2013). As an extension of secondary schools, most community colleges were trade and preparatory schools for general education completion that still educate numerous nurses, skilled workers, medical technicians, or police officers every year (Bailey, 2018; Grubbs, 2020). One of the basic principles that permeated the institution at the time was producing tangible benefits to individuals and society, as knowledge acquisition and application were perceived as an opportunity for upward mobility. Thus, the easily accessible and affordable public colleges flourished on the established expectations and internalized the traditional values accepted in modern community colleges.

There were distinct phases of community college growth and advancement: the early founding period of the early 1900s, a national organization period followed by expansion in the mid-19th century, a vocational focus that occurred from 1971 to 1985, and the current post-industrial era (Goodwin, 1973; Grubbs, 2020). College classes used to take place in high school

classrooms and were pioneered through community advocacy efforts like local voters and chambers of commerce. The historical narrative of community colleges, also known as junior colleges, credits William Rainey Harper for the idea of granting an associate degree for the first two years of college-level coursework and transfer to 4-year institutions for major preparation (Taylor & Jain, 2017). According to Goodwin (1973), the emphasis during this phase was placed on social efficiency as a way of achieving productivity. The term became synonymous with individualism or purpose (individual contributions), coordination of efforts, and association (combination) during these initial stages of junior college formation. Professionals took a systemic approach to higher education governance, as well as advocacy, through which the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) was established (Grubbs, 2020). The association plays a pivotal role in relaying 2-year colleges' mission to the public, government officials, and other stakeholders, thus dispelling myths of limited offerings and creating a semi-professional or vocational curriculum.

The following period of growth between 1920 and 1947 was characterized by the upheaval in the country's economy and World War II (WWII; Bailey, 2018; Goodwin, 1973). According to Goodwin (1973), the economic depression experienced in the 1930s only supported junior colleges' mission in easing unemployment and advancing social intelligence by improving individual competencies and attitudes. The discussion surrounding terminal degrees and continued access to higher education began surfacing more often through presidential-appointed committees, which also coined the term community colleges (Grubbs, 2020). This was a concerted effort to remove any geographic or economic barriers on the way of educational attainment and assist members of the community who cannot complete a traditional 4-year degree. Developments after the 1950s followed a similar path, where community college

offerings were noted as one of the most important developments of postsecondary education and an enhanced learning opportunity for community groups.

Funding opportunities have always been an important point of consideration for public institutions. The late 1960s commissioned the first concrete legislative efforts by enacting the Higher Education Act of 1965 and allocating money for large-scale developments in the community college sector (Cohen, 1999; Grubbs, 2020). The directive called for the creation of commissions that would coordinate institutions and program provisions to qualify federal funding. These councils were also the foundational plans for state master plans, which described the organizations' funding strategies and shared responsibility through state governing entities (Cohen, 1999). The plans centered around curriculum guidelines, student success strategies, and various other standards were rationalized through the equal opportunity and strengthening the workforce lens. There have been several amendments made to the Higher Education Act of 1965. Among the most important provisions of the said changes include the extension of Pell Grant eligibility for part-time students, dedicated grants for Hispanic serving institutions, and other scholarship opportunities for students enrolled in 2-year colleges.

The period around the 1970s was characterized by an increased concentration on trade and technical skills in alignment with corporate or industry supports and various specific skill training programs (Grubbs, 2020). However, vocational prominence permeated through other systems of higher education as well, expanding funding opportunities with the intention of alleviating unemployment rates once again. Changes in program offerings occurred once again when the national economy moved towards technological advances and service sector jobs. Thus, there is a constant need for evaluating new and projected trends and aligning public 2-year

college program offerings to match the skillsets necessary for successful employment prospective and 4-year university admission.

Modern-Day Institutional Mission and Structure

Consistent with the historical mission of open access and promotion of educational attainment for the surrounding communities, the mission of community colleges has expanded tremendously (Grubbs, 2020). There are various focal points and program offerings that provide workforce training, high-school equivalency, continuing and occupational education, associate degree options, and transfer preparation (Cohen et al., 2013; Grubbs, 2020). Increasing undergraduate degree attainment, however, has received considerable attention from policymakers at the national level (LaSota & Zumeta, 2015). State legislature has also worked tirelessly to design and implement improved performance metrics and transparency measures with respect to institutional cost versus performance. Baker (2016) alluded that increasing retention and persistence rates have been an issue for community colleges. Thus, several measures are being designed and implemented to address these challenges, like more structured curricula and academic pathways. However, according to Wickersham (2019), community college students appear to be less than linear, so in addition to vertical transfer, they also tend to pursue lateral transfer, con-enrollment and swirling. For example, about one-third of students who had entered a postsecondary education program and obtained a bachelor's degree around 2010 had left their initial institution and elected to attend another one (Zhang et al., 2018). Moreover, recent concerns about completion and transfer also pertain to undergraduate degree attainment. Studies have shown that students who attend a community college before transferring to a 4-year institution are also less likely to earn a baccalaureate degree, even when taking enrollment status, expectation, and other factors into account (Allen et al., 2013, Handel, 2014).

As such, it is evident that there has been a shift from mere opportunity to access higher education courses to persistence and completion. Developing awareness of student enrollment patterns and aspirations can result not only in increased institutional accountability but also better support and guidance.

California Community Colleges

Providing educational opportunities within specific geographic boundaries has been a fundamental right, so lack of access denies the local community the means for economic advancement and civic engagement (Hoggatt, 2017). In addition to wasted potential and missed prospects, limited opportunities can also result in further marginalization of already underserved groups.

According to the CCCs Chancellor's Office (CCCCO, 2020a), the CCC system is the largest in the nation, with more than 2 million student enrollments in 116 colleges across the state. The CCC sector symbolizes its historic mission of providing access; however, it also caters to students who not only aspire to develop their basic skills but also seek to transfer to 4-year institutions (Boland et al., 2018). California is also one of the leading higher education systems in terms of other private non-profit and for-profit, as well as public institutional offerings, consisting of 10 University of California and 23 California State University campuses.

Another primary goal outlined by the CCCCO (2020a) is the importance of social mobility and combating inequality by providing career and technical education training for securing employment. Consistent with Figure 1, CCCs enroll the highest number of low-income students compared to other institutions of higher education (Public Policy Institute of California [PPIC], 2017). The demographic composition of the CCCs is also reflective of the demographic

characteristics of the state itself, with the majority of students of color and first-generation,

beginning their postsecondary journey at a community college (Boland et al., 2018; PPIC, 2017).

Figure 1

Enrollment in Higher Education Institutions Based on Income
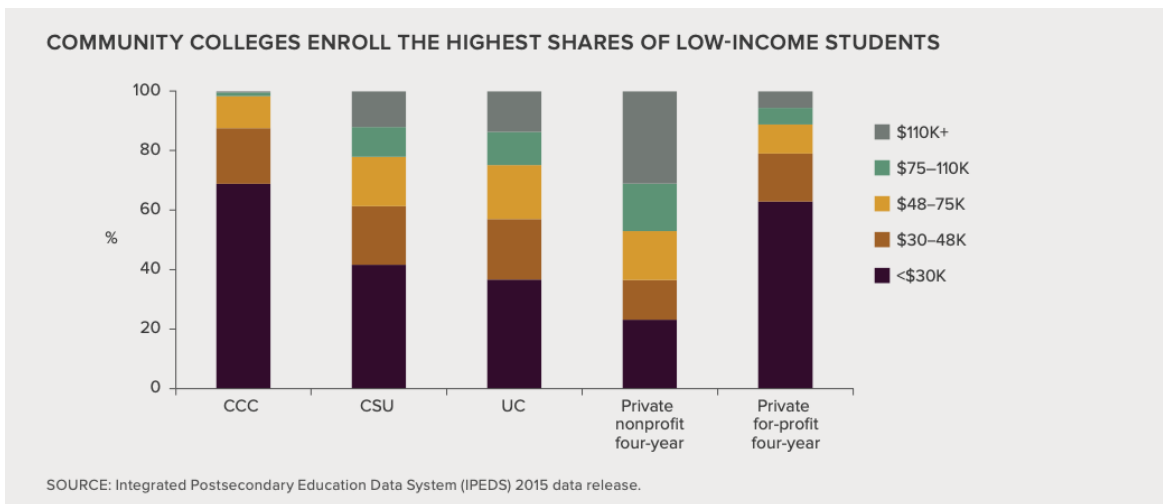
COMMUNITY COLLEGES ENROLL THE HIGHEST SHARES OF LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

SOURCE: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) 2015 data release.

Note. Charts excerpted from "Higher Education in California: Increasing Equity and

Diversity" by Olga Rodriguez, Marisol Cuellar Mejia, and Hans Johnson, 2017, *Public Policy*

Institute of California, Copyright 2017 by the Public Policy Institute of California. Reprinted

with permission.

The study conducted by the PPIC (2017), as shown in Figure 2, also established that most

adults in the abovementioned brackets view college education as a necessity for success.

Consistent with previous research, while there has been an increase in bachelor's degrees

awarded to historically underserved students, there will be a shortage of about a million degrees

by 2030 (PPIC, 2017). In the context of community college pathways, there are racial disparities

in the transfer rates between CCC and CSU, as Latino and Black students transfer at a lower rate

and are systematically directed to vocational programs instead (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014).

Vocational opportunities are essential to the community college mission; however, these programs do not align with 4-year institutions' requirements and increased economic gain.

Figure 2

College as a Success Factor for Low SES Students and Students of Color
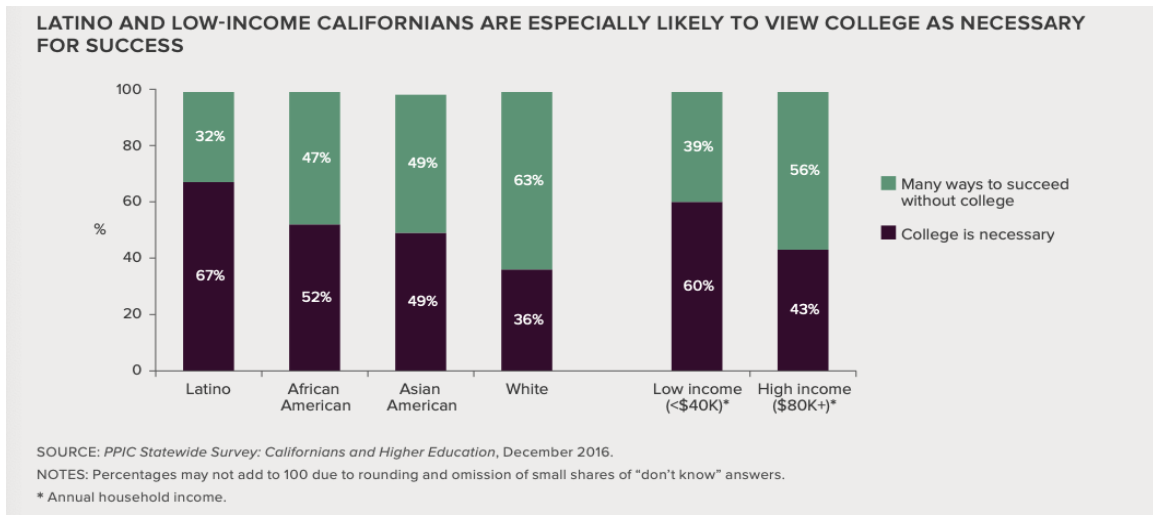
LATINO AND LOW-INCOME CALIFORNIANS ARE ESPECIALLY LIKELY TO VIEW COLLEGE AS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS

SOURCE: *PPIC Statewide Survey: Californians and Higher Education*, December 2016.
NOTES: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding and omission of small shares of "don't know" answers.
* Annual household income.

Note. Charts excerpted from "Higher Education in California: Increasing Equity and Diversity" by Olga Rodriguez, Marisol Cuellar Mejia, and Hans Johnson, 2017, *Public Policy Institute of California*, Copyright 2017 by the Public Policy Institute of California. Reprinted with permission.

A study conducted by Baker (2018) concluded that while community college students have information about labor market outcomes, the information is limited. Salaries are often overestimated or not ranked correctly by category, while employment outcomes are underestimated. Students from lower-income backgrounds are more likely to make these mistakes in employment projections, so findings suggest that accurate and up-to-date information earning potential can be an important factor in choosing a major. Assumptions of another research study predict that student persistence and success in higher education are highly motivated by local employment circumstances and potential job prospects (Reyes et al., 2019).

Moreover, having a community college in the near proximity will not only increase the likelihood of enrollment but also shape the students' daily experiences and decision-making process overall. Therefore, relying on the concept of geographic opportunity, community colleges are urged to take deliberate action in fostering opportunities for career capital development. As a combination of personal competencies and knowledge helpful in producing tangible economic value, CCC stakeholders should engage in comprehensive planning (Perez-Vergara et al., 2017; Reyes et al., 2019). This suggestion becomes more viable due to the high percentage of CCC students pursuing employment and attending school simultaneously. Thus, these employment opportunities can be purposeful and intentional in creating more alignment with potential transfer opportunities. An innovative approach to current practices can act as a catalyst for new resources or highly desired agile processes in the higher education arena (Miller 2019).

California Master Plan for Higher Education

The California master plan for higher education, similar to other regulatory state councils commissioned in the 1960s, has been in implementation for several decades (California Governor's Office of Planning and Research [CGOPR], 2018). The plan has also served as a vehicle for confronting the surge of enrollment at the time and projected exponential growth by focusing on affordability, equity, and institutional quality as a way of ensuring upward mobility (Boland et al., 2018; Nutting, 2011). Following its creation by the president of the University of California (UC) and fellow co-authors, it was intended as an umbrella document for placing public education at the forefront and was subsequently approved by The Regents in governance of the UC, CSU, and CCC systems (University of California | Office of the President [UCOP], n.d.). The ratification of the California master plan and its accepted provisions through the

Donahoe Higher Education Act was also a way of regaining control of existing systems that were threatened by political turmoil (CGOPR, 2018).

The main elements and subsequent revisions of the California master plan for higher education as outlined by the UCOP (n.d.) and the CGOPR (2018) are as follows:

1. Established distinct responsibilities between the main segments of public postsecondary education – the UC system, the California State University (CSU), and the CCCs.

    a. UCs were designated as the primary academic research institutions, with various undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree offerings, whereas CSUs would primarily offer undergraduate and graduate degrees for liberal arts and sciences. The CCC's mission was to provide broad access through lower-division academic and vocational instruction. CCCs are also able to provide remedial education, non-credit courses, various workforce training opportunities, as well as English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction.

2. Designated an eligibility pool of applicants for admission selection.

    a. Reaffirmed CCC's mission of open access and reduced UC eligibility from top 15% to top 12.5% of high school graduates, and CSU eligibility from top 50% to 33.3% of high school graduates.

3. Reaffirmed transfer as an integral element of California higher education by establishing a lower to upper-division ratio of 40 to 60 as a way of ensuring transfer opportunities and priority to CCC students.

4. Endorsed California's commitment to tuition-free education for state residents, excluding any auxiliary fees. The budgetary reductions in the following years have increased tuition costs for all systems augmented with an increase in student financial aid.

5. Revisiting the governing structure of all systems, with Board of Regents overseeing UC institutions, Board of Trustees for CSUs, and Board of Governors for the Community Colleges.

6. Established the Coordinating Council for Higher Education to oversee the planning and administration of postsecondary education with the ability to approve new campuses and/or programs.

Successes and Opportunities of the California Master Plan

As mentioned previously, the California master plan of higher education has been instrumental in establishing purpose, infrastructure, and a set of principles for various systems. Moreover, it has served the purpose of managing the growing student enrollment for all three major providers of higher education in the state while maintaining access and quality of program offerings (CGOPR, 2018). An institutional mission serves as a guide for not only serving the intended population of students but also establishing funding opportunities that allow for expansion of educational offerings. The Governor's Office of Planning and Research (2018) has also emphasized the opportunities offered by California systems, where both UC and CSU campuses have shown to enroll a more diverse student body in comparison with universities of similar stature and provide some of the highest mobility rates in the nation.

Nevertheless, several distinct challenges are associated with using the foundational ideologies and structural principles intended for the 1960s and some of the 1970s. The ever-

changing student landscape, especially concerning their demographic composition and various

economic or institutional fluctuations in a diverse state like California, has recently presented

distinct challenges for the higher education segments. The traditional manufacturing jobs have

declined in California, so the gap in earnings of bachelor's degree holders in comparison with

high school graduates has also widened, along with the share of income held by the top 1%

(CGOPR, 2018). Consistent with previous discussions about dismal economic predictions due to

low degree attainment and a shortage of skilled employees in several industry sectors, the

completion agenda has become a priority (Boland et al., 2018).

The increased heterogeneity of California now accounts for the ethnic majority of the

state's population identifying as LatinX. Thus, increasing the overall enrollment, persistence, and

success rates for these historically underrepresented students of color in higher education is

essential in reaching the desired economic and skilled workforce goals (Boland et al., 2018;

Floyd et al., 2016). Imminent considerations resulting from demographic changes the overall

landscape of a more homogeneous and financially able student group for which the CMP was

originally intended. So, it is crucial to critically examine and discuss the existent policy

implications and take concrete action in supporting the needs of underrepresented students.

Transfer Center: Essential Functions and Regulatory Compliance

LaSota and Zumeta (2015) posit that the renewed focus on CCC student transfer to

baccalaureate programs is consistent with the recent and projected labor market demands, as well

as higher returns on educational investment. States have been involved in reviewing and

amending the educational policy to fit the needs of their unique populations and promote desired

outcome attainment. According to Perna and Finney (2014), who examined state legislatures in

higher education, the policy has the potential of reducing inequality in attainment and converging

the individual benefit with the public interest. The authors identified three main areas for achieving the desired student outcomes: college affordability, support in improving student preparation and transition without loss of credit, and the creation of enhanced opportunities for state residents. At the structural level, transfer rates, and associate degree completion in transfer-positioned majors were the main determinants of vertical transfer probability (LaSota & Zumeta, 2015). Individual transfer success predictors were tied to *full-time attendance* and transfer aspirations, particularly for first-generation and low-income community college students, who benefit greatly from attending transfer-oriented colleges.

The limiting funding availability in the state of California has impeded support efforts for educational institutions. Based on prior discussions surrounding the accessibility and efficiency of transfer pathways as a priority through the CMP for higher education and the need to meet 60%-degree attainment for 25-to 64-year-olds by 2025, spearheaded the comprehensive programmatic developments for CCC Transfer Centers (CCCCO, 2017; Chase, 2011). The early 1990s were crucial in pioneering major legislative and practical initiatives in California when the intersegmental general education core curriculum and transfer center funding were established (CCCCO, 2017). One of the most important triumphs, however, was the adoption of minimum standards for transfer centers in Title 5 because of the emphasis on underrepresented student preparation and transfer. The recent merger of three key initiatives like the student success and support program, the basic skills initiative, and student equity gave way for transfer centers to join in the efforts of closing the achievement gap by utilizing success indicators (CCCCO, 2020b). These measures identify and operationalize or quantify areas where underserved student groups can potentially be impacted due to lack of equal opportunity.

The transfer centers in the CCC setting are structured in compliance with Title 5 regulations of the education code (California Code of Regulations, 2020). According to the regulatory guidelines, each district should support the development and implementation of a transfer center plan, which includes the activities and services that will be provided to the students. Moreover, the plan will identify target populations, such as underrepresented student groups on campus, and aim to increase transfer preparation and application submission to 4-year institutions. The underserved student populations are identified as African American/Black, ChicanX/LatinX, low-income, and other groups who have not been proportionately represented in higher education institutions.

There is a myriad of other required services that need to be offered by transfer centers as hubs for university transfer support efforts. Title 5 also mandates accurate and up-to-date academic planning, implementation of transfer admission agreements with 4-year segments, and course-to-course or major articulation agreements. Academic planning presumes the selection of courses needed to satisfy the major preparation and general education requirements for ADTs and various other transfer agreements. Some of the outlined program components will be provided through coordinated counseling services and referrals for academic support, financial assistance, and other support programs as necessary. The transfer center staff is also tasked with assisting students in timely completion of admission applications and other related forms, understanding and submitting appeals if needed, and implementing a schedule of services in partnership with 4-year university personnel. To ensure accountability and transparency in resource allocation, an ongoing evaluation of services reviewed during annual reporting cycles will be submitted to the governing body of the institution.

Furthermore, some of the campus-wide goals mentioned in the collaborative guidelines developed by the CCCCO and CCC TCDs involve increasing the percentage of students who establish transfer as their academic goal and clarifying transfer processes through local policies. The standards additionally concentrate on collaborating with administration, faculty, and staff to foster a transfer culture on campus and create student learning outcomes commensurate with baccalaureate-level learning (Wyner et al., 2016). While the development and structure of these functions will be discussed in greater length through the literature review portion, it is important to note that transfer center staff also act as liaisons in informing the campus community and key stakeholders about changes in admission requirements.

Statement of the Problem

Navigating transfer pathways is challenging for several obvious reasons. At the structural level, course numbering systems vary across community college institutions and systems of higher education as a whole (Baker, 2016). Baker (2016) also emphasizes that courses necessary for obtaining an associate degree might be significantly different from meeting the admission requirements set forth by 4-year institutions. These obstacles are even more pervasive for students who lack the academic preparation needed to succeed in college-level coursework, have external demands impeding on their time and effort (e.g., work commitments, dependents, etc.), or have insufficient support networks for sustained enrollment. It is well-established that the vast majority of students enrolled in CCCs come from historically underrepresented student populations (PPIC, 2017). These groups include LatinX and Black/African American students (students of color), those who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, or first-generation students (first in their family to attend college). In order to reduce the skills gap needed for the

future workforce, California has an increased demand for underrepresented student college degree completion.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research study was to explore and highlight effective practices utilized by CCC TCDs in supporting underrepresented student transfer efforts. As such, challenges and opportunities experienced by seasoned professionals in the field were examined to not only provide successful strategies for transfer student success but also create a roadmap for new practitioners in the field.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study.

- **RQ1** - What challenges do community college TCDs encounter when supporting historically underrepresented student transfer to 4-year institutions?

- **RQ2** - What best practices and strategies are utilized by community college TCDs to support historically underrepresented student transfer efforts to 4-year institutions?

- **RQ3** - How do community college TCDs define, measure, and track success?

- **RQ4** – Based on demonstrated transfer success strategies (indicators), what recommendations would community college TCDs have for practitioners coming into the field?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be instrumental to a wide range of professionals/ stakeholders in the higher education arena and individual students alike. Data gathered through semi-structured interviews with TCDs can be useful in informing decisions at the policy level that will inadvertently affect transfer experiences for historically underrepresented student

populations. In addition to policy implications, the best practices identified by study participants will be used for effective program design and implementation, as well as subsequent modification or improvement of existing transfer centers in CCCs. Due to changes in roles and positions within the system, incoming practitioners will be able to utilize the knowledge and strategies gathered from more experienced professionals in the field.

Individual students who identify with underrepresented student groups can also take advantage of the narratives that will be uncovered during this research. While not all challenges will apply to students seeking transfer support, the experiences discussed by TCDs can help students with transfer aspirations feel like they are not alone in experiencing obstacles. Incorporating research findings will also be a great way of creating a more supportive environment that is conducive to historically underserved student success.

Limitations and Assumptions of the Study

The following limitations and assumptions were considered to be relevant for this study. Research assumptions entail a set of challenges unique to non-traditional students who aspire to transfer to 4-year universities and rest on the experiences gathered from TCDs in supporting those efforts. While conducting interviews with TCDs of CCCs, the research aimed to uncover challenges and opportunities in supporting historically underrepresented student groups, individual transfer student narratives might paint a more detailed picture regarding their lived experiences. The study is also representative of professionals supporting student transfer in California and may not be generalizable to centers in other regions/states, as populations served might be significantly different. Moreover, the inclusion criteria for study participants indicates more than 3 years of experience as a transfer center director, which can exclude perspectives from practitioners who have not been in the role for the desired amount of time. The data

gathered encompassed students who attend multiple institutions to fulfill their degree and transfer requirements, so implications gathered from data analysis included those unique perspectives as well. Moreover, it was assumed that the account provided by the participants accurately reflects the students' perception and their transfer experience. Finally, the study assumed that earning an undergraduate degree or credential will expand students' earning potential and self-efficacy.

Definition of Terms

- *Articulation Agreements*. Agreements developed between 2- and 4-year institutions outlining the transfer policies and procedural guidelines for specific academic programs or degrees (Taylor, 2019).

- *Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT)*. Sometimes referred to as a degree with a guarantee – the CCC associate in art for transfer (AA-T) and the associate in science for transfer (AS-T) are two-year associate degrees that are fully transferable to the CSU and are no more than 60 semester/90 quarter units. This entails guaranteed priority admission to a CSU campus (not to a particular major or campus) if the minimum admission requirements are met.

- *Enrollment Status*. Part-time load refers to academic term enrollment of less than 12 unit/credit hours for fall and spring. Full-time enrollment, on the other hand, entails enrollment in 12 or more units during the fall and spring terms (Crosta, 2013).

- *Historically Underrepresented Students*. Students who have been historically underrepresented in higher education, including LatinX and Black/African American students, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and first in their family to go to college/first-generation (PPIC, 2017).

- *Lateral Transfer*. Those students who start at one institution and transfer to another institution of a similar type: either two-year to two-year or four-year to four-year (Shealy et al., 2013).

- *Pell Grant*. A federal grant awarded only to undergraduate students who display an exceptional financial need and have not earned a bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

- *Retention*. Continuous enrollment in the higher education institution until completion of a degree.

- *Social Mobility*. Defined as the movement of individuals or groups in socioeconomic status relative to others in a given society and measured using income, education, and occupational status (Romano & Eddy, 2017).

- *Transfer Shock*. Post-transfer drop in student performance during the first quarter/semester of enrollment (Hills, 1965).

- *Transfer Student*. Students who have attempted and/or completed more than 12 units/credit hours at the community college after high school graduation (Radwin & Horn, 2014).

- *Transition*. Any event or non-event that impacts existent relationships, established routines, assumptions, and roles (Schlossberg & Goodman 2005).

- *Vertical Transfer*. Students who successfully transfer from a community college to 4-year institutions (Ortagus & Hu, 2019).

Summary

Community colleges, similar to other higher education institutions, have a long-standing mission of providing various opportunities for upward social and economic mobility through an

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array of program and course offerings. Consistent with its tradition of open access and affordability, CCCs have been examining current institutional practices and educational policy implications through the equity lens. These measures are predominantly geared towards supporting historically underrepresented students, who comprise the majority of enrolled students in the system, with crucial resources and networks needed for success. Similarly, transfer centers in 2-year colleges were developed to foster a college-going culture and increase degree attainment for the campus community.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

With the growing number of students enrolling and transferring to universities from CCCs, there have been mounting concerns surrounding effective services supporting this transition (Leptien, 2015). In order to achieve the objective of CCCs to completely eliminate achievement gaps, address equity concerns, and further increase the transfer rates to the UC and CSU systems, a comprehensive analysis of available literature is needed. The examination of existing institutional deficiencies, individual characteristics and attributes that might contribute to attrition or persistence, and external circumstances that have an identified effect on degree attainment will be crucial for this research design. Moreover, the above-mentioned elements and policy implications concerning the current landscape for fostering historically underrepresented student success in higher education will be discussed through an equity lens. Thus, the following section will align with the purpose of this study with the intent of identifying effective strategies utilized in transfer centers for successful program development and implementation.

1. Current trends in the higher education space, with emphasis on community college policy and implementation.

2. Schlossberg's transition theory intended to delineate the process of expected or unexpected transitions, consequences on the individual, and identification of resources aimed at easing the negative effect of change.

3. A discussion surrounding the unique experiences of historically underrepresented student transfer efforts from CCCs to 4-year public/private institutions.

4. Transfer center considerations from the culturally responsive perspective that will help inform the nuances of day-to-day activities and services.

5. A dialogue regarding post-transfer success efforts and strategies to ensure undergraduate degree attainment.

California Community College Policy: Practical Implications on Vertical Transfer

Wheeler (2019) identifies several policy initiatives that were enacted to restructure and improve 2-year colleges, including achieving the dream and completion by design. One of the newer and most prominent measures, guided pathways, emerged from redesigning America's community colleges and has been in various stages of adoption in CCCs (Bailey et al., 2015; Wheeler, 2019). Students often begin their enrollment in 2-year institutions with limited information about major selection or degree opportunities at the college (Baston, 2018). Moreover, they also tend to earn excess units or frequently change majors, which can result in exhausting available financial aid benefits. First-generation students or those from low socioeconomic backgrounds are particularly susceptible to having longer time-to-degree and increasing their cost (Baston, 2018; Van Noy et al., 2016). So, as explained by the Campaign for College Opportunity (2020), this approach revisits the traditional cafeteria-style course offerings to more clear/structured programs and pathways. According to Harbour (2016), the new initiatives reaffirm the role of quality institutional offerings and measurable outcomes in the student completion agenda.

Guided Pathways

The guided pathways model is inherently completion, and degree attainment focused. However, it does not overlook the individual student needs and takes a holistic approach to address those needs at every step of the student journey. At the academic level, students are encouraged to initially select a general field of study, followed by a specific program that facilitates degree attainment (Wheeler, 2019). High-performing institutions use coordinated

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efforts when administering programs and services to ensure alignment to the institution's mission (Bailey et al., 2015). Chase (2016) and Calcagno et al. (2008) noted that institutional characteristics and content often entail how a policy is interpreted and successively implemented. The current infrastructure of community colleges has shown to be ineffective for assisting students in entering and completing programs of study, applying their training to secure employment or transferring to universities. The guided pathways approach starts with the end in mind by incorporating redesigned courses and support services in a more prescriptive manner, though without limiting the possible options (Baston, 2018). Thus, four key areas are addressed: (a) creating clear pathways to further employment or continued education, (b) assist students in choosing and entering a pathway, (c) help students stay on the path, and (d) ensure that learning is happening (Jenkins et al., 2017).

The pathways project implementation and scaling efforts along community colleges in several states are coordinated by the AACC. To elaborate on the main areas of focus, AACC (2017) outlined various practical measures that can serve as viable guidelines for institution-wide adoption. Establishing clear pathways with student needs in mind entails accessible mapping for all program offerings, including exact course alignment, time-to-degree completion, and accurate information about prospective employment or transfer opportunities. Assisting students in choosing and entering a pathway has shifted from open course offerings to a deliberate exploration of possible academic plans and career options in the hopes of identifying an area of study (e.g., health sciences, business, etc.). Consistent with the model proposed in redesigning America's community colleges, institutions also need to identify student learning outcomes and teaching strategies that are in alignment with job skills and transfer requirements in the related field (AACC, 2017; Bailey et al., 2015).

In order to safeguard academic progress, it is imperative to keep students on track and consider the application of early alert systems for immediate intervention and support service referrals as needed. For example, food and housing insecurity are now some of the most common challenges experienced by community college students (Goldrick-Rab, 2018). When these needs are not acknowledged and addressed in a timely manner, students can be left with diminished ability to make viable decisions on academic or career pathways. Another important consideration is the overall cost of attendance, which has increased drastically over the last decade. According to Goldrick-Rab (2018), Pell Grants now only cover a little more than half of community college costs and only for low-income students. So, it is also crucial to strengthen the internal and external support systems and provide students with comprehensive networks needed for success.

Guided pathways aim to utilize high-impact practices for assisting campus administrators, faculty, and staff in facilitating coordinated student success efforts in each of those categories (Baston, 2018). Students are believed to gain momentum partly through positive interactions or be at risk for losing momentum to degree achievement during any of the connection, entry, progress, or completion phases. Goal alignment and a shared vision of increased degree completion and transfer rates, along with seamless job placement options, will have a greater impact on community college student experience and their future opportunities. This framework's overarching goal is to get the campus stakeholders out of operating in silos, combine and scale-up initiatives with positive outcomes, and avoid allocating resources for duplicative efforts. Thus, in response to the reframing of current offerings and institutional infrastructures, colleges have made concrete efforts in making viable information available on the prominent landing pages of the websites, utilizing general education guidance for incoming

students, developing learning outcomes for each pathway, and clarifying the process from entry to completion (Wheeler, 2019). As a result, the policy interpretations and actions that originated from those interpretations have been creating innovative institutionalized practices and methods of thinking around student success (Chase, 2016).

AB705

According to Achterman (2019), the vast majority of CCC students are placed in remedial courses and never complete transfer-level English or math. The discouraging student success outcomes resulted in attempts to incentivize colleges through student-centered funding formula targeting the number of graduates, transfers, and the number of students to complete transfer-level English and math in a given year (Bailey et al., 2015). For example, there has been a change in focus from remedial education and the development of basic skills to throughput since remediation is believed to discourage long-term progress towards a degree (Schnee, 2014). Measurements of said progress are measured by term-to-term retention rates, the number of earned credits, and degree or certificate attainment (Quarles & Davis, 2016). As such, California experienced significant shifts in policy and practice by implementing new processes for placement (Shaw et al., 2018). It is important to note that while there is significant evidence of drawbacks associated with remedial education enrollment, some argue that developmental courses can be beneficial for academically underprepared students (Quarles & Davis, 2016; Schnee, 2014). These are the students who take time off after high school math or developmental course completion and lack the procedural knowledge traditionally measured by community college assessment tests.

Assembly Bill 705 (AB 705) took effect in 2018 and radically transformed the traditional functions of CCCs, especially in English, math, and credit English as a Second Language

discipline (CCCCO, 2019; Shaw et al., 2018). It is now required for colleges to increase students' likelihood of entering and completing transfer-level English and math within one year or three years for ESL students. Instead of assessment measures used in the past, counselors are tasked with utilizing high school coursework and grade point average (GPA) to determine appropriate placement. The benchmark is based on previous research that shows a high school GPA of 2.6 and above is positively correlated with transfer-level coursework success (Shaw et al., 2018). AB 705 is intended to reduce the probability of unsubstantiated remedial course enrollment, which has been shown to deter academic progress, persistence, and overall success (Achterman, 2019; Research and Planning Group [RPG], 2018a). A study published by the RPG (2018a) stipulates that students who were placed in remedial English courses had exponentially more likelihood of succeeding in transfer-level English courses if remediation was skipped entirely. The results have been comparable for math courses as well. So instead of remedial courses, community college personnel have been rearranging their course sequences, utilizing co-curricular supports, and increasing sections for available transfer-level English and math.

However, legislative statutes and other forms of educational policy do not reside solely on the printed page (Feinman, 2018). These bills establish a generalizable set of concepts intended to inform procedural intricacies and provide a guiding framework for future practice. AB 705, along with its ratified provisions, aim to establish consistency and equitable opportunity for students with varying levels of academic needs. Research efforts in the student success arena have underscored the significance of these fundamental laws in reducing achievement gaps and aligning support area objectives to overarching institutional outcomes (CCCCO, 2019). Thus, the implementation of various initiatives needs to take into consideration the scope and breadth of the change framework, along with the individual variations of the institutions. Moreover, Schnee

(2014) posits that institutions should include the perspectives of students who are more likely to be affected by policy changes and vulnerable to structural inequities as a result, instead of a singular focus on outcomes.

Credit for Prior Learning

While college enrollment is on a steady rise, completion and retention rates have remained relatively low, with 62% retention calculated for new students enrolled at a community college full-time (Education Resources Information Center [ERIC], 2019). The statistical inferences are lower for non-traditional adults, part-time learners, military service members, and historically underrepresented student groups. However, non-traditional students also bring a myriad of lived experiences and cultures into the classroom, giving higher education practitioners the opportunity to assess and apply these experiential skills/knowledge to academic benchmarks (Lakin et al., 2015). Another innovative policy that has shown a lot of promise in increasing completion rates among these populations is credit for prior learning (CPL), as there is an established positive association with the desired academic outcomes (Klein-Collins, 2011). This is largely due to the fact that students have acquired knowledge and skills through employment opportunities and, when assessed, can be equivalent to college course outcomes (Washington Student Achievement Council, 2019). CPL was first pioneered around since World War I (WWI), when college-level examination programs and general education development (GED) exams were administered to integrate veterans into higher education and the workforce.

A more formal definition by the American Council on Education (ACE) broadly defines CPL as academic credit that is granted for skills or knowledge gained outside of the classroom (ERIC, 2019). CPL can either be measured through standardized exams, external evaluation agencies, portfolio reviews, or individualized and institution-initiated assessments. Some

institutions limit the number of units or credit hours that can be accrued using CPL, though these practices have shown to increase postsecondary access and affordability, nonetheless. This is due to the fact that CPL processes divert from the institutionalized credit awarding processes and require a significant shift in recognizing learning that occurs outside of the classroom (Lakin et al., 2015).

An emerging area of research is the application of CPL credits to satisfy university transfer requirements and the consequent acceptance of those credits by the 4-year institutions. Since granting credits for CPL is more customary to community and technical colleges, an alignment with undergraduate degree-granting institutions will be instrumental in further supporting underrepresented student transfer success and preventing loss of credit. Lakin et al. (2015) state that CPL presence is likely to increase at all levels of higher education, as the student demographics and demanding labor market trends continue to change. So, the renewed focus on providing pathways to successful completion is advanced by the alignment of CPL policies from community college to baccalaureate granting institutions.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Considering the variables associated with student success, Schlossberg's transition theory will be used to develop insight into adult perspectives relating to transition. Previous literature in the higher education arena has applied this theoretical paradigm to better understand specialized student populations, like international student enculturation, student-veterans transitioning from deployment to colleges/universities, and career planning (Lavallee, 2006; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; Vanthournout et al., 2017). However, the underlying principles and implications of the framework are also greatly relevant to non-traditional student transfer experiences from a community college to undergraduate programs at a 4-year university.

To set the stage for further examination of the topic, Schlossberg and Goodman (2005) discuss the stressors related to changing environments and events, the creation of meaning surrounding these experiences, and appropriate coping strategies for effectively handling change overall. Several interconnected theories outlined by the author build onto existing knowledge about the topic and examine the various degrees of predictability or variability in adult development. For example, the contextual framework describes perspectives and concepts from the structural point of view, where actions are determined by the environment in which they occur (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Context influences personality and learning capacity, especially when considering the organizational impact on individuals.

The developmental framework diverges from the initial theory by focusing on the sequential nature of adult development that either involves progress made due to age, unfolding and subsequent resolution of crucial events, or advances made through the expansion of ethical/moral and cognitive virtues (Waters & Goodman, 1990). The life-span framework perspective adds to this knowledge and is a more agile view of adult development. It takes into consideration continuity and the possibility of change throughout individuals' life. Similar to the stages described in the previous theory, this approach emphasizes the milestones and transition points in one's life as hierarchical and often permanent (Heckhausen et al., 2010; Knight & Poon, 2008). Latter versions of lifespan theory; however, examined adaptations through the lens of contradicting experiences that are not congruent with the events experienced prior and does not exclude permeability.

Schlossberg and Goodman (2005) also discuss the implications stemming from the fourth, transition perspective, which concentrates predominantly on life events that bring upon change. These events can range from graduating seniors and newlywed couples to those who are

getting ready to retire. The main premise is expected or scheduled change, as well as unanticipated transitions that cannot be predicted in advance. Schlossberg's transition framework, thus, is based on the assumption that while there is variability in the manifestation of emotions, certain tenets remain stable. The assumptions based on the adult development theories discussed above are as follows:

- Transitions can be confusing, and individuals undergoing these changes can be in need of assistance to understand the essential meaning of the experience and develop a plan for coping.
- The role of others in helping successful transitions is facilitating exploration with increased communication and counseling skills.

Transition Framework

Schlossberg's transition model offers a systematic approach for professionals in various fields to understand those who are in the process of transition (Schlossberg & Goodman, 2005). The framework consists of three major components: transition identification and process, the 4 S system, and taking charge or strengthening resources. The first step of the model helps identify the nature of transition, develop a working description of it, and distinguish how much the transition will impact the individual's life. Taking charge or strengthening resources, on the other hand, conveys the use of strategies needed to mitigate the transition (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition

TRANSITION
Event or nonevent resulting in
Change or assumption
Change of social networks
Resulting in growth or deterioration

PERCEPTION OF THE
PARTICULAR TRANSITION

Role Change: gain or loss
Affect: positive or negative
Source: internal or external
Timing: on-time or off-time
Onset: gradual or sudden
Duration: permanent, temporary,
              or uncertain

Degree of Stress

CHARACTERISTICS OF
PRETRANSITION AND
POSTTRANSITION
ENVIRONMENTS

Internal Support Systems:
    Intimate relationships
    Family unit
    Network of friends
Institutional Supports
Physical Setting

CHARACTERISTICS OF
THE INDIVIDUAL

Psychosocial Competence
Sex (and Sex-Role
    Identification)
Age (and Life Stage)
State of Health
Race/Ethnicity
Socioeconomic Status
Value Orientation
Previous Experience with a
    transition of a similar nature

ADAPTATION

Movement through phases following
    transition: pervasiveness through
    reorganization
Depends on:

1) Balance of individuals
     resources and deficits

2) Differences in pre-and post-
     transition environments
     re perception, supports, and
     individual

Note. "A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition," from N. K. Schlossberg (1981). *The Counseling Psychologist*, *9*(2), 18. Reprinted with permission.

For the purposes of the given context, the emphasis will be placed on the 4 S system of Schlossberg's model, which refers to the individual's **s**ituation, **s**elf, **s**upport, and **s**trategies (see Figure 4)*.* The said variables portray the complexity of change and our ability to cope with it. Regarded as either assets or liabilities, coping effectiveness is often related to the balancing act of those interrelated factors and dependent on the values we assign to the available resources and/or deficits. This method can be used to explain why certain individuals react differently to the same set of circumstances or life experiences that result in a change of the established status quo. The face analysis conducted at the initial stages of the life-altering transition, either positive or negative, involves the perception of the situation, whereas the secondary evaluation gauges

the available resources for handling the event. As such, a detailed view of the 4 Ss will allow for

a more in-depth understanding of the student experience when transitioning from a community

college to a 4-year university.

Figure 4

Coping Resources – the 4 S's
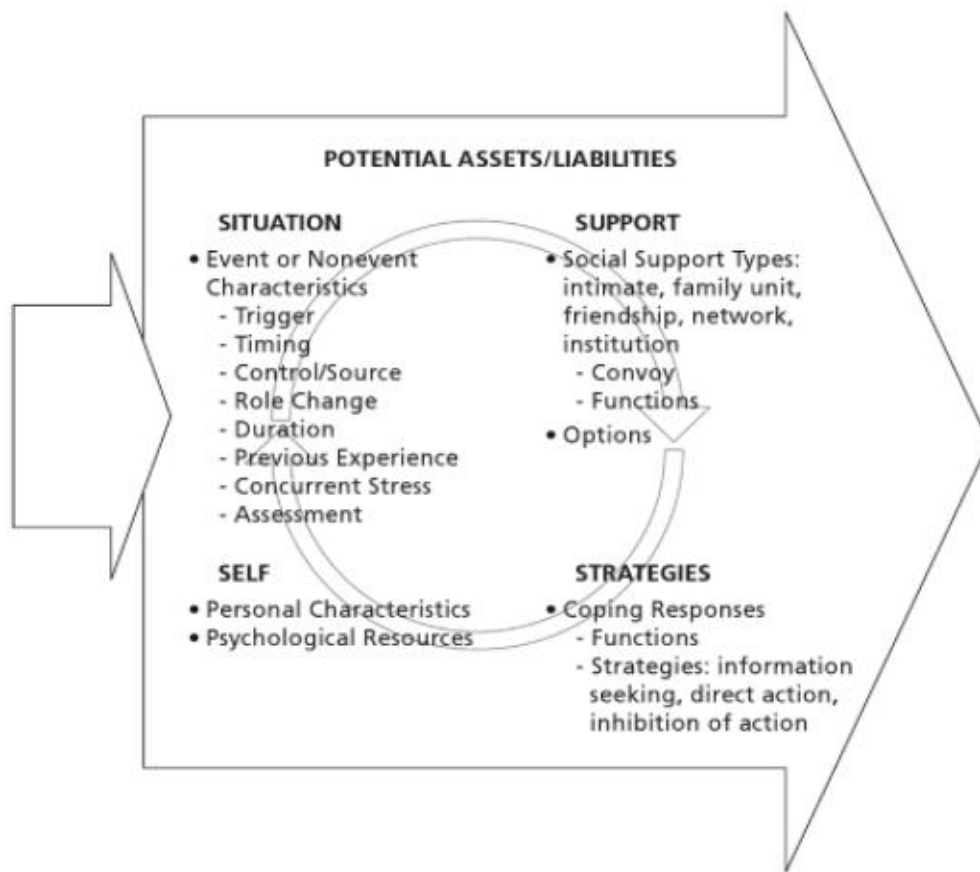
Note. "*Counseling Adults in Transition,*" from Anderson, G., Sun, J. C., & Alfonso, M. (2012)

(4th ed., p. 62). Springer Publishing Company. Reprinted with permission.

Situation

As defined by Schlossberg et al. (1995), situations vary depending on the trigger, timing,

control, role change, duration, similar experiences related to the transition, any concurrent

stressors, and assessment of the situation. A transition, for the purposes of this narrative, is any event or non-event that has the potential of changing one's life. So, any triggers associated with these transitions can be external or internal in nature and consequences. Timing, on the other hand, posits the socially accepted metrics that most people try to abide by as a determinant of whether they are on- or off-time. Rigid timelines, for example, being a returning student after taking time off from taking classes, can make students uncomfortable and possibly require different considerations to ensure their success. Control of certain transitions is possible if the decision is made by the individual as opposed to an external source or circumstance. Although some experiences may not entirely be in one's control, the elicit responses to those situations can be one's own prerogative. Support staff and counselors are crucial in differentiating the dichotomy of these elements for a more favorable outcome or provoking a more positive perception of the situation. Similarly, a role change and concurrent stress that can accompany students on their learning pathways are often associated with imminent stressors. Thus, high-touch and proactive practices on the part of community colleges have proven to be more effective in assisting through degree completion and 4-year university transfer processes. Mandatory orientation sessions, academic, and career advising workshops, transfer-focused appointments have all proven to increase persistence and bridge the information gap or set norms for future success (Baker, 2016; Mechur Karp, 2011; Yu, 2017).

Moreover, the duration of any experiences or events is either permanent or temporary in nature, where certain elements might be endured for a short period of time but proven to be unbearable in the long run. A permanent change to the receiving institution might be desirable or stressful, depending on the implications that the change will bring in the particular student's case. So, a previous experience in similar environments can be a good indicator of potential

assimilation and indicate a positive assessment of the process. For example, college-level coursework completion and knowledge of institutional support systems for academic achievement and social integration can be pillars in sustaining the student through undergraduate degree completion also. Traditional student success models often disregard the importance of organizational factors and instead focus on student engagement efforts (Van Noy et al., 2016). However, recent research has also emphasized the role that institutional structures - academic and social integration and campus supports - play on student outcomes. The inference is also placed on existent policy measures and practices in the array of course and programmatic offerings. Drawing upon this research, scholars have designed intentional pathways for navigating majors of study with increased guidance, alignment with desired employment prospective, and deliberate integration into campus life.

The Self

In addition to the transition's situational characteristics, every individual brings an often-complex set of resources and deficits. Self-knowledge or mastery of each individual's composite parts can involve personal and demographic characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, age, and gender, to name a few (Mooring & Mooring, 2015; Schlossberg & Goodman, 2005). These characteristics might entail a different set of responses depending on the individual's social status and standing. Research shows the consistent disparities and achievement gaps that exist between non-traditional students and their traditional counterparts (Xiong et al., 2015). Thus, certain changes can be predetermined and often mitigated ahead of time, whereas the same opportunity is not afforded for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. A significant gap also exists in relation to age or other social determinants when assessing assimilation to changed

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circumstances (e.g., independent students, students who have dependents, returning students, etc.).

Crucial to the transfer student success conversation is the psychological resources individuals utilize for enduring threats, including self-efficacy, optimism, and commitment. Reference frames entail whether or not individuals follow set rules, think in stereotypes, or be more critical and better manage uncertainty. From this standpoint, some individuals might seek immediate gratification or pursue validation from peers, while others are interested in honing their skillset and developing a deeper understanding of themselves. Value typologies are of equal importance to the self when addressing a change: achievement, personal relations, philosophical virtues, service, contentment, enjoyment, and personal growth are all included in Fiske et al.'s (1990) value typology. Knowledge of these focus points and values at different stages of life reveals how to facilitate collaboration rather than conflict or explains why certain situations might be more challenging for a certain group.

Support

Social support plays an integral role in mediating possible discomfort or other negative consequences of transition and can be classified as a basic human need (Martinez & Munsch, 2019). For the purpose of operationalizing the term, support is classified by its source, like intimate relationships, family, friendships, and communities that individuals associate with (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Whether being in a relationship that involves trust and understanding or knowing from past experiences that there is a capability of having this sort of relationship can prove to be reinforcing and encouraging. Support received from the family unit, friends, and/or through organizational affiliations can also either exasperate or help a transition along. This is

evident in the surge of newly founded programs and services that target a certain group and intent to provide resources for the outlined phases of change.

Support often integrates a combination of crucial elements like affection (e.g., admiration or love), affirmation (e.g., asserting agreement with a chosen course of action), and aid (e.g., monetary, investment of time, sharing viable information). These support essentials are often reciprocal and prone to change as individuals move through various life stages. To measure social support presence in one's surroundings, it is necessary to consider people who are stable and independent of a role, those who are likely to change over time, and the ones that are directly vulnerable to role changes. Student involvement and integration to their immediate environment can be the basis for establishing support networks needed for enhancing retention and graduation. Disadvantaged students are more likely to lack social networks for supporting their enrollment and academic progress, so students' family and friends have a direct impact on higher education aspirations (Grubbs, 2020).

Strategies

Coping is referred to as the set of overt or covert actions that occur in response to taxing situations and function as a way of either preventing and alleviating strains or responding to stressors after their occurrence. Three types of coping strategies are outlined: a response aimed at altering the situation, modifying the meaning, or schemas that manage the discomfort (e.g., avoidance, emotional discharge vs. controlled reflectiveness). Davidson and Wilson (2017) noted that strategies chosen in a situation depend heavily on how the situation is defined. The appropriate ways of coping are determined by the given context and situation at hand. Where one strategy can improve self-efficacy caused by interpersonal stressors, sharing amongst people who might be experiencing a similar range of emotions can prove to be effective in others. Individuals

can either choose to take or inhibit action or seek more information before making a decision. Community college staff and faculty should consider students' cultural heritage and be knowledgeable or sensitive to diverse backgrounds (Martinez & Munsch, 2019). The role of student services professionals is to connect students with available resources on- or off-campus and create a more nurturing environment (Grubbs, 2020). When planning for transition, especially in underrepresented minority groups, filling out a scholarship application and seeking additional programs that provide necessary services can greatly aid transfer efforts (McKenzie, 2014; Yu, 2017). Due to the detrimental effects of misinformation in ever-changing campus environments, seeking advice instead of relying on the self is also often an important tactic to utilize. Students should take advantage of resources even if the plan does not pan out as desired, so coping strategies often relate to the person's psychological resources as discussed prior and their current frame of reference.

Equity Considerations

Equity gaps persist in CCCs, where the diversity reflected in student enrollment is met with a wider gap in desired outcomes of low-income and students of color (Kezar et al., 2008; Sidman-Taveau & Hoffman, 2019). Sidman-Taveau and Hoffman (2019) note that the achievement gap among certain student groups is an indication of larger inequities that exist in resource allocation and power imbalances, which later translate into academic performance and attainment imbalance. Educators are tasked with the increased need of empowering their students, as traditional means of student recruitment and general support programs have proven not to be sufficient in offsetting injustices. Creating equity on campus can mean challenging assumptions and dominant ideologies, since some higher education professionals might not be cognizant of their own biases and exercise intentionality in treating students equitably (Kezar et

al., 2008). Hence, research conducted policy and implementation focuses on the importance of disaggregating the data by race or ethnicity, establishing goals in closing attainment gaps, and ensuring institutional accountability following through (Sidman-Taveau & Hoffman, 2019).

Equity considerations stemming from academic and non-academic factors influence transitions for underrepresented community college students from postsecondary education and beyond (Baber, 2018). As discussed, college completion and transfer to an undergraduate degree at a 4-year institution are tied to persistence and completion. In terms of academic preparedness, Baber (2018) suggests that students' academic experiences and an enrollment gap after high school are factors that influence the desired outcomes. Non-traditional students are more susceptible to the negative implications of individual constraints and structural inequities, which either results in remedial course placement or an increase in time to degree completion. Harris and Wood (2013) have also outlined notable differences in participation and educational aspirations. Thus, utilizing a form of cultural and social capital will support students' sense of belonging and engagement, such as aspirational support from family members, faculty interactions, and peer support (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2007). Disseminating important information about potential resources, accepted campus practices, or ensuring access to sustainable and institutionalized support services are also factors in ensuring student success for underserved populations.

From the institutional perspective, positive interactions with faculty can also serve as a predictor of academic performance and non-cognitive outcomes (Wood & Newman, 2017). Institutions and faculty members need to be mindful of student perceptions and initiate interactions to the extent possible. It is important to note that the ability or willingness to do so might be inhibited because of large class sizes or overall campus planning like access to faculty

office hours. Using culturally responsive teaching (CRT) practices has shown to be successful, since it utilizes cultural characteristics and perspectives for more effective teaching and learning (Sidman-Taveau & Hoffman, 2019). CRT is based on critical race theory's underpinnings, which challenges the socially accepted and dominant norms and values, bringing to light historic marginalization. Educators who subscribe to these tenants have a developed understanding and appreciation of cultural contributions and differences, are able to evaluate curriculum design from a more critical standpoint, value relationship-building with students, and are diligent in transcending any institutional or personal biases. Moreover, CRT faculty bring meaningful learning experiences by incorporating cultural frames and scaffolding or by affording students the opportunity to express their unique perspective.

While the transition model has been used to examine special populations attending higher education institutions, it is also an excellent framework that helps understand why and how transfer students make certain choices or take particular actions. The framework is useful in understanding the comprehensive breadth of the community college vertical transfer journey, with special consideration to non-traditional student populations. In terms of academic counseling and support program development, students in this population experience a wide array of challenges that could be studied from the deficit standpoint. These challenges range from time constraints to financial and/or institutional strains that students can find difficult to navigate and ultimately result in discontinuation of enrollment. However, it is equally as important to consider the undeniable resources that can facilitate their transition to 4-year universities and ultimately guarantee success to the possible extent. Strong family connections and background, available support services at the sending and receiving institutions, transfer agreements, as well as the intentional promotion of the transfer culture are assets in this equation.

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Currently, community colleges in California have an equity plan that requires institutions to make data-driven decisions in setting goals, implementing policies, and putting in place activities for reducing identified equity gaps (Sidman-Taveau & Hoffman, 2019). The funding of this initiative was allocated in 2014 and was intended for course completion and all other attainment measures based on students' educational goals. This was an important step in institutionalizing and scaling up what has historically been an effort through categorical programs or other measures targeting low success rates on a micro scale.

Underrepresented Student Transfer

Ortagus and Hu (2019) assert that minority students and those from lower SES backgrounds have demonstrated a lesser likelihood of attending a selective 4-year institution. However, the authors stress the importance of the institutional and community characteristics in this equation that are positively correlated to selective university attendance. These characteristics include, but are not limited to, taking advanced courses in high school and having strong familial support systems in place. Other external influences, such as social, political, and economic forces, can also play a role in students' college choice. For example, affirmative action exclusion from admission decision-making led to a decrease in Black and Hispanic students attempting to seek more selective institutions. Given the context of university choice, application, and admission to 4-year institutions, Black and low-income students were also less likely to transfer from 2-year colleges to undergraduate programs in comparison to their peers. These findings are consistent with other research regarding community college pathways. However, studies have also substantiated that vertical transfer students, even from historically underrepresented student groups, were more likely to transfer to selective universities than with students who possess similar background characteristics but have not started their educational

journey at a community college. Thus, the following discussion will cover factors regarding academic engagement opportunities, cultural implications, and existent institutional support programs that aid in the vertical transfer efforts.

Near the Gate and Through the Gate

Increasing student success rates among low-income and historically underserved community college students have become a collaborative effort among policymakers, advocacy groups, community members, scholars, and education practitioners alike (RPG, 2017.) These efforts are concentrated on supporting students in advancing social and economic mobility through accessible and affordable pathways to either of the 4-year segments. So, the RPG has pioneered a multitiered study examining CCC vertical transfer challenges, which revealed the various pathways that students take to reach their educational goals. Some of the most prominent pathways identified by the research are students who are exploring transfer, momentum students, the ones who are near the transfer gate, and achievers or students who successfully make it through the transfer gate.

- Transfer explorers: Students who have completed anywhere from 12 to 44 transferable units within 6 years and are further away from transferring.
- Momentum students: Students who have completed 45-59 transferable units while maintaining a 2.0 GPA or above (2.0 GPA is one of the minimum requirements for university admission by most sectors).
- Students near the gate: Individuals who have completed 60 or more units towards transfer and are missing either transfer-level math or English courses.

- Near the gate: Students who have completed the unit, transfer-level English and math requirement, and/or earned an associate degree for transfer but have not yet transferred.

- Transfer achievers: Transfer students who have successfully made it through the gate.

However, the research is predominantly focused on so-called high-leverage learners, who have satisfied most (if not all) of the transfer requirements but fail to make the transition to an undergraduate program. The practical implications for achieving transfer success are substantial and should be used in assessing the overall effectiveness of transfer center support services. Lessons learned from transfer achievers described in this study include transfer from CCCs without earning an associate degree or a certificate, which can account for a lost opportunity in earning a credential. The implementation of AD-T degrees has been shown to increase vertical transfer probability and make the overall process easier. In terms of underserved student transfer, LatinX/ChicanX students have utilized the benefits of earning an AD-T more so than their peers, although barriers still exist (e.g., regional access).

Several lessons were learned from students at the gate. While the majority of study participants were eligible to earn an AD-T or successfully transfer to a university, many left without earning a college degree. Among this group, the students were also likely to identify as LatinX/ChicanX. For those who are near the gate, transfer-level course completion appears to be the biggest obstacle on the way of degree attainment or transfer. Students who were near completion were also more likely to leave the system without maximizing their unit potential for earning a degree and less likely to transition if more than a year lapsed from enrollment.

The RPG has clearly differentiated possible student outcomes related to transfer, thus paving the path for a more detailed examination of challenges and opportunities. So, this study aims to explore the TCDs' experiences in supporting minority and other underserved student groups through the transfer process, reasons for student attrition at the gate, possible strategies for mitigating these obstacles, and what can be learned to ensure students' transition through the gate.

Faculty-Student Engagement

Various research studies have emphasized the connection between faculty and student engagement with persistence and academic success among community college students (Alicea et al., 2016; Gipson et al., 2017; Wood & Newman, 2017). These interactions facilitate another layer of opportunity in assisting students to achieve their aspired academic objectives.

According to Wood and Newman (2017), faculty engagement with students can be predictive in fostering various non-cognitive outcomes, like enhanced motivation, improved academic self-efficacy, better satisfaction in the academic setting, as well as increased focus on academic matters. The research also indicates that in addition to these positive attributes, student interactions with faculty can be one of the potential determinants of success by definition in most student success metrics. These positive influences, as shown by data, elevates student learning in general. Meaningful and constructive opportunities to engage with faculty members can facilitate enhanced learning, whether in science courses or general education classes, or even intellectual, personal, and career development. Furthermore, to add to the discussion surrounding underrepresented minority support, it is essential to note that the learning that happens through faculty interaction varies across ethnic groups. Students of color are said to gain greater benefit from faculty meetings than their peers. In this case, the variable that made a notable difference

was the communicated faculty validation of the students' ability to work and succeed in college (Wood & Newman, 2017).

The higher education literature mentions several interrelated terms as a descriptor for interactions that take place between students and faculty. These include terminologies like engagement or integration, involvement, or even social belonging (Alicea et al., 2016). However, in the domain of higher education, these opportunities are defined as the time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities, and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational practices. Adding to the theories and frameworks that are geared towards explaining the micro and macro-level impacts of external factors on persistence, student engagement involves several variables. Demographic attributes, like being a first-generation college student or from a low SES, are combined with academic preparation in the complex interplay of student engagement with the institutional actors. As such, a conversation will be included about the distinct roles instructional and non-instructional faculty play in fostering the desired outcomes and facilitating support efforts for transfer students on campus.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality originated in the1980s by Kimberlé Crenshaw and is rooted in Black feminist and critical race theories in an effort to create discourse for those who identify with multiple identities (Harris & Patton, 2019). It is argued that as a term, the social phenomenon was coined at a later date; the social movements of previous decades served as a catalyst for discussing the role of the compound and historic systems of inequality on marginalized communities. Instead of the traditional way of approaching identities as isolates and mutually exclusive, the lens of intersectionality examines how interconnected social systems influence various identity-dependent experiences (Harris & Patton, 2019; Tefera et al., 2018). Research

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that uses this framework often strives to understand how the dynamic interplay of race/ethnicity, age, class, gender, and ability shape individual identities and experiences in relation to structural and intra/interpersonal factors as seen in Figure 5 (Jiang & Gong, 2019; Tefera et al., 2018).

Some intersectionality critiques argue for the creation of a more operationalized definition and establishment of clear bounds or limitations, while proponents embrace the vagueness and praise its resistance to traditional hegemonic or positivist approaches to theory (Shaffner et al., 2019). However, for the purposes of this research, and in an attempt to apply implications derived from intersectionality to a systematic inquiry of higher education, the following delineations will apply. There are three distinct forms for conceptualizing the term, which involve structural, political, and representational intersectionality. At its base level, the exclusion of lived experiences in the development of societal systems results in the disproportionate and mismatched allocation of efforts and resources. Political intersectionality, on the other hand, emphasizes the complete omission of these experiences in political discourse due to conflicting narratives. The last form, representational intersectionality, manifests through cultural representations that further reinforce violence and negative notions regarding the marginalized groups (Harris & Patton, 2019).

Since its introduction, Crenshaw's theory has been utilized by numerous scholars and practitioners across industries, however, Harris and Patton (2019) primarily discuss the effects of intersectionality in advancing racial equity and social justice. The authors caution against using intersectionality as a buzzword without further backing of meaning and commitment to social justice or failure to accurately depict systems of oppression. Recognition of sources and appropriate citation of social movements leading to the creation of the theory are of equal importance, as to avoid inaccurate definitions and incorrect application to the field of higher

education. When attempting to utilize the principles derived from intersectionality, higher education practitioners often overlook the weight of its meaning and emphasis on social justice or fail to recognize the theoretical construct from a historical perspective. The intersectionality of college students, especially in combination with past educational experiences, are often correlated with the students' self-efficacy and goal setting. Hence, there is an emphasis on the need for holistic and multifaceted support services to engage the development of non-cognitive skills related to success and increase persistence among academically vulnerable students (Mechur Karp, 2016; Salinas & Hidrowoh, 2017).

Figure 5

An Overview of Intersectionality Elements in Relation to Macro, Meso, and Micro Systems

- Macro (structural/institutional discrimination)
- Meso (mass media/social norms)
- Micro (Intra/interpersonal influences)

Sexism

Singlism

Ageism

Classism

Race/Ethnicity
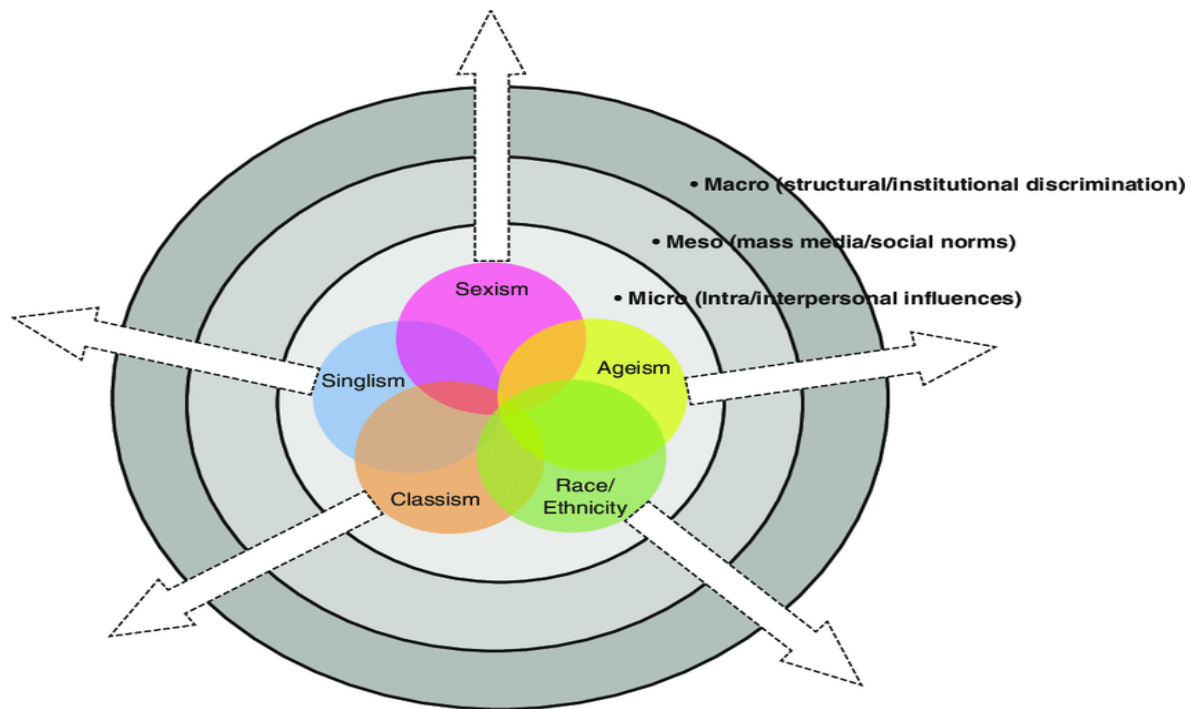
Note. "*The Palgrave Handbook of Intersectionality in Public Policy,*" from Jiang, C. L., & Gong, W. (2019). p. 307. Reprinted with permission.

Higher education professionals' primary objective is to positively affect the level of student connectedness and integration to the academic and/or social systems of the campus by correctly articulating intersectionality theory and recognizing its origin. Moreover, practitioners at the legislative and campus decision-making level should consider the multidimensional identities and experiences of community college students and ensure the inclusion of those narratives in program development/implementation practices.

Student Support Programs and Services with a Transfer Mission

Puente

According to Moreno (2002), various outreach programs like Puente were established as a direct result of the need for providing underrepresented students with increased support and encouragement to pursue higher education opportunities. As discussed previously, the exclusion of race-considering admission policies contributed to the equity gap in college enrollment and completion. So, the main objective of Puente is to directly increase who complete the eligibility requirements for selective university campuses but also provide strategies for prospective applicants to become more competitive. The program predominantly serves students from LatinX backgrounds and is successful in developing a greater college-going culture as compared to non-Puente students. Moreover, program participants are more willing to give up any competing goals or aspirations in favor of college enrollments and complete admission requirements at a higher rate.

Umoja

The Umoja statewide program integrated into the infrastructure of numerous community colleges in California, follows Tinto's theoretical framework of academic and social integration in relation to student success and retention (Messier et al., 2018). This student attrition theory

emphasizes the need of breaking down existent and perceived barriers by tailoring support programs to specific student groups and creating learning communities. Based on these principles, the Umoja community targets African American students by increasing college preparedness, ensuring connection points with peers and faculty based on relevant teaching-learning models, and removing financial hurdles related to higher education attainment.

The disparities attributed to African American student success are primarily linked to the inequitable resource allocation and experiences at the primary and secondary educational levels (Messier et al., 2018). Data indicate that more than half of African American students elect to go to a community college in California and an even higher percentage gets placed into remedial level coursework (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2015). These courses are often not applicable to a degree or satisfy a transfer requirement, which increases the amount of time needed for completion. Low academic performance earlier on based on prior educational experiences is also linked to low self confidence in the students' own ability to succeed and can be further solidified by faculty's display of lower expectations or negative perceptions (Messier et al., 2018).

Based on the premise of increased student engagement and consequent degree attainment, the Umoja community combines events and activities to meet the needs of their students. These activities include but are not limited to summer learning institutes for faculty professional development, concerted outreach efforts to recruit new and continuing programs, accelerated curricula design, as well as Umoja community space. In addition, the program encompasses cultural components that resonate with the students and increase their likelihood of academic success, such as tapping into African American intellection, spiritual, and artistic voices (RPG, 2018b). The Umoja community also closely mirrors some of the key elements of the new

statewide initiative of clarifying the path, entering and staying on the path, and ensuring learning with guided pathways. Unlike other disjointed initiatives, support program and institutional effort alignment is crucial in ensuring successful completion and transition of students from underrepresented groups.

A recent analysis conducted by the RPG (2017) of CCCs made recommendations for improving current service offerings for the Umoja programs across the state. The expansion of student outreach efforts targeting prospective and continuing students are mentioned as a way of increasing overall awareness and participation in the program. It is a key suggestion showing an untapped potential and an existent gap in meeting the needs of African American students on the CCC campuses. Another noteworthy recommendation is an enhancement in curriculum offerings, especially for the STEM areas, and incorporation of hands-on experiences as a part of the learning design. The students surveyed as a part of the research also expressed a need for more guidance resources and support services available to strengthen completion efforts, since there were no notable differences found between Umoja students and their non-Umoja counterparts in cumulative GPA and university transfer.

Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOP&S)

A study conducted by Engle and Tinto (2008) show that students from low-income and first-generation categories disproportionately come from racial minority groups with historically low formal education participation rates. These students are also often returning adult students with less financial support, reduced course load, and several external obligations that limit their full engagement to the campus activities. It is suggested that past academic performance and experiences, such as limited access and participation in advanced secondary school curriculum, and lack of study skills result in lower self-confidence or ability to navigate college processes.

While the college-going culture is still woven into the makeup of the United States, the expectations of four-year/baccalaureate degree attainment are met with less-than-optimal career prospects and increased student debt (Padilla et al., 2019). To mitigate some of the academic, social, and financial barriers throughout underserved students' educational journey, the extended opportunity program and services (EOP&S) was established (Soltani et al., 2017).

EOP&S were pioneered in CCCs with an explicit mission of assisting previously underserved students and expanding access (Soltani et al., 2017). Program offerings include essential and holistic support strategies, such as academic tutoring and counseling, peer-mentoring, book vouchers, gas cards, and/or meal vouchers, as well as work-study opportunities for students who qualify. EOP&S has been successful in facilitating student self-efficacy efforts on campus through increased motivation, positive outlook, and greater involvement with various campus initiatives and/or activities. Significant statistical differences were found by ethnic group for three learning outcome measures, namely term GPA, overall GPA, and positive student outcomes as defined by the EOP&S program. These outcomes have been shown to be positively related to college degree attainment, term-to-term retention (also proved higher for program participants), and the probability of university transfer. EOP&S program structure addressed not only the academic factors related to student success but also social integration and basic needs.

While the positive impact in EOP&S participation is overt and evident, several practical implications have emerged from examining the program structure and service offerings (Soltani et al., 2017). For example, the broader definition of student success should move away from the narrow focus on grades and graduation rates to a more holistic and student-centered model, which in turn will also be reflected in the student services program design and implementation. Moreover, state and local leadership bodies are urged to increase the funding for wrap-around

programs like EOP&S as a way of expanding service offerings to a larger population of underserved students. EOP&S is also urged to expand the peer-to-peer support opportunities and non-cognitive skill development.

The Student Support Services Program (TRiO)

The student support services program is one of the several federally funded programs offered under the TRiO umbrella designed to increase retention, degree attainment, and transfer rates (Abbott, 2004; Ruiz, 2008). TRiO/SSS program's main objective is to bridge the high school to college transition for low-income, first-generation, and disabled students. Ruiz (2008) also suggests that structured programs that establish learning communities and cater to target student populations' needs are more effective in increasing retention rates. According to Abbott (2004), among services offered by TRiO/SSS, transfer planning and academic advising were the best predictors of academic achievement. On the other hand, persistence and non-persistence for program participants were characterized by offerings like dedicated computer labs, cultural and campus integration activities, and personal counseling. Practical implications derived from these studies are aimed at identifying best practices in advising behaviors for TRiO/SSS students, reconciling the differences in perception of program effectiveness between administrators and participants, and revising any commonly accepted practices based on the feedback.

While the differing experiences of underserved students is widely acknowledged and examined, the impact of TRiO/SSS program and other support services is still limited (Quinn, 2017). Underrepresented students might not grasp the importance of campus integration through engagement activities and social self-confidence with a primary focus of class attendance or career ambitions. Thus, institutional efforts in referring continuing students or filtering new

students into support programs is limited due to external obligations and time constraints, as well as the restrictive program requirements imposed by the governing body.

Transfer Center Considerations

The vast majority of students who enroll at a community college aspire to attain a bachelor's degree, though only a slight percentage is successful in undergraduate degree completion efforts (Nielsen, 2015). Low-income, minority, and first-generation college students demonstrate lower than 6-year completion rates, and those who complete a program of study tend to earn certificates as opposed to associate's or bachelor's degrees. In an effort to explain the disparities between indicated academic goals and degree attainment outcomes, higher education scholars have described the following factors affecting student experiences: (a) broad cultural frameworks of educational attainment, (b) political-economic structures, (c) institutional arrangements, and (d) interactions between marginalized students and institutional actors.

Since stakeholders at various levels of campus administration and legislative decision-making roles have stressed the importance of retention and completion to the individual and societal benefit, the most salient issue at hand is increasing persistence. Lindsey (2019) challenged higher education professionals to continue being responsive to their students' needs and ensure equitable programming for all student groups. Research implies that academically, socially, or financially disadvantaged students are particularly affected by the bureaucratic tape of modern-day institutions and information constraints regarding successful college navigation (Schudde et al., 2020). For example, professionals need to examine the accessibility, accuracy, and completeness of the information provided by CCC Transfer Centers regarding university admission requirements. Additional considerations need to be made about the availability of

major opportunities and program outcomes not only at the community college but also at the 4-year level.

As such, improving transfer outcomes requires a strong institutional commitment (making transfer a priority on campus) by administrators, faculty, and staff at both community colleges and four-year colleges (CCCCO, 2017; Wyner et al., 2016). Transfer partnerships on and off campus are made successful only by the increased efforts on the part of senior administrators, faculty leaders, and support staff. These characteristics are essential in establishing and reinforcing the importance of serving transfer students and result not only in strong organizational structures that support transfer student success but also mutual intra- and inter-institutional trust. Clearly communicating transfer as a key component of the institution's mission, data-driven and transparent decision-making for improving transfer outcomes, and dedicated resource allocation for supporting these efforts are some of the strategies that can be utilized by CCC Transfer Centers. These strategies are also consistent with the guidelines established by the CCCCO in collaboration with CCC TCDs. Student transfer must be a shared responsibility and an integrated function between all major departments, academic, and student services alike.

Transfer Relationship to High School Partners and Community Outreach

Most, if not all, CCC campuses staff dedicated to the identification and recruitment of prospective students (CCCCO, 2017). The CCCCO suggests joint coordination of these efforts with transfer centers as a way of conducting early transfer outreach and disseminating information about potential opportunities. As with previous initiatives, these efforts should be inclusive of student groups who have been historically underserved in the higher education setting. High school outreach is also a great way of dispelling any myths or stigmas associated

with community college enrollment and a way of encouraging A-G requirement completion. Previous discussions show a positive correlation between high school math and English completion with a 2.6 GPA and successful completion of transfer-level courses in the same discipline (Shaw et al., 2018). The recent initiatives like College Promise guarantee free-tuition for eligible high school graduates who want to enroll in a 2-year institution, which makes outreach even more crucial. Another strategy for targeting prospective students from the target demographic in early transfer efforts is collaborating with various community organizations. Such organizations include public service organizations, youth groups, labor unions, and business/industry representatives.

Transfer in Student Success and Support Process, Equity, and BSI

CCCCO (2017) once again underscores the importance of quality program offerings in long-term student success. The provisions of SB 1456, or the Student Success Act of 2012, call for academic competency assessment, acquaintance with the institutional offerings through orientation, clarification of academic pathways through counseling, and continued enrollment in courses. All of these aspects are critical to transfer student success. Assessment interventions through the Transfer Center faculty and staff can help provide tutoring service information and other high-touch practices that are tied to better student outcomes. Similarly, students become familiar with the campus through online or in-person orientations, which can be an instrumental tool for providing a brief overview of university admission processes, general education options, major preparation requirements, and support services available to assist students throughout the process.

As a way of facilitating data-informed decisions on the part of TCDs and staff, background information provided during initial admission and registration phases help identify

students' academic goals, credit completion status, GPAs, as well as transfer aspirations. Close ties with the admissions office are also crucial for TCDs when submitting general education certifications for CSUs and IGETC certifications for UC institutions, which indicate completion of all lower-division general education courses. Similarly, strong relationships with the counseling faculty are paramount to transfer student success efforts. Counseling faculty are often the ones who have the most consistent contact with students and should be updated on any changes pertaining to university admission requirements, especially if the student has completed coursework at another institution in- or out of state.

Transfer Pathways

Mounting evidence suggests that students are aware of the narratives regarding the viability and economic advantage possible through four-year degree completion and internalize these narratives in ways that translate into their decision-making (Padilla et al., 2019). So, while it is clear that improving degree attainment rates by redesigning structural and political components of California's higher education systems, the institutionalized practices often prevent these changes from happening (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2017). Based on the 2017 results gathered by the Campaign for College Opportunity, only one-fourth of CCC transfer students earn an associate's degree or certificate before transferring. While transfer student retention and graduation rates are comparably higher for UC and CSU institutions, obtaining an AA/AS degree along the way ensures that students earn a credential in case an undergraduate degree is not obtained. This is important because individuals who possess an associate degree have an increased earning potential by 29% in comparison to high school graduates. An associate degree completion is also positively related to undergraduate degree completion in the future (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2017; Kopko & Crosta, 2016).

This brief discussion about possible transfer pathways sets the stage for a more detailed examination of available options that greatly facilitate vertical transfer efforts at the CCCs.

Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT)

Regardless of the existent transfer policies at the regional and state levels, about half of students who transfer from a community college to a public university tend to experience some credit loss upon transfer (Hodara et al., 2017; Taylor, 2019). Doyle (2009) and Monaghan and Attewell (2015) discussed the prevalence of credit loss for community college students through the examination of beginning postsecondary students (BPS) data, as well as the relationship that credit loss plays in bachelor's degree completion. Fifty-six percent of the 1995/96 community college transfer cohort were able to transfer all credits, while the remaining students experienced credit loss. The 2003/2004 cohort results were comparable to the previous dataset, with 58% of community college transfer students transferring 90% or more of their college credits. The remaining students still experienced some credit loss, and about 14% of students had only 10% of their credits accepted by the receiving institution (Monaghan & Attewell, 2015). Among other known factors, loss of credits during transfer is tied to low bachelor's degree completion for community college students. The credit loss of the 1995/96 cohort was associated with a 40-percentage point graduation gap, as 82% of students who were able to transfer all of their credits graduated with a bachelor's degree within 6 years of starting college. Less than half of the students who lost credit during transition attained the desired outcome of undergraduate degree completion (Hodara et al., 2017).

One of the most significant initiatives targeting credit loss and strengthening transfer pathways was passed legislatively in 2010 (Padilla et al., 2019). The Campaign for College Opportunity (2017), in collaboration with the CSU Office of the Chancellor, the CCCCO, other

various internal and external stakeholders, worked to pass the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act (SB 1440). The follow-up policy, SB 440, along with the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act pioneered the development of the associate degree for transfer. This reform was successful in creating a smoother path to a bachelor's degree without exceeded 120 units. SB 1440 collaborative allowed for the CCCs and the CSU segment to work together in achieving three overarching goals: (a) create clearer transfer pathways that reduce the number of excess units taken; (b) create an associate's degree for transfer; and (c) increase the number of students transferring to a four-year college. Each system was then tasked with creating the Associate Degree for Transfer pathways, guaranteeing admission to CSUs with a junior-level standing and only 60-unit completion at the community colleges. Similar to their CCC partners, CSUs would only require 60 units of upper-division coursework and assist in the establishment of what is called a transfer model curricula or TMC for specific major programs.

As a result, more than 30 TMCs have been developed, and more than two thousand ADTs have been approved across CCCs as of 2017. This is still an incremental process that involves the continued development of ADT pathways and approval by constituency groups, including faculty, curriculum committees, governing boards, and the chancellor's offices (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2017). Though the majority of community colleges in the state of California have achieved the set benchmarks of ADTs offerings, more ADTs are still in the development stage or are awaiting approval. Since SB1440 adoption, more than 68,000 ADTs have been awarded according to previous research, which is indicative of the fact that this number is much higher now. The improvements made in this arena are evident when considering that the number of degrees awarded in 2015–16 nearly equaled the total degrees awarded

between 2010 and 2015. This signified more than a 150% increase compared to 2013-14, with more than 15,000 ADTs awarded and students who enrolled at the CSU institutions.

University of California Pathways

According to the Campaign for College Opportunity (2017), AB 2302 was passed by the state legislature requesting for the UCs work with their transfer partners in simplifying and standardizing course requirements. This would allow for transfer students who seek admission to both the UC and the CSU to select from a prescribed set of course offerings. The bill also requested for UC institutions to collaborate with community colleges in the creation of degree opportunities that would assist in preparing students for admission to any major at the UC segment.

While the UC system did not take immediate action consistent with the passage of AB 2302, a transfer action was released in 2014 that included the following recommendations:

- streamline the transfer process across the systems

- work in collaboration with the CCCs and the CSUs to improve transfer

- increase the UC presence on each of CCC campuses

The UC system also recognized the lack of clear and effective pathways for community college students to transfer to the UC institutions, thus compromising their efforts of attracting qualified students. Moreover, the UC officials' review of set ADT guidelines identified misalignment with upper-division coursework offered at the research-centered institutions. As such, instead of adopting the ADT pathways similar to CSU, the UC announced the creation of their own specific transfer pathways in July of 2015.

The concept behind UC transfer pathways is the premise of providing students with a common set of coursework they can take at the CCCs in order to prepare them to be competitive

applicants at any of the nine UC undergraduate campuses and majors (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2017). These new UC opportunities are similar to the associate degrees for transfer constructed for CSU admission; however, they do not offer the same benefits as guaranteed admission to the UC system, nor do they incentivize the completion of an associate's degree. The only attribute that is a guarantee, is the number of required courses; so while less impacted campuses might be less stringent on requirements than the set standards, others will not ask for any additional courses aside from what is mentioned on the major pathway.

For competitive and research-oriented institutions like the UCs, efforts to align curriculum and simplify the transfer process might be challenging (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2017). These objectives often clash against faculty-defined requirements to ensure satisfactory academic preparation for prospective students. Thus, the only guarantee that students at the community colleges possess for transfer to the UC comes in the form of the Transfer Admissions Guarantee (TAG). The TAG is a formalized agreement between the potential student aspiring to attend the institution and the UC itself, which assures admission acceptance upon meeting specific requirements. However, only six of the nine UC campuses currently participate in TAG agreements with CCC institutions; UC Davis, UC Irvine, UC Merced, UC Riverside, UC Santa Barbara, and UC Santa Cruz. The agreement further stimulates:

- students must be attending a CCC

- students must submit an application by the filing deadline of September 30 (fall application cycle)

- fulfill all eligibility requirements determined by the UC school of choice

- fill out the general admission application by November 30 for fall admission or July 31 for spring admission

Contrasting the Associate Degree for Transfer, which guarantees the possibility of admission to any of the 23 CSU campuses, community college students may only enter into a TAG agreement with the UC campus of their choice. Furthermore, although most TAG-offering campuses accept all majors for transfer, each campus has different requirements per major that need to be fulfilled. These requirements include specific GPA expectations, general education, and major preparation coursework that needs to be completed. Since every application cycle is unique, depending on the year, some majors may be closed for TAG, permanently or temporarily suspended or discontinued, while other majors may be deemed highly selective and demand additional requirements, such as additional courses or higher GPAs. Due to strict guidelines and extensive demands, data demonstrates that students who transfer utilizing a TAG agreement represent only a small percentage of overall transfer students. The recent data implication demonstrated an overall system-wide application rate for transfer at 29,000 and admission of 15,000, of which only 7,960 (27%) were TAG applicants (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2017). Among TAG applicants, however, only 3,100 students enrolled at one of the UC campuses, which comprised less than half of all students who applied with TAG agreements.

Articulation Agreements

According to Stern (2016), researchers found that there was a significant decrease in the number of vertical transfers from a community college to a 4-year institution during the 1980s and 1990s. The decline in vertical transfer rates was substantial, from 57% in the early 1970s to only 28% in the beginning to mid-1980s. Scholars have also seen an incredible surge in the number of states that have implemented articulation agreements, which are now integral CCC transfer efforts. In its simplest form, "articulation agreements are the principal instruments to facilitate the transfer process. Specifically, [they] serve to negotiate the requirements for

students' movement from institution to institution and support the transfer intent" (Anderson et al., 2006, p. 263). The CCCCO (2017) operationalizes the working definition of these agreements further by establishing articulation as a formal, written, and published agreement that identifies a specific course or course sequences at the *sending* institution that are acceptable or comparable to similar courses at the receiving campus.

In the 1960s, virtually no states had articulation agreements. However, by the early 2000s, approximately 30 states had implemented some form of policy regarding the movement of students between higher education institutions (Stern, 2016). Stern (2016) also mentions that while there have been mixed results on the effectiveness of articulation agreements on transfer rates for community college students, especially at the onset of their development and implementation, as agreements by themselves may not be sufficient. It takes intentional collaboration between members of the campus community as they champion transfer and scale the positive impact brought forth by articulation agreements. As such, there is also considerable evidence that argues for the continued development, implementation, and expansion of articulation across the state. The CCCCO (2017), in collaboration with the TCDs in the state, reaffirm the pivotal role that these formalized agreements play in the transfer process and bachelor's degree attainment. As mentioned by Stern (2016), the odds of bachelor's degree attainment were substantially increased for community college students enrolled in states with comprehensive, statewide articulation agreements.

Articulation agreements have also been shown to mitigate the issues posed by credit loss discussed by Monaghan and Attewell (2015). Considering the number of students that community colleges serve in the nation, 15% of students losing nearly all of their credits, and 33% losing anywhere from 10 to 89% of credit units in the transition to 4-year institutions, is

definitely challenging. According to Taylor (2019), credit loss can also be attributed to the overcrowding of the community colleges and/or the increase in cost for 4-year universities (private and public).

To help solve this problem, community colleges have partnered with various for-profit and not-for-profit public, as well as 4-year institutions across the country to implement the outlined articulation agreements. As documented partnerships between 2- and 4-year institutions that outline the transfer policies and procedures for specific academic programs or degrees, articulation agreements also ensure academic preparedness based on the guidelines (CCCO, 2017; Taylor, 2019).

This analysis conducted by LaSota and Zumeta (2015) also points to a need in considering the relative influence of state articulation and transfer policies for historically underrepresented student groups like first-generation college students. Although a particular policy component may not demonstrate significance for this population overall, effective agreements may positively influence vertical transfer probability for students who share certain characteristics, such as first-generation and low-income status. Since indicators of the college's mission in relation to the institutional transfer-out rates and proportion of associate's degree completions in transfer-oriented majors are one of the leading college-level predictors of upward transfer probability, it is important for TCDs and articulation officers to work together in developing these practices. The CCCCO (2017) has identified the following touchpoints between the two roles:

- development of transferable course agreements (TCA), which includes all community college courses that can be used when adding units that will transfer to a UC campus

- establishment of a baccalaureate list – list of all CC courses that can be used when adding transferable units to the CSU system

- General Education Breadth Agreements – community college courses than can be used for specific general education or breadth requirements at universities

- lower-division major preparation agreements – CC courses that can be used to fulfill the lower-division requirements for specific majors at any of the university segments

- course-to-course agreements – identifying particular community college courses that are comparable to our acceptable in lieu of corresponding courses at a university

- Course Identification Numbering System – also called C-ID – a numbering system used to facilitate the identification of comparable courses among the CCC and CSU systems.

With the input of TCDs in the state, as well as teaching and non-teaching faculty, transfer policies regarding articulation agreement development and implementation greatly facilitate a dialogue between 2- and 4-year higher education systems. The usage of the following resources provided by the CCCCO is also instrumental in gathering accurate information about transfer agreements and making decisions for course enrollment to fulfill specific university requirement:

- Articulation System Stimulating Interinstitutional Student Transfer (*ASSIST*), which is California's main repository of course articulation for CCCs with the UC and CSU systems.

- The California Intersegmental Articulation Council (CIAC), which serves as a state-wide forum for Articulation Officers to meet, discuss, and resolve college transfer and

articulation issues. This, in turn, facilitates the progress of students between and within the systems of postsecondary education.

Academic Advising and Counseling in Supporting Underrepresented Students

In addition to the overt mission of throughput and structured completion by design, the community college mission is also inclusive of objectives that are not as readily observable (Schwitzer et al., 2016). The vision conveyed by the institutions through the student equity lens is also indicative of their goal to serve as a catalyst for individuals' life span development, personal achievement, and ability to fill important roles in life. In this context, it is important to reiterate that community colleges cater to the most diverse clientele, which include traditional-age late adolescent and young adult students (who enroll immediately after high school), non-traditional learners across the adult life span (returning students), as well as first-generation and underprepared college students. However, this is only the limited student background characteristics and needs that community college professionals interact with on a daily basis. To add to the discussion, 2-year institutions also tend to enroll high-success university-bound learners, single parents and economically disadvantaged families, individuals with various career and social adjustment needs, mid-career workers, and various other diverse community representatives (Schwitzer et al., 2016). Since community colleges maintain open-access enrollments that promote opportunity equity and support social justice goals, the function of counseling professionals working in community college settings is to implement institutional practices and convey essential messaging for student success in a more equitable manner.

In the context of counseling support in transfer centers, the Campaign for College Opportunity (2017) emphasizes that the absence of alignment between systems of higher education can potentially leave community college students and counselors confused. This

confusion might be related to the requirements students need to satisfy prior to transferring to the university of choice, irrespective of the system that the institution belongs to. However, this can pose further challenges due to the overwhelming ratio of community college counselors to students. In some instances, this ratio was as high as 1,016 students and 1 counselor. While some improvements have been made, effectively reducing the ratio of student to counseling faculty, 615 to 1, as of fall 2015, the caseload might still be hard to handle in an equitable manner.

The Campaign for College Opportunity (2017) also highlighted the challenges that a lack of available counselors and long wait times for appointments can pose to students seeking to transfer. The report findings describe students being limited to when and how often they could see counselors on campus, further intensified by the appointment system. Students might also not be able to meet with the same counseling faculty over time, which means that they often received inconsistent and conflicting information. Moreover, the new community college students, many of whom are first-generation with no prior family experiences in the higher education system, often did not know the right questions to ask and were overwhelmed by the very nature of attending and understanding college. Thus, it is important for counselors to understand these overt challenges and ensure that sufficient time is being taken during appointments to understand and address student needs.

If navigating transfer on campus remains as complex as it is currently, community college students must have better access to trained counseling faculty equipped with the accurate information necessary to answer their questions. As described, some students do not even have sufficient information on the type of questions that need to be asked, so counselors should gauge individual circumstances and assist to the extent possible. A strategy that can and should be adopted by community colleges is the emphasis on the prominence of the counselors' role on the

community college campus. Counseling faculty are not like academic advisors who possess any level of education and are trained in a specific area. Instead, counselors at community colleges come from various backgrounds and must have a graduate degree to meet the state minimum qualifications. Since sufficient funding allocation can be an issue for public 2-year colleges, additional funds to provide the required and ongoing training opportunities to counselors can help students with specific information related to intricate programs like university transfer. Without an outlined strategy, a continued lack of access will have negative implications on community college students and discourage them from transferring.

Several other community college counseling and advising practices were proposed by scholars to assist in the transfer process (Wyner et al., 2016). These practices include:

- Clearly articulate students' transfer options and help them determine, as early as possible, their field of interest, major of study, and a preferred transfer destination.
- Continuously monitor student progress, provide frequent feedback, and intervene quickly when students are off track.
- Help students plan for and access the financial resources necessary to achieve their goals.

Cultural Competency in Transfer

Campaign for College Opportunity (2017) calls for California to embrace its diverse population and closely consider the fact that students who choose to pursue college education face unique and overt challenges. As opposed to predominantly White, 18-22-year-old high school graduates who attend full-time, there is a surge of returning older students who often pursue employment opportunities simultaneously and enroll in college part-time. In fact, the

disparities in degree attainment for these historically underrepresented student groups

demonstrate a clear need for targeted resources and supports, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Percentage of People 25-Years and Older Who Hold Bachelor's Degrees in California
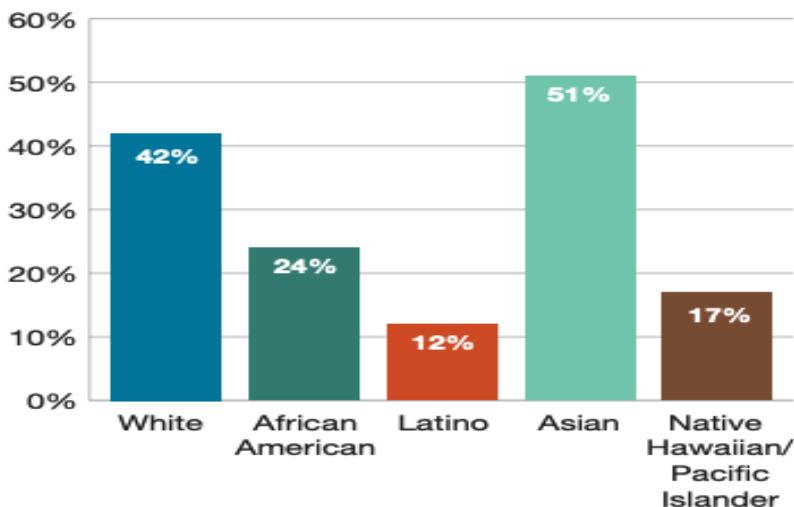
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (Table S1501)

Note. From The U.S. Census Bureau, 2015. In the public domain.

Post-Transfer Performance and Success Strategies

Nuñez and Yoshimi (2016) indicate that previous qualitative studies have addressed the

subjective experiences of students who transfer to large public universities. The yielded data and

subsequent analyses reveal that these students face unique challenges in the receiving institution,

which can include insufficient academic preparation, limited access to information about ways of

navigating the new institution, as well as obstacles in establishing connections with other

students or faculty members. These factors are often described as leading variables that lead to a

feeling of anonymity and even transfer shock. Transfer shock is characterized by the initial

decline in the community college students' grade point average upon transferring. This drop in

grades and overall are the residual effects and manifestation of the shock experienced in moving from one institutional culture to another. More generally speaking, transfer students may experience further marginalization and struggle to feel a sense of validation from the faculty and staff members at the receiving institution (Schlossberg, 1989). It is mentioned that some faculty members, administrators, and support staff can sometimes lack awareness of the distinctive needs and experiences of transfer students (Nuñez & Yoshimi, 2016). If intentional conversation merging essential institutional functions and services does not take place, it can be assumed that transfer students have the same needs as students who are native to the institution. However, studies indicate that transfer students themselves perceive their own needs as being quite different from those of native students, particularly with respect to academic engagement, goal orientation, and social engagement.

Despite the increase in the community college student transfer rate, the college experience at four-year institutions is still primarily geared toward students who started at a four-year institution as freshmen as well as traditionally aged students (Rodriguez & Kerrigan, 2018). This further reinforces a challenging environment for transfer from CCs as they make the transition, although there is a notion of shared responsibility for transfer student success on both systems of higher education. Moreover, conversations regarding vertical transfer pathway opportunities and the four-year experience, in general, have seen an increase over the years because of concern surrounding student debt, degree completion, and post-graduation employment prospects.

In an effort to understand the community college transfer population and the challenges they encounter at four-year institutions better, Rodriguez and Kerrigan (2018) viewed the population through the lenses of identity, development, and engagement. Exploring these

characteristics associated with identity, development, and engagement at four-year institutions allowed this population's unique voices and narratives to be heard, as well as gave way for the development of practical implication in the student success arena. The offers suggest transfer students make meaning of their experiences at their four-year institution and interpret the world around them through the above mentioned areas, thus providing a holistic picture of the community college transfer experience. It is suggested to design transfer student-specific orientations and activities that focus primarily on available engagement opportunities like campus internships, recreational-related offerings, and supplemental guidance during the major selection process. These measures aim to provide students with an opportunity to establish more identity-formation as a four-year student.

The differential degrees of integration into four-year institutions are also based on personal attributes like race and ethnicity, social and cultural capital differentials, as well as the receiving campus climate, all of which have been found to partly account for the achievement gap between students of color and their peers (Wang, 2012). Due to the complex nature of university transfer processes and the difference of receiving institutions' characteristics, it is essential to note that among pre- and post-transfer students, all academic advisement is noted as important (Allen et al., 2013). Research findings suggest that advisors at all levels of higher education should be equipped with the comprehensive knowledge of various cross-campus functionalities, with the information function being a top priority. This essentially entails that the advisor's ability to give accurate information pertaining to degree requirements, timelines, and processes is positively correlated with successful college navigation and success.

Although advising is deemed important for transfer students, post-transfer students are more concerned with forming meaningful relationships with their advisors, as opposed to feeling

like a number at the 4-year institution (Allen et al., 2013). The implications stemming from the challenges of moving away from a familiar environment and stressors of less personalized attention entail that advisors at the CC level are instrumental in preparing students for university success. On the receiving end of the student transfer experience, professionals at 4-year institutions should let students know that they matter. Self-efficacy and shared responsibility portion of the analysis among post-transfer students ensures that the student is an active participant in decision-making, planning, and problem-solving processes. Also, since persistence and academic success vary and greatly depend on the type of transfer student in consideration, different perspectives and perceptions should also be taken into account (McGuire & Belcheir, 2013).

Social and Cultural Capital: Community Cultural Wealth

According to Bourdieu (1986) capital, in all its forms, is the composite part of the social world we live in. While economic capital definitely plays a vital role in how the society functions, solely concentrating on the material aspects of human interaction and value-propositions de-emphasizes the importance of various other significant sources of wealth. Cultural capital, for example, can range from any cultural artifacts or personal dispositions to educational qualifications. Bourdieu bases inequities in educational achievement of students from disadvantaged groups and subsequent economic gains in part due to the disparities of cultural capital. Economic theories of monetizing profit or investment in higher education take into consideration the overt cost and time investment, overlooking the mere fact that academic success can be based on individual ability and linked to cultural capital.

The acquisition of cultural capital can depend on the society or time period, as well as social class and has an important premise of transmission, especially amongst family (Bourdieu,

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1986). Social capital, on the other hand, is referred to as the entirety of resources connected to social relationships or resources like support, access to information, assistance and advocacy (Buchmann et al., 2020). More access to social and cultural capital entails an increased likelihood of desirable educational outcomes, including degree attainment. Salient contextual elements of social capital create a lens of viable connections to familiar and institutional support, which are the primary vehicles of students' self-directed and self-responsible capabilities.

Yosso (2005) argues that epistemological principles surrounding theoretical frameworks and knowledge are often a discourse dictated by the dominant groups of the society. Hierarchical makeup of the society can be the determining factor of which cultural norms, values, and knowledge are deemed valuable for social mobility. This line of thought challenges the deficit model of accepted theoretical models that seem to de-value students of color instead of empowering them and their contribution to the college campus. Yosso's discussion of critical race theory revealed the expansion and incorporation of experiences of women, Latinas/os, Native Americans, as well as Asian American communities. Since one of the objectives of education is to evolve the discourse surrounding equitable opportunities and the intersectional nature of the students' experience on college campuses, there should be awareness of several CRT premises for informing research efforts, policy formation, and curriculum design:

1. Race and racism are linked to other forms of subordination. Critical race theory recognizes that race and racism are a dominant and permanent part of how the US society functions in combination with layers of subordination based on other personal characteristics (e.g., gender, class, status, sexuality).

2. The challenge to dominant ideology. Critical race theory rejects claims that institutions make regarding meritocracy, color-blindness, and equal opportunity.

CRT states that these ideological principles further support the deficit-informed research and the self-interest of dominant groups.

3. The commitment to social justice. CRT is committed to social justice and makes concerted efforts in eliminating racism, sexism, and poverty through the empowerment of people of color and other subordinated groups.

4. The importance of experiential knowledge. Critical race theory's application to educational tenants also recognizes that the experiential knowledge is legitimate and fitting for evaluating racial disparities. This experiential knowledge is expressed through various forms of storytelling, chronicles, biographies, or parables to name a few.

5. The transdisciplinary perspective. CRT permeates through boundaries in an effort to critically analyze racial implications from the historical and contemporary perspectives, relying on the disciplines of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, theater, and other fields.

These premises work in tandem to challenge existing ideologies in scholarship and expand the scope of literary discussions revolving around race. Thus, student empowerment begins with recognizing the potential and value of people of color and shifting the focus to incorporating cultural capital in the context of wealth (Yosso, 2005). Communities of Color have shown to nurture types of capital like aspirational, social, linguistic, familial, resistant, and navigational, which in turn are ever-evolving and work in tandem with one another. The latter discussion will provide a more focused examination of transfer student capital in alignment with various formative experiences that shape transfer student success.

Transfer Student Capital

Stephens et al. (2014) highlighted the fact that many universities have tried to address the social class achievement gap by implementing programs that are geared towards academic, organizational, and study skills. The scholars also emphasize that these programs often miss the mark in addressing the psychological resources needed for the community college transfer population, which also includes the domain of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, according to Thompson and Verdino (2018), is the personal belief the individual holds in their ability to accomplish tasks as they work towards a goal. In the higher education environment, students who lack academic self-efficacy might not perform well and have difficulty persisting or succeeding as a student. The scholars have also emphasized that the lack of one's belief in their ability to master difficult tasks can lower motivation and persistence in the face of adversity. Thus, the measurement of transfer capital includes previous experiences with academic counseling at a community college, their perceptions of the transfer process, experiences with faculty, as well as learning and study skills acquired at the two-year institution. Programming with peer support groups and mentoring can provide the supplemental support component needed for transfer students in further developing their capital, especially since many first-generation college students struggle with a lack of support from their communities (can negatively impact their academic performance).

These findings were consistent with Laanan et al.'s (2010) findings, as the positive influence of learning and study skills at a community college, also conceptualized as transfer student capital, had a positive influence on the students' academic transfer adjustment. The examples of the learning and study skills that are found as significant include: note-taking skills, problem-solving skills, and time management skills. Thus, smaller class sizes and intimate class

interaction among faculty and students at a 2-year institution might contribute to the development of transfer student capital and ensure transfer success. Other success factors include pre-transfer advisement, especially considering the importance of lower division major preparation and general education courses at the community college level (Maliszewski Łukszo & Hayes, 2019). The role of institutional agents with certain positional authority can also significantly facilitate transfer success by making connections with 4-year institutions. In line with making connections as a determinant of academic achievement, social capital or the collection of actual and prospective resources can increase students' knowledge regarding transfer processes, as well as ensure appropriate academic planning.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

The primary objective of this study was to delineate strategies and opportunities that lead to underrepresented student transfer success in a CCC setting/environment. Effective practices employed /utilized by transfer centers in supporting these efforts often stem from overt and persistent challenges experienced by students and can serve as bases for evidence-based services in the future. This chapter outlines the overall research design and methodology in congruence with the main areas of community college transfer success inquiry. As such, gathering relevant data from TCDs tasked with supporting historically underrepresented students' transfer journey was achieved through a qualitative research design utilizing a phenomenological approach. A comprehensive discussion surrounding specificities of participant selection, interview techniques, and subsequent measures for human participant protection is also included. Moreover, the validity and reliability of the research instrument, as well as data analysis measures, are addressed towards the end of the chapter to ensure alignment with the research questions of this study.

Re-Statement of Research Questions

This chapter describes the research methods that were applied to achieve the objectives of this study, which is to primarily answer these four research questions:

- **RQ1:** What challenges do community college TCDs encounter when supporting historically underrepresented student transfer to 4-year institutions?

- **RQ2**: What best practices and strategies are utilized by community college TCDs to support historically underrepresented student transfer efforts to 4-year institutions?

- **RQ3**: How do community college TCDs define, measure, and track success?

- **RQ4**: Based on demonstrated transfer success strategies (indicators), what

    recommendations would community college TCDs have for new practitioners coming

    into the field?

Nature of the Study

The study explored CCC transfer center directors' experiences in supporting students

through prevalent academic, social and cultural, as well as organizational barriers by conducting

a descriptive, qualitative study. Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2009) describe qualitative study

design as an area of research concerned with exploring and comprehending social constructs,

meanings attributed to lived experiences, and the interpretations stemming from them.

Legitimizing the choice for qualitative research for this topic is based on the following

provisions:

Descriptive and Explorative

Emerging conversations around student equity in higher education have taken a

prominent role in support program design and implementation. Qualitative research allows the

researcher to explore the innovative developments of the field and lead to extensive data findings

(Boeije, 2010).

Use and Sensitivity

One of the primary strengths of qualitative research is the promise to uncover

participants' perspectives regarding a significant field (Boeije, 2010). These findings will then be

interpreted to provide practical inferences and serve as guidelines for evidence-based services

supporting historically underrepresented student transfer success.

Qualitative research is flexible, descriptive, and inductive in nature, which allows for

continued development and modifications as the study progresses (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam,

2009). This type of research often aligns with the social constructivism or interpretivism perspectives and is also characterized by its focus on the process instead of outcome (especially when studying perspectives and experiences) and development of theories or practical models based on the gathered information (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). These varying approaches to the research approach make qualitative research quite diverse and applicable to different arenas of inquiry (Boeije, 2010). Another underlying notion of qualitative research design is the active role that individuals play in the construction of social reality; therefore, the researcher is designated as the main data collection and analysis instrument (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

It is also important to note that because of the highly contextualized nature of qualitative research, most studies tend to occur in their respective natural settings. Idiographic interpretations of the data allow for attention to detail instead of generalizations, thus, qualitative findings are normally not quantifiable (Creswell, 2013). In addition, alignment and research instrument effectiveness help to establish accuracy and objectivity of findings, which is the established paramount of any appreciative inquiry (Eisner, 1991).

The social constructivist perspective combines concepts from various discussions about social constructs and naturalistic inquiry to present a set of assumptions for the qualitative research design (Creswell, 2009). According to this approach, the researcher's primary objective should be ontological, concerned with the multifaceted nature of ideas and events from the participants' point of view, as opposed to their classification into narrow groups or categories. The social nature of constructing meaning is rooted in interactions and historical or cultural norms within the given context from the epistemological assumption and result in the need of conducting qualitative studies in the field (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Similarly,

the researcher's own experiences can play a role in the interpretation of the situation or recognition of patterns based on the *axiological* assumption. Thus, qualitative research assumptions according to the constructivist view are as follows:

- Human beings create meaning by engaging with the surrounding environment.

- The meaning created through those interactions often have historical and cultural basis, which in turn signifies the researcher's role of personal inquiry and data collection.

- Social interactions are the basic generators of meaning, largely through inductive synthesis of the data collected.

Methodology

Qualitative research categories range from ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, biographical research, narrative analysis, and case studies (Boeije, 2010). For the purposes of this study, a phenomenological approach was utilized. The design decision was based on phenomenological inquiry as a form of an inductive process that offers insight into people's experiences and their meaning (Bliss, 2016). It is primarily concerned with the investigation of people's experiences with a particular phenomenon in order to obtain a detailed account and reveal the true nature of the experience.

Structured Process of Phenomenology

Phenomenology is rooted in philosophy and psychology, especially as structured and solidified by Husserl (Cappelen et al., 2016; Merriam, 2009; Polit & Beck, 2010). The hermeneutic phenomenological approach is predominantly concerned with the interpretation of meaning and essence in the given contextual environment (Patton, 2002; Polit & Beck, 2010). Thus, the phenomenological interview instrument is the primary way of uncovering the full

scope, structure, and breadth of the experience. As done through the process of epoche and

bracketing, the researcher has suspended prior knowledge gained from experience to truly

deepen the understanding of the proposed phenomenon. The goal is a *composite* description, as

defined by Creswell (2007), representing the *invariant structure* of the topic that leads the reader

to a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Appropriateness of Phenomenology Methodology

Appropriate research strategies are needed to examine meaningful experiences as they

relate to the underrepresented student transfer phenomenon. This process also allows the

researcher to gain a new understanding of the phenomena with reflective and open-ended

methods. While it is easy to get distracted by the richness of data yielded by qualitative data,

having clear research goals and objectives will help guide the process. Phenomenological

researchers do not aim to simplify and reduce phenomena but rather to draw interpretations from

lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). Consistent with this notion, the main objectives of this

research design are to unravel success barriers that transfer students are faced with within

community colleges and best practices in mitigating these challenges. Since support services for

transfer students are often housed in specific departments, the emphasis is placed on TCDs'

interactions with underrepresented students who intend to transfer: (a) their perceptions of the

students' academic preparedness, (b) the presence of social and cultural support, (c) available

service effectiveness, as well as (d) areas of continued development.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Phenomenology

Phenomenological study design allows for a phenomenon exploration and subsequent

development of its intricacies through the participant lens (Creswell, 2013). Data collection

through this approach can be greatly streamlined and structured, if using single or multiple

interviews with participants. While the developed knowledge can be extremely valuable for certain stakeholder groups, in addition to phenomenology's obvious strengths and opportunities for yielding descriptive data, limitations of this design should also be discussed. When findings cannot be quantified, credibility, or applicability in decision-making might come under question (Rahman, 2016). In addition, since the sample size tends to be smaller in phenomenological research, the results will not be generalizable to the entire population (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Phenomenology also requires the researcher to have a working understanding of the underlying assumptions and identify those principles in their study, which can be challenging (Creswell, 2013). Finally, selecting participants who have experienced the phenomenon for the objective of creating a common understanding and later bracketing personal experiences during data interpretation may be difficult when using a phenomenological approach.

Research Design

According to Creswell and Clark (2007), an appropriate research design for a particular study requires an in-depth understanding of the process in its entirety, as well as the composite and interconnected elements that make it a whole. These procedural guidelines range from general assumptions to comprehensive descriptions of data collection and analysis informed by the topic. The principal investigator also takes into consideration the nature of the study, possible implications stemming from data interpretation, and the audience that will benefit from the findings.

Analysis Unit

The analysis unit is one current transfer center director in the CCC with more than 3 years of experience in the role.

Population

The directory of all professionals currently in the transfer center director role at a CCC maintained and made available to the public by the CCCCO, will constitute the entire population for the study.

Sample Size

Since qualitative studies do not focus on large sample sizes, the number of participants has to be enough to reach saturation during the data analysis stage (Creswell, 2013; Gray, 2017). Creswell and Poth (2018) indicate the possibility of sampling anywhere from one and up to 325 individuals, although the recommended sampling size for a single phenomenon is anywhere from 3 to 10 subjects. Qualitative studies with more than 20 participants are rare, since a larger sample size does not necessarily equate to more reliability (Gay et al., 2011). Another primary indicator is the repetitive theme and perspective emergence as an indication of data saturation; additional participants are not added to the study. For the purposes of this study, TCDs who have been in the role for several years can give an accurate account of support strategies and challenges experienced by underrepresented transfer students at the individual and institutional level. After conducting an overview of literature to determine a viable sample size, a target of 15 subjects was reached. Moreover, the peer and expert review also recommended recruiting 15 participants for the study as a good threshold.

Purposive Sampling

The study utilized a purposive sampling method with maximum variation to generate a comparatively small sample size, where each interview is expected to yield robust data until saturation is reached (Boeije, 2010). The sampling decision was informed by the literature review conducted prior to the research design selection, as qualitative research is more likely to

utilize a purposive sample due to the descriptive nature of the study (Gay et al., 2011; Patten & Newhart, 2018). Unlike some of the other sampling methods, the researcher identified a criterion for selecting the sample; a non-probability sample, established a group of individuals who are most informed about the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allowed the researcher to be intentional in choosing 15 TCDs as participants who would provide relevant information about the phenomena that is being studied.

Participation Selection

Participants were selected through the following method: a master list was established with prospective participant contact information by visiting the CCCCO; the list was compared to the transfer center webpages of the institutions for accuracy; any discrepancies between the two sources automatically excluded from the study. Experience serving underrepresented student transfer efforts was gauged from the TC program offerings, as any personal characteristics were not considered for inclusion.

Sampling Frame

Creswell (2013) stressed the importance of research participants had similar experiences in order to align the narratives related to the phenomena. The researcher resorted to the CCCCO directory, which compiles names and contact information of the TCDs in all 116 colleges across the state. The list is readily available by the CCCCO; hence 20 participants were selected from the list to be invited for participation in the study.

Criteria for Inclusion

To be included in the study, individual background characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, or gender, were not taken into account. The criteria for the selected 15 participants for this research were as follows:

- TCD in one of the CCCs.

- The TCD must have demonstrated experience in serving historically underrepresented students and supporting their transfer efforts.

Criteria for Exclusion

The following characteristics exclude potential participants from being included in the study:

- Less than 3 years of experience as a TCD.

- Unavailable to schedule an interview between the months of March-April.

- Not willing to participate in an audio-recorded interview.

Criteria for Maximum Variation

Purposeful sampling design with maximum variation aim to document unique and diverse variations that exist within the sample, identify common themes that reach across variations, and describe multiple perspectives in-depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2013). In fact, the significance of maximum variation lies in the surfacing of shared patterns from heterogeneity, which supports and improves the validity of the study (Bringle et al., 2011). Since the objective of the research study is to yield descriptive and rich data about underrepresented transfer student experiences through CCCs' TCD lens, participants were selected based on their experience of working with the particular student group. The principal investigator opted for participants who have 3 years of experience or more in the role of TCD and represented different regions of California.

Protection of Human Subjects

Ethical means of collecting data and protecting stakeholders involved in the qualitative research process is concerned with following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines

and principal investigator's own values (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Strategies for mitigating ethical issues as they arise, as well as minimizing psychological, social, economic, and legal risk to participants, are essential in gaining IRB approval prior to carrying out the proposed study (Creswell, 2013). In order to fulfill the requirement for conducting this qualitative study, a Category 2 exempt application was submitted to Pepperdine University's IRB office in accordance with the established U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45 (45 CFR 46). The study was consistent with the outlined regulatory clauses for exemption: unless otherwise required by law or by department or agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the categories in Paragraph D of this section are exempt from the requirements of this policy, except that such activities must comply with the requirements of this section and as specified in each category §46.111(a)(7). Approval was given for the research study (see Appendix A).

Informed Consent

Practical implications of ethical principles relate to three dimensions: informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and anonymity (Boeije, 2010; Sieber & Tolich, 2013). Informed consent is intended for the participants' acknowledgment of possible risks and benefits before deciding to partake in the study (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2013). The form discloses information regarding the purpose of the study, participant selection, possible risks and benefits to the individual or other stakeholders, and protection of either confidentiality or anonymity. Potential participants were sent an e-mail invitation using an IRB approved script (see Appendix B) and provided a consent form accepted by Pepperdine University (see Appendix C). Invited individuals were also reassured of their voluntary participation, which allowed for the withdrawal of consent and participation.

Privacy, Confidentiality, & Anonymity

Boeije (2010) and Creswell (2013) discuss privacy matters in relation to controlling access to study participants. While individuals must meet the designated criteria of inclusion, other information disclosed can be withheld from others. Similarly, confidentiality and anonymity are concerned with data collection and reporting, which entails that participants' personal identifiers will be codified and known only to the researcher. The inclusion of interview responses in the findings of this research will also be discussed in advance to provide potential participants with the necessary detail for informed decision-making.

Data Collection

The creation of professional researcher-participant relationships is an integral part of qualitative research methods, so the way those relationships are initiated and negotiated is a design decision (Maxwell, 2013). For the purposes of this study, about 20 potential candidates who meet the criterion for selection will be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. The goal is to have 15 candidates that accept the invitation and actually complete an interview. The researcher utilized their Pepperdine student e-mail to send the invitation and using an IRB approved script for recruiting.

To comply with the health and safety guidelines of L.A. County due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the one-hour interviews were conducted virtually. The principal-investigator obtained permission to record the audio portion of the interview and follow the steps outlined below:

- Send the approved consent form and interview questions to participants two days prior to the meeting to give them time to prepare and think through some of the questions.

- Send an email reminder the day before, indicating the approximate duration of the interview, as well as a personalized and password-protected Zoom meeting link for each individual.

- Assign codes to each interview participant beforehand to ensure anonymity.

- Audiotape Zoom meeting (then transcribe) and take notes for clarity as needed

Interview Techniques

Conducting interviews allows insight into lived experiences and perspectives that are not readily observable (Merriam, 2009). Participants are given a platform to tell a story, share perspectives that are unique to their experiences, and add to the existing body of knowledge about a phenomenon (Boeije, 2010). These conversations, similar to other forms of data collection, are made easier in a reciprocal relationship based on mutual trust. Rapport is the most commonly used term in qualitative research, where both parties have a genuine interest in asking, answering, and listening during the interview. In addition to following the approved regulatory guidelines, the interviewer started with an ice-breaker question to help the participant feel at ease.

The desired amount of structure in an interview design varies significantly with respect to content, formulation, and sequencing. Since qualitative researchers aim to truly understand a phenomenon, interviews tend to be semi-structured in nature (Boeije, 2010; Merriam, 2009). The authors note that while the questions are not highly standardized, they are not entirely open-ended either. Since specific answers are required based on the purpose of the study, the researcher was intentional in utilizing more structured sections in certain areas and allowing more flexibility in others. The interview instrument also included probing questions, as described by Creswell (2013), to allow for follow-up/clarification or more detailed explanations as needed.

The researcher plays an active role in supporting the interviewee to recollect, articulate, and share opinions or ideas about the topic (Boeije, 2010). It is important to ensure congruence with the introduced research topic, as it will more closely fit the participant's frame of reference and expected content. Creswell (2013) and Boeije (2010) also state that allocating sufficient time for participants to answer the questions and accommodating their need to spend more time on certain responses without interruptions is paramount to success. The interview concluded with a thank you statement, acknowledging the effort and time spent by the interviewee.

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions 1-3 aligned with Research Question 1

- **IQ1:** What academic challenges have been identified by transfer students from historically underrepresented groups during your appointments/based on your interactions?

- **IQ2:** What are some of the most prevalent social and/or cultural barriers identified by transfer students from this population?

- **IQ3:** What organizational challenges have you encountered in supporting underrepresented student transfer efforts?

Interview Questions 4-7 aligned with Research Question 2

- **IQ4:** What strategies do you recommend in advancing academic progress for students from historically underrepresented groups?

- **IQ5:** What strategies do you utilize for overcoming social-cultural barriers experienced by transfer students?

- **IQ6:** How do you overcome the organizational challenges that hinder transfer success for this student population?

- **IQ7:** Have you participated in formal/informal training or mentorship opportunities that helped improve equitable service offerings by your transfer center?

Interview Questions 8-9 aligned with Research Question 3

- **IQ8:** How do you define transfer success?

- **IQ9:** How do you measure and track underrepresented student transfer over time?

Interview Questions 10-12 aligned with Research Question 4

- **IQ10:** What would you have done differently at the onset of your TCD position?

- **IQ11:** What advice would you give to new practitioners in the field for supporting equity and transfer student success?

- **IQ12:** Is there anything else you would like to add?

Relationship Between Research and Interview Questions.

Intentional and deliberate instrument design considerations in the beginning stages of the research development improve the overall quality and process of data collection (Miles et al., 2019). The authors strongly urge the researcher to begin with the end in mind by aligning the interview questions to the research questions of the study. This strategy will help to clarify key ideas and set priorities for data collection and analysis. Thus, the 12 interview questions, as shown in Table 1, corresponded to one of the research questions and were intended to elicit meaningful responses for further analysis.

Validity of the Study

Ensuring validity, similar to various other design considerations, is process-oriented (Merriam, 2009). Most commonly asked questions in this phase are concerned with determining whether the results will be credible and consistent with the research objectives and if correct instruments to study the phenomenon were used (Boeije, 2010). Several strategies were used to

enhance the validity of the study, such as using rich, literature-informed descriptions, presenting

various accounts of themes or ideas, even if they contradict the general perspective, and seeking

feedback from peers/committee members for interpretation beyond that of the principal

investigator (Creswell, 2013). This study utilized prima-facie and content validity measures,

peer-review validity, and expert-review validity.

Prima-Facie and Content Validity

Each set of interview questions corresponds to one of the proposed research questions in

the study. Prima-facie and content validity address whether the elements of the interview

instruments collectively measure the construct itself (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2013). As such, the

concepts included in the interview questions were consistent with themes gathered from the

literature review phase around underrepresented student transfer challenges, opportunities, and

success metrics in a community college setting.

Table 1

Research Questions with Corresponding Interview Questions

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What challenges do community college Transfer Center Directors encounter when supporting historically underrepresented student transfer to 4-year institutions?	IQ 1: What *academic* challenges have been identified by transfer students from historically underrepresented groups during your appointments? IQ 2: What are some of the most prevalent *social* and/or *cultural* barriers identified by transfer students from this population? IQ 3: What *organizational* challenges have you encountered in supporting underrepresented student transfer efforts?
RQ 2: What best practices and strategies are utilized by community college Transfer Center Directors to support historically underrepresented student transfer efforts to 4-year institutions?	IQ 4: What strategies do you recommend in advancing academic progress for students from historically underrepresented groups? IQ 5: What strategies do you utilize for overcoming social-cultural barriers experienced by transfer students? (continued)

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	IQ 6: How do you overcome the organizational challenges that hinder transfer success for this student population? IQ 7: Have you participated in formal/informal training or mentorship opportunities that helped improve equitable service offerings by your Transfer Center?
RQ3: How do community college Transfer Center Directors define, measure, and track success?	IQ 8: How do you define transfer success? IQ 9: How do you measure and track underrepresented student transfer over time?
RQ4: Based on demonstrated transfer success strategies (rates/indicators), what recommendations would community college Transfer Center Directors have for practitioners coming into the field?	IQ 10: What is the biggest pitfall someone in your position faces? IQ 11: What advice would you give to new practitioners in the field for supporting equity and transfer student success? IQ 12: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Note. Table 1 identifies four research questions and corresponding interview questions as developed by the researcher.

Peer-Review Validity

Peer-review validity intended to triangulate and strengthen the validity of this study by examining whether similar conclusions could be inferred after other researchers have reviewed thematic conceptualization (Merriam, 2009). The researcher completed this step by seeking feedback from two doctoral students who are a part of the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. Peer-reviewers were asked to assess whether each interview questions were relevant to the study, reasonable (in terms of length/construct), and prompt descriptive responses. Table 2 shows the modification and edits made to the initial verbiage and content of the interview questions (see Appendix D).

Table 2

Research Questions with Corresponding Interview Question (Revised)

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What challenges do community college Transfer Center Directors encounter when supporting historically underrepresented student transfer to 4-year institutions?	IQ 1: What are the top 3 *academic* challenges identified by transfer students from historically underrepresented groups based on your interactions? IQ 2: What are some of the most prevalent *social* and/or *cultural* barriers identified by historically underrepresented transfer students? IQ 3: What *organizational* challenges have you encountered in supporting underrepresented student transfer efforts?
RQ 2: What best practices and strategies are utilized by community college Transfer Center Directors to support historically underrepresented student transfer efforts to 4-year institutions?	IQ 4: What strategies do you recommend in advancing academic progress for students from historically underrepresented groups? IQ 5: What strategies do you utilize for supporting transfer students from underrepresented student groups to overcome social-cultural barriers? IQ 6: How do you overcome the organizational challenges that hinder transfer success for this student population? IQ 7: Have you participated in any formal/informal training or mentorship opportunities that have helped improve equitable service offerings by your Transfer Center?
RQ3: How do community college Transfer Center Directors define, measure, and track success?	IQ 8: How do you define transfer success in your role? IQ 9: How do you measure and track your success in this role?
RQ4: Based on demonstrated transfer success strategies (rates/indicators), what recommendations would community college Transfer Center Directors have for practitioners coming into the field?	IQ 10: What is the biggest pitfall someone in your position faces? IQ 11: What advice would you give to new practitioners in the field for supporting equity and transfer student success? IQ 12: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Note. Table 2 identifies four research questions and corresponding interview questions with

revisions based on feedback from peer-reviewers. Subsequent changes were made to the order

and phrasing of questions within the interview protocol.

The last step in establishing validity consists of expert review and feedback conducted by the dissertation committee. Any revisions or modifications proposed by the committee were included in Table 3.

Table 3

Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions (Committee Revised)

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What challenges do community college Transfer Center Directors encounter when supporting historically underrepresented student transfer to 4-year institutions?	IQ 1: What are the top 3 *academic* challenges identified by transfer students from historically underrepresented groups based on your interactions? IQ 2: What are some of the most prevalent *social* and/or *cultural* barriers identified by historically underrepresented transfer students? (continued) IQ 3: What *organizational* challenges have you encountered in supporting underrepresented student transfer efforts?
RQ 2: What best practices and strategies are utilized by community college Transfer Center Directors to support historically underrepresented student transfer efforts to 4-year institutions?	IQ 4: What strategies do you recommend in advancing academic progress for students from historically underrepresented groups? IQ 5: What strategies do you utilize for supporting transfer students from underrepresented student groups to overcome social-cultural barriers? IQ 6: How do you overcome the organizational challenges that hinder transfer success for this student population? IQ 7: Have you participated in any formal/informal training or mentorship opportunities that have helped improve equitable service offerings by your Transfer Center?
RQ3: How do community college Transfer Center Directors define, measure, and track success?	IQ 8: How do you define transfer success in your role? IQ 9: How do you measure and track your success in this role?
RQ4: Based on demonstrated transfer success strategies (rates/indicators), what recommendations would community college Transfer Center Directors	IQ 10: What is the biggest pitfall someone in your position faces? (continued)

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
have for practitioners coming into the field?	IQ 11: What advice would you give to new practitioners in the field for supporting equity and transfer student success? IQ 12: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Note. Table 3 identifies four research questions and corresponding interview questions with revisions based on feedback from the dissertation committee. Subsequent changes were made to the order and phrasing of questions within the interview protocol.

Reliability of the Study

In addition to gaining insight into the proposed research questions, the research is also meant to provide meaningful implications for the practitioners in the field. Since reliability is often referred to as the degree to which research findings can be replicated, it is important to note that when studying human behavior or a social phenomenon, this can prove to be a challenging feat (Boeije, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Thus, Lincoln and Guba (1985) also emphasize the significance of dependability and consistency of findings to the collected data in qualitative research. As a way of ensuring quality in this study and establishing reliability, the researcher has detailed how the research questions relate to the field, which methods of data collection are chosen, as well as how the sample was formulated (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2013). Triangulation or using multiple methods in the data analysis section (e.g., peer-review), along with a comprehensive account of the methodology, will also be aimed at improving reliability and dependability (Maxwell, 2013).

Pilot Study

The objective of conducting a pilot study, commonly used in various areas of inquiry, is to enhance the reliability and validity of the research by modifying questions or processes that do

not elicit intended responses (Chenail, 2011; Malmqvist et al., 2019). Pilot studies are either conducted as a smaller variation of the actual study or as the pre-testing of the proposed research instrument and protocol (Chenail, 2011; Creswell, 2013). The latter is often the case in qualitative design, where rich data is generated. The principal investigator conducted mock interviews with two professionals within the higher education field and asked if the questions were clear and understandable. The process took place as follows:

- administered the interview questions in the same way as intended in the actual study

- asked the participant for constructive feedback to identify points of clarification or difficulty and evaluate whether sufficient responses can be gathered for each question

- assessed whether data interpretation would elicit the required information

- kept track of the time taken to respond to the questions

- modified, edited, and scaled the research instrument and protocol based on the feedback received

Statement of Personal Bias

The researcher's role in the systemic inquiry of qualitative research and the extent of their involvement is outlined by several prominent authors of qualitative research design (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Consistent with previous discussions, interpretive research is predominantly affected by the investigator's personal viewpoints, and sustained involvement in the field can result in a range of ethical and strategic considerations (Creswell, 2013). Thus, while the researcher's involvement is essential in carrying out a qualitative study, a level of adaptation is needed during data collection and analysis (Boeije, 2010). An accurate reflection of one's individual characteristics, such as age, disposition, and personal background, can improve neutrality and the impact of personal bias in carrying out research (Boeije, 2010;

Creswell, 2013). As a first-generation English Language learner, and a former community college student, the researcher was well-aware of perspectives and assumptions based on prior experiences during the entire research process.

Bracketing and Epoche

While existent frameworks do not outline a fail-safe approach for eliminating bias, the researcher is cognizant of limitations imposed by professional experiences in the field of higher education, specifically in a community college transfer program. Consequently, before the research instrument was constructed, utilized, and analyzed, the investigator examined her own experiences with the phenomenon to further identify prejudices and viewpoints (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) defines this process as epoche or abstaining from judgment. Thus, particular values or experiences (e.g., prior exposure to the challenges experienced by underrepresented students' throughout their transfer journey) will have to be bracketed as a way of reducing researcher expectations and affecting the conclusions of the study (Maxwell, 2013) Unique to phenomenological research, bracketing puts aside existing knowledge and experiences in order to develop an understanding of the phenomenon at hand (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2013).

Data Analysis

Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2009) delineated the distinct nature of qualitative data analysis as inductive and evolving due to themes that tend to emerge during the process. According to Boeije (2010), data analysis in this context is the process of breaking up and separating the research materials into manageable pieces to find sequences or patterns. The objective of this process is to then reconstruct the data into a meaningful whole. Reassembly after segmenting is completed through the lens of research questions and relevance to the topics of interest.

Interpretive and descriptive analysis was used after the interview responses were gathered to identify and categorize the present themes in the data (Boeije, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Coding is the initial step of separating the generated data into meaningful components and is defined as categorizing elements with a descriptive or interpretive code that ascribes and defines the meaning of that data piece (Boeije, 2010; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The codes are supposed to demonstrate how information was selected, separated, and sorted, and will later be combined into a more general idea, theme, or category. In this instance, ideas generated by the interviewees in relation to academic, social-cultural, and institutional barriers were coded into meaningful fragments. The same process was repeated for subsequent questions that aim to identify appropriate strategies for mitigating these barriers, as well as implementing evidence-based practices for the future.

Open coding of the qualitative data analysis explores and categorizes the gathered data (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2013). Fragments related to the main research objectives will be grouped together into categories with the same subject and given a code (Creswell, 2013). Open coding is a part of research conceptualization and provides a thematic approach to data organization. Thus, the researcher read the entire document at first, then went back and re-read the text carefully several times to determine the beginning and end of the fragment. Then, it was established why that fragment represents a meaningful whole for the given question before deciding if it was relevant to the research. An appropriate code was created and assigned to the text fragments, which was later compared for consistency or repetition.

Axial Coding

After the data were segmented by open coding, the axial coding method was employed to put the data back together in a new way (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2013). This relates the

subcategories of codes to categories through specific dimensions of interconnectedness (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Thus, the focus shifts from specific codes to the broader data to establish clear relationships between salient categories and subcategories. In this stage, the researcher will decide whether the codes created during the open coding process sufficiently describe the data and create new ones as necessary. If synonyms were used for certain fragments, the similarities and differences will be considered to merge or subdivide the categories. As a part of the steps for axial coding, Boeije (2010) encourages researchers to merge similar categories and establish whether an adequate description of a theme can be concluded from the assigned phrases. This process determined which categories or themes carry more weight and have more importance as compared to other categories in the data.

Selective Coding

According to Boeije (2010) and Creswell (2013), selective coding looks for connections between the established themes to assess the field of interest and tell a story. This phase is useful in identifying which themes came up repeatedly in the research and which messages the participants are trying to convey. It is during selective coding that the main research objectives will be revealed. The purpose of this study and literature review served as a parameter, the data were guided by the themes that stood out the most and included surprising information that might not have been considered before.

Interrater Reliability and Validity

Inter-rater reliability becomes a strong consideration during the data analysis process (Boeije, 2010). When codes and categories are assigned by the researcher, it is crucial for peer-reviewers to agree that those properties represent relevant data in congruence with the research questions and ascertain a systemic approach to the process. Consistency and congruence of

fragment classification can be an indication of coding scheme adequacy (Boeije, 2010). As suggested by Creswell (2013), a cross-check will be conducted to compare the themes gathered from the previous stages of data analysis and agree on the determined codes. The process will be repeated until saturation is reached, where data from new interviews can easily be categorized into the existing codes.

4 Step Process

1. *Baseline Themes.* The baseline themes were identified by the researcher after the first three interviews are closely examined and coded into appropriate fragments.

2. *Interrater Review.* Two peer-reviewers examined and evaluated the codes' systematic assignment to establish consensus or make suggestions as needed for developing a comprehensive understanding of the data. The reviewers are doctoral students with qualitative research and descriptive data coding familiarity. Interview transcriptions and identified themes from the first stage were reviewed for any recommendations and subsequent adjustment through dissertation committee consultation.

3. *Baseline Themes and Interrater Review.* A similar process was followed for the remaining 12 interviews. Peer reviewers were given the transcription and identified codes for review until a consensus was reached.

4. *Expert Review Validity.* An expert review was conducted by the committee members if a consensus.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction & Restatement of the Research Questions

CCCs continue to be a critical point of access to higher education, especially for historically underserved student populations. As the various functions and objectives of these 2-year institutions continue to develop and expand to meet the needs of the diverse student population, providing support for transfer pathways remains a priority. Institutions with a stronger sense of a transfer culture on campus are more equipped with handling an influx of students with 4-year degree aspirations and providing the necessary support services through the transfer center. Chapter 4 will discuss the research findings of this qualitative study that aimed to uncover the perceived or overt individual and institutional barriers that prevent transfer success, as well as best practices to maximize the efforts in overcoming these challenges. The findings are reported based on themes uncovered from each interview question, illustrated through bar graphs, and further supported by participant quotes discussing the prominence of each response. The following research questions are the central tenants of the study and seek to uncover viable practices that can improve transfer center service offerings and overall transfer student success.

- **RQ1:** What challenges do community college TCDs encounter when supporting historically underrepresented student transfer to 4-year institutions?
- **RQ2:** What best practices and strategies are utilized by community college TCDs to support historically underrepresented student transfer efforts to 4-year institutions?
- **RQ3:** How do community college TCDs define, measure, and track success?
- **RQ4:** Based on demonstrated transfer success strategies (rates/indicators), what recommendations would community college TCDs have for practitioners coming into the field?

Introduction of Interview Questions

The interview protocol was composed of twelve questions with the objective of uncovering dominant themes posited by the research questions. The overarching research questions served as the guiding principle and were informed by the review of literature pertaining to the phenomenon of interest.

Interview Questions 1-3 aligned with Research Question 1

- **IQ1:** What academic challenges have been identified by transfer students from historically underrepresented groups during your appointments/based on your interactions?

- **IQ2:** What are some of the most prevalent social and/or cultural barriers identified by transfer students from this population?

- **IQ3:** What organizational challenges have you encountered in supporting underrepresented student transfer efforts?

Interview Questions 4-7 aligned with Research Question 2

- **IQ4:** What strategies do you recommend in advancing academic progress for students from historically underrepresented groups?

- **IQ5:** What strategies do you utilize for overcoming social-cultural barriers experienced by transfer students?

- **IQ6:** How do you overcome the organizational challenges that hinder transfer success for this student population?

- **IQ7:** Have you participated in formal/informal training or mentorship opportunities that helped improve equitable service offerings by your Transfer Center?

Interview Questions 8-9 aligned with Research Question 3

- **IQ8:** How do you define transfer success?

- **IQ9:** How do you measure and track underrepresented student transfer over time?

Interview Questions 10-12 aligned with Research Question 4

- **IQ10:** What is the biggest pitfall someone in your position faces?

- **IQ11:** What advice would you give to new practitioners in the field for supporting equity and transfer student success?

- **IQ12:** Is there anything else you would like to add?

The above referenced interview questions were answered by 12 participants who met the inclusion criteria determined by the principal investigator until saturation was reached. TCD participation was determined to yield thorough descriptive data needed for answering the research questions posed by the study.

Participants

The primary objective of this research was to address the equity gap in CCCs' transfer pathways and create a comprehensive guide for supporting underrepresented student transfer efforts to the extent possible. For this purpose, twelve TCDs with a proven track record of providing services to transfer students in the community college setting were selected to participate. While all TCDs hold the same position in one of the 115 community colleges across the state, they come from various backgrounds and a myriad of professional, as well as lived experiences. In fact, most participants worked with diverse student populations in various capacities and brought with them a vast amount of knowledge in equitable service offerings.

Due to minimum qualification brought forth by the TCDs' job classification, all interview participants had a graduate degree and aspiration to further their educational attainment in the

near future. Study participants also ranged by geographic location within the state, residing and working in northern and southern parts of California, thus also reflecting the difference of perspective posed by service area. All participants were informed that their anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the entire data collection and reporting processes.

Data Collection

The data collection phase of the study was initiated shortly after IRB approval (see Appendix A). Recruitment emails were sent out towards the end of March 2021 (see Appendix B) and the data collection concluded with the last interview conducted on May 26, 2021. Each interview was conducted virtually using the Zoom platform due to safety protocols surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, which also allowed secure cloud recording and transcription. A further breakdown of the interview schedule is provided in Table 4.

Table 4

Dates of the Participant Interviews

Participant	Interview Date
Participant #1	March 26, 2021
Participant #2	March 27, 2021
Participant #3	March 31, 2021 (rescheduled)
Participant #4	April 2, 2021
Participant #5	April 7, 2021
Participant #6	April 19, 2021
Participant #7	April 26, 2021
Participant #8	April 28, 2021 (continued)
Participant #9	April 30, 2021
Participant #10	May 6th, 2021 (rescheduled)

Participant	Interview Date
Participant #11	May 26, 2021
Participant #12	May 26, 2021

The virtual interviews varied in length, ranging anywhere from 33 minutes and 55 seconds to 1 hour and 44 minutes, and were recorded using a password-protected laptop. Several communication channels were utilized to reach and recruit study participants, such as email blasts, individual e-mail correspondence and phone calls. Documentation pertaining to the interview protocol and informed consent were sent out ahead of time to better prepare the participants for the virtual meeting. Due to the platform capabilities used to record the interviews, there were no challenges in the data collection phase, aside from scheduling conflicts that were mitigated early on.

Data Analysis Expanded

Depending on the objectives of the study, qualitative research aims to uncover the intricacies of human experiences of a phenomenon, at least in this given context (Bender et al., 2021). The participant interviews included in the study were coded in accordance with the rigorous guidelines and thorough processes identified by Creswell (2007). The generated themes provided insight from the lens of experienced TCDs throughout the state of California, with a unique combination of passion and enthusiasm for moving the transfer success needle of underserved students in the right direction. The following steps were followed:

- Watched the video recording of the interview if such was permitted by the participant or listened to the audio version in its entirety to grasp the overall meaning the participants were trying to convey.
- Hard copy transcripts were printed for reference and later kept in a locked cabinet.

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- All personal identifiers were removed prior to coding of the data and labeled via descending order in which the interviews occurred.

- The principal investigator re-played each recording while color-coding the printed transcripts for identified initial themes.

- The identified themes were written on a white board for context and frequency considerations.

- Related codes were placed into broader color-coded categories and reviewed through inter-rater reliability processes.

- Once the appropriate coding and analysis had taken place, the principal investigator placed all interview recordings and transcripts into an encrypted folder.

Inter-Rater Review Process

O'Connor and Joffe (2020) emphasize the growing prevalence of qualitative research in various areas of policymaking. Interrater reliability for the purposes of qualitative research is described by the authors as the agreement between different researchers pertaining to the identified data codes. As described in the previous sections of the study, the challenges and best practices identified by practitioners in the field of higher education transfer pathways were checked for congruence by following the steps outlined below:

1. Key phrases and ideas were identified to create the initial codes that were later combined into larger categories.

2. The PI met with two doctoral students from Pepperdine University with prior experience in qualitative research and analysis to validate the determined codes. After considering the background context, carefully reviewing the interview responses, and

establishing consensus, the data findings were solidified by the PI. Suggestions and

subsequent modifications made during this peer-review process are shown in Table 5.

3. Since consensus was reached through interrater validity, further committee review of

the established codes was not necessary.

Table 5

Inter-Rater Coding Table Edit Recommendations

| Interview Question	Items	Inter-rater Recommendations	Modification Applied
1	"Negative views of oneself"	Self-perception	Yes
2	"Financial burden"	Finances	Yes
3	"Institutional buy-in"	Administrative Support	Yes
4	"Transfer Planning"	Transfer Preparation	Yes
5	"Transfer culture"	University Presence	Yes
6	"Campus community involvement/partnerships"	Campus involvement	Yes
7	"Professional Conferences"	Conferences	Yes
8	"Equity Support"	Written-off	Yes
9	"TC Intake"	Served by TC	Yes
10	"Funding & Resources"	Lack of Support	Yes
11	"Think Outside of the Box"	Forward Thinking	Yes
12	"Infrastructure"	Institutional Divide	Yes

Research Question 1

What challenges do community college TCDs encounter when supporting historically

underrepresented student transfer to 4-year institutions? Since TCDs hold the primary

responsibility for supporting the transfer function on CCC campuses, RQ1 was broken down to

three composite interview questions to gain a comprehensive overview of this multifaceted

experience: IQ1: What academic challenges have been identified by transfer students from

historically underrepresented groups during your appointments/based on your interactions? IQ2:

What are some of the most prevalent social and/or cultural barriers identified by transfer students

from this population? IQ3: What organizational challenges have you encountered in supporting

underrepresented student transfer efforts?

Interview Question 1

What academic challenges have been identified by transfer students from historically underrepresented groups during your appointments/based on your interactions? The first interview question revealed the following codes: (a) Awareness, (b) Connection, (c) Study Habits, (d) Perception of Self, (e) Mentorship and Advocacy, and (f) Math/English (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Coding Results for Interview Question 1
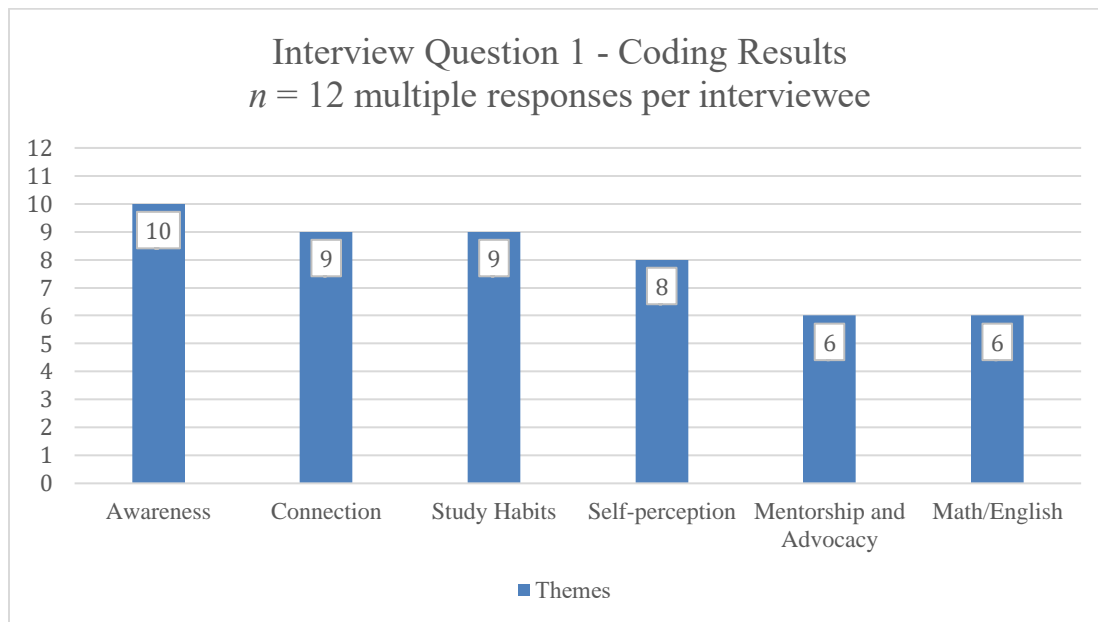
Awareness. Awareness surrounding the availability of on- and off-campus resources and/or information for underserved transfer students was the most frequent code to emerge for IQ1, where 10 out of 12 participants mentioned lack of knowledge in several key areas needed for ensuring transfer success. The code is consistent with the challenges described by Marine Nin and Gutierrez-Keeton (2020) regarding underserved students' path through transfer momentum points. According to the research, community college students who are not low-income or first-generation, have greater access to and awareness of correct and timely information pertaining to

college planning and preparation. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, and P11 mentioned

necessary lack of information regarding university campus choices, the way various campuses

highlight specific majors, lack of financial aid option awareness, and delayed information related

to transfer preparation. Resources play a vital role in dispelling any perceived barriers or actual

challenges experienced by underrepresented transfer students and also takes a toll on their

academic performance in college.

P1 states:

> I think that students don't have sufficient knowledge of different university campuses.
>
> They are not well-informed, or the research is not done to really make the decision of
>
> what campus is best for them. So, I find that students don't see the value in researching
>
> each individual institution, what major they want to be, or how the campus highlights the
>
> major. It's also them knowing that it is not just the Cal States, but they really have an
>
> opportunity for UCs as well – we have to research the major and make sure that they
>
> understand what they'll be learning once they get there because it is different from what
>
> they learn at the community college.

 Connection. Connection is the second most prominent code that emerged from IQ1, with

9 out of 12 participants brought up challenges related to making student-faculty engagement

opportunities, taking advantage of available resources, relating to the material taught in the

classroom, as well as checking in with counselors for comprehensive planning and support. The

code was based on the findings of underrepresented students' persistent and success factors

outlined by Prospero and Vohra-Gupta (2007), where integration to the college environment is

positively correlated to success outcomes and persistence. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P11, and

P12 concurred that the level of student engagement to the activities and services offered in

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combination with points of meaningful connection in the classroom setting act as barriers to academic success.

P4 states:

An academic challenge is really just connecting with faculty members. There isn't a diverse representation of faculty and administration at the community colleges as it relates to the student body. It is very likely that the professor cannot connect with the student or that the student cannot connect with the material or curriculum being taught. I see a lot of students who, you know, find it hard to reach out to faculty members who don't identify with them.

Study Habits. Several participants, 9 out of 12, also reiterated the importance of making the necessary transition from being a high school student to being a college-minded student. The code was consistent with the determinations of existing literature, which included hours of studying and self-regulated learning as a part as crucial to strengthening success among community college students (Lane et al., 2020). Using previous academic experiences, especially if those experiences were less than optimal, can inhibit underrepresented students' ability to perform better at the community college. P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P8, P10, P11, and P12 all mentioned some form of a study habit like note-taking, changing modalities, dedicating appropriate hours of study to a subject, and time-management.

P3 says:

I think another thing that is academically a challenge for our students is that adjustment from high school to college of learning how to study. I think what they needed to do in high school, what they could do to get by and get OK grades is *not* what they need to do

in college. So academically they need to learn better time management… when it comes to not procrastinating, have to learn how to take notes… this idea of study habits.

Self-Perception. The third most frequent code for IQ1 was the students' perception of themselves, which were often cited as negative or not favorable stemming from the messages received early on. Similar to previous research regarding the topic, demonstrate a correlation between not only between the initial expectations and interactions students have when entering the college environment, but also the coping mechanisms students develop to address change and reach their educational goals (May et al., 2021). The messaging that underserved students might get regarding competitive university admission chances, lack of self-esteem, fear, and the community college stigma, and various other "labels" all present as barriers to transfer efforts. May et al. (2021) also emphasize that negative perceptions often begin prior to college and can significantly deter students' academic success and other favorable outcomes. Below are examples of the codes that resulted in this overall theme:

- don't belong at selective schools
- think they are not university material
- negative views of themselves as students
- affirmation that they are not good enough
- not believing in themselves

P9 comments:

I guess it is a real one, right? The whole imposter syndrome thing… they don't think they can/could transfer because they are not good enough, because they are not smart enough to go to that place. I mean that is real because that does keep people away and has the same effect as perceived barriers.

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Mentorship and Advocacy. Similarly, not having role models or individuals in the imminent network who have gone through the transfer journey or participated in formal higher educational opportunities presented as a challenge for navigating the college process. A previous study described the primary characteristics and functions of mentors/role models as those who seek to motivate and inspire, as well as offer guidance and support (Preuss et al., 2020). The research also indicated that students from minority groups often express that institutional agents might not be as understanding of the students' culture. The interviewees revealed that students from underrepresented backgrounds either do not have a network of support or an advocate to turn to in their sphere, which led to the code that aligns with the findings of previous studies. However, lack of understanding on behalf of the familial unit or network does not indicate lack of support for the pursuit of higher education opportunities.

P3 mentions:

Underrepresented transfer students don't take advantage of all the opportunities and activities available to them. They, more likely, don't have parents to either advocate for them or kind of nudge or push them. Generally, first generation college students have parents who are supportive of higher education but they themselves don't know much about the American college system and can't really advise. If you have a student who is second or third-generation, where parents have also gone to college/university, then the students actually have a guide to assist them.

Math/English. Passing transfer-level math and English courses have proven to be challenging for community college students with transfer aspirations. Even with current initiatives, AB 705, aimed at increasing completion rates for math/English and propelling

students towards meeting transfer requirements, the course sequencing for these subjects still proves to be a challenge.

P5 indicates:

Beyond the online component of COVID instruction, one of the main barriers remain math and English. Even with AB705 and the students' ability to place into… directly into transfer-level English and transfer-level math, students have expressed that they haven't done "this" math or did not learn it well enough in high school or that it has been years since they've done math. It is also the writing component, whether writing an essay in the necessary format or faculty's concern around the students' preparedness in writing a thorough, well-written essay.

Interview Question 2

What are some of the most prevalent social and/or cultural barriers identified by transfer students from this population? Interview Question 2 identified the following themes: (a) Cultural Capital, (b) Sense of Belonging, (c) Transfer Processes, (d) Social Capital, and (e) Finances (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Coding Results for Interview Question 2
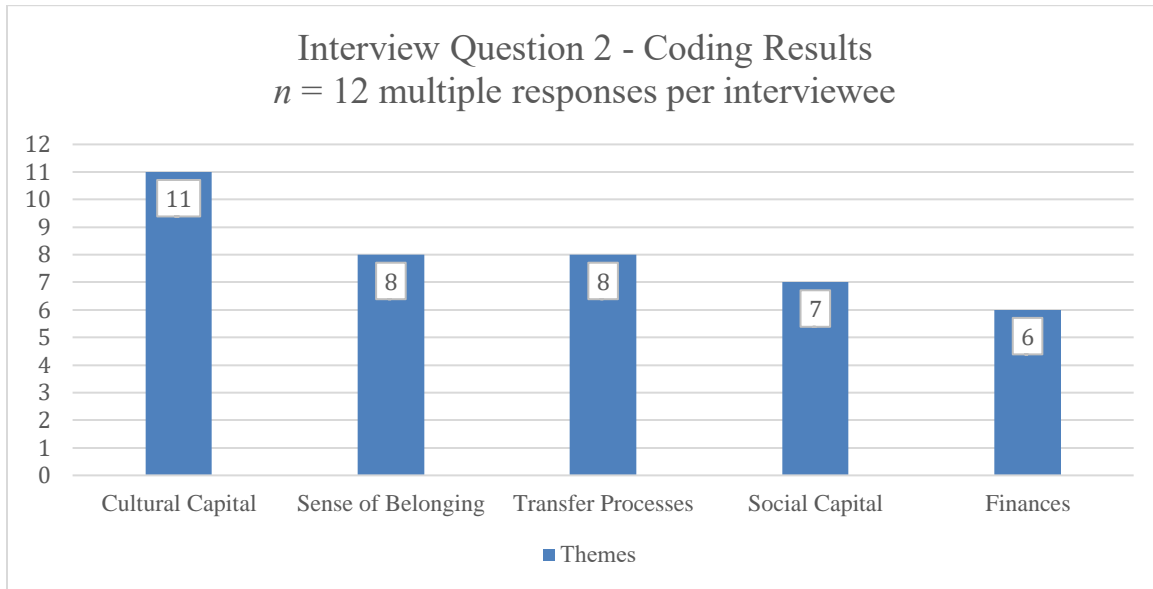
Cultural Capital. Various forms of cultural capital were brought up as the most frequent theme for *IQ2* potential barriers hindering transfer success for underserved communities. The application of cultural capital in higher education, particularly in the community college segment, often refers to the ability to navigate the educational system from the students' cultural environment (Ocean, 2021). 11 out of 12 participants cited the students' expressed inability to leave home due to obligations, being skeptical of the unknown, family unit not understanding the commitment or even community levels of educational attainment when asked about social/cultural challenges.

P6 indicated:

The living environment and communities don't always support higher education because they might gravitate towards working after they finish high school to support the family. The inference is that you finish high school, you know, go start working or it's time for you to move out. And there are differences depending on culture, but I think that is kind

of the inherent belief. The families don't always know and understand how to support

students that want to exceed and take on additional education opportunity… basically the

language of being a supportive parent the student just kind of misses out on.

Sense of Belonging. A slight variation from IQ1, the responses for IQ2 targeting social

and cultural barriers, also brought up a sense of belonging and connectedness to the campus

culture. A stronger sense of belonging to the campus community is often positively associated

with better educational outcomes across all ethnic groups through activities that promote social

connections (Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2021). These activities are cited in various forms, such

as freshman immersion courses, introduction to campus resources, and mental health/wellness

services to name a few. Eight out of 12 participants mentioned phrases like connection to

resources, feeling comfortable and confident when engaging with faculty, experiencing the

college campus, and enrichment opportunities. Not attending workshops and events or taking

advantage of other resource on campus can also contribute to the loss of connection points and

diminish students' sense of belonging.

In fact, Participant 10 states:

Depending on whether you are a recent high school graduate or a returning student, the

CCC campuses try to facilitate a student connection to resource to get that sense of

belonging. But sometimes those efforts are disjointed and get lost, especially for certain

student populations like adult learners… we need to make sure there are enough support

services for the students.

Transfer Processes. Salient phrases and codes aimed at describing the hurdles posed by

complex university transfer processes were also mentioned by 8 out of 12 participants. There are

several levels of intricacy involved in accurate student advising on how to present themselves on

university applications, which courses to take that maximize their chance of admission, or even breaking down eligibility requirements to competitive institutions. TCDs revealed that underrepresented students often find that certain 4-year systems do not get a holistic view of the applicant as community cultural wealth is not necessarily captured in the admission applications. P7 states:

> I think people's perspective isn't really accounted for, you know, your community cultural wealth, where students have certain assets that are not captured right away. Whether it is their work ethic, their ability to be a leader in their own home, and I think applications don't capture that… other than maybe UCs because I think this is where students get to realize that wait, I could talk about my experiences, I could show myself as a whole person rather than just my GPA.

Social Capital. Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth, as described in the review of literature, describes social capital as relationships with various community-based networks, which promote, support, and enable success. Similarly, level of participation in various activities, institutional environment and the quality of relationships underserved students develop on- and off-campus have proven to be conducive to persistence and represent a powerful pattern for success (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Kniess et al., 2020). Several TCDs, P2, P3, P4, P5, P8, P10, and P11, also emphasized challenges related to underrepresented student social capital. 7 out of 12 participants used key phrases such as being reluctant to ask for help, parents' level of education, no mentor presence, messaging, and feeling comfortable that led to the main code.

P8 illustrated social capital in the following way:

> Social barriers for me are also linked to accessibility and taking advantage of resources. Some methods of communication might work better with certain student demographics

than others… email has worked with older students. There is a lack of social skills, ability to access the Internet, or use social media, so students don't necessarily feel comfortable.

Finances. Among other factors deterring students from completing a 2-year degree, getting transfer ready or actually making the transition to 4-year institutions, finances were mentioned 6 out of 12 times. Participating TCDs mentioned that during their interactions, especially with underserved students, it has become harder to convince students that education is a good investment. P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, and P9 mentioned overarching themes like being loan adverse, affordability and overall cost, or financial piece of higher education.

P2 says:

One of the biggest things that come forward is just the financial piece of it. There is a…they don't understand the kind of services and help they can receive. They immediately… I think a lot of people don't go to school full time or don't even know the about the availability of financial aid, FAFSA and fee waivers and options that are available to these students in order to continue to move forward. So there is something that is common on most campuses, they think they can't consider that school because it's too expansive… they don't know how to pay for it or they don't want to take out a loan.

Interview Question 3

What organizational challenges have you encountered in supporting underrepresented student transfer efforts? Interview Question 3 revealed the following codes: (a) Administrative Support, (b) Collaboratives and Engagement, (c) Programming, (d) Funding, and (e) Transfer Outreach (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Coding Results for Interview Question 3
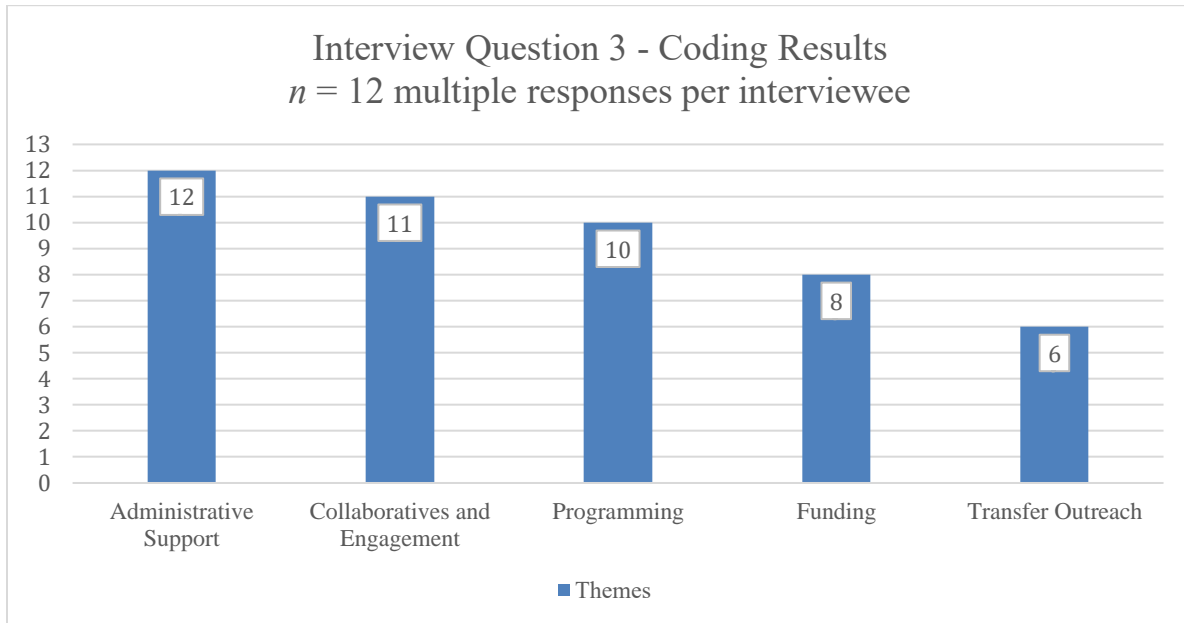
Administrative Support. According to Moschetti and Hudley (2014), whose research concentrated low-income, minority, and first-generation college students, another form of social capital that is an essential component of academic success. The authors emphasize that these student groups are often faced with difficulties in connecting with and getting support from institutional agents and building social capital on campus. Lack of support from college administration was the most frequently cited theme for IQ3 that aimed to uncover organizational challenges in supporting underrepresented transfer student efforts. All participants mentioned buy-in for the CCC transfer function and no understanding from administrators on what transfer entails, along with extensive questioning of requested items or services. Gaining acceptance and support from the college leadership can significantly increase the overall transfer culture and establish transfer function as a priority.

P11 pointed out:

With frequent changes in the admin ranks…what's happening… we know what to do but

we have this merry-go-round, and they want to put their touch on the program and

question things. I understand that they have questions, but we get some that are more

interested in how much time we spend doing XYZ… this kind of micromanaging and

trying to look for "accountability" instead of what works and why does it work. It's a

different approach when questioning what time/when you do certain things instead of

saying what works for you guys and how.

Collaboratives and Engagement. Consistent with the institutional concepts revealed by

Schudde et al. (2021), vertical transfer involves extensive discussions regarding credit

transferability pathways and processes. The complexities of these processes, with low levels of

alignment between informational structures can put students at a disadvantage. Thus,

collaboration between key stakeholders and campus constituencies was deemed as another

institutional barrier on the students' transfer journey that can be improved. 11 out of 12

participating TCDs mentioned transfer is often student services driven but should be a concerted

effort on the part of academic affairs, especially on the part of classroom faculty. P1, P2, P3, P4,

P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, and P12 specified important elements leading to this code:

- not understanding what it takes to transfer a student

- TC as a stepchild

- faculty availability to support student needs

- impact and influence happen in the classroom

- transfer put only on TC folk

- more coordinated efforts with student service programs

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P1 says:

It is also about teaching and engaging the faculty how important transfer is and what their

classes mean to that student. When it comes to transfer level classes, they really need to

push transfer in those courses like giving students extra credit for attending transfer

workshops. If they are not pushing or encouraging, then transfer becomes very student

services driven but it has to be a holistic effort by academic affairs and amongst student

service programs.

Programming. Creating transfer programming that accurately reflect the complex

process of the university transfer experience to meet underrepresented student transfer needs is

another prominent organizational barrier. The theme presented itself in the form of additional

service implementation aside from educational planning, identification of potential transfer

pathways even for CTE programs, articulation agreement clarification, and professional

development for campus stakeholders on available pathways. The code was identified in 10 out

of 12 participant interviews for IQ3.

The following quote by P12 further supports the identified code:

When I first go to campus it was very CSU focused and I would hear it from faculty, like

they would come in and say, "Tell your counselors to stop assuming everyone wants to

go to a CSU." It was a big deal and so I did what I could, I had to listen and implement

programming. It wasn't just going to one counselor or one faculty member or staff at a

time but educating everyone about the UC path and the private school path and we're

going to all know this inside and out. That way, when a student comes to your office you

can lay the options out there.

Funding. Transfer center specific funding has been a huge deterrent in the efforts of providing more resources and program offerings geared towards equity groups. Funding presented itself as no budget availability, no resources to support equity, and inadequate staffing for the TC to name a few. The code was identified by 8 out of 12 participants during the interview process.

P2 indicates:

Another thing that kind of comes into play is funding. You know, I think it goes along with that same idea of transfer not being a priority. Normally, in the transfer center, I have to ask for funding from like 20 different places… I go to shared governance, I go to the foundation office, I go to student equity but I don't actually have a line item that says I have the money to do what I need to do in the transfer center.

Transfer Outreach. Six out of 12 participants, P2, P4, P7, P9, P10, and P12, specified transfer outreach as a part of institutional challenges hindering underrepresented student transfer success. The theme was characterized by the notion that students are often behind in transfer planning, which can be a result of late transfer research or delayed discussion about potential program/university options. Most participants attributed missed application deadlines or lack of knowledge for choosing the "best fit" institution to limited outreach options in the TC.

In fact, P9 states:

I think one of the biggest challenges Transfer Centers have is that we are always perceived as a special program. I don't know what you call them on your campus, but we call them special programs if it's EOP&S, First Year Experience, or Puente. We are not a special program… we are a center that serves every student that attends the college, and so one of the biggest challenges is that we don't have a sort of listserv or a finite number

of students that we can reach out to. So if Puente wants to promote something, all they

have to do is reach out to their 30 or 40 or 60 students and their cohorts and they are

done. But how do we reach every single student on campus that's a potential transfer

student. In other words, we build it and hope they come but we are not always necessarily

able to meet them where they are to make sure they know about stuff.

Summary of RQ1

Research Question 1 aimed to uncover and unpack the complex challenges faced by

underrepresented transfer students, as well as TCDs tasked with the vital responsibility of

providing comprehensive transfer support services. The findings, in alignment with prevalent

areas identified by the literature review process, provided insight into the complexity of transfer

processes and its multifaceted challenges that perplex not only CCC students with transfer

aspirations but also higher education professionals. Institutional support and buy-in, as well as

funding allocation for the TC were the biggest overarching themes identified as a part of the

institutional barriers hindering transfer efforts. Challenges faced by students from

underrepresented students at the academic and social/cultural level were much more diverse,

including lack of timely and accurate information regarding transfer opportunities, lower levels

of self-esteem, and inadequate social support structures.

Research Question 2

What best practices and strategies are utilized by community college TCDs to support

historically underrepresented student transfer efforts to 4-year institutions? Based on the review

of established categories from the previous set of inquiries, RQ2 aligns with the following

interview questions: IQ4: What strategies do you recommend in advancing academic progress

for students from historically underrepresented groups? IQ5: What strategies do you utilize for

overcoming social-cultural barriers experienced by transfer students? IQ6: How do you

overcome the organizational challenges that hinder transfer success for this student population?

IQ7: Have you participated in formal/informal training or mentorship opportunities that helped

improve equitable service offerings by your Transfer Center?

Interview Question 4

What strategies do you recommend in advancing academic progress for students from

historically underrepresented groups? Interview Question 4 uncovered the following themes: (a)

Support Services, (b) Transfer Preparation, (c) Empowerment, (d) Academic Support, and (e)

Peer-mentorship (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Coding Results for Interview Question 4
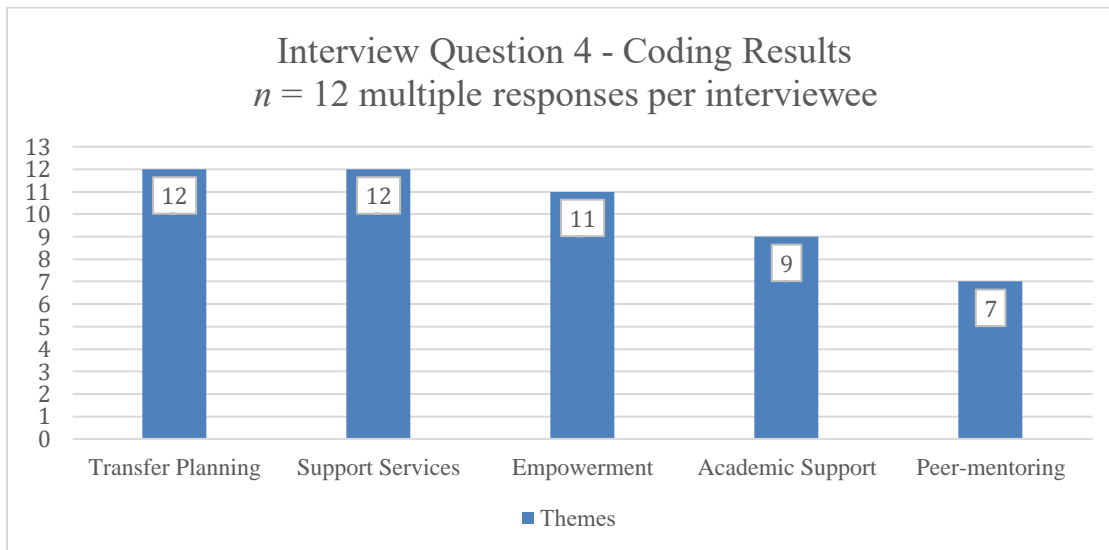
Support Services. Making referrals and connecting underrepresented students with

support services and programs that are tailored to their needs was the main strategy identified by

12 out of 12 participants. All interviewees deemed it essential for transfer students to be

connected to wrap-around services to the extent possible, especially since special programs have

the ability to provide more individualized attention. A team effort on the part of the entire

college community is needed to address the comprehensive scope of services and a tailored CCC experience for the students.

P10 describes this success measures as follows:

You know, the key is trying to connect them to one of the student support services or programs, depending on will be better suited for helping the student navigate the college process. Again, generally speaking, we will funnel them through to College Promise or EOPS… if you are a black student, you are likely to get connected to Umoja, it depends. But the Transfer Center will also go ahead and collaborate with all those programs and create programming around their needs. The best way possible to get resources is…is to identify their academic goal and try to understand the transfer process along the way with the combination of support programs that they are in.

Transfer Planning. A previous study of low transfer rates among community college students (Crisp & Nora, 2010), cite the effects of selection biases in combination with structural elements or college experiences as an integral part of student success outcomes. Similarly, notion of being transfer ready but also ensuring that the student is given all the possible options to consider and find their best fit, was also brought up by all participants. University choice should not solely be based on geographic proximity or choices of peers. Instead, transfer planning and preparation should take into account individual interests by dispelling any transfer myths and working in tandem with future career aspirations. Twelve out of 12 participants mentioned the important of walking students through the entire journey, where transfer begins when they walk in through CCC doors, evaluation of their current academic standing and choosing a major, to making the transition to 4-year institutions.

P2 exclaims:

You can start here and go anywhere! If I see students from the very beginning, I talk to

them about that, and they start thinking and leaving their options open and not closing

themselves off to possibilities. We go back and really talk to students about what they can

do to fix some of the earlier mistakes and move forwards towards a particular goal. It is

really getting students to think outside that box, that image of, you know, it's easier to get

into Cal State than it is to get into a UC…or that it's cheaper. So, for them to at least

consider it and not immediately push it away.

Empowerment. Maliszewski Lukszo and Hayes (2019) discussed steps to support the

development of transfer students' self-efficacy. These include advocacy, follow-up, and proper

way of phrasing needs in a given situation, thus *empowering* the students to complete the

transactions themselves and gain confidence in their ability to navigate similar scenarios in the

future. Another strategy, a close second mentioned by 11 out of 12 participants, is empowering

students to develop autonomy and self-confidence. Several interviewees broke empowerment

down to more manageable and attainable pieces by either making subtle changes from being

more transactional to talking/processing feelings and humanizing the student journey. Other

participating TCDs took pride in never saying *No* because of the high-poverty community they

service or sharing their personal success stories.

P8 states:

I try to have a little more flexibility and check in with the students, especially those

students that have a very difficult time or they are having low self-esteem issues, or they

are super shy. You know, I start by telling my own story, because they look at us and see

a successful person… how are you going to reach my level? So, I always remember to

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meet a student at their level, and build them up, help them develop that autonomy and that always seems to work.

Academic Support. Successful class completion is inextricably linked to all transfer student success. Nine out of 12 participants were cognizant of the academic supports available on campus and the absolute necessity for students to take advantage of those services. However, rather than focusing on a deficit model and being reluctant to seek additional assistance in certain subject areas, it is important to frame these services in a more positive light.

P3 states:

Students who did well in high school are going to do fairly well in college. OK, who did not do as well or are struggling already, typically don't do as well. There are also students who do well in high school but never truly adjust to college, so academically… helping prepare students for college and academic rigors of college and making connections with academic support services like tutoring.

Peer-Mentorship. The peer mentoring aspect in the two-year college's transfer process is mentioned by Davies and Kratky (2000) as connection to other transfer students, and student organizations/clubs. According to the study hearing from students with similar aspirations can help others overcome any fears or issues associated with the process, so peer-mentorship is the last code brought forth by IQ4, with 7 out of 12 participants mentioning engagement with peers and involvement in student government activities. These shared experiences facilitate the creation of support networks with navigational capital and share interests that can be further built upon. CCC TCDs relied on former transfer students from the institution or graduate students, as well as current students to build that community of support around underserved student with transfer goals.

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P11 states:

I think this is our challenge… we need to make the community college experience just

like the first 2 years at a 4-year school… get involved in clubs and organizations, hang

out with other transfer students, hang out with students interested in your major. That's

what the transfer profile we created is used for. We send emails out and we can try and

get them to join our Transfer Club or the STEM club, so we really try to get the students

to expand their interests and engage with other students.

Interview Question 5

What strategies do you utilize for overcoming social-cultural barriers experienced by

transfer students? Interview Question 5 revealed the following themes: (a) Transfer Exploration,

(b) Holistic Support, (c) Redefining Success, (d) University Presence, and (e) Post-transfer

Preparation (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

Coding Results for Interview Question 5
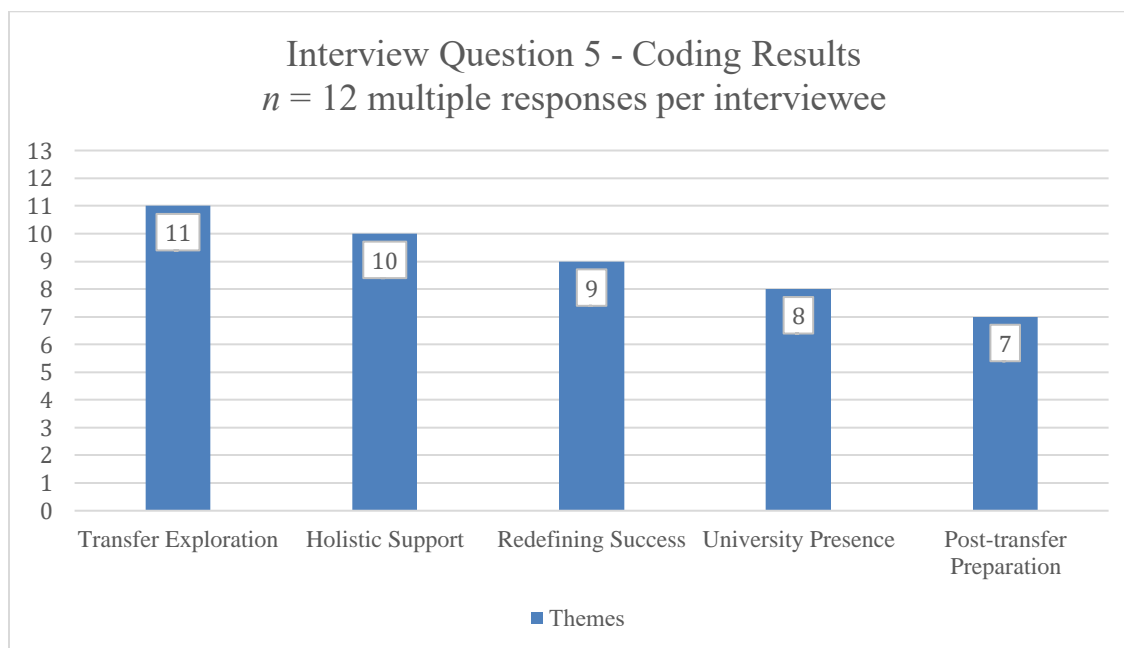
Transfer Exploration. Transfer exploration was the most prevalent theme identified by IQ5 and appeared in 11 out of 12 interviews. Phrases that contributed to this code are primarily related to clarifying the transfer process; expanding ADTs offered at the college, helping students understand transfer requirements, as well as disseminating information about financing a 4-year degree. Various workshops offered at the transfer center, such as TAG or UC/CSU application assistance, give underserved students the opportunity to plan, get involved, and reach their academic goal.

P3 mentions:

I designed the Transfer Center using transition theory: what it takes to move in, through, and out. A lot of those efforts are already happening in general counseling classes, academic career prep or transfer prep kind of classes, orientation services, summer bridge, EOPS collaboratives and so forth. We've also built summer transfer planning workshop for all students. We also do UC/CSU application workshops, common application workshops, scholarship workshops but then not only looking at that but also looking at what additional things that we could do in order to prepare our students for transfer.

Holistic Support. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P9, P10, P11, and P12, similar to supporting students' academic success efforts, discussed the significance of identifying student needs and building comprehensive resources to meet those needs. Some of the codes that emerged during the process were as follows:

- supporting the whole student
- building communal support

- find available resources

- programming with support services

P5 states:

I would say that connecting students to programs like Puente that has been in effect for more than a decade or ensure transfer-focus for some of the first-year experience programs. Collaborating with programs that have transfer as a priority allows us to organize tours, like the HBCU tour through Umoja or the Black Student Union.

Redefining Success. The idea of transfer success, as responses from IQ7 indicate, greatly depend on the student's individual circumstances. Whether attending school part-time and having work obligations or tending to familial responsibilities, each student can achieve transfer success irrespective of any established timelines or expectations. Nine out of 12 participants discussed what makes an underrepresented transfer student successful outside of the traditional meritocracy.

P9 indicates:

Having that communal space in our offices and in our Center, I think it's important because education is so individualistic like a lot of the US society. It can sometimes be a detriment because it is all about your achievement and you're "A" and if you beat others, and I think *that* is unfortunate because we are communal beings culturally and yet we are supposed to thrive in an environment that is not communal at all. So, creating a space that to happen is a good strategy to address some of the disconnect…what makes you successful because you've got that one "A" or because you got a "B" while working 40 hours a week. Let's redefine that success a little bit.

University Presence. Eight out of 12 participants mentioned that having university representatives on the college campus makes a huge difference in helping underrepresented transfer students realize that even competitive 4-year institutions can be a viable option. Organizing activities like campus tours for students to explore a university campus in a safe environment or scheduling workshops hosted by university representatives sends a message that 4-year institutions want transfer students on their campuses. This is especially true if exploring options was not a part of the soil in secondary school.

P12 echoed similar sentiments by saying:

I like to connect students directly to the university as early as possible by not only having representatives come to campus but also planning events where they are connecting with the representatives… that's really meant for first-year students, to show them that these people also want to help you and they want to talk to you, and if you connect with them they are going to help you build the bridge to get to your university.

Post-Transfer Preparation. Transfer student success at the receiving institution is described as a combination of individual factors (e.g., motivation, parental education etc.), academic preparation (e.g., first-year GPA), associate degree and credits earned, and transfer student adjustment (Umbach et al., 2019). Post-transfer success initiatives were mentioned by 7 out of 12 participants in the interview process. These initiatives included next-step workshops led by university representatives that discuss transition from a CCC campus and give students a preview of what to expect at the 4-year institutions. Setting an admit portal, submitting financial and admission documentations, following through with last minute items, and checking course articulation were the repetitive themes leading to the code. Moreover, several participants

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discussed motivation, career preparation, like interviewing somebody in the desired occupation, as another strategy for post-transfer success.

Interview Question 6

How do you overcome the organizational challenges that hinder transfer success for this student population? Interview Question 6 revealed four main codes for overcoming institutional barriers: (a) advocacy, (b) campus involvement, (c) creating buy-in, and (d) professional development (see Figure 12).

Figure 12

Coding Results for Interview Question 6
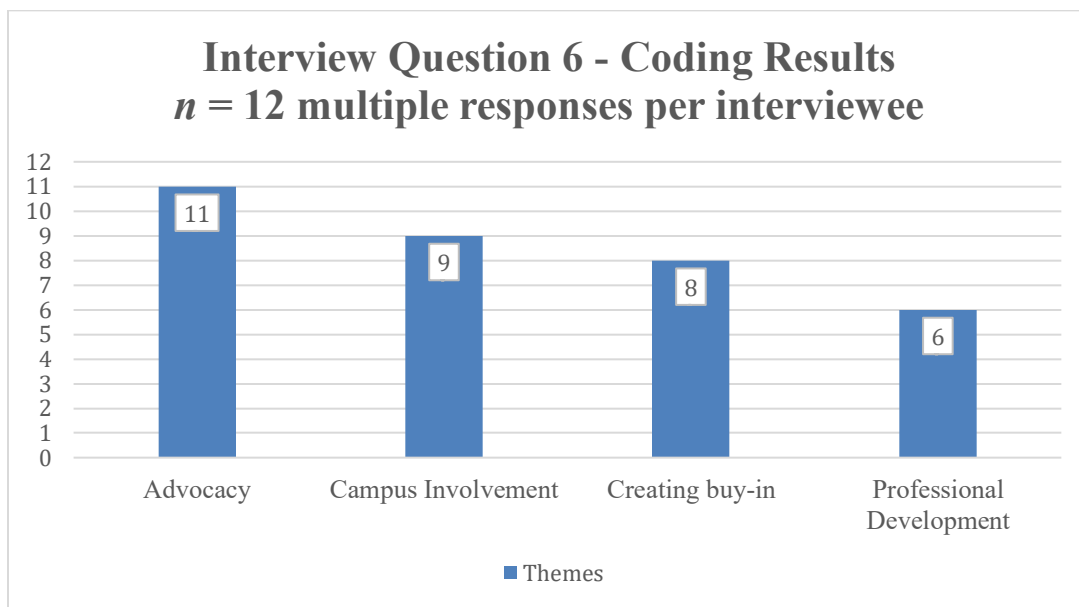
Advocacy. Eleven out of 12 participants explicitly mentioned advocacy as a way of overcoming institutional barriers hindering transfer support efforts on campus. Building transfer center's reputation and discussing the transfer culture the participants are trying to create are viable strategies for advancing this goal. Another strategy is to present current efforts and success factors by admission rates, number of applications, or even number of students serviced by the center. P9 emphasizes: "I was talking about how money is always going to be an

organizational challenge. A lot of it is just advocating, advocating, and advocating. Right?"

Campus Involvement. Being involved at the campus level and various initiatives was determined to be another theme, with 9 out of 12 participants naming several ways of integrating the TC into the larger campus. Some indicated being a committee member or even chairing a committee, when possible, especially when transfer is tied to enrollment, or being a standing member of the academic senate. This allows for any transfer misconceptions to be addressed or any inaccurate information to be corrected before reaching other programs or students.

P12 asserts:

Being persistent. I am involved in committees or chair a committee whenever possible. I am a standing member of the agenda as a resource for Academic Senate. And what that means is that I am there at the meeting, right? And if they have a question about transferrin, I am there… or if somebody says something that doesn't sound right, I'm there to answer the question. I also report out, so I give quick updates.

Creating Buy-In. Strategies for creating campus buy-in to support the transfer function was another code mentioned by 8 out of 12 participants. Institutional support plans involved bringing the information to campus constituencies in various forms, as every department is transfer's home. Building relationships and expressing transfer needs through the chain of command can help alleviate the burden of working in silos or trying to accomplish the transfer mission only in the TC.

P7 speaks to this by saying:

My thing is developing relationships with key players on campus. Whenever I send out notices, I don't just send it to the counselors… I'll send it out to English and math faculty, especially those two, because they represent a main barrier for transfer. Also, our

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key programs. We also have an established Transfer Committee that meets every month, where we talk about topics, bring in guests to get the dialogue and creative energy going. It is very helpful to have other members share the same vision, share the load, share the responsibility.

Professional Development. Dowd et al. (2013) refer to professional development activities as a primary way of facilitating the role of faculty and administrators as institutional agents in support of promoting students' educational attainment. Professional development activities initiated by the TCDs is the last code for IQ7. Six out of 12 participants mentioned conducting trainings for faculty, staff, and administrators on transfer basics, as well as partnering with other professional development opportunities like SafeZone or Undocu trainings. While not all students on CCC campuses are transfer students, participants echoed the sentiments of having programming tailored for all student needs. The idea is to create a shared goal and build relationships around helping underrepresented students achieve their objectives.

Interview Question 7

Have you participated in formal/informal training or mentorship opportunities that helped improve equitable service offerings by your transfer center? Although several professional development and training opportunities were deemed essential in developing a working understanding of the TC functions, IQ7 revealed the following codes: (a) Conferences, (b) Equity Trainings, (c) Regional/TCD, (d) Field Experts, and (e) Experiential Learning (see Figure 13).

Figure 13

Coding Results for Interview Question 7
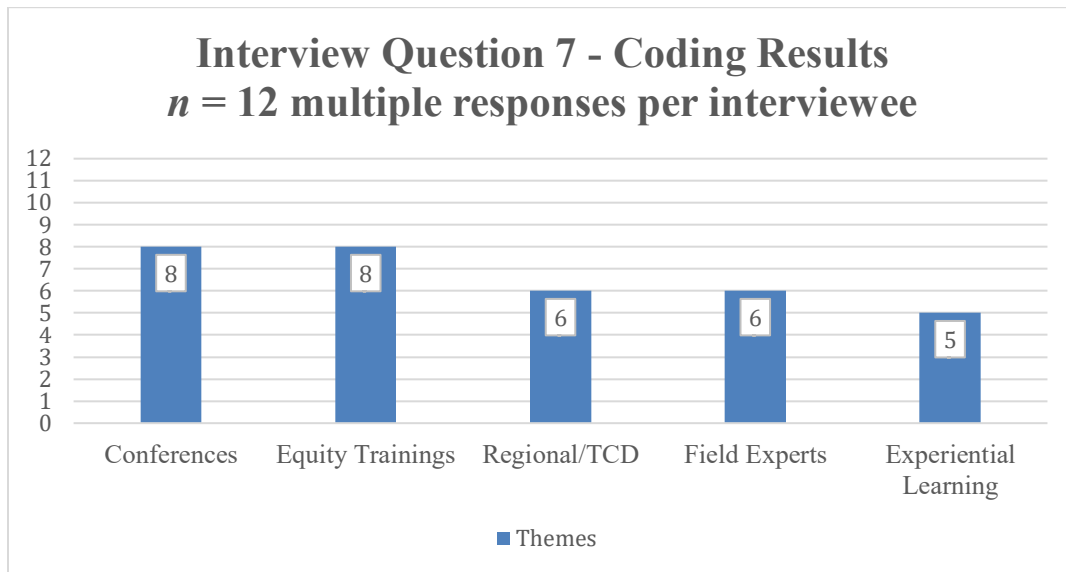
Conferences. Due to the evolving and changing nature of the transfer landscape, and the fact that community colleges are often at the mercy of 4-year institutions' policy shifts, ongoing involvement in professional conferences were deemed important by 8 out of 12 participants. Ensuring transfer success series, for example, is intended for new and seasoned counselors with UC transfer admission policies, while New TCD training is put together by the CCCCO to provide a roadmap of essential TC functions. Other conferences that were spoken highly about include the Western Association for College Admission Counseling and the National Association for College Admission Counseling. On the local level, TCDs appreciate opportunities of connecting with the counseling faculty on campus and share vital information.

Equity Trainings. Training opportunities with campus and external equity groups or service providers was deemed equally as important, with 8 out of 12 participants. Most participants appreciated getting a refresher or an overview of practices geared towards assisting equity student groups.

P2 also likes to take advantage of those opportunities:

I have definitely done the different kinds of trainings that we have on campus, like

SafeZone, VetNet, and Undocu series. I try to do as many of those as possible to

understand where our students are coming from in the different grouping.

Regional/TCD. The clusters of TCDs, depending on geographic proximity, are also

organized into regional meetings and districtwide TCDs' meetings. The regions often invite

guest speaker from feeder university campuses to discuss local preference, selection criteria and

requirements, special programs geared towards transfer student populations and best practices.

P2 states:

I think a big piece of where I'm getting things that I love… is exchanging ideas from

Region X, our meetings, we actually as a region meet several times each semester. So I

know that's sometimes more than other regions might, but I really find it incredibly

helpful for us to meet once a month to really talk about what we are doing, what we are

doing that works, what does not work, and what we can do differently. It's just a matter

of... OK, I am doing this but I am doing it not in the same way, so maybe I can make it

more focused.

Field Experts. Connecting with experts in the field and getting mentorship from

seasoned TCDs or those with technical knowledge in the area. University evaluators and

admissions officers from 4-year university setting, articulation officers, or administrative

professionals with previous experience in transfer processes are among experts mentioned by the

participants. IQ7 code of learning from others is a reminder that no matter how much we think

we know, there is always room for continued growth and development.

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Experiential Learning. Experiential learning was the last noteworthy and most frequently appearing code, with 5 out of 12 participants citing on-the-job training as a way of improving equitable services by the TC. Some TCDs interviewed for the study has previous experience in the transfer field and brought that working knowledge to the position. Others were able to hone the skills and talents of other employees working in the TC or the previous faculty/staff occupying the position.

P3 states:

Regarding any type of mentorship or support, I am actually very fortunate that I've been in the world of transfer for many, many years. I was in the transfer center at the previous college that I worked at, so, therefore I was in the midst of helping students with application cycle, CSU applications. ADTs and all that stuff. With that, I didn't need a lot of mentorship or support to be a TCD. Now, of course, the first year is always a challenge because you are transitioning to a new position, as well as a new campus. So, I had a little bit of growing pains, but we had a really good transfer center specialist who was with me for the first, I think, three years. And it really helps because once you have really excellent staff members and dedicated counselors, they already have a lot of experience.

Summary of RQ2

RQ 2 was directly correlated to the first research question posed by the study. In response to the academic and social/cultural barriers identified by transfer students and organizational challenges experienced by TCDs themselves, efficient and impactful practices were identified. Key findings included cross-campus collaboration, partnership development with 4-year institutions, institutional buy-in, and student empowerment measures were among the most frequent codes. Some of these themes appeared in slight variations throughout interview question

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responses, indicating their applicability in addressing several institutional challenges related to underrepresented transfer student success.

Research Question 3

How do community college TCDs define, measure, and track success? Continues improvement of TC service offerings and recent focus on data-driven inquiry for RQ3 aligns with the following interview questions: IQ8: How do you define transfer success? IQ9: How do you measure and track underrepresented student transfer over time?

Interview Question 8

How do you define transfer success? The most frequent themes identified by participants in response to IQ8 were: (a) Knowledge and Resources, (b) Transfer Readiness, (c) Written-off, and (d) Degree Completion (see Figure 14).

Figure 14

Coding Results for Interview Question 8
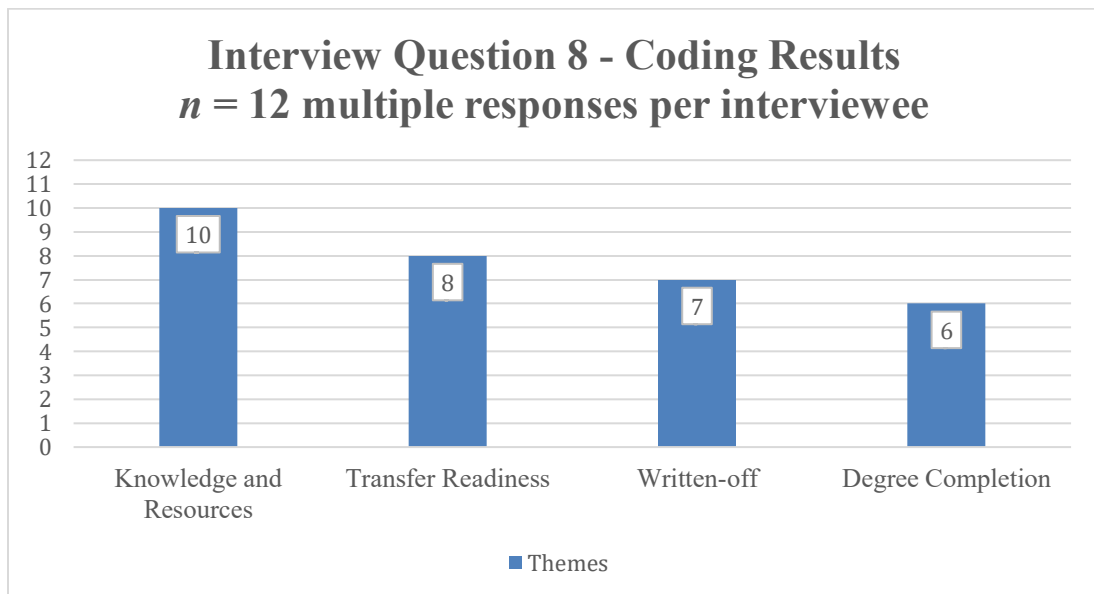
Knowledge and Resources. For the purposes of this question, transfer success measures and ideologies supporting the claims behind each code varied significantly. Imparting knowledge

and resources appeared most frequently. Ten out of 12 participants identified the ability to assist

students and the campus community with accurate and timely transfer information, share

appropriate resources, and introducing students to possibilities as a priority.

P1 states:

At this point, it is counselors and faculty being more empowered and knowledgeable to

positively impact transfer rates, especially for equity groups. So, if more Umoja students

apply for UCs and if more Dreamers and Puente students do the same, that'll show that

providing more resources to them has the desired effect.

Transfer Readiness. Transfer readiness was another theme that was mentioned fairly

frequently by study participants, 8 out of 12 times. The central tenants of transfer readiness as

outlined by participants vary from timely application submission and transfer within 2 years to

completion of the necessary units for meeting transfer requirements. The numbers of admits from

each campus were indicative of transfer preparedness on the part of the student and institutional

efforts in addressing attainment gaps. The code was consistent with transfer readiness research

conducted by Johnson-Benson et al. (2001), where transfer center success and students readiness

indicators were outlined by knowledge of university admission requirements, financial aid, and

application processes, in addition to timely transfer.

As P4 notes:

Transfer success for me means… when a student begins at the college, completes the

necessary units each semester, and on their third, third semester they are already

applying, to 4-year institutions. So, come next fall, they are already at the 4-year within

two years. They transfer within two years. And that comes with a lot… to make sure they

have all the units, making sure they know about lower-division courses, or what major to choose.

Written-Off. The following code was brought up by 7 out of 12 participants, and encompasses phrases by P1, P3, P7, P8, P9, P11, and P12. Examples that led to the creation of this overarching theme include:

- not the students who would have transferred anyways
- helping students who were "written off"
- students' half-empty mentality – deficit think
- focusing on stories/when a homeless student transfers

P3 points out:

For my role, transfer success is not to transfer students who would have transferred anyways, OK? There are certain students, who with just basic… with a counselor once a semester or once in a while, they are going to transfer. It's really… transfer success to me is really the students in the margins. A lot of students if you're able to provide timely support, decent amount of supports support, then there is a better chance of them transferring. So, to me, transfer success is in those marginal students who without support, that extra help and support would not transfer. But with the extra help and support they would transfer.

Degree Completion. The last determinant of transfer success was deemed to be degree completion by 6 out of 12 participants. Degree completion by underserved transfer students, both at the CCC and 4-year institutions, is believed to result from mitigating transfer shock, seeing students through the entire journey, and ensuring that students are prepared for the new

environment. Participating TCDs discussed degree completion not as a destination but a process involving connection points to avoid loss of momentum.

Interview Question 9

How do you measure and track underrepresented student transfer over time? IQ9 was intended to reveal data-driven tenants for decision-making and effective strategy development. The main themes for the question include: (a) Transfer by System, (b) Served by TC, (c) ADT Tracking, and (d) Survey Results (see Figure 15).

Figure 15

Coding Results for Interview Question 9
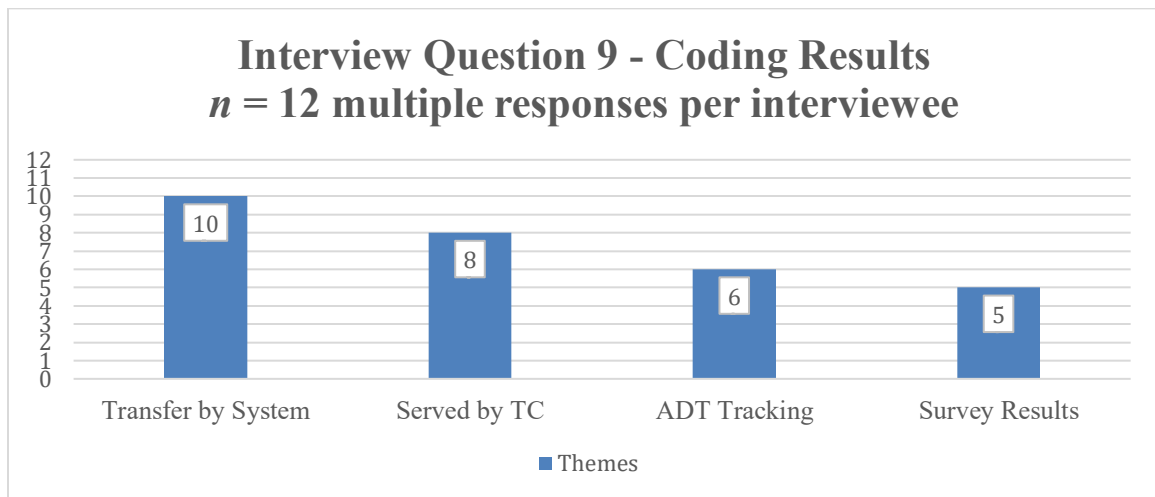
Transfer by System. P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, and P12 selected transfer numbers by university system as the primary method of measuring and tracking transfer success. The recent push in quantitative analysis of institutional practices calls for intentional incorporation of transfer trends into TC planning. 10 out of 12 participants mentioned the following phrases that led to the final code:

- number of students who apply and transfer by system
- transfer rates and number of admits to CSU/UC

- CSU/UC application and admission rates

- private school application and admission numbers

- data provided by the State and CSU data mart

- transfer dashboard

Served by TC. Eight out of 12 participants noted that the number of students who take advantage of the services offered by the transfer center are another way of measuring and tracking success. Student sign-ups and attendance to the available workshops and university representative visits at the TC reveals interest and allows for better planning in the coming academic cycle.

The way P10 describes the process of quantifying success measures for the transfer center is as follows:

It depends on what we are talking about as far as you know, numbers…Because like I said, you know there… there has to be that really high touch customer service that is provided to the students. So, we want to make sure that we're giving students the necessary time to understand and to walk them through the transfer process. Of course, we have various ways of collecting information like workshop attendance and number of students served through different TC services.

ADT Tracking. Six out of 12 participants also track ADT data from each application cycle to measure the different degree attainment rates. ADT tracking is not, however, a tell-all sign of transfer readiness and university application/admission trends, as students have the option of transferring without earning an ADT. ADT are also tailored specifically for the CSU system and can work for certain private or out-of-state institutions, though the admission reporting from those institutions is not directly tied to ADT completion.

Survey Results. Five out of 12 participating TCDs also deploy surveys and utilize summative/formative evaluation techniques to assess the overall effectiveness of the TC services. Surveys are administered to the transfer class of that particular admission cycle as a way of determining what works and what improvements students would like to see in the Transfer Center. Some participants also utilize surveys after workshop/event attendance to further evaluate student response and perception of the given activity.

Summary of RQ3

Research Question 3 was geared towards defining success and quantifying the transfer function on CCC campuses. The responses revealed a range of broader concepts and concrete examples of what success means to each participating TCD. While some were primarily concerned with individual student stories and dispelling success as a timeline dictated by the meritocratic system, most also expressed making data-informed decisions for improving the TC offerings. Utilizing data, in some cases, was still a relatively new function for some professionals in the field, which they hope to expand in the near future.

Research Question 4

Based on demonstrated transfer success strategies (rates/indicators), what recommendations would community college TCDs have for practitioners coming into the field? Due to professional growth opportunities and high turnover rates that exist in the field of higher education (among other factors), the following interview questions seek to share insightful feedback for aspiring professionals in alignment with RQ4: IQ10: What is the biggest pitfall someone in your position faces? IQ11: What advice would you give to new practitioners in the field for supporting equity and transfer student success? IQ12: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interview Question 10

What is the biggest pitfall someone in your position faces? Interview participants described various pitfalls they face as TCDs. The codes that emerged more frequently were as follows: (a) Lack of Support, (b) Campus Climate, (c) Expectations, and (d) Burnout (see Figure 16).

Figure 16

Coding Results for Interview Question 10
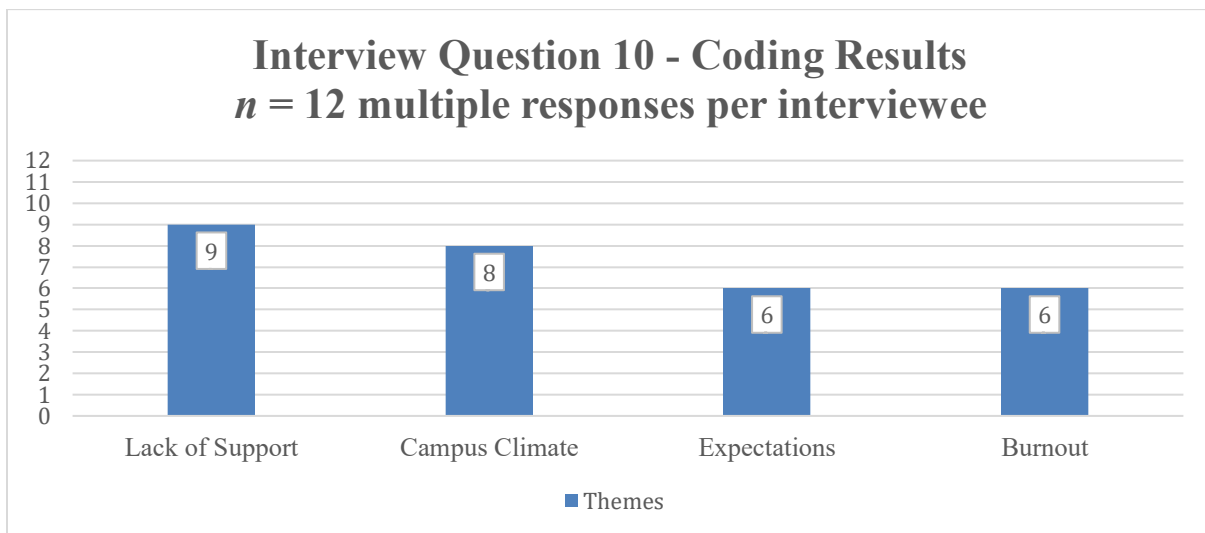
Lack of Support. Ten out of 12 participants deemed lack of support as the greatest pitfall faced in the TCD position. Lack of support was contextualized in various ways for IQ10, such as:

- not being given the platform to advocate for transfer

- not have administrative support

- low faculty engagement

- budget/No TC designated funding

- lack of allocates resources

P8 says:

Funding and we don't have a lot of support. I don't have any transfer counselors, it's just

me. I do everything and so I depend on my student workers and my CGCA. You can't do

everything yourself… something gets missing.

Campus Climate. Successfully navigating the culture on CCC campuses also proved to

be a pitfall and was the second most frequent code. It was mentioned by 8 out of 12 participants

in various forms. Some TCDs emphasized their disappointment with having to play into campus

politics or get with the "right people" to accomplish a task. Others talked about processes that are

not student-centered and having to be strategic or play chess when challenging the status quo.

P7 states:

Just politics, not knowing how to manage and flow in the politics or getting caught up

into the politics, so being above fray. Not being petty. Also, balancing… you might find

this at different campuses… balancing people's biases towards certain universities.

Expectations. Unique to the TCD position, 6 out of 12 participants expressed their

concern with the amount of expectations placed on the role and the individual occupying the

role. P2, P3, P4, P8, P9, and P10 used phrases like expected to know it all, do it all, and solve all

the problems. The consensus with managing high expectations was to make transfer a shared

responsibility and make strides towards a more community effort in supporting the students and

the individuals in this role.

A clear example is given by P9:

The biggest pitfall I find is that everybody expects me to do it all as it relates to

transfer… to know it all, do it all, to be the go-to person when somebody doesn't know or

has messed up… fix all the problems. Oh, a student got denied because they were ill

advised by a counselor, don't worry! Just send them to P9, he'll figure it out.

Burnout. Half of the participating TCDs, 6 out of 12, also mentioned burnout as a result of constant and ongoing stress couples with lack of resources to manage the workload. Some of the relevant phrases included mental strains, mental and physical exhaustion, and no sigh of relief in the role.

P3 described the code in a following manner:

One thing could be a little bit of a burnout, because you could become a workaholic having to dedicate so much time to the role. So, I think that's a big challenge with this type of position, where work is constant and ongoing and there is always something to do. I think a few times in the last five years where I felt deflated…but, yeah. You are mentally and physically exhausted, more so mentally, and you become less effective.

Interview Question 11

What advice would you give to new practitioners in the field for supporting equity and transfer student success? The codes identified for IQ11 give new practitioners useful feedback in navigating the CCC campus culture and supporting the transfer function for students: (a) Humanize the Experience, (b) Collaborate, (c) Forward-thinking, and (d) Transfer Nerdy (see Figure 17).

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Figure 17

Coding Results for Interview Question 11

Interview Question 11 - Coding Results
n = 12 multiple responses per interviewee

Humanize the Experience	9
Collaborate	8
Forward-thinking	6
Transfer Nerdy	5

■ Themes
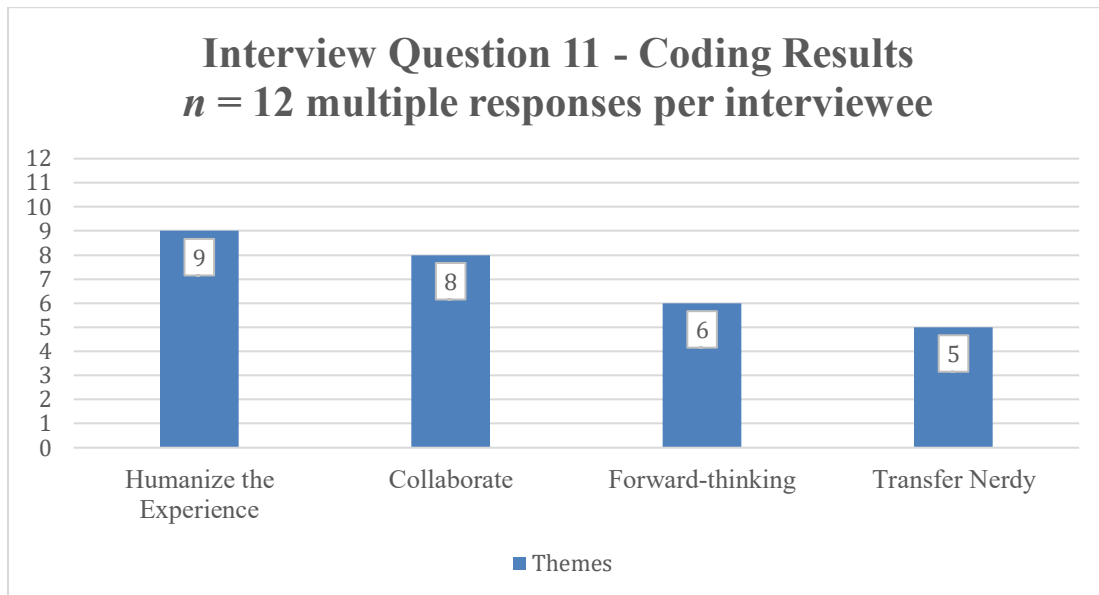
Humanize the Experience. Higher education institutions offer a certain amount of flexibility and upward mobility to their employees. Nine out of 12 participants deemed it important for new practitioners interested in joining the TC ranks to humanize the transfer experience for students. The code presented itself in phrases like helping students feel comfortable and yet still challenging their mindset if needed, making humanistic connections first, being present and really caring about the students' success.

P5 notes:

Definitely support transfer success of all students just on a personal level…like a more humanistic level. Have your door or emails open and being you know, responsive. One thing about equity is about just being available… what helps our students on this transfer journey is really the connections. When I've spoken to other counselors and they expressed how great one of the students is, it is not because they met the student once, but because they "knew" the student.

Collaborate. Collaboration, identified by 8 out of 12 participants, was the second most frequent code. The overarching theme encompassed several facets of a similar thought process and expressed phrases. Several TCDs described collaboration as:

- work with different people/build relationships

- make connections to facilitate a feeling of community

- work with like-minded individuals

- create more allies/share the mission

- collaboration and teamwork with equity initiatives

Forward-Thinking. Six out of 12 participants deemed it important to evolve with the times and be open to new ideas or practices. With the recent shifts brought forth by the necessity to move services online, TCs with a proven track record of virtual service offerings made an easier transition to the online modality. Adapting to changing requirements and staying abreast of new trends is helpful in serving the needs of underrepresented transfer students.

P12 notes:

Any kind of programming we can do to help students break down the barriers or break down the barriers for them should be what we work on… that's the part that is sometimes harder to see. So, how can we do that best and continue to evolve and change and help our students evolve and change and become their best selves… evolve with the times right? Like virtual platforms mean so many more students get services, and it is easier and faster for them. So, really thinking outside the box.

Transfer Nerdy. The term transfer nerdy came from one of the interviews and perfectly summed up the themes discussed by 5 out of 12 participants. P1, P2, P7, P9, P10 mentioned that

it takes a specific personality or a certain characteristic to maximize the opportunities presented in this role and mitigate any challenges that arise.

P9 describes it as:

It does take a special person. Like I do, I do believe it takes a specific personality type. You know, somebody who is very inquisitive that likes a little bit of the quantitative things too. You have to be meticulous; you have to be detail oriented; you have to be… why not… a little transfer nerdy.

Interview Question 12

Is there anything else you would like to add? The final interview question was open-ended in nature and aimed to give participants a platform to express any final thoughts or discuss any transfer-related topic not covered in the structured portion. Several codes emerged as a result: (a) Focus on Equity, (b) Share Ideas, (c) Institutional Divide, and (d) Information Influx (see Figure 18).

Figure 18

Coding Results for Interview Question 12

Interview Question 12 - Coding Results
n = 12 multiple responses per interviewee
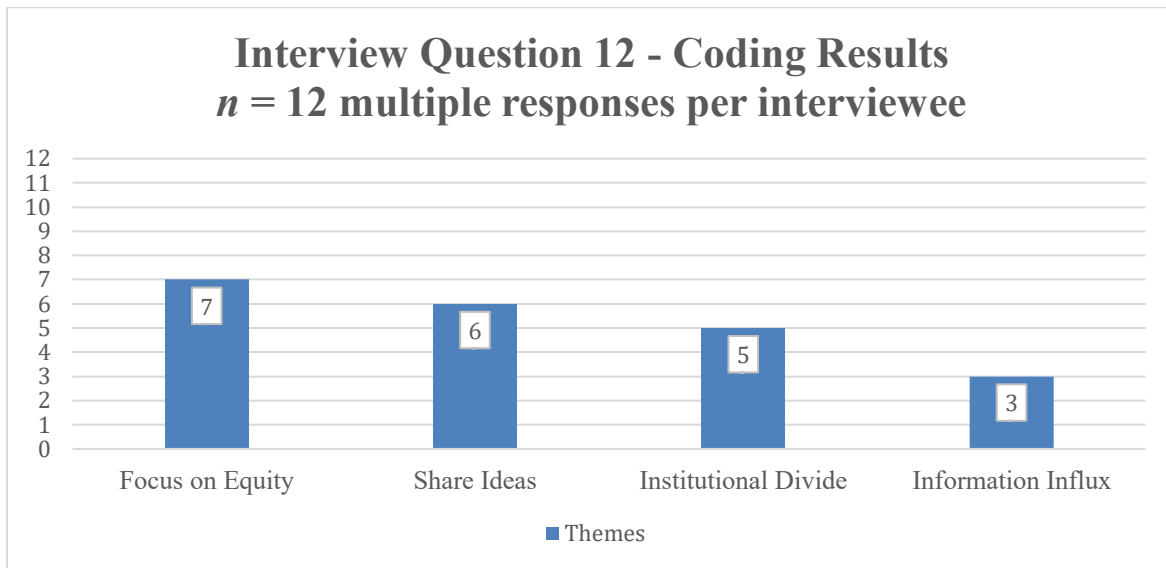
Focus on Equity. Seven out of 12 participants discussed a greater need to focus on

equity. The code presented itself as either inability to focus efforts on serving equity populations

to the extent needed due to staffing and resources or an emphasis on the TC's fundamental

mission. These concerns were further emphasized by participants who felt like the governing

boards and local leadership do not reflect the diversity of their student population.

P4 says:

The transfer center was built under the fact of equity. I'm not sure if everyone knows that.

I didn't know that coming in, but there is some historical context to this… Title 5 … kind

of thing where the transfer center at every college is built for that specific, you know,

reason for achieving equity in transfer. And I think we lose that thought. I think we forgot

about that thing. We forget that it was built for that. And so just keeping that in mind that,

you know, that… that's why transfer was built. Not to minimize any other benefit, but at

least the focus should be on equity students and disproportionately impacted students. So,

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just making sure that that's the actual language that is reflected in our vision or mission to go by every day.

Share Ideas. Half of the participants, 6 out of 12, responded to IQ12 by expressing the importance of sharing ideas. TCDs described the ability to form collective knowledge and develop best practices by sharing or borrowing what works at similar institutions. Some colleges implement innovative strategies in addressing transfer student needs on campus, so it makes it easier for other TC professionals to tailor new programs to fit their interest.

P2 spoke to this theme:

I really, truly believe in learning from others, and I think a big piece of transfer…being a TCD, is understanding that we are not stealing but we are borrowing, we are adjusting. But ultimately, it is totally OK to share our ideas because every student population is going to be different, but sharing is still going to make us successful and make our students successful.

Institutional Divide. The third most prevalent code for IQ12 was the notion of institutional divide. Five out of 12 participants, especially those who did not identify institutional support systems to be in place for TC in the earlier questions, expressed that the CCC campus had a lot of room for growth. The themes leading to the code included disjointed efforts from the three main units of the college (i.e., student services, academic affairs, and administrative services), institution being very fragmented, and existence of conflicting initiatives without a shared structure.

Information Influx. The last code for IQ12 is the influx of information stemming from the complex and multifaceted nature of the TC functions. Three out of 12 participants expressed that there is always a massive amount of information regarding various university requirement updates, changes in degree completion or availability, scheduling of events and activities, to

name a few. The growing concern is that too much can be overwhelming for students who are trying to make sense of the information.

P12 says:

The only other thing I keep thinking about is just how much information is out there for students, but it can be extremely overwhelming to them… and, you know, how to help students get organized, break it all down for them. That's another big kind of hurdle we have to jump every day. Really pairing down the information, yet not oversimplifying because it is complex, right?

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the codes or findings from conducting 12 TCD interviews from the CCC system. A total of 65 codes, shown in Table 6, were produced based on the research questions posed by the principal investigator. Certain thematic elements appeared in several interview question responses, indicating a deeper connection that will be discussed in the next section.

Table 6

Summary of Themes for Four Research Questions

RQ1. What challenges do community college Transfer Center Directors encounter when supporting historically underrepresented student transfer to 4-year institutions?	RQ2. What best practices and strategies are utilized by community college Transfer Center Directors to support historically underrepresented student transfer efforts to 4-year institutions?	RQ3. How do community college Transfer Center Directors define, measure, and track success?	RQ4. Based on demonstrated transfer success strategies (rates/indicators), what recommendations would community college Transfer Center Directors have for practitioners coming into the field?
IQ1	IQ4	IQ8	IQ10
1) Awareness	1) Support Services	1) Knowledge and Resources	1) Lack of Support
2) Connection	2) Transfer Preparation	2) Transfer Readiness	2) Campus Climate
3) Study Habits	3) Empowerment	3) Written-off	3) Expectations
4) Perception of Self	4) Academic Support	4) Degree Completion	4) Burnout
5) Mentorship and Advocacy	5) Peer-mentorship		
6) Math/English			
IQ2	IQ5	IQ9	IQ11
1) Cultural Capital	1) Transfer Exploration	1) Transfer by System	1) Humanize the Experience
2) Sense of Belonging	2) Holistic Support	2) Served by TC	2) Collaborate

3) Transfer Processes	3) Redefining Success	3) ADT Tracking	3) Forward-thinking
4) Social Capital	4) University Presence	4) Survey Results	4) Transfer Nerdy
5) Finances	5) Post-transfer Preparation		
IQ3	IQ6		IQ12
1) Administrative Support	1) Advocacy		1) Focus on Equity
2) Collaboratives and Engagement	2) Campus Involvement		2) Share Ideas
3) Programming	3) Creating buy-in		3) Institutional Divide
4) Funding	4) Professional Development		4) Information Influx
5) Transfer Outreach			
	IQ7		
	1) Conferences		
	2) Equity Trainings		
	3) Regional/TCD		
	4) Field Experts		
	5) Experiential Learning		

Chapter 5: Summary, Findings, Implications, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Chapter 5 presents an analytical discussion of the findings presented in the previous section, along with pertinent implications and recommendations for future research. The thematic elements of external and internal barriers hindering transfer success for underserved student populations and suggested strategies were then converted into a logic model to improve equitable service offerings by CCC transfer centers. This study aimed to provide a comprehensive description of the transfer journey faced by students who aspire to transfer from a community college campus to 4-year universities. Moreover, since transfer centers in community colleges were established to support the transfer mission of all students but also emphasize equity considerations in service offerings, participating TCDs were asked about any pitfalls and advice that could benefit new practitioners or other professionals in the field. Echoing recent discussions and emphasis on racial justice, the discussion of each research question centered around academic and social/cultural challenges expressed by underserved students through the lens of seasoned TCDs. Since transfer success efforts do not happen in silos and also encompass institutional or systemic hurdles, the findings of this chapter will also address effective strategies for facilitating cross-campus collaboration. The inferences derived from the study will be used to further inform practical implications and future research in CCC transfer success efforts.

Summary of the Study

The study utilized a qualitative research design through phenomenological principles for the purpose of discovering underrepresented student transfer journey through the lens of CCC TCDs. This objective was accomplished through a 12-question semi-structured interview of 12 participants selected following the determined inclusion criteria. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the landscape, overall purpose for conducting the study, as well as the research questions that

will guide the research efforts. Chapter 2 delved deeper into the identified areas of higher education administration, equity consideration in student transfer, current efforts in closing achievement gaps, as well as established pathways to university systems in- and out-of-state. Chapter 2 also discussed the principles of transition theory that focus on moving students in, through, and out of any transitionary experiences, with an emphasis on individual and environmental characteristics. Moreover, since culture is one of the central tenants of this research, the literature review also analyzed the effects of intersectionality and culturally responsive practices in community colleges.

Chapter 3 broke down the methodology and data collection procedures, along with measures for ensuring validity and reliability, participant anonymity and confidentiality, and disclosed any personal bias that might come into play in data analysis. A detailed account for data analysis procedures described coding in its entirety, which yielded the findings discussed in Chapter 4. The codes were further supported by direct participant quotes chosen from the interview transcripts and aimed to illustrate the participants' perception of the phenomenon. Chapter 5 summarizes and ties the findings together in a cohesive and logical manner.

Discussion of Findings

The process of gathering qualitative data and breaking it down to fragments under an overarching theme produced a total of 56 codes. These codes aimed to answer the research questions posed in the study, which are as follows: RQ1: What challenges do community college TCDs encounter when supporting historically underrepresented student transfer to 4-year institutions? RQ2: What best practices and strategies are utilized by community college TCDs to support historically underrepresented student transfer efforts to 4-year institutions? RQ3: How do community college TCDs define, measure, and track success? RQ4: Based on demonstrated

transfer success strategies (rates/indicators), what recommendations would community college TCDs have for practitioners coming into the field? A more detailed overview of the findings will ensue after the themes for all interview questions are revealed.

Discussion of RQ1

The first research question posed for the study intends to uncover the challenges CCC TCDs encounter when supporting transfer students from historically underrepresented groups. Aside from the explicit themes identified by the participants in classifying academic, social/cultural, and institutional challenges, it became apparent that these factors work in tandem. Not only do they affect student performance and pose a threat in accomplishing their educational goals, but these can also be a detrimental for those students who come from first-generation and low-income households. These findings are consistent with previous research in the area of academic achievement and persistent equity gaps of higher education (Baber, 2018; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2007). The interplay of various individual and external factors described affects transfer and completion at the CCC and baccalaureate granting institutions. Baber (2018) mentions disparities in educational experience at the high school level, which often also influence students' aspirations and decision to enroll in higher education entities.

There are notable differences in student performance based on factors like previous educational experience (i.e., secondary school), internalized negative perceptions that might be further perpetuated by institutional agents at the CCC, as well as lack of social/cultural capital. Navigational capabilities and higher education aspiration were mentioned as a part of the larger social/cultural umbrella. Moreover. TCDs emphasized the importance of being deliberate in dispelling transfer myths and perceived barriers often experienced by students who might not have a mentor or advocate to guide them through the journey. It was also deemed essential to

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recognize the difference between perceived barriers that students think will prevent them from meeting eligibility requirements, applying, and being admitted to competitive 4-year institutions. Naming things like the imposter syndrome, which is a perceived barrier, per se, but can act like a real and overt deterrent from students' reaching their full potential. Previous research emphasized the cultural and social capital aspect of supporting students and facilitating a stronger sense of connection and engagement with viable resources (Allen et al., 2013; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2007; Wang, 2012). Familial and peer support, availability of timely and accurate information regarding transfer and any other areas of the student path, as well as continuity of services can assist in closing some of the equity gaps in postsecondary degree attainment.

At the institutional level, it was noted that some leaders in the community college arena might not fully grasp the complexity of university transfer processes and the extend of efforts it takes. These challenges are coupled with low levels of faculty engagement, which furthered the college from having a transfer culture or transfer student needs being reflected in the college' mission. Transfer center, as the primary hub for hosting transfer activities and events, also suffers from lack of funding allocation. While this increased the likelihood of collaboration with other campus programs and initiatives, lack of dedicated resources also inhibited the availability of services. As noted by Wood and Newman (2017) when discussing the role of institutional agents in the success of transfer aspirations, student-faculty engagement can either serve as a catalyst or inhibit some of the academic and non-cognitive outcomes. The findings are also consistent with previous research in the area of community college transfer pathways. Navigating college pathways and the extensive processes of choosing a major, class enrollment options, course-to-course articulation, and major preparation can be complex and overwhelming (Baston, 2018; Crisp et al., 2018; Jabbar et al., 2020). Successfully getting through the planning

process and making the transition is often more challenging for first-generation and low-income students. The authors eloquently describe the fact that capacity, decision-making, and culture are not to be accounted for this difference in navigational capital, in direct contradiction to the deficit-think model. Rather, it is attributed to a lower margin of error permitted within low-resourced communities. The findings also align with the description of completion by design (Bailey et al., 2015; Harbour, 2016; Wheeler, 2019), where measurable outcomes and a more structured emphasis on equitable offerings campus wide are at a forefront.

Discussion of RQ2

Research Question 2 directly aligns with, and is the logical extension of, the first research question. RQ2 set out to reveal effective strategies and best practices in addressing the multifaceted transfer experience and ensuring that underrepresented transfer students are supported in achieving their educational goals. The most frequently appearing themes for the second research question were as follows: support service availability, empowerment, mentorship and advocacy, as well as university presence on the CCC campus. Consistent with Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes (2019) discussion of effective strategies to assist in furthering transfer students' self-efficacy, empowering students to advocate for themselves and complete the academic process is crucial to their success.

These findings were significant in several key areas of the research. First, availability of wrap-around support services on college campuses that were geared towards serving a specific group of students were mentioned as a strategy for addressing not only social/cultural, but also academic challenges faced by students. Second, while counseling guidance and faculty engagement in the transfer planning and preparation, these factors also greatly/positively influenced the students' self-perception. These concepts also correlate to the notion of

empowerment, which was a consistent theme during the TCD interviews. Interviewees emphasized the importance of making the student an integral part of their academic journey by being less prescriptive and asking more open-ended questions to facilitate transfer exploration to competitive 4-year institutions. Ortagus and Hu (2019) discuss access stratification to selective 4-year institutions based on individual background characteristics. The study suggests that historically underrepresented students with lower resource availability tend to gravitate towards less selective baccalaureate granting institutions, where they could have been admitted to. Therefore, defining transfer success based on individual accomplishments rather than established meritocratic measures and dispelling perceived barriers can expose students to new possibilities.

Lastly, advocacy at the institutional and individual student-centric level and TC involvement in campus activities were the most frequent codes in further the transfer mission and creating allies. Similar to notions brought up by previous research, having role models and mentors with similar experiences, who inspire action, along with offering the proper guidance throughout the transfer journey can be a pillar for transfer success (Buchmann et al., 2020; Preuss et al., 2020).

Professional development opportunities offered by the local, regional, and state agencies, along with sessions offered by the TC to the campus community, were an important vehicle in disseminating vital information. Due to the ever-changing nature of the transfer process, TCDs heavily utilize all possible communication channels for sharing accurate and timely information. Baldwin (2017), noted that recent policy measures are starting to follow the guided pathway model, as institutions focus on the entire student experience and strive to streamline programmatic offerings. Clarifying requirements based on major pathways and offering a full-

spectrum support services are gaining momentum, especially when discussing non-traditional transfer patterns.

Discussion of RQ3

Craig (2011) conducted an analysis of numerous student characteristics and their impact on transfer outcomes. The findings revealed that certain strategies are positively correlated to the successful fulfillment of the CCC transfer function. Supporting the completion of 2-year degrees while preparing for 4-year university admission and providing resources for the transfer center were deemed important for community college transfer function's success and contributions to the transfer student capital (Laanan et al., 2010). These findings are consistent with the findings of RQ3 of this study, where degree completion and number of students served by the transfer center were identified by participating TCDs as success measures.

Imparting knowledge and resources was another key finding that emerged from interview questions for RQ3. 2-year colleges are often at the mercy of 4-year university policies and shifting environments, so faculty and staff rely on accurate information dissemination to make sure that students are not deficient in meeting any of the vertical transfer requirements. The findings align with Crisp and Delgado's (2014) notion of transfer being extremely process oriented from the get-go. Other scholars of the literature pertaining to this arena also discussed the need for data-driven and evidence based-practices that would yield measurable outcomes, such as high-touch strategies and intersegmental stakeholder engagement (Baber, 2018; Hatch & Bohlig, 2016; Romano & Eddy, 2017). Summative and formative assessment measures were also used by TCDs to inform the scheduling and adjust the content/modality of service offerings. The assessment takes place in the form of a survey instrument administered after workshops or at the end of the academic year to the transfer class of the given cycle. Surveys allow for students to

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give feedback regarding any changes they would like to see in the activities or events offered in the future. On a more quantitative scale, in order for TCs to show broader effectiveness in boosting transfer rates, professional in the field often rely on institutional dashboards and rankings among the 115 CCCs. Other measures include raw numbers of transfer applicants and admits by system, as well as students who actually enroll after being offered admission.

Discussion of RQ4

The last set of interview questions is aligned with Research Question 4 and aimed to provide constructive feedback and advice to practitioners interested in the field of transfer. Participating TCDs reasserted their concerns around funding availability, among low levels of staffing for a center that is intended to serve the entire student population along with supporting underserved student success. As stated by previous research, institutional support levels are often dictated by the overall transfer culture on campus (Van Noy et al., 2016; Wyner et al., 2016). If campus support is lower, the TCD staff are often the ones advocating for students or trying to fulfill all functions by themselves, when it should be a shared responsibility. As a result, TCDs express burnout and exhaustion from balancing high expectations and unmatched resource levels.

However, in terms of advice for new practitioners, TCDs most frequently encouraged for novice transfer faculty and staff to humanize the transfer journey for students. The theme also came up in one of the previous questions about mitigating social/cultural barriers for underserved students (RPG, 2017). It was suggested for practitioners to take the necessary time, even if it exceeds the time allotted for the given appointment and really be present with the student. Meeting students where they are and building rapport by following up/following through allows for the expansion of potential. However, it is important to note that pairing down the influx of

transfer information, making it accessible to students but not overly simplifying, is yet another strategy for successful transfer preparation.

Moreover, since CCC Transfer Centers continuously work to improve their program offerings and stay ahead of trends affecting students they serve, participants expressed their appreciation for the ability to share ideas. These findings align with the importance of collaboratives to foster a transfer culture (Wyner et al., 2016). Formalized meetings in the determined geographic proximity or conferences put together by industry experts allow for professionals to adjust practices with proven success. Adapting events and activities that show promise or have proven to reach desired outcomes also increases collaboration amongst TCDs and fosters mentorship opportunities as needed.

Implications of the Study for Future Research & Practice

While this phenomenological study sheds light on some of the most prevalent barriers experienced by underrepresented transfer students and practitioners tasked with supporting transfer efforts on the CCC campuses, there are still many areas of vertical transfer that need further exploration. The most prevalent idea surrounding community college transfer barriers is students' perception of those barriers, as the internalized messaging can often be negative and not conducive to educational progress. As such, transfer myths can be dispelled if a combination of factors supporting student efforts exist. This notion is consistent with the findings of Jabbar et al. (2019), where social capital, along with institutional factors and external obligations to either facilitate transfer pathway navigation or hinder these efforts. Since social capital can take various forms and represent connections to fundamental resources or information in hierarchical structures can have a positive correlation to educational attainment (Buchmann et al., 2020; Yosso, 2005).

Moreover, when looking at transfer data provided by the various university systems and unveiling the themes presented by the study participants, it was apparent that the number of applicants who apply for transfer and get admitted, outweighs the number of students who actually enroll at the receiving institution. Marine Nin and Gutierrez Keeton (2020) discuss the struggles related to financing college education or feeling unmotivated and alone in the transition process. The review of literature also revealed the increased likelihood of students to earn excess units or exhaust their financial aid, especially for first-generation and low SES students (Baston, 2018; Van Noy et al., 2016). CCCs have been making efforts in mitigating perceived and overt barriers experienced by transfer students, especially from equity groups. However, are those efforts successful in the final stages of university transfer? This study examined barriers and opportunities present in the CCC transfer centers when supporting underserved student populations, as experienced by TCDs. Future studies should examine these challenges from the students' perspective to gain more insight on proper strategies for supporting CCC transfer success.

Recommendations of the Study

The recommendations based on the study aimed at addressing the equity gap in the CCCs' transfer pathways are multifold. The most important, however, are the practical inferences for creating a transfer center guide for supporting the transfer success of underrepresented students. It is evident that higher education professionals cannot discredit any part of the student journey, including past educational experiences, current academic standing, cultural/social background characteristics, and future career/educational aspirations. These factors make up the entire student journey, along with current and receiving institutions' characteristics have a profound effect on whether the transfer student will reach their educational

goal. The overarching tenets derived from evaluating internal and external influences, as well as discussions around effective strategies utilized by seasoned professionals, the following recommendations were identified:

1. Creation of Learning Communities: Organizing transfer pathways by implementing learning communities with comprehensive support services by major or area of interest when possible. Learning communities allow for the creation of peer and faculty connections earlier on, which translates into mentorship and guidance, and ultimately navigational capital.

2. Transfer Starts Day 1: Putting transfer at the forefront of all first-year experience programs at the CCC. While not all students mention transfer as their educational goal, and might be interested in obtaining a CTE degree, there are 4-year institutions who offer niche bach-level degrees tailored to CTE programs. Participating in campus orientation services and incorporating transfer into programs like College Promise, ensures that transfer is at least a thought.

3. Sharing Transfer Deadlines: Incorporate transfer cycle information, especially application deadlines, into heavy student traffic areas. One strategy is printing dates/deadlines on advising sheets and educational plans to avoid missed opportunities in filing admission applications for consideration.

4. Collaborate With the Career Center: Establish transfer-to-career sheets that give students an overview of career prospective and earning potential with each major pathway. Invite alumni and industry leader panels to present at the TC for students to gain an understanding of what the occupation actually entails, as opposed to what their idea of it might be.

5. Evaluate Current ADT Offerings and Articulation Agreements: Look for opportunities and any existent gaps in degree offerings/alignment with 4-year institutions or articulation agreements that translate credit from CCC to universities. Tighter articulation agreements and offering of degrees deemed similar can greatly reduce the strains of major preparation and lower-division general education completion. This is especially true for multi-college districts, where students are allowed to cross-enroll.

6. Collaborate With Teaching Faculty: Create a transfer module using the learning platform utilized by instructional faculty that can easily be incorporated into class resources. Send transfer calendar out early on, so faculty can offer extra credit opportunity to students for attending transfer workshops or events. Advocate for learning opportunities that will allow students to present themselves better on transfer application, like assigning UC personal insight questions (PIQ) in a writing/composition course; alternatively, use the same PIQs during Oral Communication courses to normalize/give students the ability to talk about themselves.

7. Transfer Bootcamp: Since passing of Golden 4 courses still present a barrier on students' transfer journey, a transfer program targeting written communication, oral communication, critical thinking, and transfer-level math can greatly facilitate transfer prep completion. The program can include transfer advising to let students know the difference between program/course content at the CCC versus what they will be learning at the 4-year institution.

8. Peer-Mentor Component: Embedding a peer-mentorship component, whether in the form of graduate assistants, former transfer students from the same or different CCC campus, or current students with a similar major. Students are receptive of institutional agents'
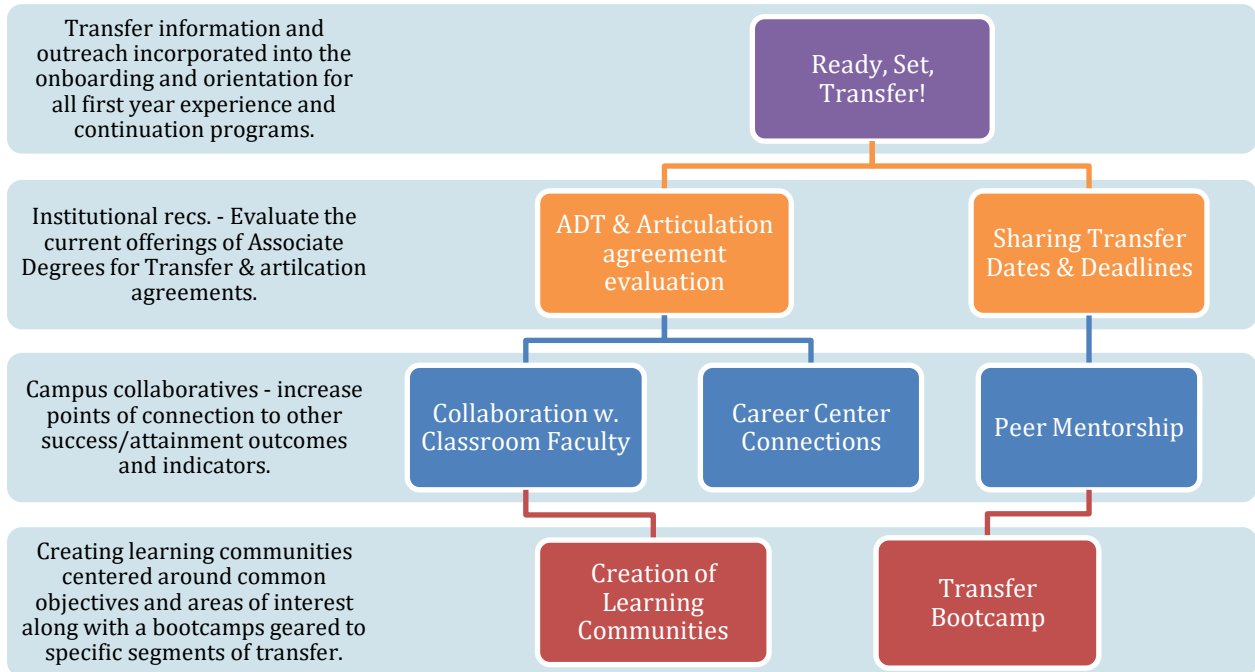
suggestions; however, they are more likely to internalize similar experiences and suggestions from their peers. Host transfer panels where students can ask about GPA, major requirements, financial implications of earning a 4-year degree, and post-undergraduate planning.

Application: Transfer to Success Model

Based on the key recommendations brought forth by the study, the *Transfer to Success* model encompasses the community college transfer students' primary touch points on their path to success (see Figure 19). Through intentional application of these findings, Transfer Center professionals and other institutional agents will be able to better assist underserved students who indicate transfer as their educational goal. The model is intended to be a holistic overview of supportive strategies and best practices in facilitating transfer efforts locally and across various segments. The connections and momentum developed as a result, will contribute to boosting institutional transfer rates for underserved student groups and serve as a catalyst for moving the needle in addressing attainment gaps. Additionally, desired outcomes include an increased sense of belonging to the campus community, self-efficacy, and year-to-year persistence until the point of transfer and beyond.

Figure 19

Transfer to Success Model

Transfer information and outreach incorporated into the onboarding and orientation for all first year experience and continuation programs.	**Ready, Set, Transfer!**
Institutional recs. - Evaluate the current offerings of Associate Degrees for Transfer & artilcation agreements.	**ADT & Articulation agreement evaluation** **Sharing Transfer Dates & Deadlines**
Campus collaboratives - increase points of connection to other success/attainment outcomes and indicators.	**Collaboration w. Classroom Faculty** **Career Center Connections** **Peer Mentorship**
Creating learning communities centered around common objectives and areas of interest along with a bootcamps geared to specific segments of transfer.	**Creation of Learning Communities** **Transfer Bootcamp**

Study Conclusion

The totality of experiences and characteristics of transfer students on the CCC campuses, as well as their aspirations for higher education attainment through an open access institution is what makes the transfer journey unique. Since a large percentage of community college students come from historically underserved backgrounds, institutional efforts in providing access are no longer sufficient. Systemic barriers present throughout primary and secondary school environments can often be a predictor of how well the student will perform academically at the higher education institution. For example, early enrichment opportunities or advanced placement courses at the high school can often set students back or propel them forward. As such, strong partnerships with feeder high school and external constituencies, along with universities of prime interest, can greatly clarify the path for transfer success. Moreover, university presence and

students' direct connection with representatives or admission officers indicates that 4-year campuses, even the most selective ones, want transfer students on their campus.

Final Thoughts

Access to timely information and adequate resources is an ongoing topic of conversation in the community college transfer centers. Confirming to the changing times and the needs of the modern students have also been recognized across higher education segments, whether in the classroom or in the form of services. When looking at the abundance of the said information from a macro lens, it was evident that the sheer volume can be overwhelming to students. Whereas before I'd be concerned about creating more opportunities for transfer students, the revelations of the study made me realize the importance of gathering student feedback and being methodical planning in the TC.

Challenging the status quo and dominant ideology, balancing the existent biases against groups or institutions, as well as considering racial/ethnic identity as a value that students bring to any higher education institution, is the central idea of this study. There is nothing constant; the only certainty is change. So, it is detrimental to foresee and get ahead of trends, forge meaningful connections across all levels of education, and make students feel heard, seen, and valued.

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APPENDIX A

Pepperdine University IRB Approval

PEPPERDINE

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: March 16, 2021

Protocol Investigator Name: Nune Mikayelyan

Protocol #: 21-03-1551

Project Title: Addressing the Equity Gap in California Community Colleges# Transfer Pathways: A Transfer Center Guide for Supporting Underrepresented Student Success

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Nune Mikayelyan:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Script

Dear [Name],

My name is Nune Mikayelyan, and I am conducting a research study as a doctoral student at Pepperdine's Graduate School of Education and Psychology. The objective of the study is to identify and highlight best practices in California Community College Transfer Centers in support underrepresented student transfer success. As professionals who play a key role in addressing higher education equity gaps, you are invited to participate in the study.

If you agree, you will be asked to partake in an interview process that is anticipated to take no more than an hour. The interview will be conducted via password-protected Zoom link and will be audio-recorded.

Participation in this study is voluntary and your identity will remain confidential during and after the study. Confidentiality will be ensured by using a password protected laptop for the storage of informed consent forms, the audio recording of the interview, and any data derived from the process. Additionally, pseudonyms will be assigned to each interview recording to safeguard participants' identity.

If you have any questions or would like to participate, please contact me at nune.mikayelyan@pepperdine.edu.

Thank you for your participation,

Nune Mikayelyan
Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology
Status: Doctoral Student

Informed Consent

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

IRB TEMPLATE SOCIAL- BEHAVIORAL ADULT PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

IRB #: 21-03-1551

Formal Study Title: **Addressing the Equity Gap in California Community Colleges' Transfer Pathways: A Transfer Center Guide for Supporting Underrepresented Student Success**

Authorized Study Personnel:

Principal Investigator: **Nune Mikayelyan**
                100619043
                Nune.mikayelyan@pepperdine.edu

Key Information:

If you agree to participate in this study, the project will involve:

- ☑ (Males and Females) between the ages of (18-80)
- ☑ Procedures will include (Contacting participants using the recruitment script, informed consent, data collection via structured interview, transcription of data, analysis of data, documentation of findings)
- ☑ One virtual visit is required
- ☑ This visit will take 60 minutes total
- ☑ There is minimal risk associated with this study
- ☑ You will not be paid any amount of money for your participation
- ☑ You will be provided a copy of this consent form

Invitation

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a leader in the entrepreneurship industry. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

The purpose of this research study is to explore and highlight effective practices utilized by California community college Transfer Center Directors in supporting underrepresented student transfer efforts. As such, challenges and opportunities experienced by seasoned professionals in the field will be examined to not only provide successful strategies for transfer student success but also create a roadmap for new practitioners in the field.

What will be done during this research study?

You will be asked to complete a 60 minute semi structured virtual interview. The PI will ask you a series of questions aimed at figuring out what strategies are used by leaders in your field. While the research will take approximately 26 to 52 weeks, your interview will only take 60 minutes.

How will my data be used?

Your interview responses will be transcribed, analyzed, and aggregated in order to determine the findings to the established research questions.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

This research presents minimal risk of loss of confidentiality, emotional and/or psychological distress because the interview involves questions about your leadership practices. You may also experience fatigue, boredom, or anxiety as a result.

What are the possible benefits to you?

You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this study.

What are the possible benefits to other people?

The benefits to society may include better understanding of leadership strategies used within your industry. Other emerging leaders might also benefit from any additional recommendations that are shared through this process.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. There are no alternatives to participating, other than deciding to not participate.

What will participating in this research study cost you?

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Will you be compensated for being in this research study?

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?

Your welfare is the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

How will information about you be protected?

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be deidentified and stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and until the study is complete.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

What are your rights as a research subject?

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):
Phone: 1(310)568-2305
Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw') at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of informed consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4) you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Participant Name:

<div style="text-align:center">(First, Last: Please Print)</div>

Participant Signature:

<div style="text-align:center">Signature   Date</div>

Interview Protocol

- If we were not living through a global pandemic, where in the world would you travel and why?

- What motivated you to go into the field of higher education?

Interview Questions 1-3 aligned with Research Question 1

IQ 1: What are the top 3 *academic* challenges identified by transfer students from historically underrepresented groups based on your interactions?

IQ 2: What are some of the most prevalent *social* and/or *cultural* barriers identified by historically underrepresented transfer students?

IQ 3: What *organizational* challenges have you encountered in supporting underrepresented student transfer efforts?

Interview Questions 4-7 aligned with Research Question 2

IQ 4: What strategies do you recommend in advancing academic progress for students from historically underrepresented groups?

IQ 5: What strategies do you utilize for supporting transfer students from underrepresented student groups overcome social-cultural barriers?

IQ 6: How do you overcome the organizational challenges that hinder transfer success for this student population?

IQ 7: Have you participated in any formal/informal training or mentorship opportunities that have helped improve equitable service offerings by your Transfer Center?

Interview Questions 8-9 aligned with Research Question 3

IQ 8: How do you define transfer success in your role?

IQ 9: How do you measure and track your success in this role?

Interview Questions 10-12 aligned with Research Question 4

IQ 10: What is the biggest pitfall someone in your position faces?

IQ 11: What advice would you give to new practitioners in the field for supporting equity and transfer student success?

IQ 12: Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX D

Peer Reviewer Form

Dear Reviewer:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The table below is designed to ensure that may research questions for the study are properly addressed with corresponding interview questions.

In the table below, please review each research question and the corresponding interview questions. For each interview question, consider how well the interview question addresses the research question. If the interview question is directly relevant to the research question, please mark "Keep as stated." If the interview question is irrelevant to the research question, please mark "Delete it." Finally, if the interview question can be modified to best fit with the research question, please suggest your modifications in the space provided. You may also recommend additional interview questions you deem necessary.

Once you have completed your analysis, please return the completed form to me via email to xxxx@pepperdine.edu. Thank you again for your participation.

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Question
RQ1: Placeholder	Placeholder a.　The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated** b.　The question is irrelevant to research question – **Delete it** c.　The question should be **modified as suggested**: _____ _____ I recommend adding the following interview questions: _____ _____
RQ2: Placeholder	Placeholder a.　The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated** b.　The question is irrelevant to research question – **Delete it** c.　The question should be **modified as suggested**: _____ _____ I recommend adding the following interview questions: _____ _____

RQ3: Placeholder	Placeholder
RQ4: Placeholder	Placeholder

APPENDIX E

Copyright Permissions

Hi Nune-

Thank you for your interest in PPIC; you can use the charts you requested in your 3/28 email. I can supply Adobe Illustrator files to you, with the stipulation that you use the following attribution:

Charts excerpted from "Higher Education in California: Increasing Equity and Diversity" by Olga Rodriguez, Marisol Cuellar Mejia, and Hans Johnson. 2017. Public Policy Institute of California.

Just for your information, PPIC published an updated version of this brief, which might provide you with more current data: https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/higher-education-in-california-increasing-equity-and-diversity-october-2019.pdf

Please let me know whether the Illustrator files will work for you, and/or if you'd like to use data from the later version of this brief.

Thanks again!
-Becky Morgan.

Becky Morgan
Publications Manager

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Institution name   Pepperdine University

Expected presentation
date   Sep 2021

Portions   Figure 12.1

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13 Sep 2021 3:27:53 PM, by Craig Myles

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