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Transfer Student Success: Latinx Students Overcoming Challenges at Two- and Four-Year Institutions Towards Baccalaureate Degree Attainment

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS: LATINX STUDENTS OVERCOMING
CHALLENGES AT TWO- AND FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS TOWARDS
BACCALAUREATE DEGREE ATTAINMENT

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

AJANI M. BYRD

CHICAGO, IL

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Completing this chapter of my doctoral studies would not have been possible without the support of my community. The care packages, words of encouragement, and visits were the fuel I burned to keep me warm during those Chicago winters, and strength I relied upon when I doubted my resolve. Though I was halfway across the country, I never felt alone because I knew I had my community with me. Thank you, mom, Lynette Byrd, for being my rock. Your unwavering commitment to my success was continuously reaffirmed through your support, sacrifice, and love. Thank you Tanika Byrd, my sister, for being an example of persistence that I continuously look upon and marvel. Your determination to complete your own doctoral studies is a shining example no feat is too great. Dad, McArthur Byrd, I can only hope you are looking down on me from heaven, smiling and proud of me – I miss you.

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“Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do.” – Pele

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ABSTRACT

As the largest post-secondary educational system, community colleges enroll nearly 35% of all college students (American Association for Community Colleges, 2014). However, the vast majority of students attending two-year institutions aspiring to vertically transfer (from community college to four-year institution), fall short of their academic goals and do not obtain a baccalaureate degree (Student Success Score Card, 2013). To this end, the extant literature has illustrated students of color, especially Latinx and African American students, transfer and graduate at disproportionately lower rates than their white counterparts. Qualitative researchers have explored this phenomenon; yet, often fall short of highlighting the specific experiences of students of color. Moreover, these studies regularly focus on the barriers or influencers that inhibit persistence, rather than exploring the narratives of students of color that successfully navigated the institutional systems. That said, this study investigated the experiences of Latinx students and how they overcame such obstacles towards four-year degree completion.

Through a Critical Race Theory analytical lens, this qualitative case study utilized Padilla, Treviño, Gonzalez, and Treviño's (1997) expertise model to frame the challenges faced by Latinx students, while using Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth to conceptualize how they successfully navigated their experiences. Each theoretical perspective helped me design, organize, and analyze data. Data collection primarily consisted of semi-structured interviews with Latinx students and university personnel. This study revealed the unwavering resolve students had to persist, despite encountering challenges on- and off-campus. Receiving support

from campus allies, forming communities of resistance, and utilizing inherent skills, students spoke about how they successfully persisted and overcame various institutional deficiencies while pursuing their education goals. Findings have implications for community academic advisors, faculty, and future research.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 50 years the U.S. higher education system has seen dramatic increases in enrollments. It was estimated in 2013 that nearly 20 million students attended two- and four-year institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], n.d.). Accounting for nearly 35% of all post-secondary student enrollments, community colleges have become an important component of the U.S. higher education system in part due to the various academic and vocational opportunities community colleges offer (American Association for Community Colleges [AACCC], 2014a). Serving millions of students each year, the reasons why aspirants choose to attend community colleges are as diverse as the students themselves. Taking advantage of the open enrollment policies (Thelin, 2011), the affordability of attendance (College Board, 2015), and having the opportunity to take courses that transfer to four-year institutions (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), are just a few of many reasons why students choose to attend two-year institutions.

Two-year institutions have been called “democracy’s colleges” in part for their open access enrollment policies. That is, enrollment at community colleges is unselective and non-competitive, often only requiring a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate. Having minimal barriers for entry, two-year colleges have been affording students the opportunity to continue their education in their local communities for decades (Dougherty, 1994). This was most prevalent immediately after the conclusion of World War II,

when hundreds of thousands of veterans returned to their neighborhoods and took advantage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the G.I. Bill (Thelin, 2011).

Coupled with low barriers for entry, community colleges are also an attractive alternative to four-year institutions due to their relatively low cost of attendance. In 2014-2015, the average tuition for full-time students attending public two-year institutions across the country was \$3,347, in comparison to public (\$9,139) and private (\$31,231) four-year institutions (College Board, 2015). Moreover, attending a community college as a part-time student effectively lowers the total cost per semester for students, thus making attendance at community colleges even more cost effective. This is particularly important to note because out of the seven million students enrolled in community college in 2013, four million were part-time students (NCES, n.d.).

Last, while attending a community college, students are welcomed to take part in a diverse range of academic endeavors including vocational training, developmental education, community service functions, and transfer services. Having a diverse array of certificate and degree granting programs that placate to a wide range of students makes community colleges an enticing alternative to enrolling immediately in four-year institutions. However, one program has historically been a particular focal point of community colleges attendees – the transfer function (Thelin, 2011).

Students seeking to transfer from a community college into a four-year institution (i.e., vertical transfer) ideally take general education courses that are aligned with the receiving institution's curricula. Once completed, students vertically transfer into receiving institutions. Though students choosing to begin their post-secondary education at community colleges are

faced with challenges that are not present with the same students that attend four-year institutions directly out of high school (Fann, 2013; Reyes, 2011), the transfer pathway has been depicted by researchers as a viable pathway for first generation students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds seeking to enter four-year institutions for decades (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Today, a diverse array of students makes up the community college student body. Illustrating diversity in its truest form, two-year institutions enroll not only more students that identify as People of Color (POC) (i.e., African-American, Latinx, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Native American-Native Alaskan) than their four-year counterparts, but also students that come from a range of backgrounds including marital status, socioeconomic status, gender identity, age, and educational goals, among others (AACC, 2014). Partly due to the wide range of students they enroll, community colleges have become a vital component in the education and social mobility of historically marginalized populations in the U.S. (Rose, 2012).

As an inseparable component of the U.S. post-secondary education system (AACC, 2014a), community colleges became a significant focus of the Obama administration's American Graduation Initiative (AGI; Obama, 2009). Embedded within the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act, two billion dollars were set aside specifically for community colleges to develop, improve, and provide education and training for their students in an effort to prepare them for the jobs of the future (Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation, n.d.; Rose, 2012). Funding has been allocated towards a range of initiatives including increasing the rates of transfer students to four-year institutions. Strengthening bonds between community colleges and four-year institutions is a particular area of focus for this initiative because students beginning

their academic endeavors at two-year institutions, especially POC, experience unprecedented challenges throughout their journey to four-year degree attainment (Crisp & Mina, 2012; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Wang 2012).

Challenges to Baccalaureate Degree Attainment by Transfer Students

In the presence of the federal government's growing fiscal scrutiny over higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), community colleges are under increased pressure to bolster transfer rates into four-year universities and colleges (AACC, 2014a). Coupled with state legislatures enacting accountability initiatives that reward community colleges for transfer outcome measures (Natow et al., 2014), two-year institutions are faced with reversing the underperforming persistence rates of their students by significantly increasing the numbers of students who plan to transfer. For example, the California State Legislature passed the Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012 in an effort to bolster and integrate services from student and academic affairs to increase the rates of certificate/degree completion and transfer to four-year institutions by community college students. In California the vertical transfer rate is 47% for all students. However, this rate changes when disaggregated by race. White (51%), Asian (65%), and Filipino (51%) students experience higher average rates, while African American (37%), Native American-Alaskan Native (34%), Hispanic (38%), and Pacific Islander (41%) all experience grossly underperforming success rates (Student Success Scorecard, 2013).

The demand is there, nationally and locally in California, as increasing numbers of students entering community colleges report intentions to transfer into four-year institutions (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2012). Yet, higher education researchers have noted the national rate of transfer is less than 50% (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009;

Melguizo, Kienzl, & Kosiewicz, 2013). Additionally, associate degree attainment rates, one marker of degree readiness, has been disproportionately low for POC for decades. POC are typically enrolled in community colleges at higher rates than white students are, but graduate at significantly lower amounts (NCES, n.d.).

Students that enter post-secondary education at a community college and intend to graduate with a baccalaureate degree are faced with myriad challenges throughout their journey. These challenges, which are often overlooked in literature, occur outside of the confines of the campus environment, yet influence student persistence despite the best efforts of students. Social inequalities rooted in sexism, racism, classism, and other “isms” are woefully underrepresented as influencing causes of transfer student persistence. Rather, outcomes that are directly related to students themselves are often named as influencing factors of student persistence. Keeping the latter in mind, researchers often group influencing factors of student persistence into student centric categories such as demographics (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, parent’s educational levels; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Wang, 2012), academic abilities (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2009), and personal aspirations (Alfonso, 2006; Wang, 2013). Some research expanded the scope of responsibility for transfer student success away from solely student-centered approaches to include community college policies and their contribution to transfer student success (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2005; Handel, & Williams, 2012). For example, traversing assessment placement tests have virtually become a universal requirement for all students entering two-year colleges to take prior to enrolling in classes (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). It is estimated that nearly one half of all students who enter community colleges engage in at least one or two developmental courses during their time

at the institution (Baily, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). However, the benefits of being placed in developmental courses, based on high stakes placement tests, are often mixed or negative, at best (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Saxon & Boylan, 2001). Nevertheless, what is generally understood is that extending community college students' time to graduation can negatively influence their chances of attaining a degree/certificate or transferring to a four-year institution (Doyle, 2009; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Wang, 2012).

Factors influencing students' post-transfer success at the receiving institution are just as numerous as described above. Transfer shock, a term which refers to a dip in grade point average (GPA) during the first year after transferring to a four-year institution (Ishitani, 2008), loss of academic credit from one institution to the next (Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf, & Laanan, 2013; Fann, 2013), integration into the receiving campus (Laanan 2007; Townsend, 1995), student involvement on campus (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Laanan, 2007), environmental "pull factors" (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Reyes, 2011), and transfer receptivity of the four-year institution (Handel, 2011; Reyes, 2011; Ruiz & Pryor, 2011) have all been associated with influencing transfer student persistence.

In sum, the vertical transfer literature has explored many of the factors that influence community college student persistence towards degree attainment. Studies overwhelmingly depict the chances of students successfully making the transition between two- and four-year institutions as considerably challenging (Doyle, 2009; Reynolds, 2012). Typically framed from a deficit model approach, one could surmise after reading the transfer literature that students, especially those that identify as students of color, attending community colleges will not succeed and graduate with a certificate/degree at their two-year institution or transfer and graduate with a

four-year degree. The vertical transfer literature is considerably scant of research that specifically investigates the experiences of Latinx students that successfully started at community colleges, transferred, and graduated from a four-year institution. Moreover, studies that specifically focus on the successes of students of color are generally absent from literature. Choosing to move away from a deficit model framework to understanding transfer student of color persistence is the foundation upon which this research was set.

Statement of the Problem

Improving the rates of success, meaning associate's degree/certificate attainment and/or transfer to a four-year institution and graduating, is important to students, their future children (if applicable), and the U.S. economy. Using data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015), the gap between non-degree and degree unemployment rates and median incomes in 2014 are readily apparent. The unemployment rate of people who attended college but did not complete a degree is the same as high school graduates at 6%; in contrast, baccalaureate degree earners' unemployment rates are 3.5%. Earning potential shows non-degree recipients earning \$38k annually, while successfully completing a baccalaureate degree increases the median earning potential by \$20k annually.

A report entitled *Thirteen Economic Facts about Social Mobility and the Role of Education* authored by Greenstone, Looney, Patashnik, and Yu (2013) further illustrates the compounding effects of baccalaureate degree attainment. Interested in highlighting the growing economic gap in the U.S. and "the pivotal role education can play in increasing the ability of low-income Americans to move up the income ladder" (p. 1), the authors expressed their concerns about the growing inequality gap. Greenstone and colleagues suggested that although

there is no statistical difference in the cognitive ability of children born to families in the bottom or top income quintiles, “a child born into a family in the lowest [income] quintile has a 45% chance of staying in that quintile as an adult and only a 5% chance of moving into the highest quintile” (p. 14). Dismissing the notion that Americans live in a “perfect mobile society” (p. 14), the authors argued degree attainment is a critical cog in the wheel of social mobility that has residual effects across future generations.

The lack of baccalaureate degree attainment, especially by students of color, also has national economic implications. According to the Census Bureau’s (2015) projections, by 2060 Americans who identify as non-Hispanic White will no longer be in the numeric majority. The report goes on to say that by the end of this period it is estimated that one in three residents will be of Hispanic descent. This is important to note because if persistence rates to transfer and degree attainment do not change for students of color, Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) caution that the current crisis we are facing with shortfalls in “human capital formation” (p. 9) will adversely impact the amount of skilled workers in our changing economy.

Besides capitalistic orientated implications, there are numerous other social benefits to increasing the rates of success by transfer students. Baum, Ma, and Payea (2013) note:

Adults with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in organized volunteer work, to understand political issues, and to vote. They are also more likely to live healthy lifestyles. The issue is not just that they earn more and have better access to health care; college-educated adults smoke less, exercise more, and have lower obesity rates. (p. 10)

Last, improving the rates of transfer success transcends economic or capitalistic principles, and becomes a social justice issue that if not addressed, will continue to reinforce social inequities. Since community colleges are utilized by a disproportionate amount of students that have been historically marginalized in higher education, and higher numbers of

students of color attending community colleges are not able to achieve their academic goals, it is becoming increasingly more difficult for minorities to improve their social mobility through education. Thus, addressing transfer student success continues to bring into focus the systemic inequities that continue subjugate the upward mobility of students of color.

Purpose of the Study

Researchers have discussed the challenges faced by students traversing the chasm between two- and four-year institutions from a myriad of viewpoints along the vertical transfer student pathway. Though the literature is expansive in identifying the barriers to student success, there is an absence of research that views transfer student persistence through a student success perspective. In other words, due to the pervasive deficit model framework used to depict and understand aspiring four-year college graduates beginning at community colleges, this research expands the literature by moving away from a deficit model framework to investigating transfer student persistence and success. Guiding this approach is the following question: How do successful Latinx students navigate two- and four-year postsecondary institutions towards degree attainment? By identifying “experts” (Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997, p. 126) that have successfully navigated both two- and four-year institutional systems, the purpose of this study is not to solely identify the perceived barriers (“deficits”) encountered by transfer students of color, as these factors are generally well known (Doyle, 2009; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Valencia, 2010; Wang, 2012); rather, it is to move beyond obstacles and explore how transfer students of color overcame their perceived hurdles (“the successes”).

This study explored these successes by identifying Latinx students that began their post-secondary education at a community college, vertically transferred, and were about to graduate

with a degree from a four-year institution. Specifically, I explored how Latinx students successfully navigated both two- and four-year institutional policies; used family, friends, and campus stakeholders along their educational pathway; and how their inherent abilities, viewed through a conceptual framework informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT), helped students overcome perceived barriers while attending their community college and four-year institution.

Significance and Contributions of the Study

Since POC are disproportionately enrolled in community colleges, and receiving certificates/degrees at lower rates than their white peers (NCES, n.d.), this study's focus on Latinx persistence will significantly add to the transfer student literature. Moreover, this study is uniquely positioned to contribute to increasing transfer student success because the findings describe the positive experiences of Latinx students across two institutional types (i.e., two- and four-year institutions), rather than focusing on deficits at one or the other. This is significant because the qualitative findings from this study examined previously identified barriers to persistence in both community colleges and universities, and depict how students successfully navigated these barriers.

Findings from this study will also assist two- and four-year practitioners in several different ways. First, two-year campuses will gain an increased understanding into counselor and student interactions and how Latinx students perceive those experiences. Similarly, four-year university stakeholders will receive a window into the experiences of vertical transfer students and how they navigate a new four-year environment towards degree attainment. Second, by using a success-orientated framework, advisors, for example, could identify strategies used by students that have successfully navigated the two- and four-year academic

pathway towards graduation and share them with other hopeful students. Rather than counselors sharing what *not* to do, expressing what other successful Latinx students *did* will hopefully assist in improving transfer success rates. Last, this study could assist campuses in developing a comprehensive transfer model framework that encourages corroboration between the local two-year institutions and the receiving university. By developing a cohesive framework that expands across both types of institutions, this framework could assist in mitigating barriers perceived by transfer students.

Research Design

A case study methodological design was selected as the best approach to addressing the overarching research question. Transfer student literature and various conceptual frameworks that focused on student persistence and success framed the study protocols, data collection processes, and how information was analyzed. Using multiple data collection sources, the case study utilized interviews from multiple sources and documentation to unpack how Latinx community college students navigated their two-year colleges and persisted at a four-year institution. The case study site, a four-year institution within the California State University (CSU) system, was selected due to various attributes, including its high proportion of transfer students, ethnic/racial campus diversity, and the researcher's familiarity with the campus. Details further explaining participant recruitment and selection, processes to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data collected and analyzed, are explained in detail in proceeding chapters.

Terminology

When describing multiple students from Latin American ancestry, I am intentionally using the term Latinx (pronounced La-teen-ex), rather than the masculinized version of the Latinos. Though, at times, I compare and contrast the experiences of Latino and Latina in the study, I felt it important when speaking about men and women together not to masculinize the plural form to be more inclusive. That said, this research centers on Latinx community college students that vertically transfer to a four-year institution. Thus, *vertical transfer* and *transfer* refers to actions taken by students who (a) begin their post-secondary education at a community college and (b) identify as aspiring towards a baccalaureate degree from a four-year institution. Furthermore, the *transfer process* includes actions taken by students while attending community college, such as filling out applications, applying for financial aid, and identifying campus stakeholders. *Campus stakeholders* includes faculty and staff that support the persistence of students towards their academic goals.

Integral to transfer student persistence, social and academic integration concepts also need defining. *Social integration* refers to the involvement of students in on-campus organizations, activities, and events, whereas *academic integration* denotes the level of interaction with faculty, academic advisors, and tutors or any other academic-related factors that have assisted the student in becoming more comfortable with their academic integration into campus. *Transfer going* and *receiving culture* refers to various campus influencers that have been associated with transfer student persistence. This includes, but are not limited to institution characteristics, full-time faculty employed on campus, and institutional support services. *Institutional support services* denotes campus departments, programs, or initiatives that focus on

assisting transfer students with integrating socially or academically on-campus. Off-campus or *environmental* influencers could include family obligations, being employed off-campus, taking care of dependents or extended family, and costs associated with attending college. Last, *persistence* refers to students continuing their educational endeavors over multiple years towards transfer and/or four-year degree attainment; this is distinct from *retention*, which is defined as a student returning to school from one semester to the next over the course of one year.

Organization of the Study

This chapter provided the background, purpose, and significance of this study. Chapter Two gives a detailed account of the relevant transfer student literature, which incorporates a historical perspective of the growth of community colleges, factors that influence vertical transfer, and emerging research regarding the role four-year institutions play in the success of transfer student's success. Chapter Three provides an overview of the case study methodology used to understand transfer student success, while Chapter Four depicts the relevant findings framed by the conceptual framework. Last, Chapter Five provides a thorough discussion of the findings alongside implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND FRAMEWORK

The following review is organized into four sections that follow students' paths from two- to four-year institutions. First, the development of community colleges is discussed briefly, as understanding the way in which two-year institutions became partners in bridging the gap between high schools and four-year institutions facilitates our awareness of the obstacles students face while traversing the community college landscape. The second section addresses pre-transfer factors that researchers have suggested inhibit and influence transfer persistence. Community college students face numerous factors that compromise their ability to navigate the institutional landscape successfully. As such, this section presents individual characteristics researchers have identified as reducing transfer success, while the following section presents institutional factors shown to support transfer.

The third section introduces the post-transfer student literature. Although some community college students have done as well as native students (i.e., students who began their academic studies at four-year institutions), the adjustment process after they enter the university, which includes environmental, academic, and social factors, can be challenging for others. This section presents those challenges transfer students face during this transition, and institutional strategies that have been used to support these students. The final section presents the conceptual framework that supported the study, which consisted of an amalgamation of two theoretical models and one analytical frame.

The National Development of Community Colleges

According to higher education scholars, the rise and development of junior colleges dates back to the early twentieth century (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Dougherty, 1994; Labaree, 1997; Thelin, 2011). However, the exact reasons for the initial development of junior colleges are still opaque. Dougherty (1994) described a democratic origin in his summary of the history of community colleges. Thus, junior colleges were established because students and their parents demanded increased local access to colleges. Cohen and Brawer (2008) pointed to the thinking of William Rainey Harper of the University of Chicago, Stanford's president, David Starr Jordan, and University of California professor and member of the State Board of Education, Alexis Lange, who advocated separating the first two years of undergraduate studies to preserve the rigors of upper division research and graduate studies associated with the increased number of students seeking higher education. Cohen and Brawer also suggested that capitalist conspiracy theories had some validity in the development of community colleges. They described this viewpoint as a "...grand scheme to keep poor people in their place by diverting them to programs leading to low-paying occupational positions" (p. 10). However opaque the reasons that junior colleges began to form, what is not contested is their physical origin.

According to Labaree (1997), the first public junior colleges can be traced back to their academic predecessors, local high schools. "As late as the 1930s, 85 percent of these new institutions of higher education were physically located in high school buildings" (p. 192). Functioning as extensions of local secondary schools, these institutions enrolled small numbers of students in expanded programs, such as those for teacher certification and vocational training (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). This was particularly true in Illinois in 1901, where one of the first

junior colleges began to take shape (Thelin, 2011). Stanley Brown, superintendent of Joliet Township High School, and William Rainey Harper worked with local officials to develop an experimental high school post-graduate program that offered students the opportunity to pursue higher education within the community, and enrolled an inaugural class of six students (Joliet Junior College, 2012). Less than 10 years later, a second junior college in Fresno, California, developed similarly because of the need to provide college opportunities within close proximity to the community, enrolled an initial class of 20 students (Fresno City College, 2014).

Whether because of the need to accommodate the growing number of students seeking workforce training, or the necessity to preserve the rigors of university coursework, federal and state policymakers facilitated the expansion of junior colleges (Dougherty, 1994). From a national perspective, several socially-based bills with community college-specific language were introduced and passed. Similarly, local officials also made progress to ensure that their state's master plans included community colleges, which led ultimately to considerable increases in student enrollments.

Federal and State Support for Community Colleges

The direct factors that led to the rise of community colleges are unclear, but scholars have posited that the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963, the Higher Education Act of 1965, and the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 were all important catalysts (Congressional Quarterly, 1963; D'Errico, 2005; Dougherty, 1994; Thelin, 2011). Through infrastructure assistance (Higher Education Facilities Act, 1963) and developmental aid to assist academic programming (Higher Education Act, 1965), these federal policies supported the foundation of

community colleges to absorb the growing number of students taking advantage of the generous tuition remission policies created by the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the G.I. Bill, was a transformative piece of federal legislation that made commitments to veterans returning from WWII. The bill's four major provisions consisted of job placement services, unemployment benefits, home and business loan opportunities, and subsidized tuition for higher education (Servicemen's Readjustment Act, 1944). The tuition subsidy laid the foundation for increased access to universities, colleges, and two-year institutions across the country for students who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to attend college (D'Errico, 2005; Herbold, 1994; Thelin, 2011).

As federal coffers opened to support higher education nationally, state and local government agencies responded by developing systems and structures to take advantage of the subsidies. However, not all states jumped at the opportunity to establish community colleges (Dougherty, 1994; Thelin, 2011). For example, states in the Northeast, such as New York, did not establish their first junior colleges until well into the 1950s. Others, such as Indiana and Maine, chose not to form junior colleges at all, electing instead to create university branches or technical institutions (D'Errico, 2005; Dougherty, 1994). Conversely, California embraced the development of junior colleges as an integral component of its higher education master plan (Thelin, 2011).

California Master Plan

In 1921, the California legislature developed a tripartite higher education system. As the first state in the country to pass laws that created public community colleges, this progressive

system included two University of California (UC) campuses, seven State Teacher Colleges (later named California State Universities: CSUs), and 16 junior colleges. Douglass (2010) called this unprecedented commitment to higher education “The California Idea,” in which post-secondary education was no longer for select individuals; rather, it was a common good that was critical to the longevity of the state and social mobility of its citizens (p. 4). By 1960, enrollment in higher education on the part of the college-aged population was 45%, while rates across the rest of the country were a mere 25% (Douglass, 2010).

Taking another step forward, California developed a strategic master plan in 1960 to coordinate the three loosely tied systems with the purpose of “...development, expansion, and integration of facilities, curriculum, and standards of higher education, in junior colleges, state colleges, and the University of California” (California State Department of Education, 1960, p. v). Thus, California maintained the three segments of higher education within the state artfully, while also binding the institutions together through their curricular functions to reduce excess duplication, but more importantly, costs.

The California Master Plan reduced costs to taxpayers by imposing tiered admission policies that curtailed the number of students that could attend costlier academic institutions (i.e., UC and CSU) in favor of funneling excess students to less expensive alternatives, junior colleges. Policies only allowed the top 12.5% of graduating high school students to enter UC campuses and 33.3% to enter State Teacher Colleges, while all graduating high school students could attend junior colleges. These barriers to entry reduced the pool of students academically eligible to enter four-year institutions significantly, thus increasing the growth of junior colleges across the state for students who were less academically prepared.

Enrollment Growth

Because of both federal and state policies and the increasing number of students seeking post-secondary education, community college enrollments have experienced positive growth rates over the last century (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; D’Errico, 2005; Dougherty, 1994; Thelin, 2011). During the early 1900s, the number of young people interested in higher education increased as the rates of high school attendance and graduation increased (Breneman & Nelson, 1981). From 1901 to the end of the 1950s, a total of 330 community colleges were established nationwide, with approximately six new institutions opening per year (D’Errico, 2005). However, according to Cohen and Brawer (2008), this is a conservative estimate because, “By 1930, there were 440 junior colleges, found in all but five states” (p. 15). In addition to these discrepancies, a gradual crescendo in student enrollment produced exceptional increases in student growth during the 1960s. Cohen and Brawer (2008), Dougherty (1994), and Thelin (2011) attributed these increases to the confluence of veterans returning home from WWII and supportive social legislation, which provided increased access to financial aid.

Between 1960 and 1970, community college enrollment experienced its most rapid period of growth, with a five-fold increase to 2.1 million students (Thelin, 2011). It was not until 1980 that this exceptional growth in student enrollment began to decline slightly (D’Errico, 2005). To compensate for the decreased growth on the part of younger students, community colleges expanded programming to attract older students. Cohen and Brawer (2008) noted, “Numbers of working adults seeking skills that would enable them to change or upgrade their jobs or activities to satisfy their personal interests enrolled because they could attend part-time” (p. 45). A plurality of credit and non-credit bearing programs attracted students to community

colleges, including English as a Second Language, remedial/developmental programs, and community engagement opportunities. Community colleges also collaborated with private and public organizations, such as banks and municipalities, to create non-credit professional development courses (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

As the average age of students began to increase, the number of credit hours per semester decreased gradually, which encouraged increasing numbers of part-time students to enroll. Between 1970 and 2004, part-time enrollments increased from 49% to 61% of all community college enrollees (NCES, n.d.). In addition, during an overlapping period, enrollment on the part of students of color also increased. Approximately 760,000 students of color were enrolled in community colleges in 1976, while in 2013, enrollment was in excess of 3,240,000.

As of 2012, Ginder and Kelly-Reid (2013) estimated community college enrollment at 7.3 million students based on data collected from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Thus, two-year colleges nationally were home to approximately 35% of all post-secondary students. The CCC system exemplifies the large enrollment in community colleges, which exceeds 3 million students annually, making it the largest community college system in the U.S. (CCCCO, 2015).

Two-Year Versus Four-Year Students

The characteristics of students at two- and four-year institutions have been shown to differ. Two-year are more likely than are four-year institutions to enroll high proportions of students of color, those of non-traditional ages (e.g., 24 years and older), students with dependents, and first-generation students (Bowen et al., 2009). With respect to race, Provasnik and Planty (2008) estimated that students of color constitute approximately 40% of all

community college enrollments. In 2003-04, community college students over the age of 24 comprised 53% of the student body, compared to 32% at four-year institutions. In the same year, differences were also evident in income levels. With respect to poverty thresholds, 26% of community college students were in the lowest income levels, compared to 20% at public and private four-year institutions (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). Mirroring national rates, students of color enrolled in CCCs more often than in four-year institutions in 2012. Approximately 70% of the student body was students of color, while students over 24 accounted for 42% of enrollments (CCCCO, 2015).

VanderLinden's (2002) survey of approximately 100,000 credit and non-credit students from 300 institutions identified several reasons why students choose to attend two-year institutions. In summary, slightly less than half (45%) were interested primarily in a combination of transfer and personal enrichment. However, other functions, including continuing education, vocational training, community service, and remediation were identified as areas of interest among community college students (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). With respect to the transfer function, these students were interested in taking general education (GE) courses that fulfill prerequisites before entering four-year institutions.

Transfer Types

The term transfer student is associated with various definitions. For example, Handel and Williams (2012) identified 14 different ways the word transfer has been defined in the higher education literature. Because of the mobility of students who transfer between post-secondary institutions, these definitions have expanded. Traditionally, transfer implied the vertical transition of students from community colleges to four-year institutions. However, *reverse*

transfer refers to the opposite phenomenon, in which students begin at four-year institutions and transfer to community colleges (Mullin, 2012). *Swirl transfer*, which refers to students who move fluidly between two- and four-year institutions, and *lateral transfer*, which indicates shifting between institutions (e.g., two-year to two-year transfer) are additional ways in which students have been documented to transfer. To include all of the various types of transfer is outside the purview of this study; thus, only vertical transfer will be discussed further.

Factors that Influence Vertical Transfer

The extant research has suggested that students who begin at community colleges are less likely than are their counterparts who matriculate to a four-year institution and complete a baccalaureate degree (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Reynolds, 2012). When students are disaggregated by race, students of color transition at lower rates than do their white counterparts (Zamani, 2001). An abundance of research has created profiles that depict individual student factors that are associated with vertical transfer, such as demographics (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, parent's educational levels; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Wang, 2012), academic abilities (Bailey et al., 2009), personal aspirations (Alfonso, 2006; Wang, 2013), and environmental factors (e.g., dependents and employment).

Individual Student Factors

Race and ethnicity. By comparison to their white peers, students of color are less likely to transfer vertically (Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006; Eddy, Christie, & Rao, 2006; Lee & Frank, 1990). Using the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 and the Postsecondary Educational Transcript Study (PETS), Wang's (2012) study suggested that because of high school test scores, self-concept, and full-time enrollment at community colleges,

students of color, specifically Latinx students, were less likely to transfer than were their White counterparts. However, Wang's study explaining power was slightly limited because there was little attention to external influencing factors such as campus climate and off-campus obligations (e.g., family and work) that could also affect persistence. In California, the rate of transfer for all students is less than 50%. However, when disaggregated by race, the numbers are even lower for African Americans and Latinxs. Beginning in 2008-09, six years of tracking first time students who completed a degree, certificate, or transfer-related outcome showed that African American, Latinx, and American Indian/Alaskan Native students had the lowest transfer rates, at less than 40% (Student Success Scorecard, 2013).

Full- versus part-time enrollment. Independent of race, enrolling full-time versus part-time for more than one semester increased the likelihood of transfer significantly (Anderson et al., 2006; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Doyle, 2009; Eagan & Jaeger, 2009; Eddy et al., 2006). For example, Dougherty and Kienzl (2006) noted that the closer students were to full-time enrollment, the greater their chances of transferring successfully. Full-time enrollment also was found to be a powerful predictor in Wang's (2012) investigation of the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS88/2000). He reported:

Full-time enrollment and continuous enrollment were both positive and significant predictors of [vertical] transfer. These two variables also seemed to mediate the negative effects of being Hispanic and being [Asian and Native American]. After controlling for the enrollment patterns, these racial/ethnic backgrounds were no longer statistically significant. (p. 864)

Gender. Results are mixed with respect to gender. Although females graduate college at higher rates than do males, in part because of their performance in high school (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006), this advantage does not always translate to higher rates of vertical transfer and

degree attainment. Anderson et al. (2006), Eddy et al. (2006), and Surette (2001) found that females were less likely to be transfer students, even though more females than males enroll in community colleges. However, Conway (2011) discovered that when females make an on-time transition, they are more likely to complete their degrees. In contrast to these works, Dougherty and Kienzl's (2006) findings indicated that gender was not related significantly to vertical transfer. However, these discrepancies may be attributable to the various datasets the researchers used.

Financial aid. The more financial aid a student needs, the lower his/her probability of success (Chen & DesJardin, 2010; Thayer, 2000). According to Thayer (2000), students from high SES backgrounds have a greater likelihood of graduating with a baccalaureate degree than do their low SES counterparts. Zhai and Monzon (2001) also noted that community college students claim that financial hardship inhibits their persistence. Although community college students apply for financial aid less often than do four-year students (Juszkiewicz, 2013), the former's persistence appears to be associated with access to financial resources (Chen & DesJardin, 2010; Kane, 2003) and other socioeconomic factors, such as parental educational level (Anderson et al., 2006; Porchea, Allen, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010) and family income (Eddy et al., 2006; Wang, 2012).

Academic readiness. Researchers have investigated the way in which academic readiness influences vertical transfer from various perspectives, including pre-college and in-college factors. In particular, Eddy et al.'s (2006) analysis of the High School and Beyond 1980 Sophomore Cohort (HS&B/So.) used high school GPAs, among a host of other pre-college variables, such as high school curriculum and test scores, to predict transfer. Consistent with

other research, Eddy et al.'s findings indicated that not only was high school GPA important (Porchea et al., 2010), but the rigor of high school courses also was associated positively with transfer (Adelman, 2006; Lee & Frank, 1990).

Once admitted to a community college, students who enrolled in developmental courses also experienced lower levels of transfer (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Mourad & Hong, 2011). It has been estimated that nearly half of all students who enter community colleges take at least one or two developmental courses (Baily et al., 2010). However, some have said that this projection falls far short of the actual number. Grugg (1999) argued, for example, that because of optional remediation policies and students choosing not to enroll in developmental courses, numbers could be closer to two-thirds of all entering community college students. Researchers have posited that the depth and breadth of remediation needed are associated negatively with transfer (Roksa, Jenkins, Jaggars, Zeidenberg, & Cho, 2009). For example, the latter's study of 24,140 first-time college students in the Virginia Community College system found that, among students who enrolled in the lowest levels of developmental courses, less than 10% completed the developmental sequence successfully. The converse was also true: students with fewer developmental needs who were placed in higher level courses or courses just below college-level, were more likely to complete their progression and transfer successfully (Bahr, 2008; Baily et al., 2010; Roksa et al., 2009).

Degree aspirations. Spanning the divide between pre-college and college characteristics of transfer students, studies have posited that a student's degree aspirations are related to vertical transfer (Alexander, Bozick, & Entwisle, 2008; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Porchea et al., 2010; Roksa, 2006; Wang, 2013). For example, McCormick and Carroll's (1997)

results illustrated that students seeking a four-year degree or higher were significantly more likely to transfer than were those who did not aspire to obtain a baccalaureate degree.

Investigating student motivation to complete a degree, Wang's (2013) study, which was based on the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, found that the baccalaureate degree expectations of first-time entering community college students were influenced strongly during the first year of post-secondary education. Therefore, practices within community colleges, through the various connection points that they have with their students, as well as external environmental factors, can shape, and alter students' ability to persist (Miller, 2013).

Environment. Research has demonstrated that environmental factors also affect transfer. Negative environmental factors include having dependents, such as children (Roksa, 2006; Wang, 2012), and working away from campus (Anderson et al., 2006). However, Dougherty and Kienzl's (2006) findings suggested that the number of hours employed could have a positive effect on transfer. Results from their study of the NELS:88 dataset illustrated that working fewer than 20 hours a week was better for transfer students than was not working at all. Dougherty and Kienzl also noted, "...being single does not have a significant impact on transfer in either NELS:88 or BPS:90. However, being childless at time of college entry has a substantially large, positive effect in both NELS:88 and BPS:90" (p. 477).

Building a Transfer Going Culture

Moving away from individualized characteristics connected to student persistence, research is investigating transfer student persistence through an institutional perspective. These studies explore institutional characteristics or practices that are associated with student success. Such factors, including campus characteristics (e.g., college size, tuition levels, racial

composition), practices (e.g., student support services and mentoring), experiences (e.g., social and academic integration), and articulation agreements (e.g., programmatic, institutional, and district wide agreements) have all been associated with vertical transfer success.

Campus Characteristics

A small, but growing number of researchers have analyzed the relationship between community college characteristics and student outcomes (Bailey et al., 2005; Banks, 1994; Calcagno, Bailey, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2008). Using a sample of 78 community colleges across 15 states, Banks (1994) found that two-year institutions with higher proportions of full-time students and more full-time faculty that were located in higher income communities were more successful in transferring larger numbers of students. Corroborating Banks' finding with respect to faculty ratios, but investigating a different set of institutional characteristics, Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl, and Leinbach (2005) used NELS:88 and institutional-level data from IPEDS to explore additional institutional variables. Bailey et al.'s study suggested that smaller campuses (fewer than 2,500 full-time equivalent [FTE] students) located in rural areas that emphasized certificates rather than associates degrees, had higher retention rates. In a more recent study using both the NELS:88 and IPEDS, Calcagno et al. (2008) confirmed the findings of Bailey et al.'s (2005) and Banks' (1994) previous works; however, Calcagno et al. (2008) also stated, "...a \$1,000 increase in academic support per FTE decreases the probability of graduating by 12% among NELS:88 students" (p. 639). Moreover, these authors determined that student success was associated more closely to individual characteristics than institutional factors.

Faculty Support

Within community colleges, employing full-time faculty is associated positively with higher rates of student success (Cueso, 1996). This theme is further strengthened by studies that have investigated faculty-student interactions and their residual effects on GPA, educational satisfaction, and aspirations (Cejda & Rhodes, 2004; Cole, 2008; Dowd, Pak, & Bensimon, 2013; Tovar, 2014). For example, a common factor in the experiences of 10 community college students who transferred successfully to four-year institutions was the role of institutional agents (Dowd et al., 2013). Institutional agents are defined as people who have the access, status, and willingness to help other persons access opportunities that previously seemed unattainable (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). These students, who came from community colleges across the country, all expressed their gratitude to specific faculty or institutional agents and how they were “...helpful in terms of providing useful information, increasing their awareness of competitiveness at four-year institutions, and motivating them to build the ‘whole package’” (Dowd et al., 2013, p. 17). Faculty members are not the only institutional agents associated with student success; staff members in academic support services also are influential.

Support Services

Community college practices administered by student support services (e.g., TRIO programs, interactions with counselors, and peer-peer advising) are associated with student success (Angrist, Lang, & Oreopoulos, 2009; Fike & Fike, 2008; Jenkins, 2007; Tovar, 2014). In his investigation of the way in which the combination of institutional agents and support programs influenced Latinx student success in community colleges, Tovar (2014) observed and surveyed 397 students attending a large, ethnically diverse campus in California. After

controlling for pre-college and college variables, Tovar reported several noteworthy findings. First, interactions with faculty outside of the classroom affected GPA, but did little to influence retention. Second, interacting with institutional agents within student support services were influential in retention. Further corroborating these findings, Fike and Fike's (2008) regression analysis of first-time students attending a single large (9,200 enrollment) community college also noted that participating in student support programs was associated positively with retention. Researchers also stated that mentoring practices were associated positively with student development, greater social and academic integration, retention, and acquiring a better sense of community (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). However, numerous studies that investigate mentoring are conducted at four-year institutions, leaving a notable gap in our understanding of the phenomenon in community colleges.

Nevertheless, the studies identified for this review produced varying results. For example, a multi-institutional study that assessed minority students' perceptions of the importance of mentoring services found that students of color believed mentoring programs were important to their success (Pope, 2002). This finding was consistent with previous outcomes of mentoring in four-year institutions (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). However, Crisp's (2010) regression analysis of responses from 320 transfer minority students found that student mentoring was not a significant factor in predicting community college transfer. Rather, his findings suggested that mentoring was associated more closely with retention in females and part-time students' than in males and full-time students.

Community College Integration (Academic and Social)

Community college campus experiences and their relation to student retention have shown mixed results. Works by Astin (1984), Kramer, (1997), and Tinto (1988) highlighted the concept of academic integration, which involves the process through which a student develops a strong sense of affiliation with the college's academic environment through interactions with faculty, staff, and peers. Further, these authors also discussed social integration, which emphasizes social interactions with faculty, staff, and peers that include involvement in student organizations and informal exchanges with faculty. Researchers who investigated retention in four-year institutions using frameworks of the authors above have shown fairly consistent findings with respect to the effects of demographic characteristics, financial assistance, and social and academic experiences, for example (Nora & Crisp, 2012). However, when these same theoretical concepts have been applied to the community college population, which is typically older, and more diverse ethnically and socioeconomically, the findings have tended to be mixed (Deil-Amen, 2011; Schuetz, 2005).

Researchers have shown that community college students do not engage in social integration activities as readily as do their four-year counterparts, which may contribute to the inconsistent outcomes (Bryant, 2001). For example, Bryant found that community college students were less likely to participate in campus-sponsored events. This was supported further by Schmid and Abell's (2003) survey of non-returning community college students, which illustrated an association between high attrition rates and failure to participate in student life activities. Branett (2010) argued that these results are understandable, given that the majority of community college experiences occur inside the classroom. Karp et al. (2010-2011) also

concurrent, suggesting that both forms of social and academic integration are present in community colleges, but are more fluid than previous research has proposed. “We found that, for community college students, the two constructs are not distinct. Instead the two forms of integration are developed simultaneously, through the same [classroom] activities” (p. 84).

Articulation Agreements

Articulation agreements have become more common across the higher education landscape as a way to establish formal links between community colleges and four-year institutions. Although there are various types of agreements that connect community colleges to their four-year counterparts (e.g., program to program, department to department, and individual two-year college to four-year universities), there is a dearth of literature about the way in which these agreements affect upward mobility. Therefore, research has focused primarily on the predictability of transfer when articulation agreements are in effect.

National and state articulation studies have approached this area of research through directed surveys (Ignash & Townsend, 2001), policy analyses (Chase, 2011), and the intersection of policy and longitudinal datasets (Anderson et al., 2006; Roska & Keith, 2008). Mirroring the multitude of methods, the effectiveness of these agreements also varied. At least one reason for the varied approaches to analyzing articulation agreements could be the lack of consistent policies enacted by state legislators, which make it challenging to determine what is considered an effective policy (Keith, 1996). Nevertheless, researchers have suggested consistently that articulation policies do not have a statistically significant influence on vertical transfer (Roksa & Keith, 2008). However muddled the results concerning vertical transfer, some higher education scholars still argue that articulation policies are critical to transfer success because they

safeguard the transfer of academic credit from one institution to the next (Ignash, 2012; Rifkin, 2000; Roska & Keith, 2008). Roska and Keith argued that results could be flawed because of the inability to measure the intended outcome of specific policies. Thus, future studies should determine the effectiveness of policies based on the stated purposes of the legislation, thereby providing researchers with a better framework or variables to use to determine articulation outcomes.

Adjustment to the Four-Year Institution

Although community colleges have established support systems to assist students who transfer vertically, those who pursue this path to a baccalaureate degree face additional obstacles (Tinto, 1993). Before enrolling in a four-year institution, transfer students must learn how to navigate their new environment, which often requires understanding the differences in academic policies and procedures necessary to transfer their courses effectively from one institution to the next, as the loss of academic credit is a genuine concern (Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000).

Losing academic credit can extend students' time to graduation, which has been shown to decrease their likelihood of completing their degrees successfully (Anderson et al., 2006). Academic credits may not be transferrable for several reasons, ranging from the lack of formal articulation agreements, misunderstandings between students and counselors, and obscure transfer language used by the recipient four-year institutions (Wilson, 2014). Transfer students also must navigate issues of financial concerns successfully, potential drops in GPA, and social and academic integration at their new institution (Cedja, 1997; Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston, 2010; Wilson, 2014; Zamani, 2001).

Financial Concerns

Transfer students face paying the difference in cost between two- and four-year institutions, as four-year institutions generally are more expensive. Tuition costs at universities, for example, have continued to exceed those of community colleges over the past decade (Heller, 2013). In the 2014-2015 academic year in California, for example, the cost to attend public four-year institutions for in-state students was \$9,000. During the same year, tuition and fees at public California community colleges were \$1,500 (College Board, 2015). In addition to tuition, transfer students often have other increased financial burdens associated with attendance, such as books, living expenses (e.g., housing, parking, dining) and lab course fees (Townsend, 2008; Zamani, 2001). Once they have surmounted these barriers, transfer students also encounter academic difficulties adjusting to the new curriculum.

Transfer Shock

Vertical transfer students who enroll successfully in a four-year institution often experience a phenomenon referred to as transfer shock and popularized by Hills (1965). Interested to know whether transfer students fared as well academically as did their four-year counterparts, Hills conducted a meta-analysis of articles from 1928 through 1963. He found that, in the majority of cases, transfer students' GPAs decreased by the end of the first semester, although they could rebound later. Hills also noted that transfer students did not persist to graduation at the same rates as did native students. These findings have spurred subsequent studies on the academic performance, recovery, and persistence of students who transfer to four-year institutions (Cedja, 1997; Diaz, 1992).

Cedja (1997) was interested to know whether transfer shock was more prevalent in specific majors or disciplines. He identified 100 students who made successful vertical transfers from community colleges to Benedictine College, collected information on pre- and post-transfer GPAs and majors declared, and conducted a planned comparison test among the students' various majors (i.e., Business, Education, Fine Arts and Humanities, Mathematics, Science, and Social Sciences). The results indicated that the GPAs of students who declared majors in Business, Mathematics, and Science disciplines decreased significantly. Combined with the new curriculum, transfer students perceived that professors were apathetic about whether or not they came to class, which was an adjustment for some (Cedja, 1997).

Four-Year Integration (Social and Academic)

Students' academic and social integration has been the focus of numerous articles concerning undergraduate students in four-year universities. Works by Astin (1984), Kramer, (1997), and Tinto (1988) primarily have been used to frame the way in which vertical transfer students adjust to their new institutions. For example, Berger and Malaney (2003) used blocked hierarchical regression analysis in a survey of transfer students at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, to profile their transition to the new campus. Results indicated that transfer students had to reduce off-campus influences (e.g., working off campus and family commitments), and increase their academic study time. Using the same type of theoretical structures, Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf, and Laanan (2013) interviewed 29 students who attended a large Midwestern university. Their findings revealed that transfer students anticipated struggling with the academic transition into their new university, but "...seemed unprepared for the stress the change would bring to them socially" (p. 11). The authors reported further that participants

who did not live on campus or join clubs felt disassociated from the campus and were not as happy with their social experience. Similar themes emerged in Townsend and Wilson's (2006) study of 19 older transfer students (e.g., 25 year of age and older) who felt out of place because of their age and lack of common life experiences with their classmates. However, these same students did not perceive social integration as critical to their success. Similar findings by Townsend and Wilson (2009) described these students as "...more concerned about doing well academically than participating in institutionally-sponsored social activities designed to provide the college experience" (p. 419).

Interested in the adjustment of African American transfer students at a large research institution, Lee (2001) suggested these students had trouble finding academic support networks while attending their new institutions. For instance, students would contact faculty and staff members at their two-year colleges to maintain mentoring relationships. The authors posited that the students did this because the faculty and staff were not as accessible at their current institution, and they did not want to be perceived as academically incompetent because they were identified as students of color and transfer students.

In another indication that transfer students rely on alternative support networks to succeed, Chrystal et al.'s (2013) study reported that these students relied regularly on informal ways of gathering information about transitioning to their new institution. Although the university had several programs created to assist in the transfer process, the authors found that students relied on the experiences of friends and family members who had attended the institution previously.

Building a Transfer Receptive Culture

Much of the transfer literature places the responsibility for low transfer numbers on students themselves, which perpetuates a victim blaming mentality that supports deficit thinking stances (Valencia, 2010) and/or community colleges, without taking into account the links required between the two institutional types to promote transfer student success (Jain et al., 2011). However, a growing body of literature has focused on the four-year institutions' role in the vertical transfer process (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Wilson, 2013), specifically, the way in which institutional support structures help transfer students persist to obtain their degrees. The following section describes four institutional support structures: student support services, faculty interactions, academic policies and procedures, and tracking and assessment efforts.

Institutional Support Services

Creating links between community colleges and four-year institutions is critical for transfer student success (Ellis, 2013; Fann, 2013). Researchers have suggested that support services for transfer students at four-year institutions would assist in their upward mobility (Grites, 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Although there was little racial diversity among the students in the study, Townsend and Wilson's (2006) qualitative research of 19 transfer students was informative. Depicting student experiences in transferring from various community colleges to a large research institution in the Midwest, students expressed that they wanted some "...hand hold[ing] for a little bit" (p. 450). Students indicated that orientation programs were helpful in making the transition to their new university, a finding supported by other studies (Fann, 2013; Grites, 2013).

Orientation seminars were found to be helpful in Grites' (2013) analysis of institutional programs that support transfer students. Learning the nuances of a new campus by becoming familiar with names and geography were important. Transfer students may find this helpful because of their unfamiliarity with building/location names, which sometimes can be confusing for new students, for example, when buildings have official names, but are referred to by acronyms. Geographic identification of campus landmarks is equally important in orientation programs, because transfer students, in theory, can then identify essential locations on campus, thus helping them find important resources, such as the library, study locations, and advising centers. Referring to the latter, Fann's (2013) recommendations suggested that advising centers need to be intentional in their outreach to transfer students. To establish a transfer culture, both the community college and the four-year institution's advising centers are responsible for seeking out and guiding transfer students actively through their academic progression. It has been suggested that both institutional types need to balance their approach in helping transfer students succeed. Thus, while it is necessary to offer transfer students a level of autonomy in defining their education and pathway, they also must provide guidance and "a little hand holding" (Townsend & Wilson, 2006, p. 446) when needed to support their academic goals (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012).

Advising support. The transfer literature also has noted that advisors are potentially helpful in mitigating the issues students face while transitioning to their new institution. Although studies have indicated that not all transfer students use advisors effectively (Ellis, 2013), others have indicated their importance. Flaga (2006) stated that the more students know, the more likely they are to integrate successfully into their campus. Distributing information can

be particularly helpful to transfer students and potentially shorten their adjustment to the campus. Rhine, Milligan, and Nelson's (2000) study also supported the positive effects of early interventions, and suggested that advisors were critical in mitigating the loss of academic credits in transfers between two- and four-year institutions.

Faculty support. Faculty involvement is evident in the successful transition and persistence of transfer students (Cueso, 1996). To that end, the lack of opportunities for students to engage with faculty members at four-year institutions can make it difficult for transfer students to integrate academically in the campus environment (Yee, 2011). Laanan, Starobin, and Eggleston (2010) used the Laanan-Transfer Students' Questionnaire, and found that when faculty members stigmatized transfer students, it had adverse effects on their ability to adjust academically. Cueso (1996) suggested that links between two- and four-year faculty members should continue to be strengthened. Mentoring opportunities, collaborating in course development, and leading efforts to connect academic policies have all been suggested.

Academic policies and procedures. From the community college perspective, Miller (2013) indicated that institutions are as responsible as are students in the transfer process and they must do their part to assist them. One of the community colleges' responsibilities is to "...maintain high expectations about their students' ability to transfer" (p. 42). In an investigation of exemplar community colleges with high rates of transfer students, Miller argued that schools need to maintain high academic rigor in the classroom and also embrace working with students to develop "realistic 4-year degree plans" (p. 42). However, developing attainable plans requires open and honest communication between students and their advisors, and, Marling (2013) also suggested, the four-year institutions to which they seek to transfer.

Marling (2013) argued as well that having current information about academic requirements is a critical step in ensuring students' transition into four-year institutions. "A lack of accurate communication leads to erroneous assumptions and the perpetuation of misinformation, which can be detrimental to transfer students' persistence" (p. 81). Unlike native students, transfer students need quick and timely information related to academics because of their newness to the campus. Fann's (2013) qualitative study of students and administrators from 14 community colleges and four-year institutions in Texas suggested that systematic policies also should be implemented to assess transfer students. For example, course numbers should be the same at community colleges and four-year institutions when statewide agreements are enacted. Fann explained further that students in the study had trouble knowing what courses matched from one institution to the next, which caused them to lose credits when they transferred to four-year institutions.

Tracking and assessment. The need to track and assess the successes or challenges of transfer students is important in understanding transfer students' persistence. However, there is no universal formula used to identify and calculate transfer rates because of the various approaches researchers and policymakers use (Handel & Williams, 2012). For example, one approach performs a simple calculation to determine transfer rates: divide the number of students that transferred to a four-year institution by the number of community college students. However, Handel and Williams stated that using this approach can characterize community colleges unfairly as failures because of low numbers of transfer students. However, including only those students who aspire to transfer still does not yield an accurate number, because this

calculation does not account for students that begin community college to pursue a certificate, for example, but then change their minds later and decide to transfer.

From a national viewpoint, Anderson et al.'s (2006) study of statewide articulation agreements cited the lack of reliable assessment data about the movements of students from one community college district to the next. Although steps have been taken to increase the ability to track transfer students accurately, Marling (2013) believed "Most national transfer data should be taken with a healthy dose of skepticism as there is no single data source that comprehensively records all transfer data" (p. 83).

The dearth of data on transfer students applies to individual universities as well. In Tobolowsky and Cox's (2012) case study of transfer students' experiences at a single university, the authors reported that there was a lack of institutional understanding of this unique population. For example, personnel interviewed stated that transfer students did well on campus, but without any institutional data to support their claims. Staff in key areas throughout the university used only anecdotal accounts and assumed transfer students were integrating successfully into campus, when actually they were struggling academically and socially to a greater extent than were other students. This lack of institutional knowledge about transfer students is not an isolated phenomenon. Fann (2013) also reported similar findings and reiterated that campuses need to "...maintain extensive data on transfer student migration and performance" (p. 31) to understand this growing population better. Taking a proactive approach to research on transfer students, Herrera and Jain's (2013) investigation of transfer from community colleges to the University of California, Los Angeles listed several recommendations for ways in which administrators can do a better job of tracking these students. Their primary recommendation

focused on collecting meaningful institutional data, including accumulating standard data, such as GPAs, majors, and the number of transfer applicants, as well as longitudinal datasets in which academic performance is measured after one year to determine institutional retention and graduation rates.

In summary, four-year institutions can implement several institutional practices to enhance the probability that students who transfer to their campuses will succeed. The most important task is to work in conjunction with feeder community colleges and enhance the links between the two types of institutions. One such element is to encourage advisors to contact students early and often to help them understand the transfer process. Other studies have cited the importance of faculty engaging with transfer students to help them integrate academically. Orientation programs and seminars designed to help students transition to campus also have been suggested as ways to mitigate the stressors of academic and social integration transfer students face. Finally, improving access to current academic policies and implementing better measures to track transfer students are all ways institutions can improve their understanding of this population.

Conceptual Framework

Viewed through the lens of critical race theory (CRT), a combination of four theoretical models provided the bases for the study's conceptual framework. Applying each of the various models in their entirety to the study would be too broad, and potentially lose sight of the intent of the study's research questions. Rather, components from each of the models were used to assist the researcher in understanding the way in which transfer students of color persisted successfully to obtain baccalaureate degrees (Yin, 2014).

Critical Race Theory

The goal of critical studies is to challenge, transform, and empower (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). These terms are purposely broad in scope to discuss inequities and power dynamics in society. Early stages of critical analysis include influences from Karl Marx, who analyzed socioeconomic conditions and class structures; Jürgen Habermas, who investigated notions of technical, practical, and emancipatory knowledge, and Paulo Freire, who researched transformative and emancipatory education (Merriam, 2009). The consistent thread highlighted by critical theorists addresses the context in which inequities occur, rather than focusing specifically on individuals.

As a framework, critical research cannot stand alone. Simply being critical is not enough when investigating power structures. Therefore, to narrow the focus of this type of research, critical analysis is coupled consistently with another lens (e.g., critical gender studies, critical management studies, critical feminist research). Deriving from the overarching epistemological perspective of critical inquiry, critical race theory (CRT) embodies race as its core construct while also addressing issues of power and structure. Although there is no single principle or definition to which critical race theorists subscribe when explaining this theory, there are two general themes that are consistent across the literature: (1) understanding the way in which “white supremacy” continues to suppress people of color, and (2) the way in which institutionalized structures such as education and criminal justice systems have ensured these inequities persist (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Merriam, 2009).

Researchers such as Schwandt (2007), and Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (1995) framed CRT as an array of works, such as legal and sociological studies, that are a blend

of research, policy, and race interests. For the purpose of this study Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) five tenets of CRT influenced my understanding of CRT in education, which include the following elements: (1) racism is ordinary; (2) challenging dominate ideology; (3) a commitment to social justice; (4) valuing the lived experience, and (5) counter storytelling.

Racism is ordinary is strongly consistent with the foundation of CRT and underpins the remaining four tenets. Although Delgado and Stefancic (2001) did not articulate a clear way in which to define racism, they inferred that it is not overt, but lies just below the surface of society, such that only egregious forms of racism are detected easily.

Challenging dominate ideology examines the structural inequities found in higher education such as colorblindness, meritocracy, and equal opportunity. This tenet confronts those “neutral” approaches and seeks to shift empower to oppressed ideologies as a way of understanding the systemic inequities that continue to assail minoritized populations in higher education. *A commitment to social justice* pertains to the notion that the work of CRT is fundamentally grounded in rebuking the inequities prevalent in education, which are often informed by sexist, racist, and classist white majority narratives. CRT *values the lived experiences* of racial minorities in higher education as valid, legitimate, and as an appropriate way of understanding racial subordination. Last, *counter storytelling*, also described as the “unique voice of color” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 9), emphasizes the lived experiences of people of color and the way in which their stories are told to whites to inform them of unjust matters.

The overarching strength of CRT is that it is built upon the foundation of investigating the critical constructs of power and racism in society. This is a salient feature because, by

bringing race into the middle of the conversation, difficult questions about racism and the way in which it is enacted in law can be investigated fully. In addition, CRT gives voice to counter stories that reject common dominant narratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

In summary, CRT's inherent strengths focus on empowering minorities by challenging racial constructs with the goal of achieving racial emancipation. However, the limitations of CRT derive from the inability to generalize its content. For example, the tenet of *counter storytelling* derives from individual standpoints that can be challenged because of personal subjectivities that could have derived from factors related to environment and racial identity development. *Challenging dominate ideologies* can also be scrutinized because it is often grounded in the idea that privileged whites intentionally manipulate systems and structures to support their dominance while oppressing others. That said, assumptions and speculations can be made by investigating history, yet substantial verification of this idea is difficult to find.

Expertise Model

Padilla, Treviño, Gonzalez, and Treviño's (1997) expertise model uses the experiences of students of color who have overcome barriers successfully and persisted to attain degrees. Developed in part using concepts from Harmon and King's (1985) expert systems theory, Padilla et al.'s (1997) model uses two components to identify student success: theoretical and heuristic knowledge. Theoretical knowledge can be described as that acquired formally, from books, lectures, and coursework, while heuristic knowledge is information gained from experiences within an environmental setting. Padilla et al. argued that students must acquire a level of competence in both areas to navigate the college system successfully.

In progressing through coursework, students acquire theoretical knowledge and become proficient in a particular discipline. However, unlike theoretical knowledge, "...heuristic knowledge is passed along informally from experienced students to new students on a one-on-one basis or by student organizations to groups of new students" (Padilla et al., p. 127). Padilla et al. posited that minority student groups must overcome four heuristic barriers to succeed in college: discontinuity; lack of nurturing; lack of presence, and resources. Discontinuity refers to the obstructions that can occur when transitioning to a college environment. Lack of nurturing focuses on the absence of supportive resources for students of color that help them adjust and persist at their institutions. Lack of presence centers on the absence of ethnic minority students, faculty, and staff among the university population, while the final barrier, resources, refers to the lack of financial aid required to pay for the various academic needs associated with attending college.

Padilla et al.'s (1997) expertise model is relevant to this study because it shifts from a deficit approach, focuses on understanding minority student success, and places students of color at the center of the analysis. Unlike previous attrition models that primarily used white students as the unit of analysis (e.g., Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1988), this model focuses specifically on the success of students of color. The expertise model was used in particular to identify potential barriers they encountered at their institution and assisted in the development of the interview protocol.

Community Cultural Wealth

Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth was developed in part to rebut the dominant research narrative of deficit thinking with respect to communities of color. Rather than

assume "...students of color come to the classroom with cultural deficiencies" (p. 70), she used CRT to assert that these communities have developed communal "funds of knowledge" (p. 76) that strengthen their abilities to resist various forms of educational oppression.

Community cultural wealth asserts that there are six forms of capital (i.e., social; linguistic; resistant; aspirational; familial, and navigational); however, this study focused on the latter three. First, aspirational capital refers to people of color's motivation to persist towards goals despite current circumstances and overwhelming odds against success. Second, familial capital focuses on the importance of immediate and extended family bonds, and the way in which a collective consciousness is developed to combat isolationism when confronting problems. Finally, navigational capital centers on the social and psychological skills acquired to traverse institutions such as colleges and universities that historically have been "racially-hostile" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80) to communities of color. These forms of community cultural wealth helped the researcher understand the various strategies students of color used outside the academic environment while persisting to obtain their degrees.

Summary

This section of the study reviewed transfer students' journey from two- to four-year institutions and the conceptual framework used in the research. Beginning with the rise of community colleges, the literature reviewed the development of two-year institutions and the shift in student enrollments from predominately white, male, and middle-upper class students (Bragg, 2001) to campuses that are described often as "democracy colleges" that enroll students from various backgrounds and ethnicities (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Labaree, 1997). Although students choose to attend community colleges for many reasons, research has suggested that the

ability to transfer to four-year institutions is a significant motivator (VanderLinden, 2002).

However, community college students face numerous barriers throughout their path to baccalaureate degree attainment.

A multitude of student characteristics have been identified as influential in the progress of vertical transfer students while they are attending community colleges. Being a student of color from a low SES, enrolled part-time, with dependents, academically unprepared, and working off campus all have been shown to have negative effects on transfer students' persistence. To ameliorate these effects, researchers have documented institutional factors that have been associated with creating a campus culture favorable to transfer students. These include increased full-time faculty, mentoring programs, availability of academic advisors, providing social and academic integration opportunities, and established academic links between community colleges and their four-year counterparts.

Although the characteristics above have been identified and institutional structures have been established within community colleges, transfer rates are still unimpressive. Researchers have posited that factors at four-year institutions also contribute to the waning persistence rates of community college transfer students to degree attainment. Loss of academic credit, transfer shock, increased financial costs of attendance, and adapting to new social and academic environments have been associated with transfer student attrition. Studies have illustrated that students have overcome these obstacles by relying on peer social networks and transfer student capital as they persisted to obtain their degrees. Research also has recommended that four-year institutions create specific opportunities for this population. Outreach programs to local

community colleges, orientation courses, specific transfer student organizations, academic services, and improved tracking and monitoring of needs have all been suggested.

Finally, the research introduced a conceptual framework comprised of various theoretical models to understand better the way in which Latinxs overcome barriers en route to obtaining a baccalaureate degree. I applied only specific components of each of the two models to provide me with a unique perspective in understanding the persistence of Latinx transfer students. Grounded in a critical analytical lens, this study engages in all five components of CRT, which collectively recognize Latinxs are experts in traversing the higher education landscape because of their abilities to apply strategies from one institution to the next. CRT also acknowledges Latinxs enter higher education with various forms of cultural wealth, which assists them in navigating institutional systems and structures towards their academic goals.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The barriers faced by students who enter community colleges, transfer, and ultimately complete an undergraduate degree at four-year institutions have been documented well, as shown in the literature review. Using quantitative methodological approaches, research has focused consistently on factors correlated with transfer students' persistence. These characteristics often include being a student of color, of a non-traditional age, enrolled part-time, having dependents, being academically unprepared, and coming from a low SES background (Alfonso, 2006; Bailey et al., 2009; Wang, 2013). Although it is important to illustrate characteristics that are associated with non-persistence to understand the low rates of vertical transfer and baccalaureate degree attainment, these studies often fall short of including the way in which successful transfer students navigate the different systems and structures in community colleges and four-year institutions.

Qualitative studies have helped fill this gap by exploring transfer students' experiences at community colleges and four-year institutions, and have highlighted perceived barriers the students themselves identified. Obstacles have included navigating their new campus, experiencing transfer shock, and adjusting to the new academic environment (Laanan, 2007; Townsend, 1995). While these studies have furthered our understanding of transfer students' persistence, participants in the studies often do not represent the national racial demographics of students who attend community colleges. Relatively few articles have focused specifically on

the successful transfer of students of color; instead, they tend to emphasize the broader experiences of “transfer students” by collapsing the stories of students from all racial backgrounds, including those of white students who tend to constitute the majority of the sample (e.g., Owens, 2010; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). In doing so, the voices of students of color are obscured by the different experiences of white students, which subsequently can fail to represent them if the stories do not fit the dominant narrative. In summary, using a deficit-framed approach, transfer research has identified numerous obstacles that impede the progress of students’ vertical transfers, while also obscuring the experiences of students of color, a population that is affected disproportionately by low success rates in community colleges and in four-year degree attainment.

By shifting from a deficit model approach to examine transfer students’ persistence, this research added to the literature by using a strengths-based approach to understand student persistence, and concentrating on Latinxs as the unit of analysis. Rather than identifying and reaffirming dominant narratives that focus on underachievement and the lack of social and cultural capital, academic preparation, and environmental pull factors, this study presented an anti-deficit reframing to their persistence in attaining a degree, and also identified perceived barriers. Thus, this study focused on understanding the facilitating factors, rather than just the barriers to their matriculation in post-secondary education. Moreover, by employing a CRT analytical lens, this study underscored the voices of Latinxs in higher education, thereby advancing an asset-based paradigm, while countering deficit-based narratives that implicate students of color as the sole proprietors of failure, without acknowledging the structural inequalities that are inherent in the U.S. higher education system. This chapter begins with the

study's research questions and design, a description of the site and rationale for its selection, and the way in which participants in the study were identified. The chapter concludes with data collection protocols, analytic approaches, and strategies for ensuring reliability and authenticity.

Research Questions

The research question that guided this study is: How do successful Latinx students navigate two- and four-year postsecondary institutions towards degree attainment? The following sub-questions helped address the overarching inquiry: (a) How do students' experiences at their community colleges influence the vertical transfer process, and (b) How do students' experiences at their four-year institutions influence their persistence to degree completion?

These two sub-questions address the overarching inquiry in several ways. First, because participants were asked to reflect upon their post-secondary experiences in both two- and four-year institutions, it was necessary to separate the research question into sub-components (i.e., pre- and post-transfer experiences). Understanding these experiences separately allowed a deeper examination of the stories students recalled about attending their community colleges and four-year institutions. Next, investigating the way in which Latinx transfer students navigated their community colleges successfully is critically important in understanding the way in which they persist at four-year institutions, because the transfer student literature does not indicate whether the skills learned at their community colleges, for example, were instrumental in their progress while attending four-year institutions. The final sub-question focused specifically on the four-year institution. This question focused on understanding the way in which these students overcame institutional and environmental barriers to degree attainment successfully. Together,

the two sub-questions provided the researcher with the opportunity to investigate more deeply the journey of Latinx students who transferred from two- to four-year institutions.

Building the Case

A qualitative case study design was useful for this research because qualitative research is "...an inquiry process of understanding... a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Furthermore, Yin (2014) suggested using a case study when asking "how" and "why" questions about a set of events that the researcher cannot control. This study fits these criteria for at least two reasons. First, the overarching research question addresses the experiences of Latinx transfer students and the way in which they persisted to graduation. Further, I had no control over the events that led these students through their academic pursuits, including their SES status, academic background, degree aspirations, and environment pull factors (Adelman, 2006; Porchea et al., 2010; Roksa, 2006; Wang, 2012).

Second, this study was grounded in a social phenomenon. Although Latinx students have increased their rates of four-year graduation over time (NCES, n.d.), there is still a noticeable gap between their success and that of white students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). If the vertical transfer pathway between two- and four-year institutions does not improve considerably for Latinxs and other students of color, Bowen et al. (2009) cautioned that the current critical shortfalls we are facing in "human capital formation" (p. 9) will have an adverse effect on the number of skilled workers in our changing economy. From a social justice perspective, improving the rate of baccalaureate degree attainment by students of color is important in

uplifting communities of color that have been pushed aside by decades of systemic and structural racism in higher education (Wilder, 2013). Although federal and state legislators have worked to improve access to post-secondary education, for example, by providing financial aid (e.g., Pell Grants) and targeted outreach services (e.g., TRIO programs), opponents of affirmative action (*Fisher v. University of Texas*, 2013), hostile campus climates (Vaccaro, 2010), and acts of microaggression in the classroom directed to students of color (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) undercut racial equity in higher education continually. Further, viewing degree attainment on the part of transfer students of color through a social justice-success lens, and referring to graduating Latinx transfer students as “experts” in navigating higher education (Padilla et al., 1997), provides a unique perspective that resists racist deficit-framed narratives, and offers an alternative approach to combating dropout rates. Thus, for these reasons, a case study design was an appropriate methodology with which to investigate Latinx transfer students’ success in obtaining a four-year degree.

Case Study Design

A constructivist, epistemological stance guided this case study. According to Merriam (2009), constructivist research “...assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event” (p. 8). A constructivist approach was applied to this study because the stories of Latinx students are often marginalized, or absent altogether in higher education literature (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). By sharing these students’ stories in their own words, engaging in dialogue during the interview process, and practicing reflexivity, I attempted to minimize *othering* the

students, which would have marginalized their experiences further by assigning them permanence and the burden of representation (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012).

Using a constructivist approach allowed identification of additional elements of the case study design, including recognizing and defining the unit of analysis and binding the case. Yin (2014) stated that case studies can be used to investigate a single person, groups of people, or events. However, the definition of the unit of analysis should be defined clearly. The units of analysis for this study were community college Latinx students who had transferred vertically to a four-year institution, and had been identified by institution they were attending as eligible for graduation during the spring or summer terms. Next, binding the case helped "...determine the scope of your data collection and, in particular, how you will distinguish data about the subject of your case study (the 'phenomenon') from the data external to the case (the 'context')" (p. 34). According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a case study can be bound using several strategies: according to time and place, time and activity, or definition and context. This case study took place at a California State University (CSU) system campus during the spring 2016 semester (time and place), and focused specifically on the experiences of Latinx transfer students as they persisted to graduation (phenomenon).

Site Selection

Woodville State College (WSC), a pseudonym used to protect the anonymity of the university, is a part of the CSU System. This university is located in a metropolitan center and the majority of its students are local; however, it also enrolls applicants from across the state of California. African American, Asian, Chicana/o, Filipino, Latinx, and Native American/Alaskan Native students are represented well on campus, with enrollments surpassing 50% of the student

body. Total enrollments exceed 25,000 students annually, and the average age of undergraduates is 22. Most students attend classes full-time (12 units or more per semester) and commute to campus.

Several considerations guided selecting WSC as the site. First, it admits a significant number of transfer students from the California Community College (CCC) system. Through the implementation of the Transfer Achievement Reform Act (2010), the CCC and CSU systems have developed formal partnerships to support transfer pathways between two- and four-year institutions. WSC has embraced these policies and enrolls over 2,000 transfer students a year. Second, there are large numbers of students of color and those of non-traditional ages on campus. Students 25 years of age and older have comprised 20% of the student body over the last six years. During the same period, students of color have accounted for two-thirds of all student enrollments. It is important to note the combination of these two campus characteristics, because they overlap with characteristics found in aspiring community college transfer students (Bowen et al., 2009). Last, personal knowledge of the setting allowed me to gain a better understanding of the participants' experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Because I was familiar with the campus, I was able to access information pertaining to transfer students more readily, and also was able to contact key institutional stakeholders who were involved in providing programs and services for transfer students. For example, because of my institutional knowledge of WSC, I had professional relationships with staff who work directly with community college transfer students. This established rapport gave me enhanced access to information specific to transfer students, such as new initiatives and pilot programs, and provided a gateway for disseminating information about the case study to participants.

Participant Recruitment

This study used purposive sampling to identify participants for the study. The development of specific criteria helped me obtain student participants who contributed to an “information-rich case” (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Merriam (2009) indicated, “...the criteria you establish for purposeful sampling directly reflect the purpose of the study and guides the identification of information-rich cases” (p. 78). I was able to identify students who transferred vertically from CCCs and were eligible for spring or summer 2016 degree conferral by contacting a senior administrator in the Office of Enrollment Management. This office sent initial and follow-up email invitations during the spring 2016 semester to all student participants on my behalf (see Appendix C). Students who chose to participate in the study clicked a link in the email, which forwarded them to an online Google document form. Participants filled out the consent form (see Appendix A) and demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E) before I contacted them.

Student Sample

I sent recruitment emails to 58 African American students. After three follow-up emails, five students completed the online waiver and demographic questionnaire, while only two students participated in interviews. Although Merriam (2009) indicated that there is no universally accepted number of participants required for a robust qualitative sample size, I was not comfortable making inferences or analyzing data from only two participants. Therefore, I employed two strategies to increase the numbers of participants.

First, I tried convenience and snowball purposeful sampling techniques. As the name implies, convenience sampling generally requires fewer resources to conduct, such as time and

money (Merriam, 2009). Merriam suggested that this sampling method alone is inadequate in eliciting information-rich case studies, but may be used to complement existing approaches. Therefore, to bolster the population pool, I contacted staff that had worked previously with transfer students of color and ask them to solicit information detailing the case study and the way in which participants could join. I provided staff with an introductory email (see Appendix C) that they eventually forwarded to potential participants.

Snowball sampling also was used in conjunction with convenience sampling. “Snowball, chain, or network sampling is perhaps the most common form of purposeful sampling” (Merriam, 2009, p. 79). Through this approach, I asked the two participants identified previously if they could refer other participants to fill out the online consent form and participate in the study. Unfortunately, however, after three unsuccessful weeks of soliciting more African American students to participate in the study, I changed the ethnic focus of the study to Latinx students. I selected this population because they face similar challenges to those of African American students, including being marginalized historically in higher education, having low vertical transfer rates, and a disproportionately low frequency of graduation from four-year institutions (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009).

Latinx Students

Three criteria were selected to best identify a sample population for the project: (1) self-identify as Latinx or Hispanic, (2) transferred vertically from a CCC to WSC, and (3) students’ graduation applications were processed by WSC for spring or summer 2016 degree conferral.

Criterion one. The first criterion identified Latinx students as the primary unit of analysis. Latinxs were identified because they are overrepresented in CCCs compared to CSU

institutions (CCCCO, 2015), yet are disproportionately underrepresented when transferring to CSU schools (CCCCO, 2013). National studies illustrate this same trend, and show that smaller numbers of Latinx students transfer to four-year institutions by comparison to their white peers (Anderson et al., 2006).

Criterion two. As defined in Chapter One, vertical transfer refers to actions taken by students who (a) begin their post-secondary education at a community college, and (b) identify as aspiring to obtain a baccalaureate degree at a four-year institution. Because of the focus of the study, it was imperative to emphasize the vertical transfer of Latinx students, versus swirl or reverse transfer students, because vertical transfer students would provide an information-rich case to investigate, as data suggest that Latinx students attain associate degrees at lower rates than do their white peers (NCES, n.d.).

Criterion three. The final criterion was included in the selection process to help pinpoint students who were closest to graduating. The CSU 120 semester or 180 quarter units minimum threshold for graduation (California Education Code, Article 5) was not used, because requirements for some undergraduate majors exceed the minimum. Therefore, identifying students who had turned in their official graduation applications to the University for spring and summer degree conferral ensured that I identified the population that was closest to graduation.

Sample. The Office of Enrollment Management identified 317 Latinx students who met my criteria. After the university sent the initial and three follow-up emails, 26 students completed the online consent and questionnaire, and 15 students completed interviews.

Faculty and Staff Sample Group

In an effort to understand better the institutional perspective of transfer students' success, I invited WSC faculty, staff, and administrators to participate in interviews. Understanding this viewpoint offered me an alternative approach to corroborate student stories, but also identified the role the University took in supporting this population. To be eligible for interviews, participants had to have worked directly with transfers students or have an investment in their success. Using a snowball sampling technique, I identified and interviewed three staff members for the study.

Interview Coordination

I coordinated dates, times, and locations with students, faculty, staff, and administrators only after all protocols were completed. Participants had the choice of interviewing on campus or via telecommunication (e.g., Skype and Google Hangout). Participants were given the previous interview options because studies have demonstrated that there is little difference between in-person and online interviews (e.g., Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Interviews at WSC occurred in a private office. For participants who did not wish to, or have the time to be interviewed on campus, I used online telecommunication. To encourage participation, individuals received a Starbucks gift certificate.

Data Collection

This case study used four principles of data collection adopted from Yin (2014): (1) collecting evidence from multiple sources; (2) constructing a database; (c) maintaining a chain of evidence, and (4) and ensuring participant confidentiality. Each of the principles was relevant to

the way in which the data were collected, and helped establish the validity and reliability of the evidence.

Using Multiple Measures

This project used several different sources of evidence to investigate the experiences of Latinx students. Yin (2014) asserted that using multiple approaches to data collection, rather than one source of evidence, and triangulating the data collected subsequently will, for example, increase a study's rigor. The process of triangulation, in which multiple forms of data are used to compare and crosscheck the information gathered (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995), helped ensure the reliability of the data collected and the themes presented. Therefore, the study used student and staff interviews, and documentation as data sources. Interview protocols were developed before the data were collected. Protocols are "...intended to guide the researcher in carrying out the data collection" (Yin, 2014, p. 84). There were separate protocols for student (see Appendix F) and staff interviews (see Appendix G).

Interviews. The primary data source was individual, semi-structured interviews with students. Using this method allowed me to ask questions that were worded more flexibly to study the phenomenon in question. Further, this format was particularly useful because it "...allow[ed] the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to emerging worldviews of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). For example, having a malleable framework permitted me to ask follow-up questions that linked experiences between two- and four-year institutions seamlessly. Interviews with WSC faculty, staff, and administrators also utilized a semi-structured process. This approach gave me the flexibility to ask probing questions that explored the institutional perspective regarding transfer student

success. Interviews with students and staff lasted between 60-75 minutes. Sessions were recorded with an audio digital recorder and field notes also were used.

Documents. The final source of information collected was documents. These materials came from various institutional sources, such as the university website, promotional materials, student support services, and orientations. Including university documents in this study helped corroborate the stories the participants shared.

Creating a Database

All relevant information in the case study was collected and stored in a secure database. This step was necessary so I could manage the volumes of evidence gathered effectively and maintain an audit trail (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Sources of information included reflective field notes kept in a journal, the interview audio recordings and transcripts, and relevant documents. Sources of information collected electronically were stored on a password-protected laptop computer that only I could access. Physical documents were stored in a locked file cabinet. All documents were protected throughout the research study. After the study was completed, I destroyed all relevant information to protect the anonymity of participants and the study site.

Chain of Evidence

Developing a chain of evidence allowed me to construct and maintain a thorough and transparent study (Yin, 2014). Yin described this as showing clear linkages between the research questions, methods, data collection, and findings. Several steps were taken to ensure the highest integrity of this study. For example, links that tied the research questions, conceptual framework, and transfer student literature, were used to inform the protocols directly (see

Appendix E). With respect to data collection, supplemental documents were collected to help verify participant interviews, together with the development of an audit trail to track findings. These efforts allowed me to achieve the highest levels of validity and reliability of the evidence collected and provided a foundation for continuous analysis.

Participant Confidentiality

According to institutional review board (IRB) requirements, it is incumbent upon the researcher to protect study participants' anonymity. Measures were included in this study to ensure that the participants' identities remained confidential. All participants were given the option to choose their own pseudonym for reporting results. If they did not choose a pseudonym, one was provided for them. After all interviews were completed, member checking, or soliciting feedback from the people interviewed to ensure accuracy of the statements provided, also was used (Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) explained that the goal of data analysis is to make sense out of the data, "...by consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read" (p. 176). Although data collection and analysis are presented in separate sections, they occurred in concert. According to Stake (1997), organizing, sorting, and summarizing data throughout the data collection phase helps the researcher keep the analysis focused and pointedly informative.

The evidence collected underwent a multilayered analysis process. First, field notes were used to capture reflective thoughts during and between data collection activities. For example, during interviews, notes were taken to emphasize aspects of the meeting that elicited deeper

conversations between participants and myself. These notes helped guide other conversations with participants to investigate various topics further, and facilitated more robust data collection and analysis. A third party was used to transcribe the interview audio recordings. I emphasized the importance of transcription accuracy and confidentiality in an effort to protect the integrity of the study and the participants' anonymity. After the completed transcripts were received, I emailed them to the participants to give them the opportunity to clarify ambiguous comments or include any additional thoughts. The transcripts were then analyzed with NVivo. The program was used to code and categorize large amounts of data. When creating codes and themes, I ensured that categories embodied central principles, as described by Merriam (2009), which includes having components that are *responsive* to the purpose of the research and *exhaustive*, such that all data placed into categories are relevant to the study.

A priori coding was the initial step in analyzing the participant interviews. Initial codes were informed by relevant transfer student literature, the conceptual framework, the grouping of interview questions, and notes. Initial codes referenced obstacles described by participants and framed by the five barriers identified in Padilla et al.'s (1997) work. Although these codes were used as the initial point of analysis, open coding also was implemented. Preliminary categories were constructed and later combined or subsumed within others. Through this process of axial coding, I ensured the patterns I observed across all interviews were related to the research questions guiding the study. In addition, I did not rely solely on a deductive process of coding, and also used inductive coding to identify emerging themes.

In addition, external peer reviews and member checks assisted in the analysis process. I emailed transcripts to four external peer reviewers not associated with the study. Each reviewer

read at least two different transcripts independently, such that half of the student participants' transcripts were read by three different people—me and two reviewers. Reviewers were asked to highlight any components of the transcript they judged to be barriers and successes the participants experienced. Using their notes and comparing them to my own, this process of peer reviewing enabled me to focus my analysis further in the areas most critical to the research questions. After external reviews and preliminary analysis were completed, student participants were contacted and offered the opportunity to express their feedback on the initial findings. This process of member checking allowed them the chance to confirm whether my interpretations of their stories reflected their experiences accurately (Merriam, 2009).

Reliability and Authenticity

Disclosing a researcher's position or subjectivity is a common practice in the qualitative tradition used to increase the reliability and authenticity of the study (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). This process requires researchers to "...explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken" (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). Thus, expressing my position was critically important to the integrity of the study.

I identify as an African American male who holds both marginalized and privileged identities in higher education. I can be considered privileged because I identify as a heterosexual male who pursued undergraduate studies as a traditional-aged student (i.e., 18-22), and also come from a middle-class family. The marginalized identity I also hold in higher education is my race. Thus, I shared some of the identities of the participants described previously. When we did share identities, I was able to analyze topics from a personal viewpoint; however, being aware of these similarities, I tried actively to minimize the effects of my personal biases on the

findings. Further, I was familiar with the faculty and staff at the study site. Although having relationships at the site provided me with increased access to information and resources pertinent to the study, I also always was forthcoming in telling my campus contacts that I would analyze the results objectively from the perspective of my research questions and the voices of participants. Moreover, I would not obstruct the participants' stories and shape them in any way that was either favorable or disparaging of the university.

Limitations

The research included several limitations because of the methodology chosen. Qualitative research cannot be generalized readily, nor was this study representative of all transfer students. There are numerous types of transfer students (e.g., swirl, reverse, and lateral) who transfer between college campuses every year, but are not discussed in this work. Although this study was limited intentionally to students who transferred vertically from a CCC to a four-year institution, this restriction strengthened the study by allowing the researcher to focus on a particular transfer pathway that many students of color have used (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Furthermore, understanding the way in which Latinx community college students have traversed the two- and four-year educational landscape successfully will prove to be particularly useful for community college and university administrators, advisors, and student services professionals who work with underrepresented populations.

With respect to data collection, two additional limitations must be acknowledged. First, data collected from interviews inherently are self-reported. This type of data presents limitations because it is impossible to verify the accuracy of the memories of their past experiences that the students shared. Second, students were interviewed during the course of the spring semester

prior to May commencement and degree conferral. Thus, participants in the study may not have completed their undergraduate degrees successfully.

The previous threats to validity were addressed in at least two ways. Data collected through interviews were cross-checked and corroborated by staff interviews and by collecting documents. Dates students attended campus orientation, for instance, were found on the university website and details of the event were checked against students' stories. With respect to students who potentially did not graduate, I emailed all of the student participants after the spring and summer graduation dates passed. Not all responded to the email, but half of the students did respond to say they had graduated successfully.

Researcher Subjectivity

Researchers engaging in qualitative methodologies should explore, recognize, and divulge their subjectivities related to the topic they are investigating (Merriam, 2009). Tillam (2008) expressed when engaging in research focused on underrepresented populations, self-reflection becomes even more important, due to the lack of cultural sensitive general found in the extant literature. Adhering to Berger's (2013) call for researchers to "better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge" (p. 2), I recognize that I am an outsider in the context of Latinx heritage and culture, and the lived experiences of students that enter post-secondary education through the community college space. As a four-year university student athlete, I was supported by systems of advisors, coaches, and various resources designed to ensure my continued progress towards degree completion. I did not commute to campus; I did not have to work full time to support family members or supplement my income in order to pay tuition; I was privileged.

Though I did not generally experience that same challenges faced by the students of color in the community college transfer literature, I was affected by the extant research as a person of color due to articles continuously portraying the likelihood of POCs vertically transferring to four-year institutions as scant, without acknowledging the various systems and structures working against them. Knowing family members and friends had navigated the community college system, transferred, and successfully obtained their undergraduate degrees, I was determined to describe a counter narrative that reflected their stories of triumph. Gaining inspiration from critical researchers such as Shaun Harper, Gloria Ladson-Billings, bell hooks, and Paulo Freire, I wanted to seek out and engage in research that highlighted the unwavering resolve students of color to have to succeed despite the various negative calculations and statistically significant regressions. I wanted to distort the narrative of POCs struggling to succeed in higher education and illustrate that we too have inherent capital that can be utilized to navigate foreign spaces. The aforementioned scholars, the successes of my friends and family in higher education, and my determination to upset racist narratives all shaped the research design and epistemology of this study.

Summary

This section discussed the importance of the research questions and the way in which the methodological design for the study helped fill those gaps. A case study was determined to be the best qualitative approach to this phenomenon because of the dearth of knowledge about the success of transfer students of color. The study site was selected because of the campus' racial diversity, large numbers of transfer students, and my institutional knowledge and working relationships with staff, faculty, and administrators.

Three different types of data were collected and analyzed to produce the most comprehensive results. First, through purposive sampling techniques, I identified an ideal sample of 15 Latinx students to participate in interviews. Initially, students were recruited for the study through email invitations sent by the university on my behalf. Next, interviews with faculty, staff, and administrators who worked with transfer students at WSC also were conducted. Conversations with campus stakeholders added to the richness of the study by including the institutional perspective of transfer student success. Finally, documents were collected from various sources throughout the study to help verify and validate student experiences.

Throughout the chapter, various strategies were discussed that would strengthen the reliability and authenticity of the study. Techniques included establishing a chain of evidence, identifying and securing a database to protect sensitive information, and collecting multiple sources of data. Further, to ensure validity during the data collection and analysis phases, member checks, external reviews, and data triangulation also were employed.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Applying a constructivist case study design, I provided the opportunity for Latinx students at WSU to tell their stories about how they successfully traversed the two- and four-year postsecondary educational systems. Following the interview protocol, students and staff were asked to complete consent forms and online surveys prior to meeting with me. Utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interviews, I used open-ended questions to guide participant reflections about their experiences in higher education. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and participants were given the opportunity to read their transcripts to ensure accuracy of the experiences provided before coding. Based on the conceptual framework, I made assumptions students would face particular challenges along their pathway towards four-year degree attainment; yet, I also assumed they would successfully navigate these perceived challenges utilizing various approaches, personal skill sets, and resources. This chapter is organized into four sections: The first describes the participant backgrounds. This information derives primarily from the pre-interview survey questions. Next, student participant profiles are briefly described, while the following section presents the findings framed through the lens of the conceptual framework. Last, a chapter summary is presented reviewing results of the study.

Participant Demographics

The student survey consisted of 29 questions divided into three sections: demographics, community college, and university experiences. A total of 26 students took the survey, but only

15 completed the protocol (i.e., consent form, survey, and interview). Only students who completed the protocol in its entirety were included in the following findings. The staff survey included eight questions and was comprised of two sections: demographics and university work history. All four staff participants completed the full protocol.

The student participants ranged in age from 23-37 years of age. Ten students (66%) were less than 25, while the remainder were over 26. The sample included five men and ten women. The majority of the students self-identified as first-generation (80%), and the average household income was under \$36,000 (73%).

The majority of students indicated that they did not work on campus while attending their community college (73%) and WSU (66%). Instead, they worked off-campus 11-30 hours a week (80%) while attending community college, and while at WSU, worked off-campus 21-40 hours (73%). The majority of students (86%) enrolled full-time while attending community college, but also *stopped out* or unenrolled for a period of time (e.g., 2-3 semesters), while attending community college for various reasons including losing interest in school, working full time, or personal reasons.

Most students attended 1-2 community colleges (86%) and took an average of 3-4 years to transfer (66%), while others took between 5-7 years to transition to WSU (33%). While attending community college, respondents earned 61-75 units (46%), 76-90 units (40%), and 91+ units (13%). However, when asked how many of those units transferred to WSU, students indicated in general that they were able to transfer only some of the hours. All of the students transferred to WSU in the Fall of 2014 and most indicated that they had always planned to transfer once they enrolled in their community college (86%).

Three women and one man completed the staff survey. The three women identified as White/Non-Latino, while the man was Native American. Collectively, they had over 40 years of experience working at WSU. Three were staff members and one was an academic counselor with teaching responsibilities. Their working titles were Vice President of Enrollment Management, University Articulation Officer, and Community College Outreach Coordinator. The counselor's title was program coordinator and he taught sections of the university's transfer bridge program.

Participant Profiles

To ensure their anonymity, all participants either chose or were assigned pseudonyms. Participants shared their unique experiences with the researcher during the interviews, which allowed short descriptive profiles to be developed. Only student profiles were developed, as they were the central unit of analysis for the study. A table that summarizes key information follows the descriptions.

Helen. The oldest of three children, Helen grew up in Northern California. Her parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico. Though her father has only an eighth-grade education, and her mother completed trade school to become a dental assistant, they always encouraged Helen to go to college. When she completed high school, they gave her an ultimatum, "Either go to college or move out." Faced with that choice, she attended community college full-time and worked part-time. "I had to pay for [college] myself; I realized I had to get it together." She attended four different community colleges for three years before transferring to WSU, where she lived in on-campus housing. Although the cost of attending WSU made it difficult for her to balance work and school, she took pride in her ability to maintain a 3.5 GPA

and work 30 hours a week off-campus to pay her expenses. Helen graduated as a Liberal Studies major and planned to work with children after college.

Jaime. Jaime is a 24-year-old, second-generation Mexican American. Both of his parents were born and raised in Mexico and immigrated to the United States. Because they had no formal education, both worked in agriculture. Jaime is the youngest of five children and has always strived to be like his brothers and sisters, who are 10 years older than he. His parents separated before Jaime entered high school, "...which left my mother and I to struggle on our own since my other siblings were away at college or had their own families to support." After he graduated from high school, Jaime's sister encouraged him to attend community college. "She was a role model to me...so I listened to her about going to college." However, realizing that his "...personal life was really out-of-whack" and he was missing classes "...because [he] couldn't keep balance [in his life]," Jaime moved out of his mother's home and moved-in with his older sister. Thereafter, he continued to attend college with a renewed focus. Working 30 hours a week and attending classes full-time, Jaime transferred to WSU after attending two different community colleges. He commuted to WSU while working full-time off-campus and part-time on-campus, and maintained a GPA over 3.0 as an Urban Studies and Planning major. After graduation, Jaime planned to work full-time.

Javier. Javier grew up in a blended family, and has always been close to his mother, who had custody of him from 15 years old. After high school, he tried attending community college, but dropped three out of four classes during his first semester. "I felt like, alright, maybe this isn't for me, first semester you fail, drop out of three classes, it's kind of a bummer." After taking time away to work full-time, Javier ultimately enrolled again, passing a few classes

and failing others. However, as he began to pass more classes, his confidence grew and he realized he could transfer. After attending community college for seven years, Javier transferred to WSU, and maintained a 3.0 GPA as a Cinema major while he continued to work full-time and commute to campus. Javier is a 30 year-old, first-generation college student who planned to work after graduation.

Jazmin. Jazmin immigrated to the United States from Mexico with her mother and sister, and self-identifies as an undocumented student. “When I was nine, my mom, sister, and I moved to [city name] with my aunt, uncle and cousins...we moved there because my mom didn’t have any opportunities in Mexico.” After high school, Jazmin felt discouraged and lost about attending college because she did not feel that her school’s academic counselor supported her. “I told one counselor that I was undocumented, but she didn’t know how to help me.” Jazmin worked part-time after high school before she decided she needed to go to community college. “I figured this is the whole point of us moving to this country. I can’t just let it all go to waste because I’m feeling discouraged or not supported.” In 2011, she attended community college, making sure to keep her undocumented status to herself. It was not until 2013 that Jazmin stopped being fearful of being deported because she was granted a level of asylum under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrives (DACA) policy. She worked part-time on- and off-campus, and attended college largely full-time. She transferred to WSU after spending three years in community college. Although she lived with her parents, commuted four hours a day round-trip to campus, and often worked multiple jobs off-campus, Jazmin maintained a GPA above 3.5. Jazmin is a Humanities major and planned to attend graduate school after graduation.

Joaquin. Joaquin is 25 and the oldest of three children. Joaquin grew up in southern California. His mother, a naturalized citizen from Mexico, has a high school degree, and his father, who is seeking citizenship, completed 8th grade in Mexico. Joaquin attended community college for four years before transferring to WSU, and was employed between 20-30 hours a week off-campus consistently. While living on-campus at WSU, he maintained a GPA above 3.0 as an International Relations major. After graduation, Joaquin planned to work full time in law enforcement.

Joseph. Joseph described himself as a “first-generation immigrant.” He and his parents and older sister immigrated to the United States from Peru. Both his parents and sister attended community college, but only his father transferred and graduated from a university. Seeing his father struggle to find employment after the recession in 2009 only confirmed his determination to go to college. “Seeing my parents as immigrants essentially be casualties of the recession really solidified the idea of me going to college. It was like I have to go to college. I will face certain economic doom if I don’t.” Working part-time and largely attending community college full-time for four years, Joseph was determined to transfer and leave his home town. “I decided that I had to get out of there if I wanted to make something of myself.” While attending WSU, Joseph lived in on-campus housing and worked 30 hours a week off-campus. He maintained a 3.4 GPA at WSU and graduated with a degree in Business Marketing. He planned to work after college.

Juanita. Juanita is 24, the youngest of three children, and identifies as a Mexican American. Her father immigrated to the US from Mexico during the 1970s, while her mother is a second-generation Mexican American. While she was enrolled in community college largely

full-time for three years, she worked part-time until she transferred ultimately to WSU as a Health Education major. Juanita maintained a GPA above 3.0 while living at home with her parents, commuting to campus, and working part-time. She planned to continue her education after graduation by applying to graduate school.

Liz. Liz is a 24 year-old, first-generation, Mexican-American who grew up in southern California. She has always had a fascination with learning. “From the time I was young, I was so in love with school.” She always wanted to attend a university, but enrolled first in a community college because it was more affordable than any four-year institution. Liz attended community college for four years before transferring to WSU. Moving out of the house for the first time was a challenging experience for her, but Liz was excited about being on her own in a new city. She worked two part-time jobs to cover her living expenses, and maintained a GPA over 3.0 while attending WSU. Liz is an American Studies major who planned to attend graduate school after graduation.

Noemi. Noemi is a 27 year-old, first-generation, Mexican-American who grew up in southern California. The oldest of two siblings, she describes herself as being very family oriented. She attended community college for five years and became engaged during that time. Noemi transferred to WSU, where she and her fiancé live off-campus. She maintained a GPA above 3.5 as a Psychology major while balancing long commutes to campus and part-time employment, and planned to attend graduate school after graduation.

Norma. Although Norma’s parents did not stress the importance of attending college, she always knew she wanted to go. However, not having a clear idea about what she wanted to study after high school, she enrolled in the local community college first. After attending the

college for five years, Norma transferred to WSU as a Business Management major. Norma lived with her parents and younger sister at home and commuted to WSU for her final two years in college. At 24 years-old, Norma is proud to be the first person in her family to graduate from college.

Oscar. Oscar is the middle child of three siblings whose parents immigrated to the United States from El Salvador. His mother has a high school degree and his father graduated college in El Salvador. Oscar attended community college because it was less expensive than a university, and lived at home and worked part-time. He attended community college for four years before transferring to WSU, during which time he continued to live with his parents and commute to campus. Oscar also worked part-time while attending WSU. He maintained a 2.9 GPA and majored in Liberal Studies. Oscar planned to work in law enforcement after graduation.

Pamela. Pamela is 22 years old and the oldest of five siblings who immigrated to the United States from Mexico with their parents. Before moving to the US, Pamela's father graduated from a university in Mexico. Pamela always knew she wanted to go to college, and decided to attend community college because she did not know what she wanted to study. She lived at home and worked part-time during the three years she attended community college before transferring to WSU as an Early Childhood Education major. She lived at home for the first semester after she transferred, but moved to on-campus housing for the remainder of her time at WSU. Pamela maintained a GPA above 3.0 at WSU and after graduation, she planned to work for several years before attending graduate school.

Pixie. Pixie is a 28 year-old Mexican American from Northern California who has two siblings. Her older sister did not attend college, and her younger brother is in grade school. She worked part-time while attending community college, and was enrolled for five years as a part-time student. Ultimately, she transferred to WSU, where she was an Early Childhood Education major and attended classes full-time. Pixie maintained a 3.7 GPA while attending WSU, and balanced a 40-minute commute to campus and full-time employment. She planned to work before attending graduate school.

Raquel. Raquel immigrated to the US with her family when she was 13, and identifies as El Salvadorian and Dominican. Her mother never obtained a post-secondary degree, while her father completed college in El Salvador. Raquel is the eldest of four biological siblings and two stepsiblings. “I had to help out [my mom] a lot,” she recalled. As the oldest child, she often helped her mother, who was a housekeeper while Raquel was in high school. She enrolled in community college after high school, but dropped out shortly thereafter. “I got pregnant, married at 19, had three young children by the age of 24,” she stated, which made it difficult for her to continue school. However, after she divorced at 26 and became a single parent, “School was suddenly the only way I thought I could give myself and my kids a better chance at a better life.” With her parents’ support, Raquel worked full-time and attended community college for six years part-time, graduating Magna Cum Laude. She transferred to WSU and commuted to campus as a part-time student. Raquel continued to work full-time while maintaining a 3.7 GPA as a Sociology major. After graduation, she planned to attend graduate school.

Susana. Susana is a 23 year-old Mexican American from southern California, and the youngest of four siblings. Although only one of her older sisters has a post-secondary degree,

she always knew she wanted to go to college. “For as long as I can remember, that’s what I wanted to do. Before anyone told me that was the right thing to do, that’s what I wanted to do.” As she was not accepted directly at any four-year universities after high school, she attended community college for three years, and declared as a Communications major when she transferred to WSU. She moved into on-campus housing, and worked continuously both on- and off-campus while maintaining a GPA over 3.0. Susana planned to work after graduating.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Age	Generation Status	Years at Community College	Major	After Graduation
Helen	23	1st Gen.	3	Liberal Studies	Work
Jaime	24	n/a	4	Urban Studies	Work
Javier	30	1st Gen.	7	Cinema	Work
Jazmin	22	1st Gen.	3	Humanities	Grad. School
Joaquin	25	1st Gen.	4	Int. Relations	Work
Joseph	24	n/a	4	Business	Work
Juanita	24	1st Gen.	3	Health Education	Grad. School
Liz	24	1st Gen.	4	American Studies	Grad. School
Noemi	27	n/a	5	Psychology	Grad. School
Norma	24	1st Gen.	5	Business	Work
Oscar	26	n/a	4	Liberal Studies	Work
Pamela	22	1st Gen.	3	Psychology	Grad. School
Pixie	28	1st Gen.	5	Early Childhood Ed.	Work
Raquel	37	1st Gen.	6	Sociology	Grad. School
Susana	23	1st Gen.	3	Communications	Work

Thematic Results

The findings were derived primarily from participant interviews. Codes and subsequent themes were identified initially using *a priori* coding, after which I developed second- and third-level codes with inductive and deductive approaches. Patterns that linked their experiences

emerged across interviews, and also referenced the study's research question, how do successful Latinx students navigate two- and four-year postsecondary institutions towards degree attainment? I analyzed the interviews further in the context of the conceptual framework, which assumed that successful Latinx transfer students would confront four primary barriers, as identified in Padilla et al.'s (1997) work: discontinuity, lack of nurturing, lack of presence, and resources. Because they confronted these obstacles, students also would employ facets of Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth model to transfer successfully and ultimately obtain degrees.

Through the process of member checking, I shared codes with external researchers unassociated with the study to confirm the saliency of the codes developed. Moreover, I shared the preliminary analysis of the findings with several participants to ensure further that the interpretations were accurate. Finally, I used supplemental sources of data collected, such as student surveys and staff interviews to compare, crosscheck, and corroborate student experiences to increase the reliability and accuracy of study. The following sections present two major themes. The first describes the challenges students confronted based on Padilla et al.'s (1997) conceptual framework, while the second describes their successes in navigating those obstacles to transfer and degree attainment.

Challenges in Degree Attainment

Students experienced a multitude of challenges in obtaining their degrees. Participants identified several on- and off-campus obstacles they encountered while attending community college and WSU. Although Padilla et al.'s (1997) work described four obstacles successful students confront while attending college, students in this study encountered the "lack of presence" barrier rarely. Thus, they did not express feelings of cultural or racial isolation, or the

absence of minority role models while attending community college or WSU. Pamela's quote when talking about the WSU student body captures these sentiments best: "Since WSU is a very diverse community, I felt accepted because there's always different clubs and people who are not going to be judgmental toward you because you're Latina. So, I felt accepted and acknowledged." However, students did confront the remaining three challenges, lack of nurturing, discontinuity, and resources.

The following section is organized utilizing Padilla et al.'s (1997) barriers as thematic headers. Each includes supporting subsections that speak to obstacles students confronted while attending community college or WSU. The first theme, lack of nurturing, centered on students' experiences with academic counselors and the difficult choices they made to continue pursuing their academic goals. Several students were concerned about the lack of support they received from counselors, while others faced challenges with their social environments off-campus. Discontinuity, the second theme, highlighted the challenges of being a commuter student and the way in which that affected their ability to engage in on-campus activities. This section also includes experiences students shared about the way in which their need to support their families financially conflicted with their academic goals. Finally, students reflected on the way in which finances shaped their choices in pursuing their education, which corresponds with Padilla et al.'s final barrier, resources.

Lack of Nurturing

Students experienced diminished levels of support on- and off-campus. Although the literature suggests that meeting with academic counselors increases the probability of student success (Rhine et al., 2000), seven students interviewed recounted unfavorable experiences when

meeting with their community college and four-year university counselors. These included students feeling that their counselors were impersonal and inaccessible, and lacked technical knowledge about academic planning. However, not all students had these negative experiences. Positive experiences often focused on the way in which counselors facilitated their progress in transferring to a four-year college by helping them obtain financial aid and select colleges, or encouraging them to persist despite certain challenges. These positive experiences and others are discussed further in the next overarching theme, as students indicated that they facilitated their persistence. In addition to challenging experiences with counselors, students also spoke about obstacles they confronted off-campus. These stories focused on students' social environments, including family and friends.

Lack of consistency. Raquel was 37 and a mother of three when she entered community college 10 years after she graduated high school, and attended part-time for six years before transferring. When she met with community college counselors, Raquel indicated that they were not as helpful as she wanted them to be. "Some of them weren't very knowledgeable or helpful, or some of them seemed to be a little fresh, so they didn't have a lot of input." When probed further, she recalled:

I think I got the feeling that they didn't realize what you were really trying to pursue. I didn't just want to graduate, I wanted to do something that inspired me to do better and learn more about certain areas of my own life...so I think sometimes they just try to tell you, here are the classes you need, here you go and just sign off.

Raquel was seeking not only educational guidance, but direction about the way in which to fulfill herself through her academic pursuits. Similarly, Juanita did not like attending counseling appointments because they seemed impersonal. Counseling sessions at her community college were conducted by drop-in appointment. She disliked the lack of

consistency, as she met with a different counselor each time. She wanted to ensure that she was still on track prior to transfer, and recalled:

I just wanted to make sure I was on track and the counselor was kind of pessimistic overall. She was just like with your GPA you'll never be able to transfer to [university name]. You should consider transferring to another place or basically telling me to set my expectations lower. I just felt like that was a negative experience for me, so I never went back to the counseling and advising center.

Helen stopped meeting with her community college counselor for seemingly opposite reasons than Raquel and Juanita. Helen was determined to get in and out of college as soon as possible, and did not particularly need the holistic counseling approach that previous participants valued. She reflected:

I think at community college they didn't see me as somebody who wanted to get out and finish. They wanted me to better myself. And I didn't see the point in that. I thought why not do it both simultaneously and get something out of it and not just a lot of soul searching.

Although Helen was required to meet with her counselor every semester, she indicated that she received accurate information rarely, reaffirming again why she did not seek additional advice from her counselors.

Diminished support. Pamela and Joaquin had negative experiences primarily at their four-year institutions, where they felt they had less counselor support compared to their previous community college experiences. After meeting with her academic counselor at her four-year institution, Pamela felt like she had wasted her time. She had anticipated a thorough conversation about her academic pursuits; however, she only received a brief tutorial about how to look up classes by herself and was sent on her way. Comparing the differences between his community college and four-year university, Joaquin noted the inability to ask a counselor follow-up questions except during an annual consultation.

If I had any questions as to what does this look like or what am I doing or how am I supposed to get to this place, that wasn't as available as it was in my community college, so that was a very stark difference.

Joseph's unfavorable experiences derived from his counselor's inaccessibility. Joseph was often pressed for time, as he was enrolled full-time and worked nearly 30 hours a week. However, even if he was able to set time aside, he felt it was still impossible to reach anyone, either at his community college or four-year institution. Joseph lamented:

It's impossible to get a hold of any of these people at my community college, and at WSU. These administrators are quite frankly subpar as far as the services they provide and hoops you have to jump through to come into contact with them, and even if you come into contact with them, the help that they offer is marginal at best.

Critical decisions. While several students faced challenging experiences with their academic counselors, four found that the environments outside the classroom inhibited their personal development while attending community college. The men in the study spoke about conflicts they faced in social situations, while the women spoke of a need to strike out on their own and be independent of their families. Joseph felt that his friendships were running their course, and he experienced increasing conflict between his views and those of his family. He recalled feeling, "Everything was collapsing around in on itself and that [he] had to get out and start anew." He felt an increased urgency to "...complete [his] community college education and transfer immediately before something really bad happened." Similarly, Jaime felt his "...personal life was really out-of-whack." His mother had remarried recently and he was dedicating more hours to work rather than school to help support his family, which did not sit well with him. "That was kind of the tipping point for me where I decided I needed to move away from [city]." Both participants made the decision to remove themselves completely from their current situations to continue their academic pursuits.

Susana and Helen spoke of becoming more independent of their families, as they felt inhibited by familial ties. Helen felt sheltered and wanted to show herself that she could make it on her own without her parents' financial support, while Susana, the youngest in her family, wished to prove her independence from her family. The two women mentioned that both of their families had trouble understanding their perspective at first, but ultimately they knew their families supported them, even if they did not always say so. Susana's quote describes these women's thoughts best:

I felt like I wanted to do something that's kind of different from what everyone else has done...I wanted to do something that was going to make everyone really proud of me. But also know that I was going to be able to do it for myself and make myself proud at the end of the day too.

Although each of the experiences described above presents a slightly different perspective of the two different types of institutions, the common thread was perceived lack of support or understanding. At the community college, Raquel, Juanita, and Helen were disappointed either by the counselors' lack of interpersonal communication or their technical knowledge. Their inability to understand the students' individual needs, whether they were a holistic counseling approach or simply technical feedback, reduced students' willingness to seek additional advice and left them feeling that they lacked an institutionalized support structure. Negative experiences at WSU focused on access and support. These students had positive experiences while attending community college, and expressed collectively that their academic advisors were not only sources of information, but advocates as well. After transferring, however, that level of support was notably absent. Several students also spoke about off-campus obstacles. The men faced challenging environments that they believed were toxic, while the women chose to move away from home to foster their independence from their families.

Regardless of their reasons, they made both sets of decisions during the transfer process, and felt a need to remove themselves from their current situations because of their families and friends' lack of support or understanding.

Discontinuity

This barrier focused on experiences students had while transitioning from community college to WSU, and coming to terms with having to balance various obligations while attending school. The students had to balance three interrelated responsibilities. First, they shared an increased responsibility to help their families financially. Although the participants acknowledged overwhelmingly that their families contributed to their persistence, which will be addressed further in subsequent sections, contributing financially to help support them disrupted some students' progress. Second, work became a constant feature for the students because they needed to finance their education, as well as support their families in some cases. However, work also compromised students' ability to engage on campus, even for those who lived in university housing. Finally, commuting added an additional layer of complexity to many students' balancing act. Sixty percent of them lived off-campus, such that several of those same students commuted more than two hours round-trip to WSU. Working, attending classes, and commuting to school and work stole precious hours from each day, and affected students' ability to devote sufficient time to their studies and participate in on-campus activities.

Family. Students talked rarely about the burden of helping their families. Instead, they discussed the challenges of balancing their ability to contribute to their families financially and attend college. Joaquin, Liz, and Pixie stated that work became more important than school. Joaquin's father in particular pushed him to work rather than attend classes to help support the

family. Joaquin remembered him saying, “Either you contribute to this family and you help out, or you don’t live here.” Joaquin was conflicted about the ultimatum. “Because one, I’m trying to be a better student than I was in high school and two, having to work on the side and deal with that emotional stressor at home.” Joaquin picked up additional hours, but also resorted to using part of his financial aid package to help his family. Joaquin reflected:

I wasn’t making that much [money] in the store because it was minimum wage and I only worked 20 hours a week, but I also got some FAFSA money for books and things like that. And I did more than half the time use that money, to help out my family during this slump of sorts.

Liz and Pixie also described that they felt compelled to work more hours rather than focus on their studies because of family influences. Liz shared that she believed her family expected more from her, which she translated as picking up more shifts at work to help them. Working became a higher priority for Pixie when her family began to experience financial hardship. Not surprisingly, increasing the hours they worked affected Liz and Pixie’s schooling adversely. Liz’s thoughts capture their combined sentiments best:

It felt like my family and work were more important than my school and I was letting it happen. So you would see it in my grades. They would start to slip down and I would be like it’s fine, next time. Whenever they needed me at work, there were a couple of weeks when I would go in full-time and just forget about schoolwork.

Work. All students in the study balanced employment and attending college. While work helped them cover various expenses associated with attending college and supporting their families, it also limited their opportunities to engage on campus. Because she had to work full-time to support her daughters, Raquel intentionally picked classes each semester that required her to be on-campus the fewest number of days so she could continue to work. This allowed her to save money on gas, parking, and other costs. “I was basically just a commuter student. I would

come here, park my car, walk to class, be done with class, hop in my car and drive back” she recalled. She elaborated further about a conversation she had with a classmate who asked:

You don’t know that the mall is right up the street? You don’t know that we have a pool or a gym?’ And I am like, nope. I never spent enough time here on campus to figure out where anything was...I just don’t have enough time to be here that long.

Work also affected students who lived on campus. Three of five who lived at WSU did not engage on campus because their stories were similar to those of commuter students. Joseph and Helen each spoke to me about their reasons for not engaging in student organizations.

Joseph explained that he did not have the luxury to participate in clubs because he had to work:

I realize this is a bit cynical, but I feel like a lot of the people who are involved in anything campus related and social activities on campus are the people who are privileged enough to not have to work during college...working during school has definitely inhibited me from making connections.

Similarly, Helen prioritized working and attending classes as more important than participating in clubs. As she worked full-time, like the majority of the participants in the study, Helen planned her classes around her work schedule, and anything that conflicted with those two priorities was set aside. “Most of the time the classes or groups are at 5:00 pm on a Tuesday, which is when I worked or had lecture...I’d rather be able to pay for rent or go to my lecture than make some friends.”

Commuting. Students commuted to campus between 40–120 minutes one-way. This did not include any additional commutes students had to make to their places of employment, which primarily were off-campus. Because she was unable to afford to move closer to WSU, Jazmin lived at home like many of the other participants. In working 15-20 hours a week, being enrolled full-time, and commuting approximately four hours a day round-trip, Jazmin

underestimated the effects of commuting on her other responsibilities. She described that commuting to campus began to wear on her:

Sometimes after school, I would have the closing shift at work, then get up early the next morning and do it all over again. That was really hard. That was extremely hard. That actually got to my schooling. And that's what I was saying that my quality and the hours that I put into school at WSU kind of diminished at one point. And I actually thought I was just going to give up.

While commuting affected the quality hours Jazmin could dedicate to her homework, Juanita spoke about the way in which commuting affected her ability to engage socially on campus. "Going to WSU I have not been involved in extracurricular [activities] just because of how long it takes me to get to campus." Jaime, who participated in on-campus clubs at community college, described his experiences with commuting. "Commuting like two hours by bus or train I would get to the apartment, I would just make some food, relax at the house and sleep. I spent a lot of time working or simply just getting to class." Commuting not only affected students' ability to participate in extracurricular activities, but also to take advantage of support services. Juanita explained:

It's just difficult when you're commuting to really take advantage of those things. There's times when I have wanted to go to the career center or to say like counseling and psychological support services when I was dealing with a lot of stuff. But I couldn't because their hours are kind of limited and it was difficult commuting all the time because sometimes my classes would be at night so I never really took advantage of those services like I should have. It's just kind of hard.

This barrier focused on the difficulty some students had balancing three competing needs, contributing financially to their families, working, and commuting. The survey students filled out indicated that most households (80%) had incomes less than \$48,000 a year, which supported the notion that financial responsibilities were an ever-present concern in students' daily lives. Working helped students support their families and pay supplemental costs for college, but time

spent at work also affected their ability to engage in co-curricular activities. This was even true for students who lived on campus. Among those who lived off-campus, the combination of commuting, working, and attending classes strained their ability to succeed. Overall, students confronted isolated obstacles rarely while attending college. Instead, they faced multiple overlapping or conflicting problems that all required a level of attention and time.

Resources

Financial concerns were a consistent topic across the participant interviews. The ability to pay tuition and fees was a primary factor that influenced many students' decision to attend community college rather than enter a four-year institution immediately after high school. Costs, such as those expenses not covered by financial aid, also weighed heavily on participants as they attended community college. Moreover, financial concerns also affected students' decisions during the transfer process and while attending WSU. For example, the increased cost of attendance at universities caused some students to self-select out of their first-choice institutions. Moreover, once enrolled, the stress of not having resources available readily compelled students strongly to work more hours, take out additional loans, or scale back their already limited means further to continue going to college.

Choosing community college. Several students discussed why they chose to attend community college, rather than entering a four-year institution right away. It was not Liz's first choice after high school, but when she realized the costs associated with attending a four-year university, she opted ultimately to enroll at the local community college.

It was my second choice to enroll in community college. I originally intended to go to Cal State Northridge. What stopped me was the tuition. I did not know, neither did my parents, how to manage FAFSA. So it seemed like I was not going to get any tuition help at all. So that's why I enrolled in the community college. Because it was financially

accessible at the time. That was mostly why. And it was really close to where I was living at the time.

Several other students also expressed similar sentiments. Pamela believed it was the best way to save money and explore different classes for less money, as she was not set on a particular major. Oscar chose the community college route "...because it was a lot cheaper and because the people at high school were telling me that I could transfer into a four-year if that was my goal." Also reflecting on his community college experience, Joseph was happy that he decided to attend his local community college because of the money he saved. He stated, "I would have been paying way more for my General Ed classes than I have done and I would have been in way more debt. So I'm glad I did."

Cost of attendance at WSU. The ability to pay for college also influenced the choices students made about where to attend when they prepared to transfer from their community colleges. Pamela and Jazmin were accepted at several colleges, but concerns about their ability to pay the increased costs limited their transfer options significantly. Pamela was accepted at seven different universities. However, she chose to attend WSU because it was the most economically reasonable option. Jazmin was accepted at five different schools, but delayed transferring because she did not realize the level of increased costs in addition to tuition. She explained:

It kinda bummed me out, the fact that I applied to so many schools and I got into all of them and then I couldn't because I thought, how am I going to pay for it...how am I going to pay for my living expenses there? It was overwhelming, feeling unsupported.

Ultimately, she narrowed her selection only to WSU because she felt more comfortable with the cost. Juanita always planned to move out of her parent's house and attend college in a different part of the state; however, she knew if she did, her parents would stop providing her

with financial support. “My parents and I would argue about it a lot” she recalled. Although disappointed that she was unable to move out, Juanita still made the best of her situation and looked forward optimistically to transferring.

In addition to tuition, the increased financial burden associated with attending a four-year university became clear during the transfer orientation, as Joaquin explained. He attended with his mother, and felt the stress of choosing whether he should purchase the class schedule booklet at the university. “Why should I have to buy something extra to try to succeed in your school?” he remembered thinking. He wanted to buy the booklet to ensure he was moving in the right direction, but he did not have the resources to purchase it. “I wanted to [purchase the booklet], but at the same time, I was like ‘why do I have to buy something else from you if you already have my tuition?’”

The gap in financial aid, or “unmet need,” the difference between the cost of attending university and what financial aid covers, was a significant reason why students worked while attending the four-year institution. The pre-interview survey suggested that the majority increased to working almost full-time, unlike they had while attending their community colleges. Since he enrolled in the university, “Not working has not been an option,” Joseph said. Taking out loans was a “disaster” at the time for him, because this was the first time financial aid would not cover all his costs. “So I have to work to pay for my living expenses and pay for my transportation costs and pay for my groceries and stuff.” Like Joseph, after essential costs were covered by financial aid, Joaquin had very little to use for food while living in university housing. He recalled:

The loans that I got covered the housing and they covered the meals, but the plan that I could afford was the five meals a week thing. I did have some savings and I survived off

those for a bit. But even then it was a very Spartan existence.

Susana and Norma also indicated that they needed to work increased hours while attending university. Susana sought more hours constantly, while, to keep up with daily necessities, Norma was unable to go home during breaks from college. They noted:

Norma: I was never able to go home. I didn't even go home for Thanksgiving or Christmas, which was kind of depressing and so when I was at work, working those holidays making the most money because that's when you make your money, it was a little depressing.

Susana: I've had a job this whole time that I've been in school now. And I've had to work so much more than I ever thought I would during this time of school...I'm calling to pick up more hours, as many as I can.

Meeting financial responsibilities often dictated the students' choices. Finances were never far from their minds, as they influenced their choices to enroll in community college, select a transfer university, and manage the increased costs of attendance. Because they needed money, students had to minimize their expenses. This was illustrated in the student survey, which indicated that all study participants worked either part- or full-time, and 67% of them increased their hours of employment after they transferred to WSU. Nevertheless, however challenging their experiences, students did not allow the lack of support and resources, or discontinuity to prohibit them from transferring and graduating from WSU. Relying on a personal set of skills, students in the study navigated the challenges described previously as they worked their way to graduation.

Successes

All of the students in the study transferred vertically from their community colleges and graduated from WSU successfully. They were able to navigate both educational systems because of their ability to circumvent various obstacles, as described above. Moving forward,

this theme focuses on students' abilities to surmount obstacles using various intrinsic techniques. Rebutting deficit narratives that suggest that Latinx students, together with other students of color, generally lack the ability to succeed in higher education, I have presented various narratives that illustrated these students' unwavering resolve to complete their degrees. The first section describes the way in which several students used knowledge developed while attending community college to ensure their success at WSU. The second section focuses on students' ingenuity. Informed by Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth, I identified several approaches students used in their academic pursuits. For example, they spoke about the way in which mentors and friends helped them navigate institutional systems and structures. Students sought out mentors intentionally to help them choose classes, and understand the transfer and financial aid processes. The final theme focuses on the positive interactions students had with external support networks, such as campus stakeholders, friends, and institutional support services, all of which provided emotional support, camaraderie, and guidance.

Skill Acquisition

When I asked study participants if they experienced any academic, social, and/or financial obstacles when they first transitioned to WSU, students largely expressed the increased burdens associated with social engagement and financial obligations, as discussed in the previous themes. Interested in understanding why participants rarely included academics as a challenge, I inquired further about the experiences, if any, they had while attending their community college that helped them integrate successfully into academics at WSU.

Participants most often referred to community college as a "training ground" where they refined the skills necessary to be successful in college. Joseph described his community college

as a place where he grew and developed. “I learned to be independent and do things on my own and it’s also where I developed some sort of work ethic.” Fourteen of the students discussed acquiring time management and classroom skills, and growing personally while attending two-year institutions.

Time management. Students described honing their skills in time management in various ways. Norma talked about her ability to “better control her time,” while Jazmin talked about multitasking. As a self-described procrastinator, Oscar told me his time at community college helped him improve his time management skills so that he completed his homework on time. He recalled:

I worked 75% of the time at WSU. So time management was extremely valuable for me. I learned that I was a procrastinator [at community college] so I just always made sure [at WSU] I had time to get that assignment done and just make sure that the day before was absolutely clear...I wasn’t going to play around. I was able to get all my assignments done because of the time management I learned at City College.

Liz explained she was able to handle a full schedule at WSU better because of her time at community college. “In my community college, I had full-time school, a part-time job, and then my family dynamic. It taught me how to find the balance among those three things that I brought back over here [WSU].” Pamela also talked about learning balance while attending community college.

When I was in community college, I had to have a job. So I had to make sure that I was making enough time to study so I can still have a social life. So I definitely feel like time management did carry over into WSU.

Becoming a student again. Several students expressed that attending community college helped them gain an increased sense of awareness and become better students. Juanita, Norma, and Joseph each attended community college directly after high school and experienced a sense of personal growth. Juanita and Norma shared that attending their two-year institutions

allowed them to explore different courses and identify their interests, which aided them in their unwavering academic pursuits after transferring to WSU. Feeling like she "...blossomed in a lot of different ways," Juanita told me her time at community college was a "...huge period of growth for [her] to figure out what [she's] interested in and passionate about." Similarly, Norma talked about knowing herself better. "So I think it was just like self-awareness...I felt like it [community college] helped me know, and understand what I want to do, and who I want to be as a person."

Joseph experienced a "watershed moment" while attending his two-year institution. In high school, Joseph was not greatly interested in academics. He indicated that he was a good student, but did not have a clear idea of what he wanted to pursue after high school. However, attending community college changed his outlook. When asked to elaborate, Joseph shared:

I learned what I wanted to do with my life, I learned what I wanted to do with my career, and I learned why I wanted to do it. I would say that I learned what works best for me on academic terms before then, I didn't know. Community college was really the first place where I felt like I was inspired to do my work and do it well and feel like I was actually doing it for me, and not the school.

Several other students gave specific examples of the way in which their time at community college supported their academic successes by helping them improve their writing abilities, study skills, and ways in which to become a better student. Recalling that each of his classes included a writing component, Oscar, a Liberal Studies major, expressed that honing his writing skills at community college afforded him the "confidence to write" and pass each of the writing assignments in his classes. Pamela talked about becoming more comfortable using word processing applications in community college, which she said she used more often at WSU. Susana and Helen learned that high school was very different from college. Attending

community college taught them the importance of study skills that they used subsequently while attending WSU. Susana's quote exemplifies their sentiments best:

I don't think that before entering [community college] I had ever really studied before. Throughout high school, I never had to try to get good grades. But when I went to community college, I realized I actually do have to sit down and study for midterms and finals; that's basically what your grades depend on. If you do bad on midterms now at WSU, you're done for...I feel like coming to WSU I'd already got the hang of that and knew what to do. Whereas, I think if I had just started here [WSU], I would have wasted a lot of time trying to get in the groove of it.

Analogous to Susana's story, Raquel expressed appreciation for attending community college after leaving for several years. Attending community college allowed her to "relearn" how to become a good student. She shared:

It gave me a chance to catch up and freshen up and sort of relearn some of those things I had probably never learned in high school or kind of lost along the way...gaining confidence in my writing, reading and critical thinking skills, being able to talk in class. I think after being gone for four years, was kind of a little stepping stone for me...if I had thought, 'I'll just go to a four-year college and see how it goes,' it probably wouldn't have been the best thing for me.

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that their time at community college supported their continued success at WSU. Attending community college before transferring to WSU afforded participants an opportunity to find their academic passion, improve upon their time management abilities, and fine-tune their study skills, all of which they used while attending WSU. Curious to know whether students would portray community colleges in a negative light because of the loss of credits they experienced, I found that the majority were unconcerned about their loss of academic credits. Raquel had an excess of 119 units, as indicated on her pre-interview survey, but stated that she learned a little something from each class and does not regret accumulating all of the units. Liz knew she would only be able to transfer approximately 60 units, but stated, "I did spend 3 ½ years at my community college, so it was fine."

Using Capital

I identified numerous examples of Yosso's (2005) work in which students used community cultural wealth to help them throughout their educational journey. Most often, when students were asked about what motivated them to succeed, they included their families. They indicated that they often relied on their families' encouragement when the odds of success were stacked against them while attending community college and WSU. I categorized these stories as familial capital. Familial ties also were evident in experiences I recognized in aspirational capital. However, through this form of capital, students used their desire to provide a better life for their parents, for example, as a steadfast goal to strive for during difficult times. I also identified elements of resistance capital, or behavior that is grounded in determination to combat opposing forces, in that several participants talked about overcoming challenging experiences with academic counselors. Finally, students often relied on peer-to-peer networks or social capital to traverse their campus experiences. They also employed pooled social capital, which helped them expand their navigational capital to build relationships with campus stakeholders (e.g., academic counselors and faculty), which, in turn, helped them learn about the transfer process, financial aid, and other opportunities.

Familial capital. Words of affirmation from family, including significant others, seemed to be steady sources of encouragement upon which participants relied during their two- and four-year college experiences. The majority of participants talked about their families' support. Students took comfort in the words people close to them shared when they were feeling stressed, challenged by academic courses, or overwhelmed with responsibilities. Pixie and Jaime relied on their networks of family and friends to encourage them emotionally. Pixie talked about the

way in which the people close to her always gave her words of encouragement through challenging times. Pixie reflected:

My family. My friends. The close friends I do have. They've always been there to support me and help me through when I felt like I was stressed. They're like 'You got it, you can do it, you've been doing so good. We know you can do this, just keep pushing through this, you're almost done.' The small group of people that I feel helped me, it's a small group, but they've been there.

Jaime received encouragement primarily from his older sister. "She was the main battery pack in the back of my head telling me to keep going." He talked to me about the conversations they had together with respect to the struggles of being a person of color and how important it was to succeed after first transferring to WSU. "They would give me pep talks on the phone...and my sister would talk to me about how people of color have to work twice as hard in order to get to be successful in America." Internalizing this struggle, Jaime eventually felt he could accomplish anything, despite the challenges, because he began to believe in himself.

The year before I had been really supported by my family and friends, they made me feel like I could really do anything academically...I just believed I could do it, [I just] had to take the time and complete the work.

Oscar, Joaquin, and Noemi indicated that words of encouragement or support reduced their stress. They recalled that their significant others helped push them when they needed a little extra assistance. Noemi's boyfriend helped her study by making flash cards for her and testing her before important exams, while Oscar's girlfriend was the voice of reason when he did not want to complete homework assignments. However, Joaquin's quote captures best the way in which significant others helped: "In regard to my girlfriend, if I have a bad day, she's someone that I can vent to or that I trust and I know is going to want to help me in any regard."

Aspirational capital. Being a role model, defying the odds, and using their families as sources of strength all motivated participants to persevere. With respect to the latter, although the topic of family resurfaced in this form of capital, it presented differently. As such, students who employed aspirational capital spoke of their desire to finish college to reward their parents for the sacrifices they made for them, rather than using their family's words of encouragement as a source of support as described above.

Raquel was compelled to succeed because she wanted to be a role model for her children. As a single mother with three children, she believed that going to school was the only way to give her and them a better chance in life. "It's hard being a woman, it's hard being a woman of color, and being a woman of color who is also lesbian is even harder." She went on to say that, although she has had to make numerous sacrifices to graduate, she is proud she can, "...show them [her children] that it is possible to get through school and get an education."

Several participants who had siblings also felt the sense of being a role model, a strong feeling that came across clearly as a source of motivation for such participants. Noemi, Liz, and Joaquin, for example, each expressed the way in which their current experiences in college would benefit their brothers and sisters later, because they would share their knowledge with them. "I want to show her that she can also succeed if she really wants to" Noemi reflected. Liz also shared that being able to help her sisters motivated her:

I want to do this so she knows that she can do it and I'm going to be there to help her do it. Because I had that experience. Growing up my mom always told me 'You're her mirror' so whatever I do, she's going to do. That's something that still motivates me.

Several students also spoke about altruistic motivations. Joaquin was inspired by a conversation he had with a campus mentor while attending community college. While

participating in the Equal Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) learning community, Joaquin became close to his advisor, who spoke openly about the low rates of Latino men who succeed in college. Learning this not only strengthened further his desire to succeed, but also to be an example of perseverance for his younger siblings. He recounted:

One of the things that makes me want to graduate from college is the fact that [advisor name] gave me that statistic and on that end, I am trying to show that people of color can and will succeed in this environment and it's important for me to do this because it's upsetting that statistic...I'm also influencing my siblings that are behind me because I'm the first born to be capable of doing this and to go outside their comfort zone and to really try.

Liz, Joseph, and Pixie also credited their parents for motivating them to succeed. Liz wanted to show her parents primarily that "...all the sacrifices [they endured] were worth it." Living at home while working minimal hours and attending WSU full-time strained her parents financially. Graduating was one way for her to show them that their sacrifices were not in vain. Joseph and Pixie indicated that one source of motivation was their desire to provide a better life for their parents. Pixie captured this sentiment best when she said, "I want to be able to buy a house so they can live with me and I can take care of them type of thing. Kind of to pay them back for all their hard work and their sacrifices."

Resiliency. Relying on an inherent desire to succeed, or channeling resistance capital, the vast majority of students confronted various obstacles that could have inhibited their ability to transfer from their community college, or graduate subsequently from WSU. I identified resistance capital primarily when students articulated an acute awareness of the current circumstances that threatened their academic goals, but also recognized resistance capital in other emerging forms. Jazmin, who lived two hours from campus and worked part-time, realized that commuting to WSU, working, and completing her homework was much more taxing than

she had anticipated. She realized that she needed to make a change after she received an incomplete in one of her classes.

When I had that whole thing with my grades going down, I quit working. I've been just focusing on my classes. It's been hard. But, I feel like it's worth it because my grades show it. This semester I want to finish with a 4.0 so I can make the Dean's List my last semester. That's my goal. Because I do want to eventually go to graduate school and I want to say I overcame all these obstacles.

Liz and Pixie felt the need to make changes to focus more intently on their education. They also were first-generation students who lived at home and worked part-time. Each student reached a tipping point that caused them to put themselves first, despite strong familial ties. When Liz realized she was one class away from transferring, she knew she needed to make a change. "I had to check myself real quick...I think that definitely pushed me to finish my last semester successfully." Liz worked fewer hours at her job because she knew that it was inhibiting her ability to transfer, even though she knew this change would make it difficult for her to contribute to her family's finances.

Pixie had to make a decision about working, but also helping her family take care of her young brother. Once she realized that working in retail was preventing her from pursuing childhood development, the degree in which she was majoring in community college, she knew she needed to make an adjustment. She explained, "I felt bad leaving to find something in the early childhood field, so that was a little challenge I was facing; but in the end, I decided I needed to do what was best for me." Her new job gave her more flexibility to focus on school and continue her academic pursuits, but her parents relied on her even more to care for her little brother. She did so for awhile, but finally realized that this new arrangement also was slowing her progress. She remembered telling her parents: "As much as I want to help you guys out, I

got to focus on me trying to transfer...you guys have to figure out some kind of system because I'm going to focus my time on school."

Jazmin and Juanita's form of resistance capital did not cause them to make sudden changes to their circumstances; rather, my interpretation was that their experiences fueled their desire to succeed. Well aware of the sacrifices her parents endured to immigrate to the United States, Jazmin's motivation to succeed seemed to be rooted in part in guilt. As an undocumented student, Jazmin felt the weight of the privilege she had to attend college, while her extended family in Mexico did not. "You feel guilty and I have carried that with me. Even now, I still feel like I can't fully enjoy it." When asked what prevented her from quitting despite the pressure, her family was at the center of her response. She explained:

It's just keeping in mind where I come from. It's like I can't quit. I don't have the same opportunities as other people...you can't just say I'm going to drop out and come back in a year when I feel better. You have family always on your back and mind...I don't want to let them down. I don't feel like that's something I have an option for. That's why I always have to pull through.

Juanita, who grew up in a socioeconomically impoverished neighborhood, drew upon those experiences to increase her will to succeed. She decided to become a health educator because of all of the social problems she observed in her community. Juanita stated that she is most proud of knowing her degree is going to be used for something good. "It is going to be used for something that enriches my community and I am hopeful my actions will be able to make a positive impact."

Social capital. Students relied upon social systems developed throughout their higher education experiences. This accumulation of networks or social capital, which they indicated were largely peer-to-peer interactions, helped students when enrolling in classes and in problem-

solving situations. Students also relied on their peers to learn about internships opportunities when they arrived on their new campus. Two students even used their networks before they entered community college. For instance, Javier, who worked immediately after attending high school, knew college was going to be his next step, but was unfamiliar with the process. “In high school they kept telling us you need to go to college. College is the next step, but they didn’t facilitate the steps and the process very well.” However, after speaking with a friend who was attending the local community college, things changed. Javier recalled asking his friend about enrolling in classes, “Is it hard, is it complex?” After Javier’s friend allayed his fears, they sat down and enrolled in classes together.

Noemi and Liz relied upon their social networks while attending community college. Noemi expressed her gratitude for having a group of friends that was like minded and kept her motivated about school, aware of homework deadlines, and informed about the transfer process. Noemi reflected warmly, “Having people that had the same mentality and wanted to transfer, and wanted to keep going made a big difference in showing up to class and getting good grades.” Liz also recalled joining a large group of friends, most of which was first-generation students like she was. Although only some of them were in the same classes, they banded together. “It was awesome because we were all so school orientated. We all just kind of pushed each other to finish our classes and transfer...and we pretty much all transferred out at the same time too, which was cool.” When I asked Liz to elaborate on the way in which the group motivated each other to transfer, she recalled:

Most of us were first-generation students, so we were navigating [college] on our own...but it was comforting to know that if the group was confused, someone in the group would figure it out...so that someone could help us in our talk in terms that we

could understand. I think that definitely helped knowing whatever we gained in knowledge was for the group, not just for ourselves.

When I asked Juanita how she learned about her current internship at WSU, she recounted, “I remember I got that internship because one of my classmates the year before me, she was a teacher’s assistant for one of my classes and she told me about [organization name].” Juanita explained further that she obtained the internship with the TA’s help. Similarly, when I asked Oscar how he learned to find a particular class or building at WSU when he first transferred, he told me he relied upon his friends who already knew the campus. “I had a friend who had been at WSU a really long time. So if I ever needed something like that, I would definitely ask her.”

Navigational capital. Numerous students relied upon and used the assistance of campus stakeholders or campus resources to traverse their community college and university experiences. When attending community college, Oscar learned about scholarship opportunities through faculty and academic advisors. He met regularly with his academic advisor when he needed guidance. “I told her everything I wanted out of college and she was able to tell me what I needed to do in order to get there.” This became especially true when he was researching the cost of attending WSU and questioned whether he should transfer. “That’s when I told the old counselor, what do I do? And she told me that I needed to get financial aid and she walked me through the process.”

Similar to Oscar, Jazmin, who was one of the few students employed on campus, relied heavily upon the relationships she developed with her supervisors to navigate the transfer process. Jazmin explained that her supervisors asked her constantly about transfer deadlines, which led her to keep thinking about her next steps after community college. “When someone

physically puts it in those words like ‘okay what are your plans?’ then you think okay, I really need to think about this.” She recalled valuing the constant reminders, because as a first-generation student, her parents could not help her with the process. “Being exposed to them, they did help me. They made me think, what am I going to do, what are the next steps, because they did mentor me through the process.”

Unlike Oscar and Jazmin, who used campus stakeholders to navigate their community college experiences, Helen, Joseph, and Raquel relied upon various campus resources rather than the counselors with whom they had unhelpful interactions. Thus, these students took it upon themselves to self-advise during their community college experience. Helen felt she received accurate information from her counselor rarely. In response, she found a transfer guide online and followed those instructions. “It was really clear cut, really organized, which I loved...I knew exactly what to take. So I just organized [my educational plan] myself.”

Similarly, Joseph took the responsibility to find specific transfer information when counselors were unavailable. He recounted attending a workshop in which they explained how to use assist.org, a California-specific online student-transfer database. Thereafter, he sought advice from a counselor rarely. “I basically looked up [transfer courses] myself” he remembered. When Raquel grew frustrated with counselors whom she felt did not care about her needs, she did not let that stop her. She explained:

I just looked at the requirements and figured out what would work and what didn’t work and just did it on my own...I’m pretty resourceful so luckily I didn’t have to try to deal with figuring out which guidance counselor would tell me which classes to take and how to do it.

Interconnectedness. Students implemented various forms of Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth framework intuitively to cope with countless obstacles throughout their

educational journey. Although I describe several of Yosso's concepts as distinct elements, individual components interacted across the segments and resulted in concepts that had similar features. For example, there were notable connections between familial-aspirational and social-navigational forms of capital. The importance of family was interwoven within the concepts of familial and aspirational capital. Words of affirmation from family members seemed to be a grounding component that encouraged the participants when school became overwhelming or when they became overly anxious. The family dynamic was also evident in aspirational capital as a goal setting measure. Thus, students focused on success because of the sacrifices their parents made on their behalf to give their children a better future, or to be role models for their siblings.

Social and navigational capital were also interconnected. The development of shared knowledge in peer networks helped students acquire navigational capital. Liz exemplified this connection when she spoke about shared knowledge among friends, as described in her quote above in the social capital section. The students invested in their relationships with one another, building capital together as first-generation students in an effort to finish college. Tapping into knowledge pooled previously helped Pamela find a supportive community college counselor. She told me "After high school her friend recommended Mark [a community college counselor] because he was really good...So [she] went specifically to him to talk about the [community college] application process." From that point, the relationship between the two flourished to such an extent that Pamela continued to seek Mark's advice, and even took his class.

So I feel like after that meeting we clicked a little and it just started from there. He was teaching a class and I took it. I felt comfortable with him so I just kept going back to ask questions and I think that's how our relationship developed and he would teach me a lot of important and useful things.

Each of the students shared an unwavering determination to persist. Whether because they did not feel supported by academic counselors, or prioritized their education over external pressures, students did not let temporary obstacles impede their progress. This section discussed five forms of capital that students used as they traversed their community college and WSU experiences. Before enrolling in college, it was evident that students invested significantly in family ties. They leaned on these previously established familial bonds, often exemplified through words of encouragement, to help them overcome stressful academic situations. Further, grounded in that strong connection to family, students aspired to finish college because of their desire to reward their parents for the sacrifices they made for them. Thus, they used aspirational capital as a long-term goal setting approach that reminded them that their current struggles would benefit them and their families in the end.

The students demonstrated the next form of capital, resiliency, when they made a distinct change in their circumstances to refocus on their academic goals. However, this concept emerged uniquely for Jazmin because of her guilt about her privilege in being able to pursue a higher education while other members of her family were not afforded the same level of opportunity. With respect to social capital, students worked with their peers before enrolling in community college, and while attending both two- and four-year institutions. Several students talked about banding together and using a group mentality to navigate the community college system. While attending WSU, others recalled using their social capital to identify internships and find classes on the first day of school on a new campus. Concerning navigational capital, they all mentioned that they sought help from academic advisors, staff, and faculty. When I asked them what made them feel comfortable seeking advice from these individuals, several

participants expressed having shared identities, such as gender, first-generation status, or their Latinx ethnicity. Although the men and women in the study often found campus stakeholders to assist them, women seemed to rely on non-faculty members more often, while men used faculty and academic advisors equally. Nevertheless, regardless of whom participants sought for help, a common thread in the interviews was that participants listened actively and applied the advice they received to achieve their goals and build upon other forms of capital. Jaime's quote captures this fact best:

I learned a lot. One thing is that older individuals of color who have gone to college before me come in handy. Not only in the moment with giving you advice and empowering an individual, but also in the future when you feel lost with career choices or whatever professional decisions that you have to make. You have to make these connections with adults.

Finally, an interconnection emerged among the various forms of capital reviewed in this section. A deep investment in family was evident. For the majority of students, family was a critical component in their successes, as illustrated through the use of familial and aspirational forms of capital. It was also apparent that there was a relationship between social and navigational capital. As such, the development of peer-to-peer networks before and during community college informed students' ability to tap new networks not exploited previously.

Building Community

Feeling a sense of community was palpable across interviews. Students relied often on their community of friends and campus stakeholders to assist them throughout their community college and WSU experiences. Although the majority of students commuted to campus and did not participate in social activities, such as student organizations, they talked about finding community in the classroom with other like-minded peers. Students also indicated that faculty

and academic advisors were instrumental in their persistence. The presence of campus stakeholders resurfaced in this theme, specifically because of their words of encouragement, rather than because they shared institutional knowledge with participants. They supported students by encouraging them to persevere and helped them feel that they belonged in the academic setting.

Community with peers. Students felt the most sense of community when they were in the classroom. These sentiments were expressed across all students, institutional types, and whether they lived on campus or commuted to WSU. Oscar, Noemi, and Norma talked about their experiences at community college and that being in the classroom with liked-minded people, “where everyone wants the same thing,” was where they developed a sense of community. Noemi talked about the way in which her community motivated her to keep striving. She explained:

I work, but I’m not close to anybody there. I’m just there to make the money and that’s it. But I’m around other people who are passionate, they’re students, they want to learn, they want to succeed whatever their endeavor is. I feel like that made a big difference in allowing me to be motivated. I see these people doing all these great things and I want to do that too.

Norma defined community as a group of people who are willing to support each other, and described feeling the strongest sense of community when she was working with her classmates on group projects. “Everyone wants the same thing...everyone is willing to help each other out to get good grades.” Similarly, Omar talked about people working towards a common goal. “I think the common goal for people in the classroom is to pass the class...I know there’s a community that had the same goal and if they needed help, I would be able to help them.” He explained further:

I remember my first semester at WSU. I took a meteorology class which was a little bit hard and it was me and two other dudes, we would help each other out with the writing assignments. And at [community college name], my major there was administration of justice. And there I felt a strong sense of community because you see the same people in different administration of justice courses. And I felt there was a community there. If I needed any help, I'd be able to go to them.

Pixie, who participated in the designed learning community, benefited from the relationships she developed with the other students in the class. She talked openly about the way in which they supported each other. "If something comes up, were all there for each other." Elaborating further, she stated, "A lot of the times things are stressful during finals, but we all kind of link up and study together, makes notes and start Google docs and everyone puts their notes on and we just help each other out." Juanita, who also relied on the support of other classmates when coping with the stressors of college, spoke about her community. Being in a small major and taking several classes together, Juanita explained, gave her an opportunity to get to know her other classmate and commiserate about assignments. She continued:

They are all people that I have had a couple of classes with so I felt like us taking all the same classes together instilled a sense of community because we could all relate to the stress of always having presentations and group work and stuff like that.

Campus stakeholders, building a sense of belonging. Students indicated that campus stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and academic counselors were influential groups that helped students feel they were part of the campus community. Building a sense of belonging seemed to be important to several women in the study, while this topic surfaced rarely among the men. Five of ten women spoke about the way in which positive interactions with academic advisors and faculty members instilled a sense of community further, while only one male student talked about similar experiences. Pixie and Pamela experienced positive interactions

with community college academic advisors, and Pixie described the way in which her advisor helped her push through difficult classes.

I kind of took classes and dropped them. She really pushed me. She said ‘I know you can do this. You’ve gotta push through.’ She kind of motivated me to do good and when I was on a roll, I feel like her being there for me and telling me I could do it...she helped me believe in myself that I could actually do [transfer].

Pamela spoke about a positive experience with an advisor when applying to transfer. Not confident about her GPA, she narrowed her choices only to schools where she believed she was sure to be accepted. However, her counselor convinced her otherwise. Pamela reflected:

My counselor recommended that I apply to UC Berkeley and Davis and really good schools. I didn’t think I had the potential to do it because I didn’t have a 4.0 or the right experiences. I just didn’t think I was good enough. So what he did was say, ‘Just push yourself and apply because you never know what is going to happen.’ So I did apply and I didn’t get into the schools but I came away thinking at least I tried and I had someone who believed in me and knew that it was possible to go to these types of schools.

Raquel, Noemi, and Jazmin talked about experiences while attending WSU. Raquel recalled that she felt a sense of belonging because her professor understood her unique situation. Asking Raquel to elaborate, she recalled a story when she first entered WSU.

My first semester, my same daughter was still struggling with the same situation, her depression and issues. I was able to actually speak to my professors. And one of those professors was actually a man and he was very understanding and very supportive...they just kind of let me know to keep them posted and let them know how things were going and if things got out of hand, to feel comfortable asking for time to do certain things that I needed to do for those classes.

Noemi started thinking about attending graduate school only because of one of her professors. “She always encouraged her students to basically move forward...I think that was one of the reasons I was so fascinated with her...she got me thinking about a lot of stuff.”

Jazmin found encouragement to continue doing well in class because the professor expressed interest in her, saying, “You’re different.” Jazmin explained:

She often mentioned that I was a good student and she mentioned that I was different. Things she would say made me think, if my teachers sees something in me, I have to keep going. Not that I don't have a choice—I know I do—but I think it's more like I don't want to let her down...she gave me positive feedback on my work and that made me think, this is awesome, I can do this. That's why I'm like, maybe I'll pursue graduate school.

Students described a sense of belonging because of their interactions with peers and campus stakeholders. When speaking with students about feeling a sense of community, they indicated often that it was most noticeable in the classroom. Whether it was with other students during group projects or the communal goal to get good grades, students identified the classroom as a community of support. Support also took the form of words of affirmation from professors. For several of the students, just a few words of encouragement from faculty motivated them to continue to strive to graduate, and at times, go on to attend graduate school.

Institutional Support

Interested in the institutional responsibility to support student success, I asked participants if they felt their two- and four-year institutions supported their transition or continued progression towards degree attainment. Students did mention tutoring and writing centers, but indicated that they used them little. The common response when asked why not was that they lacked knowledge about programs, the limited availability of service hours, and work conflicts. Conversely, students did mention wide participation in the transfer orientation program WSU provides for prospective students. However, students did not talk about outreach services or the transfer bridge program, which the WSU staff I interviewed described as specific transfer related services. Nonetheless, I included descriptions of all the services provided and mentioned by staff interviewees in this section because they were available for all students, even though participants in this study did not talk about programs independently.

The interviews with staff personnel who engaged specifically with transfer students on various levels helped me gain insight into the way in which WSU supports transfer student success. I particularly wanted to learn more about the programs the student participants did not mention to determine potentially why they did not, and how the transfer orientation, which participants did talk about, supported their transition to campus. I spoke with Jessica, Debbie, and Peter, all pseudonyms for the staff I interviewed. They shared their perspectives on the services or programs they administer for transfer students, including outreach efforts, a transfer bridge program (TBP), and transfer orientations.

According to my discussion with Jessica, the VP of Admissions for WSU, the university largely front loads their efforts to support transfer students through various services and programs. When I asked her why services are organized in this manner, she explained further:

We consider ourselves kind of a bootstraps institution...we don't have a transfer center or a support center, the support services we do have are available to all students. I don't think we are neglecting transfer students or taking them for granted, as it is wanting them to be integrated into the mainstream services that we do have.

Although transfer students constitute a sizeable demographic at WSU, these students were recognized rarely as a separate group. The integration of transfer students was interwoven throughout many of Jessica's responses. For example, when I asked her about current assessments or evaluations designed to understand this population, she had only minimal information. The university collected descriptive statistical data, including acceptance numbers, ethnic breakdown, and graduation percentages, but a more nuanced understanding of this population was notably absent.

Outreach. Two full-time coordinators who are responsible for all transfer student inquiries for the university operate the outreach services available to transfer students before they

enter WSU. I asked Debbie how she described her work with transfer students. “I meet with students one-on-one for preadmission advising, application, and prospective major workshops, and yield events, where we make sure students that have already been admitted to the university finish all their paperwork.”

Debbie’s office focuses primarily on larger events or workshops to maximize the number of students they reach. Because of budget constraints, community college outreach extends only to the university’s service area, which includes four community colleges. Transfer students from outside this region do not have direct access to WSU outreach coordinators. This is particularly worrisome for Debbie, because the university is “...dedicated to admitting a diverse population that is reflective of the state of California,” but her office has limited ability to reach students that are most at risk of not completing their admissions paperwork. “You can imagine there is [sic] only two of us so there are lots of students that are falling through the cracks because we cannot get to them and they may not know how to get to us.” Wanting to know more, I asked if she knew how many students her office could reach. “That is a very difficult thing to answer because we have absolutely no tool to keep track of students...I have no idea how many students we meet, versus how many are actually applying or enrolling into WSU.”

Transfer bridge program. Peter, an academic advisor, instructs a TBP course that allows prospective transfer students to co-enroll at WSU while attending their community college. The course was developed “...particularly for those from low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented student groups in higher education.” Peter indicated that the goal of the class was to show community college students that it is possible to transfer to WSU. Only one section of the course is taught each semester. The class is hosted at WSU, but co-facilitated by

Peter and an advisor at a local community college. The course syllabus includes topics on transfer guidelines, financial aid, university departments and majors, career planning, and academic advising. Peter said that his classes are often comprised of 30 or more students and he never turns anyone away. When asked to detail the level of coordination between his course and other transfer-related offices his answer was stark, “None.” Asked to elaborate further, he explained:

I’ve been doing this for 30 years and I still have to explain to people, even on my own campus, what I do. I do see Debbie in the outreach office when I am out [tabling at community colleges]; she knows me, but we rarely coordinate our efforts...I have seen the [transfer] orientations during the summer, but have not been asked to work with them; unfortunately, there is not much synergy between groups.

Orientation. Although I was unable to talk to a staff member who administers the transfer orientation, I was able to find information on the university’s website, in shared internal documents, and by speaking with students in the study about their experiences. The transfer-specific orientations occur between June and July. Twelve sessions take place on the WSU campus, consisting of eight half-day and three full-day sessions. One orientation is held off-campus in concert with university housing as well. Half-day orientations have a capacity of 175 participants, while full-day sessions can accommodate 235 attendees. The half-day orientation schedule includes a welcome overview, general presentation, optional campus tour, and workshops (i.e., enrollment, advising, and class registration). The full-day orientation includes the same elements as does the half-day program, but also includes a resource fair and two additional unnamed “conference style presentations.”

Students in the study had mixed opinions about the transfer orientation. Five students did not attend it at all. For example, Norma said she did not attend because she “...thought she was

attending San Diego State, so it was very last minute.” Oscar did not attend because he was still determining whether he could afford to attend WSU. “I missed the whole orientation thing because of my indecisiveness. I could not decide whether or not I should go to WSU because of the prices.” The nine participants who did attend an orientation recalled favorable experiences concerning campus tours, informational packets, and campus diversity. However, our conversations focused primarily on workshops during which participants registered for class, and students had mixed opinions about these. One set of students was troubled by the stress of picking the classes and accomplishing everything in one day. Others found that it was helpful to register for classes with the assistance of other students. Nonetheless, Noemi and Raquel’s quotes captured best the mixed experiences participants had during the transfer orientation.

Noemi: They had one in [city name], they know not everyone can make it to WSU. I knew we were going to have a chance to look at our classes and choose our schedule, but I didn’t know that we had to right then and there for the upcoming semester. They gave us a certain time window to do that and they didn’t give us the catalog previous to that. So I didn’t know what classes to take...It was complicated. They didn’t explain that very well to us; I knew my community college, but here was so much more complicated. It was so frustrating.

Raquel: We met with a couple graduate students or other students who had taken classes there who wanted to make sure we had gotten all of our lower division and all of our GE requirements taken care of before starting. They walked us through, how to read our transcript to make sure that was all taken care of. They talked to us about certain requirements and then they kind of mapped out the semester schedule of how it should work. They also helped us figure out what classes we could or should take. It was very helpful.

With respect to institutional support, WSU focuses primarily on prospective transfer students. This is accomplished through outreach services, a transfer bridge program, and orientations. It is possible that the students in the study did not talk about two out of the three services mentioned in the staff interviews because of the fairly limited availability of the services

provided. For example, only five participants attended community colleges in the areas Outreach Services reach, and only three of the five attended the college where the TBP coordinator enrolls students. Several students in the study attended the transfer orientation, and their positive remarks focused on campus tours, informational packets, and the diversity of the campus, while there were mixed views about the workshops that included class registration.

Summary

Fifteen students shared experiences with me about their successful progression through two- and four-year educational systems, which I organized into three sections. The first included survey responses, demographics, and participant backgrounds. The following two sections depicted the major challenges confronted and successes students achieved while striving to obtain a four-year degree. Informed by Padilla et al.'s (1997) model of minority student success, I found that these students confronted three of the four barriers, in that they faced issues related to lack of nurturing, discontinuity, and resources. With respect to the first, students recalled various unfavorable experiences with academic counselors while attending community college and WSU, while others shared stories about challenging environments outside of college, including work and family. Nonetheless, across experiences, participants perceived a noticeable lack of support that caused them consternation.

Challenges in balancing familial ties and being a working college student were ever-present concerns among all interviewees, which was consistent with Padilla et al.'s (1997) second obstacle, discontinuity. Students were confronted with contributing financially to their families, while also reconciling the increased cost of attending WSU and working additional hours to cover those added expenses. Several students spoke about the conflict between working

to help support their families and attending college. Other participants shared the way in which the increased burden of commuting to campus while working nearly full-time affected their academics or prevented them from taking advantage of campus services. The final barrier was financial resources. I interpreted this barrier as the way in which the lack of readily available funds influenced student persistence. Experiences concerning financial resources included conversations about school choice and becoming reconciled with the increased cost of attending WSU. Numerous students wrestled with the decision to attend community college directly after high school, but conceded that the two-year route was much more “financially accessible.” Once at WSU, student hardships included managing increased costs, such as lab fees, commuting, parking, and tuition.

Although any of the barriers found in the results could have derailed the participants from transferring or graduating from WSU, students shared their stories of the way in which they averted these obstacles. Three broad sub-themes emerged. First, students talked about certain skills they developed while attending community college that supported their initial transition to WSU, two of which I identified. Many believed that learning how to manage their time effectively supported their success at WSU. Others recalled skills they developed in the classroom, such as writing and study skills, as most influential in their success. Overall, students believed that the time spent at their community colleges allowed them to grow personally, identify their academic passions, and acquire or fine tune the skills necessary to be successful at the four-year level.

Together with skills developed while attending community college, students also referred to their intrinsic abilities to navigate obstacles while attending both levels of higher education.

Viewing student experiences through the lens of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth, I identified numerous students who used various forms of capital to their advantage, including familial, aspirational, resiliency, navigational, and social. Although these forms of capital were described in different sections, many were interconnected, in that components resurfaced throughout the study.

Finally, students stated that external support systems, such as peers, campus stakeholders, and WSU itself, contributed to their successful persistence. Students talked about finding a sense of belonging in the classroom, and experiencing community with other students in the collective sense of wanting to succeed in the classroom. With respect to stakeholders, words of affirmation or understanding seemed to motivate students powerfully. They spoke about the importance of faculty and academic advisors who encouraged them to push through difficult classes, apply for four-year institutions they thought were out of reach, or think about attending graduate school. In describing WSU's role in supporting their success, students mentioned only one of three programs mentioned by the campus staff members interviewed. Students spoke largely about the workshops designed to help them register for classes. Although this component of the orientation was met with mixed reviews, students overall felt that it was beneficial and supported their initial transition.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Nationally, the Latinx community is the fastest growing racial/ethnic groups in the US. By the year 2050 the Latinx populations is projected to reach 106 million people, approximately double of what it is today (Krogstad, 2014). However, despite population growth, the rate of participation compared to white students in higher education continues to wane (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Latinxs are not achieving their academic goals at the same rate as their white counterparts. Across the country, students of color are more likely to enroll in community colleges, where the chances of transferring to and graduating from a four-year institution are significantly lower than similar students that originally begin at a four-year university (Doyle, 2009; Reynolds, 2012). Research on obstacles influencing community college student persistence have often focused on student deficits, such as lack of personal aspiration, enrollment status (i.e., part time or full time) and poor academic ability (Bailey et al., 2009; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Wang, 2013). These deficit approaches to understanding persistence have consumed the transfer student research, and only provide a partial understanding of community college student persistence. The current study, however, adds to the extant literature by employing a strengths-based approach to understanding how Latinxs have successfully overcome previously identified barriers and transferred to and graduated from a four-year institution.

I developed the study through qualitative inquiry, utilizing a case study methodology. The site of the study, WSU, was a large public four-year university within the CSU system. The

site was selected as an ideal location because of high enrollments of transfer students, first-generation students, and students of color. Additionally, WSU was selected as an ideal location because I had working knowledge of the institution, which afforded me access to key stakeholders who were connected to programs and services for transfer students. The study was guided by the following research question, and two sub-questions.

- (1) How do successful Latinx students navigate two- and four-year postsecondary institutions towards degree attainment?
 - a. How do students' experiences at their community college influence the vertical transfer process?
 - b. How do students' experiences at their four-year institutions influence their persistence towards degree completion?

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section reviews the methods and students identified in the case study. The second consists of a discussion of the findings and inferences made from results. The final section includes implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Study Review

I originally identified participants using a purposive sampling technique, which included three criteria: (a) self-identify as African American or Black descent (b) vertically transferred from a California Community College to WSU, and (c) students' graduation applications were submitted and accepted for a spring or summer 2016 conferral. Working with university contacts, recruitment and follow-up emails were sent to a total 58 African American students fitting the criteria. Five students completed the online questionnaire, while only two of the five

students successfully scheduled and completed an interview. After several unsuccessful snowball sampling attempts to increase the sample size, I determined, due to the lack of time and resources, an alternative ethnic group would be recruited as stipulated in my methodology, and prior interviews with African American students would not be included in the study. Therefore, the first criterion was changed to students that self-identified as Latinx or Hispanic descent, while the remaining two criteria were left untouched. A total of 317 Latinx students fit the new criteria and were sent recruitment and follow-up emails. Twenty-six students completed the pre-survey questionnaire, while 15 students successfully completed all steps required within the interview protocol (e.g., consent form, survey, and interview). Only information from students that completed all components of the interview protocol were included in the findings.

Ten Latinas and five Latinos participated fully in the study. Participant ages ranged between 23-37 with the majority of students under the age of 25. Most attended 1-2 community colleges and transferred after 3-4 years. The majority of students accrued an excess of 60+ units while attending community college, with diminished levels of unit transferability to WSU. All participants transferred to WSU in the fall of 2014 and graduated either during the spring or summer of 2016. The majority of participants were first-generation students, had a household income of under \$48,000, and worked full-time while attending college.

Data was collected primarily utilizing a semi-structured interview method. Interviews were held at WSU and through telecommunications (e.g., Skype and FaceTime). On-campus interviews took place in a secure office for privacy. Students that conducted telecommunication interviews were asked to do so in a location where they felt comfortable and were able to talk about their experiences uninterrupted. Sessions lasted approximately 60-75 minutes and were

audio recorded. Recordings were later transcribed using a third-party organization that adhered to strict accuracy and confidentiality standards. Completed transcripts and preliminary themes were later shared with participants to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy of the study.

Moreover, the process of member checking was used with external researchers to further confirm the authenticity of themes developed. Other sources of data collected, such as WSU staff interviews and documents, were utilized to corroborate and confirm student experiences where applicable.

Findings for the study were primarily organized using the theoretical frameworks of Padilla et al. (1997) and Yosso (2005). I applied the first model to identify the challenges confronted by students, while the second was employed to illustrate the inherent approaches participants used to navigate obstacles towards their academic goals. Said differently, the two concepts were utilized to frame the obstacles and successes students confronted during both their community college and WSU experiences. Barriers were categorized into three areas, each consisting of supporting subthemes and experiences. Significant thematic obstacles included lack of nurturing, discontinuity, and resources. Successes, viewed through the lens Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth concept, included five forms of capital: familial, aspirational, resiliency, navigational, and social.

Discussion

Over the course of their community college and WSU experiences students encountered a litany of influencers, which negatively and positively affected their persistence towards transfer and degree attainment. Three takeaways address the overarching research question and sub-questions, while an additional emergent theme is also included. The first takeaway speaks to

specific influencers that concurrently supported and inhibited participant success. The second highlights the importance of on-campus support networks of Latinx students, while the third takeaway illustrates a disconnect between institutional support services and participant engagement. Additional emergent themes include discussions about the fluidity of cultural capital and findings that challenge conventional narratives.

Mixed Influencers

Counselors. This study highlighted the effects that academic counselors and family ties had on the persistence of participants and supports the extant literature illustrating their importance (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). However, what was unexpected in this study was the mixed effects they had on students. Counselors were described as mentors, advocates, and allies and conversely as insensitive, unapproachable, and dismissive. Regarding negative experiences, many of the students' stories seemed to point towards an advising disconnect. Several participants experienced poor academic counseling, such as being encouraged to apply to less competitive four-year institutions or having highly mechanical interactions with counselors (Fann, 2013). Though students in the study ultimately overcame these barriers, extant literature has illustrated that these poor advising experiences can be prohibitive for students of color (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). Negative interactions often lead students to find their own means of locating information through alternative online resources, peers, and family members (Chrystal et al., 2013). Through the study's CRT analytical lens, there could be a number of possible explanations for this disconnect, including counselors utilizing a colorblind approach to advising or not being equipped with the cultural competency skills necessary to effectively work with students of color. Supporting this line of thought, Solorzano, Villalpando, and Oseguera

(2005) would argue that culturally reflexive academic support systems are often absent in higher education settings, despite their demonstrated applicability to improving retention and persistence rates of students of color, especially students from Latinx decent.

Alternatively, an equal number of students had positive interactions with academic counselors while attending community college. Students seemed more willing to converse and listen to advice given by counselors that had similar backgrounds or identities, or took a vested interest in their successes (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). Many students talked about how they saw their counselors as mentors. For instance, students often talked about how the relationships formed assisted them in obtaining access to critical information about the transfer process and financial aid. Notably, positive interactions with academic counselors were only talked about during participants' community college experiences (Crisp, 2010). In fact, connections between students were so strong that several students mentioned how they maintained those relationships through their time at WSU since they felt a drop off in academic counseling support once transitioning to WSU.

Familismo. The importance of family continued to resurface across the study. There was a strong adhesive connecting students to family members. This interrelationship made neatly separating out family from other findings quite challenging. That is, for many of the students' family was a foundational presence that touched upon many dynamics described in the study and which will be further discussed in this section. Familismo, "the feeling of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity towards members of the family" (Cortes, 1995, p. 249) was like a pendulum that often swung in the students' favor, but at times, did cause consternation and challenge participants' progression while attending community college and WSU.

Overwhelmingly, a strong sense of family obligation was represented by students' desire to provide future financial support for their parents. This was exemplified when students expressed what motivated them to succeed. Combining the needs of family with personal goals corroborates Zalaquett's (2005) interview results of 12 Latinx students attending an urban university. Interested in understanding their motivations to graduate, Zalaquett expressed, "for these students pursuing a college education was more than a personal goal" (p. 41); students willed themselves to succeed in part as a way of honoring their families. This strong connection between family and students also surfaced in my study as words of encouragement, especially across the parents of first-generation students. Though parents were not generally equipped with the structural knowledge of navigating college, they provided their unwavering support as a means of reinforcing students' self-efficacy to succeed (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992).

Contrary to this direction, participants' strong sense of familismo also challenged their persistence towards degree attainment. Challenges materialized primarily in two different ways, through direct conflict either with family members or with participants' inability to effectively manage other concurrent obligations. Latinos in the study recalled needing to remove themselves from toxic environments, while several Latinas experienced conflict with parents wanting them to take on more responsibilities in the family unit. Participants were faced with making difficult decisions to put themselves before their family's needs.

A sense of pressure to placate the rising needs of family members also encroached upon students' ability to effectively balance other concurrent obligations. All students in the study juggled at least three priorities: attending college (often full-time), working nearly 30+ hours a week, and commuting to campus. Whenever another priority beyond the previous three were

introduced, students' ability to effectively navigate all other priorities came into question (Fuligni & Witkow, 2004). Several students talked about how their parents expected them to partially contribute their financial earnings to the family while living at home and attending college. This new obligation, coupled with managing other responsibilities, impacted students' ability to effectively engage on campus (Miller, 2013; Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). Living at home and working to defer costs of attending college, all while supporting family members, were also components found to negatively influence the persistence of students in Fuligni and Witkow's (2004) longitudinal study. However, unlike Fuligni and Witkow's findings, which found Latinos more likely to have a higher sense of obligation to support their families, men and women who participated in my study equally expressed this obligation.

Support Networks

Along their pathway towards degree attainment students made critical connections with faculty and peers. This finding was consistent whether students commuted to WSU or lived on campus. Rather than developing a sense of campus community through participation in co-curricular activities (Bryant, 2001; Townsend & Wilson, 2009), students recalled feeling the greatest sense of community with other students inside of the classroom (Branett, 2010; Karp et al., 2010; Zalaquett, 2005). Due to family and work obligations, students in my study may have had little choice but to use the classroom context as the most important source of building community on campus.

In the classroom sharing information, working towards common goals, or wanting to succeed together with other students helped participants cope with the stressors and demands of college (Zalaquett, 2005). Probing academic and social integration experiences of community

college students, Karp et al.'s (2010) also observed "information networks" (p. 76) occurring inside the classroom. Information networks, defined by Karp et al. as social ties where institutional knowledge is transferred from one person to the next, helped students feel connected to campus and gain access to information without being engaged in traditional co-curricular activities. However, where Karp et al.'s findings fell short, not disaggregating the backgrounds of students in the study, my study suggests that Latinx students do benefit from the same types of in-class networks with other peers.

Faculty engagement. Supporting the extant literature demonstrating the positive effects of professor and student connections, students in this research recalled engaging with and being mentored by faculty members (Chrystal et al., 2012; Flaga 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). However, these results deviate from other findings by suggesting mentoring by faculty members were more important to women rather than the men. Many Latinas in the study recalled faculty as an important component of their sense of belonging in the classroom, but also as facilitating their continued educational desires by reaffirming their academic capabilities. These actions made students feel connected and engaged. Participants talked about these experiences occurring mostly while attending their community college (Townsend & Wilson, 2006), but also recalled the same types of experiences happening while attending WSU. Perhaps Latinos in the study were less willing to acknowledge the support they received from faculty members because of reinforced gendered behaviors that men must act strong and showing weakness is not acceptable (Harris & Harper, 2008). Men in this study may have perceived asking for additional support or receiving affirmation from faculty as encroaching on their masculinity, thus possibly watering down their achievements as they continue to persist. Perhaps more research can

explore the possible differences why Latinas seemed to be more receptive than their counterparts when receiving mentor support.

Institutional support. Including conversations with WSU staff into the study lead to several takeaways. Foremost, despite transfer students making up a significant amount of the student body, they seemed to be an afterthought of the university. My conversations with WSU staff and participants exposed a disconnect between Latinx transfer student experiences and university support services. Interviews with university personnel illustrated a three-pronged approach to working with transfer students: admissions outreach, transfer bridge programs, and orientations. The transfer receptive culture approaches provided by WSU mirrored some of the best practices found in the extant literature (Miller, 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Yet, only a few students talked about participating in transfer orientation programming, while not even knowing the other outreach opportunities existed. I acknowledge, of course, the sample of interviewed students was small; however, this finding does warrant further exploration into why so many students did not take advantage of opportunities provided by the university. Perhaps the lack of engagement could partially be explained by WSU's seemingly low prioritization of transfer student engagement. Only offering one transfer bridge course per semester, and employing only two transfer admissions counselors for a campus that accepts thousands of transfer students a year could potentially explain the lack of participation. However, from a student perspective, other factors could have been involved too. The timing of the transfer orientation could have been problematic since several of the students had not decided if they were going to attend WSU prior to the orientation occurring; or perhaps, family and work obligations could have mitigated their ability to fully engage in the range of opportunities.

Whatever the root of the cause, there is a need for WSU to better understand their transfer specific programming and how it can be improved upon.

Additional conversations with personnel illustrated a limited or over-generalized understanding of the transfer student population in comparison to first-time freshman student that entered WSU (Grites, 2013). When asked, personnel only had an anecdotal understanding of transfer students on campus. Though these students accounted for a significant size of upper division enrollments, it seemed as if transfer students were an invisible population due to the lack of disaggregated data regarding their experiences. Defining WSU as a “bootstraps institution”, Jessica, the VP of Admissions, expressed a desire for transfer students to assimilate quickly into campus, as a way of explaining away the need for robust data sets regarding transfer students. Stemming from leadership, the lack of holistic understanding and data analysis about transfer students across staff interviews now made sense.

It appears as if leadership is philosophically looking at transfer students as not a high priority population. Since WSU receives more applications from transfer students than they can accept in a given year, perhaps there is less concern about helping them enroll or persist towards graduation more than any other student groups. From a critical lens, this approach is problematic as it silences the voices of transfer students that need additional support, while rewarding other transfer students that assimilate into the campus community. Moreover, this potential stance by WSU is concerning as it delegitimizes the experiences of transfer students that do not pull themselves up by their *bootstraps* while disregarding the responsibility the campus has to ensure all transfer students succeed. The lack of campus services open past 5:00pm, limited availability of evening classes, and the lack of disaggregated data are all signs pointing towards the

institutions neutral stance on transfer student success. However, despite these institutional shortcomings, participants in my study still navigated WSU and graduated. This study did not explore the depths of why WSU did not support more services for building a transfer receptive culture, but future studies could investigate this issue more closely, as more students of color are using this pathway in higher education.

Emergent Takeaways

It was evident that students experienced a litany of challenges along their pathway towards degree attainment. Participant interviews illustrated that external support systems on- and off-campus helped them circumvent obstacles, which ultimately supported their persistence. The study also provides emergent findings regarding the interconnectedness of cultural wealth components and stories that countered the extant literature or the prevailing social narrative.

Community cultural wealth. Components of community cultural wealth were observed as being interconnected, rather than independent of one another. That is, particular forms of wealth seemed to assist or help in developing other forms (Yosso, 2005). This was evident throughout the study, but most exemplified in two ways. First, there was evidence from the study about the interconnectedness of social and navigational capital. Often developed in the classroom, as discussed earlier, these peer-to-peer linkages helped build community and allowed students to pool their knowledge to find allies at their colleges (e.g., faculty, academic advisors, staff) that understood how the inner processes of the campus worked (Karp et al., 2010). Building these classroom networks seemed to build upon their social capital capabilities. Expanding beyond the classroom, these cultivated connections continued to benefit students' ability to transfer into WSU, pick classes, and identify internship opportunities. Similar to Perez

and McDonough's (2008) inquiry of the utilization of chain migration in examining Latina college choice patterns, students in my study seemingly maximized the relationships they built inside the classroom and combined them with conversations with family members, friends, and mentors to learn how to navigate a new campus before even arriving. Maximizing these shared reservoirs of knowledge, students were able to successfully navigate or "maneuver through institutions not created with community of colors in mind" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80).

Familial, aspirational, and resiliency were also observed as being interconnected, yet through a foundation of familismo. Students seemed to frequently draw upon their family networks, which included parents, siblings, and significant others, when confronted with perceived barriers. This intrinsic commitment to community well-being was observed as being inter-relational and as a means of fostering resiliency. I have conceptualized these relationships as being cyclical. First, *elder to student*. Words of encouragement from family members were especially critical for students from first-generation backgrounds. Though parents were not generally equipped with the structural knowledge of how to navigate college, they provided their unwavering support as a means of reinforcing students' self-efficacy to succeed (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). Next, *student to student*. Though the vast majority of students did not participate in traditional co-curricular activities on campus, which are often associated with building campus affiliation (Nora & Crisp, 2012), participants developed a sense of community within the classroom (Karp et al., 2010). Students often spoke of sharing knowledge or supporting each other towards common goals, such as passing classes, completing assignments, and graduating. Third, *student to sibling*. Students with younger siblings regularly talked about passing knowledge to them, so they did not have to endure the same challenges as they did.

Students took pride in being able to provide this support for family members (Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). Last, *student to elder*. Through an overwhelmingly strong sense of family obligation, students channeled that energy through the formation of aspirational capital. That is, they willed themselves to succeed because of their desire to provide future financial support for their parents as a way of acknowledging their sacrifices.

Counter narratives. There were several areas where students' challenged prevailing narratives regarding transfer students. Most notably, students that attend community college will not succeed. Embodying backgrounds that research has shown to be as inhibiting to student success – part-time enrollment, first-generation college-going status, and working nearly full-time hours while enrolled in college – students in my study still triumphed. Participants overcame these elements that are often used through deficit ideology to explain somehow that students themselves are the sole cause of their challenges. However, as a testament to their determination, community cultural wealth, and inherent abilities, and despite balancing multiple jobs, responsibilities, and family obligations, participants still successfully traversed their community colleges and WSU.

Students in the study also showed the various benefits besides the fiscal savings of attending community college. Undoubtedly, attending a two-year institution is cheaper than a university; however, findings also illustrated students found their academic passion and became better students (Somers et al., 2006). Participants in the study mostly came from low-SES backgrounds, giving them access to tuition fee waivers while attending community college. It seems as if many of the students took advantage of the waivers and enrolled in numerous classes until they were able to find a major they wanted to pursue. Though several students reported

many of their units did not transfer to WSU, participants did not worry because they were able to find their academic passion. Perhaps there are opportunities for future research to investigate how academic exploration at community college is connected to student persistence and could help lower the stigma associated with students accumulating excess units.

Attending community college also afforded many participants the ability to learn how to be students again. Developing a work ethic, time management capabilities, and critical thinking skills were all competencies students described as developing while attending community college that helped them be successful at WSU. This finding supports literature on non-cognitive skills and their association with academic success (Crede & Kuncel, 2008). Perhaps this also ties into participants' limited feelings of being overwhelmed or experiencing a drop in GPA over the first semester at WSU. Being academic prepared and not experiencing effects of transfer shock, suggests a level of variability in the transfer shock literature that generally supports the notion that transfer students experience heightened challenges when first transitioning to a new campus (Cedja, 1997).

Summary of Discussion

Three main takeaways from the study speak to the research questions. The first focuses on the challenges faced by participants. Obstacles challenging the persistence of students were present while attending community college and WSU. Concerning the difficulties faced at community college, students confronted non-supportive academic counselors, maintaining balance between work and school commitments, and navigating familial ties. After transferring to WSU several students continued to have challenges connecting with academic counselors,

while new obstacles such as balancing work, school, and family obligations and the increased cost of attending a four-year university surfaced.

The second takeaway illustrated the importance of external support systems. Students relied upon campus stakeholders, student peers, and family while attending both their two-and four-year institutions; however, for different reasons. While academic counselors were inhibiting factors for some of the students in the study, other students named them as mentors and attributed their success to listening to their insights and trusting their judgment. Noticeably, students only talked about these relationships being built while attending community college, rather than at WSU. Finding community with other student peers in and outside of the classroom also proved to be important to students. Students talked about a common bond or collective “purpose” that helped them complete challenging homework assignments, pass classes, or find campus resources. Last, the importance of family was ever-present throughout the study. Though family could have been considered an inhibiting factor at times for some of the students, overwhelmingly family was conveyed as a positive attribute for the majority of students.

The final takeaway focused on the lack of connection between institutionalized support structures and participants. Transfer specific programming was available for students; however, participants in the study only talked about engaging in the transfer orientation sessions. Students found sessions to be helpful, but did not overtly attribute orientations as instrumental to their success. The other support programs were not mentioned at all, leaving room for the institution to explore how other services could better reach prospective transfer students.

Besides external influencers that effected students, this study also highlighted the ways in which students utilized various intrinsic approaches to overcoming obstacles. Findings

illustrated students did not enter their two- and four-year institutions void of capital; rather, they came equipped with intrinsic abilities that were called upon when the time came. Fluidly utilizing familial, aspirational, resiliency, navigational, and social forms of cultural wealth, students willed themselves towards their academic goals despite challenges. These forms of wealth were also observed as being interconnected. They were not easily discernable from one another, rather I observed them as informing and building upon each other.

Implications for Theory, Policy, and Research

Based on discussion section, several implications regarding theory, policy, and future recommendations are discussed. The inclusion of two theoretical frameworks proved to be useful in identifying challenges and successes experienced by participants, while the implications for academic advisors and institutional support systems are also discussed. Recommendations and future areas of research are also included.

Theory

Padilla et al.'s (1997) framework proved to be a resourceful model for identifying and framing barriers students perceived as prohibitive to their success, albeit students did not confront all four barriers described in the model or every element described within each barrier. Most notably, the *lack of presence* barrier, which includes the absence of minority support systems, experiencing cultural isolation, and/or minority role models, was overwhelmingly absent from student stories. Perhaps students did not collectively express overt concerns with this particular construct due to participants attending schools where the campus racial climate was more conducive to students of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). Padilla et al.'s (1997) research did not indicate specific campus demographics around student populations, nor if

sample student populations included participants that began their education at community colleges. Though participants identified in Padilla et al.'s model were similar to this study's sample, the differences in the case study site and origin institution in my study may have been different enough to mitigate the effects of the lack of presence barrier. Future researchers should look to test the relevancy of Padilla et al.'s model on campuses that are not PWI.

Yosso's (2005) framework also provided an alternative lens to illustrating the ways in which students navigated the barriers described by Padilla et al.'s (1997) framework. Interjecting a community cultural wealth lens, findings from the study further expounded upon how students circumvented the model's barriers by utilizing inherent attributes. Identifying the various forms of community cultural wealth also reinforced the relevancy of cultural wealth in higher education. Supporting Yosso's goal of "empower[ing] People of Color to utilize assets already abundant in their communities" (p. 82), these findings illustrate the abundance of ability found within the Latinx community, and the wealth of experiential knowledge they bring with them into higher education.

Frameworks grounded in critical pedagogies should continue to be utilized to advance anti-deficit narratives in higher education for students of color. Through a CRT analytical lens that is committed to social justice, research that seeks to empower the voices of transfer students of color is critical to challenging victim blaming ideologies that absolve institutional and societal forces of their part in influencing student of color success (Valencia, 2010). Based on findings in this study, future research should interrogate the relationships between the various forms of cultural wealth and how these interactions are connected to persistence. For instance, familial capital was observed as being recursive throughout the study, overlapping onto the other four

aspects cultural wealth. However, outside the scope of this study are questions about whether familial wealth would be the same for other non-Latinx students, or whether other forms of cultural wealth would prove to be more significant.

Policy and Practice

Academic counselors were found to both supportive and inhibiting influencers for students. Mixed experiences with counselors mostly occurred during participants' community college enrollments, while negative experiences were regularly recalled while attending WSU. Whether students were affected positively or negatively, academic counselors were shown to be important cogs in the system that students encountered along their academic pathway. Advisors must engage students through a cultural competency lens that acknowledges the lived experiences of Latinx students. Findings from this study suggested mechanical interactions were prohibitive for Latinx students while attending community college. Thus, drawing from the tenet that race and power are interwoven in the systems and policies of higher education, counselors must take a holistic approach to advising Latinx students that helps them effectively navigate their campuses despite structural and political barriers. Professional development opportunities provided by institutions should be created to peel back the layers of structural deficits found in colleges, and help counselors to breakdown their own subconscious bias to better assist Latinx students. Ideally, in turn, counselors would be better equipped to engage in conversations that would support Latinx students or students of color through conversations on how to handle microaggressions in the classroom, finding their voice when confronted with racial epithets, or learning strategies to mitigate stereotype threat.

Findings also illustrated that there was room for WSU to grow in their understanding of transfer student experiences on campus. In order to better understand and cater to the needs of transfer students of color, WSU should seek to coordinate efforts across the institution through an intentional set of policies and practices that are financially sustainable. Influenced by Jain et al.'s (2011) concept of building a transfer receptive culture and based on the findings, three elements could further establish a supportive environment for transfer students at WSU.

First, the university should more equally balance the support systems identified for transfer students, rather than solely front loading their efforts for pre-arrival students (Miller, 2013). Currently, outreach, transfer bridge, and orientation programs are being implemented on campus. However, there is little coordination among services and programs are understaffed, limiting their ability to scale up and effectively support the volume of students needing pre on-campus advising. Once enrolled in the university, however, specific support services for transfer students or students that commute to campus during non-traditional hours are virtually absent. A centralized transfer center, extended evening hours for the career center, or evening advising opportunities are not present. Some of the described concerns could be minimized in the short term by having extended times during the evening, for instance, to support students coming to campus during non-peak hours. Long-term solutions, including the lack of campus coordination, could be addressed by creating a centralized committee charged with sharing information across programs and developing best practices to guide future work to maximize limited resources.

Next, WSU needs to improve upon their digital footprint giving students as much information about how to transfer to WSU as possibly in a format that is accessible and easy to navigate. Since students either did not attend the transfer orientation or find it to be overly

informative, developing a robust online resource with access to specific transfer information could prove to be beneficial. Links to pertinent academic resources, information regarding critical transfer deadlines, or a running list of commonly asked questions are all ways the university could improve access to information with minimal human and fiscal capital.

Last, tailored assessments and evaluations that disaggregate information by race, age, and college-going status need to be created that focus specifically on transfer student experiences (Jain et al., 2011). Transfer students accounted for large portions of the student body, but limited information was known about their campus experiences by staff (Fann, 2013). Developing longitudinal assessments that tracks student progress, coupled with focus group sessions, would help the institution learn about the changing needs of transfer students towards graduation.

Moving Forward

The investigatory scope of this study focused on exploring the influencers of student persistence of Latinx community college students towards four-year degree attainment. Findings illustrated on- and off-campus influencers challenged and supported participant persistence. Conclusions drawn from those findings left me thinking about further ways to continue this research and additional questions about student success.

Foremost, despite the seemingly limited support for transfer students at WSU, participants were still satisfied with their college experience and expressed a positive sense of affiliation to campus. Why did students feel this way? Orientation programs were loosely focused on transfer student needs, yet some students still found value in the programing. Were students so determined to finish that attending orientations were inconsequential to their success?

Did students find value in the programming simply because they were able to register for classes, while other components were frivolous?

Exploring student persistence from a mixed-methods approach, future studies could identify subsets of POCs that successfully navigated the most challenging pathways towards vertical transfer. For example, many students that enter community college below college-level math and English (e.g., academically unprepared students) have shown to have a higher propensity to stop out and not finish the developmental progression or transfer (Attewell et al., 2011). Interviewing a subset of students that completed the developmental sequence and transferred could be explored to further understand student success despite significant negative influencers.

Since community college counselors were identified as important influencers for many of the students, a future redesign could place counselors at the center of analysis and explore how counselors of color and white counselors engage aspiring transfer students of color. Do the groups of counselors engage POCs in the same way? What types of conversations are students having with the counselors and do those conversations lead to stronger bonds? Are there particular strategies utilized by counselors of color that other counselors could use, and vice versa? From an institutional viewpoint, how can two- and four-year colleges bring family members into the college going process to support students?

Ultimately, whatever angle is used to unpack student of color persistence, future research approaches should seek to do so by moving away from deficit thinking ideologies (Valencia, 2010) and participate in critical narratives that reject racism, sexism, and poverty, while empowering minoritized populations (Solorazno & Yosso, 2002). Solorazno and Yosso argued,

“Revealing the deficit discourse in majoritarian stories reveals white privilege and this often is perceived as a threat to those who benefit from racism” (p. 37). Thus, continuing to utilizing various critical theories such as cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), LatCrit (Valdes, 1998), Critical Feminism (Lather, 1992), and others helps validate the experiences of marginalized groups by challenging established narratives and recognizing various “isms” are interwoven into the fabric of extant majoritarian research, and institutions of higher education.

APPENDIX A
STUDENT PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Transfer student success: Latinx students overcoming challenges at two- and four-year institutions towards baccalaureate degree attainment.

Researcher(s): Ajani Byrd (PI), Ph.D. candidate Loyola University Chicago

Faculty Sponsor: Mark Engberg, Ph.D.

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Ajani Byrd for part of his dissertation study at Loyola University Chicago under the supervision of Dr. Mark Engberg, Associate Professor in the Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because you meet all of the following criteria. You:

1. Self-identify as Latino/a;
2. Vertically transferred from a California community college to your current institution;
3. Has been identified as “graduation eligible”, as defined by the university, during the spring 2015 semester.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to understand how Latina/o students successfully navigate their higher education experience. More specifically, understanding the perceived barriers identified by students and how they overcame them while attending their four-year institution.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in the following research components: You will be asked to participate in:

A 60-90 minute in person interview or online platform (e.g., Skype) to discuss experiences while attending two- and four-year institutions. Conversations will focus on social, academic, environmental, and institutional experiences.

Risks/Benefits:

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this research. For example, you may experience some discomfort responding to some of the interview questions. Additionally, if you participate in a focus group, I cannot guarantee complete confidentiality.

Confidentiality:

When you fill out your demographic form you will select a pseudonym, and the pseudonym will be kept on a password protected computer. After the interview, a transcript (completed by a third party affiliate) will be emailed to you to ensure validity and accuracy of your statements.

All data involved in this study will be stored on a password protected computer. Only the PI and the faculty sponsor will have access to this data (Email communications, pseudonym information, tape recordings and transcripts).

When the study is completed, including writing and reporting findings, all data and information related to the study will be destroyed (Email communications, pseudonym information, tape recordings and transcripts).

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Ajani Byrd at abyrd2@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Mark Engberg, at mengber@luc.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

I agree to participate in this interview/focus group, and to the use of this interview/focus groups as described above.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX B
LETTER TO STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Hello,

My name is Ajani Byrd and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago and [information redacted]. I would like to invite you to participate in a study that focuses on the experiences of Latina/o transfer students at [information redacted]. This research seeks to better understand how community college transfer students successfully persist across both two- and four-year institutions. If you **(a)** identify as Latina/o, **(b)** transferred from a California community college to [information redacted], and **(c)** will exceed 120 units by the conclusion of this semester, you are eligible to partake in interviews and may be selected to participate in the study!

In order to join the research study, participants will be required to do the following:

1. Sign a participation consent form;
2. Complete demographic questionnaire;
3. Participate in an interview.

All participants that complete the entire study will receive **a gift certificate in the amount of \$10 to the Starbucks**. Interviews will take place during the spring semester on campus at a time and location that will be most convenient to participants. I will ask a series of questions that focus on your experiences as a transfer student of color and the factors that you perceive have supported your persistence towards baccalaureate degree attainment. Protecting the anonymity of participants is an extreme priority of the mine. Measures have been included in this study, per Institutional Review Board regulations, to ensure that all identifying information will be kept confidential, including keeping all digital information protected on a laptop computer and hard documents in a file cabinet, secured by lock and key.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please click the link [insert link here] and fill out the consent and demographic form. Your participation is greatly appreciated and hearing your unique voice is critically important to the success of this study, and understanding how to help other transfer students succeed.

If you have questions, please email me at abyrd2@luc.edu.

Regards,

Ajani

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO FACULTY, STAFF AND ADMINISTRATOR PARTICIPANTS

Hello,

My name is Ajani Byrd and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago and [information redacted]. I would like to invite you to participate in a study that focuses on the experiences of Latina/o transfer students at [information redacted]. This research seeks to better understand how community college transfer students successfully persist across both two- and four-year institutions. . You have been identified as person that could potentially be helpful in understanding the university perspective on working with this specific population. If you (a) are current faculty, staff, or administrator at [information redacted] and (b) have worked with transfers students during your time at the institution or have a vest interest in their success at [information redacted], you are eligible to partake in the study and may be selected to participate in a focus group session.

In order to join the research study, participants will be required to do the following:

1. Sign a participation consent form;
2. Complete demographic questionnaire;
3. Participate in a focus group session.

Interviews will take place during the spring semester on campus at a time and location that will be convenient to participants. I will be asking a series of questions that assist the researcher in gaining a deeper understanding, from an institutional perspective, the context or environment that Latina/o or other transfer students of color must traverse at [information redacted] to successfully graduate.

Protecting the anonymity of participants is a priority of the researcher. Measures have been included in this study to ensure that all identifying information will be kept confidential, including keeping all digital information protected on a laptop computer and hard documents in a file cabinet, secured by lock and key.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please click the link [insert link here] and fill out the consent and demographic form. Your participation is greatly appreciated and hearing your unique voice is critically important to the success of this study.

If you have questions, please email me at abyrd2@luc.edu.

Regards,

Ajani

APPENDIX D
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete the questionnaire by filling in the information below. This information will be used to compile a profile of all the participants in the study.

1. Preferred interview format
 In Person _____
 Skype, Google Chat, etc. _____
 No Preference _____
2. First Name _____
3. Last Name _____
4. Email address _____
5. Best Contact Number _____
6. Gender Identity
 Woman _____
 Man _____
 Transgender _____
 Gender non-conforming _____
 Other _____
7. Birth Year _____
8. Ethnicity
 African American _____
 Chicana/o _____
 Filipino _____
 Asian _____
 Latina/o _____
 Native American, Alaska Native _____
 White, Non-Latina/o _____
9. Do you have any dependents living in your household under the age of 18?
 Yes _____ No _____
10. Do you currently live in on-campus housing?
 Yes _____ No _____
11. Please enter your zip code of your place of residence _____
12. What is your current household income? [brackets including levels of income listed in drop down box]
13. While attending community college, did you work full-time (21 hours or more a week) or part-time (20 hours a week)? (Select one) Full-time _____ Part-time _____
14. While attending university, did you work full-time (21 hours or more a week) or part-time (20 hours a week)? (Select one) Full-time _____ Part-time _____
15. Check highest level of academic attainment by your father: some high school, high school graduate, college graduate, advanced degree
16. Check highest level of academic attainment by your mother: some high school, high school graduate, college graduate, advanced degree

Community College(s) Information

17. Name of last community college attended _____
18. Community college GPA _____
19. Did you attend community college as a part-time student (6 units or less) or full-time student (7 units or more)?
20. Did you complete an associates degree prior to transferring?
Yes _____ No _____
21. How many credits did you earn while attending community college? _____
22. How many other four-year colleges, if any, did you apply to other than [information redacted]?
0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 and above _____
23. Did you apply to other four-year colleges? If yes, how many? _____

[information redacted] Information

24. Was attending a four-year institution a goal before you started attending a community college? Yes _____ No _____
25. What semester and year did you first start taking classes at [information redacted]?

26. Current Student Status? Part-time (6 units or less) _____
Full-time (7 units or more) _____
27. What is your academic major of study? _____
28. What are your plans for after graduation? _____

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Purpose: To gain a deeper understanding of how Latina/o successfully navigated their four-year institution towards degree completion.

Script: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me regarding your experiences as Latina/o transfer student. This study aims to better understand how you, as a transfer student of color, have successfully navigated your two- and four-year institutions towards degree completion. Additionally, I am interested in what strategies and/or techniques you accumulated along your post-secondary educational path that have assisted you towards graduation at [information redacted].

You have already filled out the demographic form before speaking with me today. But I would like to review the Consent Form that you have in hand.

[REVIEW CONSENT FORM]

Questions are sequenced in chronological order, beginning with your experiences at your community colleges and ending at [information redacted]. However, if you feel inclined to link your experiences between the two time periods, please feel free to do so.

Community College Experiences

How do students' experiences at their community college influence the vertical transfer process?

How, if at all, did you feel connected to the community college you attended?

What programs and services, if any, did you find to be most valuable as a community college student?

How did you find these programs and services?

What barriers, if any, did you face in while going through the transfer process?

What techniques and/or strategies did you use to overcome those barriers?

What resources or individuals, if any, were helpful in your ability to navigate those barriers? How specifically did these resource or individuals contribute?

What influences (i.e., family, friends, community support groups), if any, played a role in your progress towards transfer? How specifically did these resource or individual contribute?

As a successful community college transfer student, what information do you know now, you wished you knew when you were attending your two-year institution?

Do you believe any of the accumulated experiences at your community college contributed to your successful persistence at [information redacted]? If so, which ones and why?

University Experiences

How do students' experiences at their four-year institutions influence their persistence towards degree completion?

How has the university, if at all, supported you as a transfer student?

What programs and services, if any, did you find to be most valuable as a transfer student?

Outside of faculty, who have you found the most support, if at all, as a student while attending [information redacted]? How were they helpful?

Describe the types of experiences you have had with faculty members at [information redacted].

What outside influences (i.e., family, friends, community support groups), if any, played a role in your progress towards degree attainment? How specifically did these resource or individual contribute? How has the level of support, if at all, changed while you were attending your community college versus [information redacted]?

Wrap Up

How do transfer students of color describe their overall post-secondary experiences?

What comparisons, if any, can you draw between your community college and [information redacted] experiences? (e.g., faculty, advisors, support programs, mentors, community organizations)

What has been your biggest challenge while attending your community college and [information redacted]?

If you had to do it all over again, what, if anything, would you do differently?

What advice would you give other student about to begin their journey as a community college seeking to graduate from a four-year institution?

Conclusion

If you had the opportunity to talk with the President of this institution, what would you want him to know about you transfer experience and the time you have spent at [information redacted]?

If you were in a position of authority, what if anything would you do to make the university friendlier and inviting for transfer students of color?

Is there anything else you would like for me to know about your experience at [information redacted]?

APPENDIX F
FACULTY/STAFF INTERVIEW PROCOTOL

Interview Purpose: To gain a deeper understanding of how students of color successfully navigated their four-year institution towards degree completion.

Script: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about transfer students of color. This study aims to better understand how transfer students of color successfully navigated their four-year institution towards degree completion. The purpose of this focus group is give the researcher a deeper understanding, from an institutional perspective, of the context or environment that transfer students of color must traverse at [information redacted] to successfully graduate. I will be asking questions that are guided in part by a Transfer Receptive Culture conceptual framework developed by Jain et al. (2011) that focus on five different areas of interest: (a) Institutional Priorities, (b) Outreach, (c) Support Services, (e) Transfer Student Experiences, and (f) Assessment and Evaluation.

At this time, I would like to review the Consent Form that you have in hand. [REVIEW CONSENT FORM] heuristic

Institutional Priorities

- What types of students do you believe the university is most interested in admitting each year? What has led you to this conclusion?
- How do transfer students, if at all, fit into the university enrollment strategy?

Outreach

- How, if at all, are transfer students specifically targeted by [information redacted]?

Support Services

- What types of services, if any, are available specifically for community college transfer students during their first two semesters at [information redacted]?
- What efforts, if any, are made to inform transfer students of the range of services that are available to them on and off campus?

Transfer Student Experiences

- What practices, if any, are present on campus that engage the families of transfer students?

Assessment and Evaluation

- What measures, if any, are being assessed on tracking the progress of transfer students?

Wrap Up

- What suggestions, if any, do you have that would improve the integration of transfer students during the first year at [information redacted]?
- Are there any current or future initiatives that focus on transfer students at [information redacted]?
- What suggestions, if any, do you have that would improve the persistence of transfer students towards graduation?

APPENDIX G
FACULTY/STAFF PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Transfer student success: Latinx students overcoming challenges at two- and four-year institutions towards baccalaureate degree attainment.

Researcher(s): Ajani Byrd (PI), Ph.D. candidate Loyola University Chicago

Faculty Sponsor: Mark Engberg, Ph.D.

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Ajani Byrd for part of his dissertation study at Loyola University Chicago under the supervision of Dr. Mark Engberg, Associate Professor in the Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because you meet all of the following criteria. You:

1. Are in employee of [information redacted];
2. You currently or have formerly worked with community college transfer students or have a vested interest in their success at [information redacted].

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to understand how transfer students of color successfully navigate their higher education experience. More specifically, understanding the perceived barriers identified by students and how they overcame them while attending their four-year institution. The purpose of this focus group is give the researcher a deeper understanding, from an institutional perspective, the context or environment that transfer students of color must traverse at [information redacted] to successfully graduate. Additionally, conversations will be used to triangulate data collected by student interviews and university documents.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-90 minute interview that will take place at [information redacted]. The researcher will be asking questions that are guided in part by a Transfer Receptive Culture conceptual framework developed by Jain et al. (2011) that focus on five different areas of interest: (a) Institutional Priorities, (b) Outreach, (c) Support Services, (e) Transfer Student Experiences, and (f) Assessment and Evaluation.

Risks/Benefits:

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this research. For example, you may experience some discomfort responding to some of the interview questions. Additionally, if you participate in a focus group, I cannot guarantee complete confidentiality.

Confidentiality:

All data involved in this study will be stored on a password protected computer. Only the PI and the faculty sponsor will have access to this data (Email communications, pseudonym information, tape recordings and transcripts).

When the study is completed, including writing and reporting findings, all data and information related to the study will be destroyed (Email communications, pseudonym information, tape recordings and transcripts).

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Ajani Byrd at abyrd2@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Mark Engberg, at mengber@luc.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

I agree to participate in this interview/focus group, and to the use of this interview/focus groups as described above.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

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VITA

Prior to attending Loyola University Chicago, Ajani Byrd was the director of Campus Recreation at San Francisco State University. During the doctoral program, Ajani worked as a research assistant within the School of Education and evaluation and assessment assistant within the Division of Student Development. He published multiple peer-reviewed manuscripts, presented at several national conferences, and served on various campus committees, while attending the Higher Education program. Ajani's research focuses on issues of equity and diversity in post-secondary education. Specifically, focusing on the retention and persistence of marginalized student populations in community college settings.

In the fall 2015, Ajani moved to California where he accepted a Graduate Fellowship position at the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. Ajani supported the divisions of Academic Affairs and Student Services on a range of strategic initiatives, programs, and services affiliated with the retention and persistence of students of color. Particularly, working closely with statewide programs regarding Inmate and Re-entry Education, Student Equity, and Basic Skills. In the spring 2017, Ajani accepted the director of Equal Opportunity Programs and Services at Mission College.

Ajani received his Ph.D. in Higher Education from Loyola University Chicago. He received his Master's degree in Sport Management from the University of San Francisco and his B.A. in Liberal Studies from San Francisco State University.

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature that appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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