

2010

Community college transfer students' reflections of their needs, experiences, and persistence at a private four-year institution

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The University of San Francisco

COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS OF THEIR
NEEDS, EXPERIENCES, AND PERSISTENCE AT A PRIVATE FOUR-YEAR
INSTITUTION

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Department of Leadership Studies
Organization and Leadership Program

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Virginia A. Rios
San Francisco, California
May 2010

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
Dissertation Abstract

Community College Transfer Students' Reflections of their Needs, Experiences, and Persistence at a Private Four-Year Institution

A majority of the studies conducted regarding transfer students is in conjunction with their academic performance and academic attainment at the four-year institution.

However, minimal study has been done to identify what their other needs are once they reach the four-year institutions and how these needs influence persistence and success.

Many four-year colleges and universities use traditional academic factors to identify students at risk of leaving the institution but this approach may miss students who are at risk of dropping out due to other non-academic factors.

This qualitative research study explored the needs and experiences of community college transfer students attending a private four-year institution and examined the factors that lead to their persistence and success. The study utilized random sampling method and collected data from nine community college transfer students attending the university. Open-ended and structured dialogues were used in the study. The dialogues were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed for generative themes.

The results of the study showed programs and services that reflect the University's mission and values and support programs that enhance academic success were found to be supportive of transfer students' needs. The factors that lead to transfer students' persistence are faculty/staff-student interactions, academic engagement, peer support, student involvement, and student development.

The study suggested that transfer students' needs are not only academic, but also social and emotional. On a social level, the study indicated that it takes time for transfer students to form peer relationships and establish friendships, especially for older transfers. These students experience feelings of isolation during the transitional period and through their first year. The social and emotional needs of transfer students are critical factors for University Administrators to consider when implementing support programs. Many four-year institutions have academic support systems in place but social support systems need to be clearly defined if the institution wants a successful transition for their transfer students.

Recommendations for educational practice and future research were made based on the participants' responses and reflections. The transfer institution should have structures in place to help transfer students in the transition process and alleviate feelings of isolation. There should be programming specifically focused on transfer students that address their specific concerns and unique needs.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

<u>Virginia Rios</u> Candidate	<u>May 5, 2010</u> Date
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Dissertation Committee

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving dad, Pete, and to my beautiful mom, Trinidad, who have always encouraged me to continue the search for knowledge.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I give my heartfelt thanks to my doctoral committee, Dr. Patricia Mitchell, Dr. Betty Taylor, and Dr. Brian Gerrard, for their support, wisdom, and guidance in helping me shape this project. Their help was invaluable.

I thank my colleagues in the Admission Office at USF, and a very special thank you to Charles Skinner. Without their assistance, this dissertation would not have been possible.

My special thanks to my classmate and friend, Steve, for sharing his insights and advice.

I thank Rina and Giannina for their countless time and energy in making sure that this dissertation came to fruition.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the students who participated in this study. Their willingness to share their insights and reflections made this study possible.

I thank my family and friends, who have always believed in me, and for their patience and support throughout the whole process.

Last, my sincere thanks to my husband and son for their unwavering encouragement, confidence, support, and love.

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CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

While a majority of studies conducted regarding transfer students focused on their academic performance and academic attainment at four-year institutions, little research has been done to identify other needs of these students once they enroll in four-year institutions and how those needs influence persistence and success. Many four-year colleges and universities use traditional academic factors to identify students at risk of leaving the institution but this approach may miss other students who might withdraw due to non-academic factors.

According to Laanan (2001), for example, many studies regarding community college students' transition to the four-year institution examined academic performance, but only a few looked at students' emotional, social, and psychological development at the four-year institution. Laanan (2001) also concluded that transfer students are likely to experience a complex adjustment process—academic, social, and psychological—because of environmental differences between two- and-four-year institutions. And Cohen and Brawer (1989) found that students who enter the university as freshmen (native students) earned higher grades than did transfer students.

In addition, transfer students can expect to take longer to graduate and will be more likely to experience greater difficulty than native students. Transfer students often come from different racial, social, and economic backgrounds than students who enter four-year institutions as freshmen. Many community college transfer students are the first generation in their families to attend college, and a majority of these students do not

have the financial and emotional support or the academic guidance needed to persist at the four-year institution.

Despite the tremendous growth in enrollment of transfer students at four-year institutions, most research conducted on student retention has focused on native students. For example, while Tinto (1993) wrote extensively about freshmen student retention and persistence in *Leaving College*, he also acknowledged that there has been inadequate research on transfer student persistence and retention: “though transfer students form a significant segment of the population of individual institutions, they have received little attention in discussion of retention policies” (Tinto, 1993, p. 190).

There is a need for private four-year universities to focus on community college transfer students in order to retain them. A majority of studies performed at private universities focused primarily on freshmen, not on transfers.

The transfer process is a complicated one, especially considering the many academic programs and different types of institutions from which transfer students must choose. This participatory research study explored the needs and experiences of transfer students and examined the factors that lead to their persistence and success at the four-year institution.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the needs, experiences, persistence, and success of community college transfer students attending a private, four-year institution. Persistence is defined as students’ re-entry into the following academic year at the same university. Success is defined as the attainment of a baccalaureate degree from the four-

year institution. With tremendous growth in the enrollment of transfer students at four-year institutions every year, it is with hope that findings from this study will be applied to improve transfer persistence and success.

Background and Need for the Study

Townsend (2001) found that a significant portion of the college population attended more than one college declaring different majors at different times. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) discovered that there has been tremendous increase in multi-institutional enrollment over the past two decades. They found that students exhibit different attendance patterns, including entering college right after high school, withdrawing from college altogether, interrupting enrollment temporarily, or transferring from one institution to another. Transfer can be from a two-year institution to a four-year institution, from one four-year institution to another, from a four-year institution to a two-year institution, or from one two-year institution to another.

Wechsler (1989) characterized transfer students as a unique group of students—with their own concerns, needs, challenges, interests, and contributions, who adapt psychosocially to different circumstances. Laanan (2001) characterized transfer students as a diverse group of students who vary in age, gender, racial and ethnic background, academic preparation, and employment patterns. Laanan (2001) commented, the “community college student who transfers to the four-year institution faces new psychological, academic, and environmental challenges” (p. 5).

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), while only a few studies considered the consequences of such transfers, these studies’ findings consistently

suggested that such moves reduce the odds of earning a baccalaureate degree if students' unique challenges are not successfully met and addressed. Students persist as they complete the baccalaureate degree if there is a fit between them and the institution they are attending.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) determined that a student's original point of entry in college was associated significantly with educational goals, persistence, and degree attainment. Students are looking for a campus environment where they can be intellectually challenged, they can thrive, and they explore their fullest potential for personal growth. Academic or social dissatisfaction in the new environment can lead to student departure from an institution.

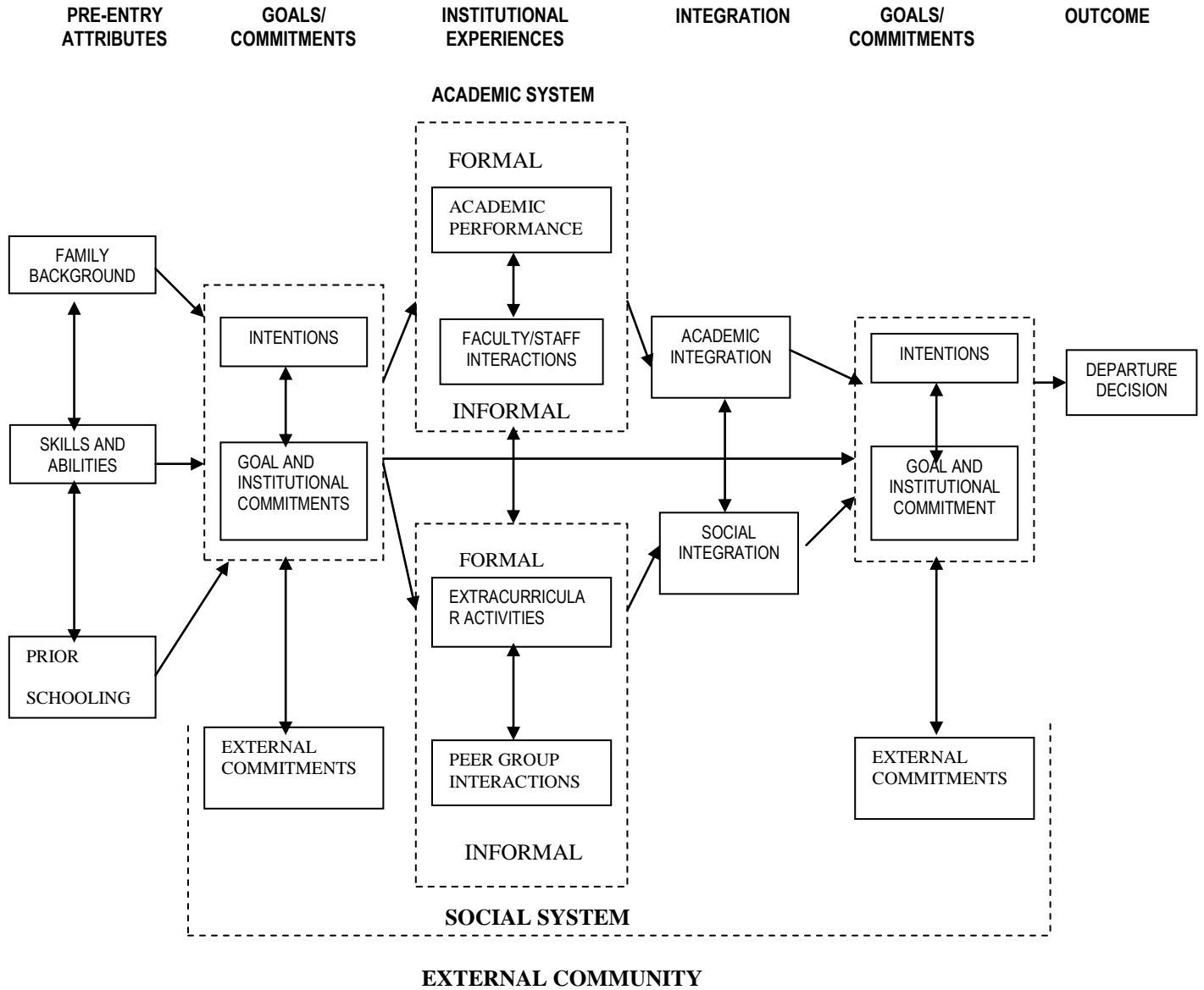
Tinto (1993) pointed to many variables that could influence student departure from campus. These included environmental concerns, "adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, isolation, finances, learning, and external obligations or commitments" (p. 112). Attinasi (1989) found that students integrate with their college because of the collective relationships they form to learn the skills necessary to handle intellectual, physical, and social aspects of the campus community.

Theoretical Framework

Two primary theoretical frameworks guided this study. The first is Tinto's (1975, 1993) theory of student departure, which provides an understanding of why students withdraw from college. It presents both academic and social systems into which the student must integrate (Tinto, 1987). Tinto (1993) stated that integration into one system does not indicate integration into the other system (see Figure 1).

Tinto's (1975, 1993) model is designed to address departure within a campus environment, including the longitudinal and interactional nature of the departure. It describes how interactions with various facets of a campus community can lead individuals with specific characteristics to leave from the environment. This longitudinal institutional model of attrition contends that the process of integration between the students and the institutions is a complex interaction of both internal and external factors.

The second theoretical framework used in this study, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of development, explains how college students develop and the developmental issues they face as they persist throughout college. Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory also provides tools for understanding various interpersonal phases and stages students encounter as they transition into a new college environment. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), it is necessary to understand the stages of human development in order to function in a multiculturally interdependent world.



TIME (T) →

Source: Tinto (1993)

Figure 1. Tinto's longitudinal model of institutional departure.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study:

What programs and services do community college transfer students perceive as supportive of their needs at the four-year institution?

What factors lead to the persistence and success of community college transfer students at the four-year institution?

What recommendations do current transfer students have for future transfers and for the institution about persistence and transfer success?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in this study:

Articulation agreement: An agreement that identifies the transfer of specific courses from the community college into specific courses and programs at the four-year institution.

Community college: A two-year accredited institution of higher learning offering a curriculum parallel to the first two years of study at a four-year baccalaureate granting institution.

Community college transfer student: A student who took courses in, but was not necessarily enrolled in, a two-year program leading to an AA degree or an AS degree for the purpose of transferring to a four-year institution to pursue a baccalaureate degree.

Four-year institution: A public or private institution of higher learning that grants a baccalaureate degree requiring four years of study.

Native students: Students who enter an institution as first-time freshmen, as opposed to transfer students.

Persistence: Student re-entry in the following academic school year at the same institution.

Retention: Student re-enrollment in courses at the university in the following semester.

Success: Continuous enrollment in a four-year institution up to attainment of a baccalaureate degree.

Transfer: Admission from one institution to another with the acceptance of course credits already earned by the transferring student.

Transfer student: A student who enrolls at a four-year baccalaureate granting institution after earning credits at another institution of higher learning.

Two-year institution: A public or private institution of higher learning providing only two-year degrees (associate degrees), vocational, and certificate programs.

Significance of the Study

Students who begin their college education at community colleges have diverse degree goals and personal aspirations. The National Center for Education Statistics (2003) reported that about one-fourth of the students who began at a public two-year institution at some point during the 1995-1996 academic year intended to transfer to a four-year institution and complete a baccalaureate degree.

This study explores the needs, experiences, and persistence of community college transfer students at a private four-year institution. Its findings may help administrators

develop effective programs that offer support services to meet the diverse needs of the transfer population and, as a consequence, positively influence their departure decisions and facilitate their successful transition and completion of the baccalaureate degree.

This study may contribute to the research regarding the retention of transfer students, which is critical to the success of tuition-driven, private institutions. The study's findings may also help Student Affairs administrators in developing and implementing programs that will meet the developmental needs and challenges of transfer students.

Delimitations

This study was conducted at a private four-year institution in northern California. The sample population consisted of students that the site institution designated as community college transfer students who had finished their first year of study. These students can be categorized as sophomores or juniors who might have completely different needs and experiences given different majors or program changes that may occur from one year to another.

Limitations

The study was conducted at a single institution from a single year sample that limited the findings of the study, and which may not be applicable to other public or private four-year institutions. The results of the study reflect the needs and experiences of the specific students who participated in the dialogues, and their responses may have been influenced by factors outside the scope of this study. Their needs and experiences

may also differ significantly from students who attend other public or private institutions and may not reflect the general transfer student population.

Summary

This chapter identified the problems transfer students encounter when they reach the four-year institution and how their needs and experiences differ from those of entering freshmen. Transfer students face academic, psychological, social, and environmental challenges when they begin at a new institution. Their persistence greatly depends on how well they adapt to their new environment and to varying situations. Community college transfer students experience a complex adjustment process in the transitioning stage. Traditional-aged transfer students also encounter a variety of developmental changes and concerns.

Chapter I also presented two theories that explain student departure/persistence and the development of college students: Tinto's model of student departure and Chickering and Reisser's vectors of development. These two models provided the foundation for this study of community college transfer students attending a private four-year institution. This is a significant portion of college enrollees. According to the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (2008), 63 percent of community college students transferred to a four-year institution in 2008.

Chapter II of this dissertation presents literature and empirical studies based on Tinto's (1975, 1993) theory of student departure, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of development, and Astin's (1985) theory of involvement.

Chapter II also examines the importance of students' voices and the impact of culture and diversity in student development. Chapter III details the research design and methodology, as well as the research instrument, data collection, and analysis of the material. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study. Chapter V discusses the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter examines the relevant literature that will help with the task of understanding the impact of college on transfer students. Five areas are discussed in this section: empirical studies that focused on Tinto's (1975, 1993) theory of student departure, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of development, Astin's (1985) theory of involvement, the importance of students' voices, and the impact of culture and diversity in student development.

Theory of Student Departure

Tinto's (1975, 1993) model asserts that students bring with them to the campus pre-entry attributes, including family background, specific skills and abilities, and previous education. These pre-entry attributes influence the students' intentions, goals, and institutional commitment. Through formal and informal activities and interactions, students develop academic and social integration with the institution. Academic integration involves a student's intellectual and cognitive development and performance at the transfer institution. Social integration involves a student's involvement in activities in and out of the classroom, clubs and organizations, interactions with faculty and staff, and relationships formed with peers. Tinto theorized that some level of social and academic integration must occur in order for the student to remain at the college.

Tinto (1975, 1993) developed a longitudinal model to address and better understand the factors that shape student persistence or its reverse, departure, in higher

education. Tinto's model was based on social theory and organizational and psychological concepts. He stated that, although many researches have been done on student departure, these models have not been very effective in explaining the complex process of college student withdrawal and how four-year institutions can increase their retention rates. Tinto (1993) argued that most models of student departure indicate that "retention and departure are primarily the reflection of individual actions and therefore are largely due to the ability or willingness of the individual to successfully complete the tasks associated with college attendance" (p. 85).

In Tinto's model of student departure, he explained through social anthropology and suicide theory, the complex process that leads students to withdraw from college and the actions, perceptions, and attitudes of the college community. Tinto applied Van Gennep's (1960) notion of "rites of passage," the process of acquiring membership in a community. Tinto examined Van Gennep's notion to the process of becoming integrated into the college community, and described the rites of passage as the process of getting membership from one community to another. According to Tinto (1993), Van Gennep's rites of passage was marked by three phases: "separation, transition, and incorporation" (p. 92).

Van Gennep's first stage, separation, involves the individual's separation and less interactions from his/her past. This stage is characterized by decreased interactions with members of the past group. The second stage, transition, "is a period during which the person begins to interact in new ways with members of the new group into which membership is sought" (Tinto, 1993, p. 93). Transition to the new community involves learning the values, beliefs, norms, and expectations of that community. The third and

last stage, incorporation, involves learning new patterns of interaction with members of the new group and establishing competent membership within that group (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto related the study of the rites of passage with the different stages that college students go through as they transition into a new environment. This concept also relates to student persistence in transfer students, as they are transitioning to their new community and adjusting to new lifestyle patterns and re-establishing friendships. Successful transition increases the likelihood of student persistence at the university.

Tinto also applied the study of suicide to further explain his model of student departure. His theoretical model was based on Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide, which asserts that if division of labor in a society does not produce solidarity, it is because the organs are not regulated in an orderly fashion and are in a state of anomie.

Durkheim (1951) defined anomie as a temporary state of time when societal rules are not in place, often leading to chaos and confusion among members of the society. Anomie leads to suicide, according to Durkheim, who argued that to prevent suicide, individuals should be more efficiently integrated into society. Tinto related Durkheim's concept to working with college students and the capability of the school's environment to make a change in their students' lives.

As in the case of societies, institutions that are able to fully integrate their students into their social and intellectual life decrease rates of departure. Tinto (1993) contended that colleges are made up of two systems: academic and social. The academic system is concerned with educating the students and the social system centers on the student's personal needs and the interactions among faculty, staff, and students in a social context.

Tinto (1993) emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the academic and social systems of institutions.

Tinto (1975) proposed that college students are more likely to leave if they are not sufficiently integrated into the social and academic systems of the institutions or if they have values sufficiently different from the values of the college or university they are attending. Tinto (1975) stated that dispositions that influence individuals toward departure rather than persistence within the college community fall into two categories, “intentions or goals and commitments” (p. 110). Goals (intentions) and motivations (commitments) help to explain student departure. A student who is more committed to obtaining goals within the institutional context (institutional commitment) will likely persist and complete a degree within that institution.

Tinto’s (1993) model of student departure

. . . seeks to explain how interactions among different individuals within the academic and social systems of the institution and the communities which comprise them lead individuals of different characteristics to withdraw from that institution prior to degree completion. (p. 113).

A student’s decision to leave also depends on his or her experiences in the sociological and intellectual surrounding. Tinto’s (1993) model

. . . argues that individual departure from the institutions can be viewed as arising out of a longitudinal process of interactions between an individual with given attributes, skills, financial resources, prior educational experiences, and dispositions (intentions and commitments) and other members of the academic and social systems of the institutions. (p. 113)

According to Tinto (1987, 1993), students’ unmet expectations in college are unlikely to become integrated with the institution’s academic and social environment because students perceive that the institutions are not meeting their expectations.

Students’ unmet needs can decrease their chances of academic and social integration with

the college community, which can eventually lead to student withdrawal. Upon enrollment, a student develops interpretations of his/her experiences at the institution, and in the process, decides if he or she wishes to establish membership in the institution leading to institutional commitment.

Metzner and Bean (1987) defined students 25 years old and under as traditional college age (younger students), and 25 years old and older as non-traditionally aged (older students). Community college students are more diverse with regard to age. Discriminant function analysis, used for Metzner and Bean's (1987) study, indicated that integration and goal commitment were important to younger students' persistence, study skills and institutional commitment were important to older students, and intellectual stimulation and perceptions of cognitive development were important to persistence in both age groups. Institutional support services impact younger and older students, and a student-centered environment positively affects student persistence and retention.

Grosset (1991) concluded,

. . . all students should be linked to some systematic, structured support network when they enter college. Students should have clearly identified institutional resources that will intervene when they are confronted with an academic or personal crisis that may impact on their decisions to reenroll.
(p. 176)

Long-term relationships, characterized by continuous and meaningful dialogues between advisors and advisees, should be encouraged. Grosset (1991) also noted that orientation programs, major and course selections, registration procedures, counseling services, and other student support programs that are offered must be able to accommodate both the strengths and weaknesses of transfer students.

Baumgart and Johnstone (1977) performed a case study with discontinuing students at Macquarie University on the characteristics of these students and the interaction of these characteristics with demands of the institution. A sample of 444 undergraduate students used for the study was divided into the following categories: students persisting in term 3 of the second year, students who discontinued during the first year, students who voluntarily discontinued after the first year, and students who were excluded because of failure at end of the first year. The study showed that persisting students tended to have higher high school test scores, had more friends, and were more satisfied with the academic aspects of university life. Persisting students tended to have clear achievement goals and were better integrated into both the academic and social systems of the university. Students who discontinued in their first year and students who voluntarily discontinued after the first year had lower goal commitments at entry, were less interested in both the institution and degree attainment and, therefore, achieved poorer social integration.

Munro (1981) conducted a path analysis to test Tinto's model of college dropping out. The variables used were socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity, sex, aptitude, locus of control and self-esteem, high school grades, perceived parental aspirations, educational aspirations, academic integration, social integration, goal commitment, institutional commitment, persistence in institution, and persistence in higher education. The sample included 6,018 subjects. The findings showed that the effects of SES, ethnicity, and sex on persistence were mainly indirect, transmitted through college experiences variables. High school academic performance was a stronger indicator of college academic performance than was measured aptitude. Self-esteem was a strong predictor of

personality. Perceived parental aspirations had the strongest direct effect on educational aspirations. Academic integration strongly affected persistence, whereas social integration had no significant effect. The study also showed that educational aspirations for both the students and the parents have a greater effect on goal commitment and academic integration than do social integration and external commitments. The findings also support Tinto's hypothesis that goals and institutional commitments increase persistence.

Pascarella and Chapman (1983) conducted a path analytic validation of Tinto's model of student departure using data collected from multi-institutional samples. The study found that the effects of background characteristics were mainly indirect, transmitted between variables. Pascarella and Terenzini (1977, 1979) investigated the effects of student characteristics (e.g., sex, academic aptitude, and personality needs) relative to social and academic integration and on persistence and withdrawal decisions. The study also aimed at identifying the interactions between student and faculty as they affect persistence. Tinto's model (1975) suggested that "interaction with faculty not only increases social integration and therefore institutional commitment but also increases the individual's academic integration" (p. 109). Tinto's (1975) model also suggests that contact with faculty correlates with higher student achievement and institutional commitment, and that it is positively related to the students' intellectual stimulation and development.

Research by Pascarella and Terenzini (1977, 1979) show that academic integration seemed more important for men than for women and that social integration (particularly relating with peers) was more important for women than for men. The

studies also suggest that not all types of informal contact had equal importance in fostering academic and social integration; nor was the effect of this contact equally strong for men and women. Discussions focusing on intellectual or course-related matters were considered the most important and positive type of contact for students who persisted. Furthermore, Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) found that faculty contact had a somewhat greater positive influence on persistence for men than for women.

Pascarella and Terenzini's (1978, 1980) longitudinal studies concluded that student experiences following enrollment are more important in subsequent student withdrawal than are students' pre-college characteristics that they bring with them to the college environment. Other factors related to attrition are student perceptions of their academic program and the frequency of student interactions with faculty outside the classroom. Contact with faculty is important for students' academic and social integration. The study found that academic and social variables continued to contribute to the amount of variance found even when pre-college characteristics and pre-college expectations were accounted for, thus validating Tinto's model that academic and social integration influence persistence/withdrawal.

Studies by Terenzini, Lorang, and Pascarella (1981) showed institutional and goal commitments have a significant and direct effects on persistence. This longitudinal and *ex-post facto* study design also determined that student-faculty informal interactions lead to different levels of institutional commitments.

Wolcott (2006) conducted a study of college sophomores on preparation and persistence during their freshman year using Tinto's model of student departure. The study found that freshmen success can be attributed to how these students are supported

by the institution, and that both academic and social integration have a positive impact on persistence through the first year.

Chickering and Reisser's Vectors of Development

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of development is one of the most widely known psychosocial theories of traditional-aged college students. The development of college students is a complex process. This theory discusses how college students develop and the tasks, stages, and/or qualitative changes they undergo in behaving, feeling, valuing, and relating to others. Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated that "movement along any one can occur at different rates and can interact with movement along the others" (p. 34).

These vectors help students grow in strength, versatility, and ability to adapt to unexpected situations. They offer a broad base of knowledge in understanding the wide array of social situations in which college students find themselves as well as their particular developmental concerns and changes. These vectors are used as maps to help determine where students are and where they are headed. This theory ties to student perceptions of their experiences and has been used by professionals in higher education for understanding college students.

Chickering (1969) first developed this model based on the work of Erickson (1959), one of the first theorists to apply psychosocial theory to adult development. Chickering and Reisser (1993) identified seven "vectors of development" (p. 2): developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward

independence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity.

The first vector, developing competence, includes intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Intellectual competence is developing new skills in ways of thinking. Physical and manual competence involves athletic achievement, self-discipline, gaining strength, and fitness. Interpersonal competence involves listening and communicating effectively and strengthening relationships with individuals and groups.

The second vector centers on managing emotions. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), “development proceeds when students learn appropriate channels for releasing irritations before they explode, dealing with fears before they immobilize, and healing emotional wounds before they infect other relationships” (p. 46). Students go through a challenging transitional phase during the college years where feelings and emotions are involved. This second vector allows one to acknowledge and be aware of such feelings and emotions. Chickering and Reisser (1993) argue that because of the growing diversity of our college campuses, institutions need to be more aware of the feelings that drive students’ behavior and help them manage those unruly emotions that can impede educational progress.

The third vector involves moving through autonomy toward independence. “A key step for students is learning to function with relative self-sufficiency, to take responsibility for pursuing self-chosen goals, and to be less bound by the opinion of others” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 47). Moving through autonomy involves emotional and instrumental independence. “Emotional independence means freedom

from continual and pressing needs for reassurances, affection or approval. . . .

Instrumental independence is the ability to organize activities and to solve problems in a self-directed way, and the ability to be mobile” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 47). This vector helps students distinguish the difference between autonomy and interdependence.

The fourth vector, developing mature interpersonal relationships, involves “tolerance [interpersonal and intercultural] and appreciation of differences” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 48). This vector is characterized by awareness, objectivity, curiosity, openness, empathy, and respecting differences, i.e., when students develop healthy intimacy with others. “Developing mature relationships is the ability to choose healthy relationships and make lasting commitments based on honesty, responsiveness, and unconditional regard” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 48). Mature relationship means less dependence on others, resulting in nurturing and long-lasting relationships.

The fifth vector, establishing identity, is knowing one’s self. This vector also involves “self-acceptance, self-esteem, personal stability, and integration” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 49).

The sixth vector, developing purpose, includes clarifying goals and having a set of priorities and plans that include vocation, personal interests, and interpersonal and family commitments (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Unifying one’s goals can result in meaningful purpose. The term vocation in this vector refers to work, career, or calling. Developing a purpose helps students find balance between intimate relationships and vocational calling.

The seventh vector, developing integrity, involves examining and balancing one's own values with the interests of others and formulating beliefs that are congruent with others. Respect for others' points of view and opinion is developed.

Astin's Theory of Involvement

According to Astin's (1985) theory of involvement, "students learn by becoming involved" (p. 133), and student involvement directly correlates with student persistence.

Astin offered five fundamental principles:

1) involvement requires the investment of psychological and physical energy in objects; 2) involvement is a continuous concept—different students will invest varying amounts of energy in different objects; 3) involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features; 4) the amount of learning or development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of involvement; and 5) educational effectiveness of any policy or practice is related to its capacity to induce student involvement. (Astin, 1985, pp. 135-136)

Astin's first principle states that involvement occurs on several stages. The second principle states that involvement takes place on a continuum and is different for every student. Involvement starts from the time the student applies to the university, to admission, and ultimately, through graduation. By getting involved in different areas of the college experience, students are exposed to a wide array of experiences that impact their growth and development as well as their personal or career decisions.

Astin's third principle considers the student's degree of involvement. Involvement helps the student grow and develop into a competent and mature person.

The fourth principle contends that the student's degree of involvement directly impacts the institution. Astin's fifth principle of involvement maintains that the

institution's procedures and policies allow students to develop and grow through involvement.

Astin's (1977) longitudinal study on the effects of types of involvement and student outcomes examined place of residence, honors programs, academic involvement, student-faculty interaction, athletic involvement, participation in student government, and effects on cognitive development. The study found that "college attendance in general seems to strengthen students' competency, self-esteem, artistic interests, liberalism, hedonism, and religious apostasy and to weaken their business interests" (Astin, 1984, p. 303). Additionally, Astin determined that living on campus was positively associated with involvement in student government, athletics, clubs and organizations, faculty interaction, satisfaction with undergraduate experiences, and an increase in the student's chances of persisting. Students who participated in honors programs enhanced their intellectual and interpersonal self-esteem. Astin (1977) found that involvement reinforces student satisfaction in four areas: student friendships, intellectual environment, the institution's academic reputation, and institutional administration.

Milem and Berger (1999) studied the relationship between involvement behaviors and integration perceptions and their effects on student persistence. Path analytic techniques were used in this longitudinal study at a highly selective, private, residential research university in the Southeast. Surveys were mailed to 1,547 first-time freshmen; 1,237 were returned. Factors included on the survey were faculty teaching behaviors, student involvement, reactions to stress, satisfaction, perceptions of the campus environment, and campus climate. The independent variables in this study consisted of (1) student background characteristics, (2) initial commitment, (3) student perceptions of

institutional and peer support, (4) academic and social integration, and (5) subsequent commitment. The dependent variable was a measure of student persistence from the first to second year of college. The study showed that early involvement has significant indirect effects on social integration, academic integration, subsequent institutional commitment, and persistence. The study found that early peer involvement reinforces perceptions of institutional and social support and, ultimately, persistence.

Astin (1973) studied the impact of dormitory living on college students. Astin found that students who were living on campus were less likely to drop out, tended to earn higher grades, and obtained their baccalaureate degrees in four years. Living in the dormitories also demonstrated a consistently positive effect on self-confidence and public speaking ability. Living on campus was determined to increase students' social life and interaction with others. Students who lived on campus were more satisfied than students who lived off campus with their overall undergraduate experience, especially with their interpersonal contacts with other students and faculty.

According to Boyer (1987), "the effectiveness of the undergraduate experience relates to the quality of campus life and is directly linked to the time students spend on campus and the quality of their involvement in activities" (p. 180). Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and associates (1991) concluded that "involving colleges" enhances student development and learning. Kuh et al. (1991) found that students are likely to have more institutional commitment and satisfaction with their education if the institution promotes active involvement in their learning and campus environment, and that there is greater social and academic integration and institutional commitment on the part of students if they are involved within the institution.

Astin's (1993) book, *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited*, examined the impact of the college experience on students using the "input-environment-output (I-E-O) model" as his conceptual framework. The study focused primarily on full-time students who went to college directly from high school and examined affective and cognitive outcomes. The study utilized behavioral and psychological data from student questionnaires completed immediately after admission to the college and again four years later. Astin (1993) concluded:

. . . [most] involvement variables showing significant residual associations with self-reported growth in interpersonal skills have to do with student-student interaction: hours per week spent in student clubs or organizations, working on group projects for a class, hours per week spent visiting with friends, giving presentations in class, socializing with students from different racial or ethnic groups, participating in a college internship program, participating in intramural sports, discussing racial or ethnic issues, and hours per week spent partying. (pp. 233-234)

Astin (1993) emphasized a strong correlation between nearly all aspects of cognitive and affective development and student involvement. The study also demonstrated a positive connection between student-faculty interaction and intellectual and personal growth.

Importance of Students' Voices

Listening to students' voices and perceptions is critical for establishing a quality education and to bring about change in today's society. Dahl (1995) wrote, voice "reveals the deeper meanings and perspectives of individuals and reflects learners' personal realities. Voice is distinctive, as individual as a fingerprint" (p. 126). Students' perspectives play out in what they believe and make meaning in what they decide to do. Kozol (1991) wrote that students' voices have been missing in discussions about school reform and change. Students are receptive to their own environment, and the realities of

their daily school experiences should be heard. Kozol (1991) argued that students have a vested interest in and are the primary stakeholders in school reforms. It is critical that their voices and judgments be heard to prepare them to assume a constructive and positive role in the real world.

Haberman (1991) asserted that teachers should actively engage their students by involving them in real life situations and giving them opportunities to reflect on their own lives. The top-down model of instruction will be effective only if students are active participants in their learning process. Students have much to say that is of great value to educators and policymakers. But, as Corbett and Wilson (1995) pointed out, “young people themselves occupy, at best, a minuscule part of the literature on the process of changing and reforming education” (p. 12). Moreover, the perspectives of transfer students are even less frequently addressed in reform literature. Since a majority of four-year institutions enrolls a large number of transfer students, it would be worthwhile to listen to their needs and experiences in order to help them persist and minimize student departure.

Lincoln (1995) commented on some of the reasons why educators should listen to students’ voices. On a scientific perspective he wrote,

. . . since schooling is one of the most powerful shapers of both learning and acquiring world-wide view, it makes sense to attend to ways in which children actively shape their contexts and begin to model the worlds and the way in which we, in turn, shape the possibilities available for learners.
(p. 89)

In order better to meet students’ needs, educators must understand how students interpret their educational experiences. Lincoln (1995) suggested also that it is important to listen to students’ voices for political reasons, and that historically the purpose of education has

been to educate citizens so that they can participate in the democratic process. However, the very opposite has been true (Selden, 1988). What has been done instead has been an effort to “retrofit . . . children to the presumed roles they would occupy as adults” (Lincoln, 1995, p. 89). According to Lincoln (1995), educational institutions have assigned children to social statuses that are related only to race, gender, or economic status, rather than based on intellectual capabilities. In order to build a just and prosperous society, we need students’ active participation and critical skills that are far beyond what most students experience in school. In order to produce citizens who are able to have a voice in the public domain, our students must be able to evaluate and synthesize information about important social issues. These skills are acquired in the process of schooling. Students are the primary benefactors in the learning process. But teachers can be, too. When teachers and students explore learning together, they create new forms of wisdom.

Oldfather (1995) also focused on the importance of students’ voices in education and the need for more research, especially as we move toward a view of learning as a “process of social construction and dismantle notions of teaching as transmission” (p. 131). Oldfather (1995) wrote,

In the midst of expanding the boundaries of knowledge authority and scholarly research, we are generally leaving out the primary stakeholders of education: students. They should be active participants in their own learning environments. . . . students are the experts on their own perceptions and experiences as learners, (p.131).

While students have been considered to be the “only authentic chroniclers of their own experience” (Delpit, 1988, p. 297), “adults (both teachers and researchers) more often than not leave students out of the dialogue about educational concerns and

underestimate the potential that students have in contributing to our understandings” (Delpit, 1988, p. 131).

Listening to students’ voices can help educators and educational researchers to construct scholarly knowledge about learning, teaching, and motivation. Giroux (1991) thought that pedagogy on students’ voices must also include their educational experiences as part of the process. This demonstrates that the experiences students bring to the classroom affect the nature of the classroom itself.

Giroux (1991) wrote:

. . . developing a pedagogy that takes the notion of student voice seriously means developing a critically affirmative language that works both with and on the experiences that the students bring to the classroom. This means taking seriously and confirming the language forms, modes of reasoning, dispositions, and histories that give students an active voice in defining the world; it also means working on the experiences of such students in order for them to examine both their strengths and weaknesses. (p. 104)

Understanding how students interpret their experiences at school will help foster their intellectual growth and development.

Examining students’ voices and engaging them in dialogues as part of the educational process bring students’ experiences to the forefront. When their voices are heard and valued, their commitment to the school’s community is strengthened, and they invest more of their energy in the learning process.

Research by Johnston and Nicholls (1995) found that students want to construct their own vibrant lives in school and to have a voice in their own schooling. Students’ voices are connections between books and their own experiences. Giving them a voice affords them the responsibility for the curriculum and how they want to navigate their own learning environment.

Impact of Culture and Diversity in Student Development

Diversity interaction and exposure are critical in student learning and development during the college years. Many universities recognize diversity as a goal and equip their students with skills and ways of thinking that will be useful in a diverse and complex society. Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen (1999) stated that although minimal empirical research has been done regarding the impact of diversity on students' educational experience, student and faculty diversity positively enhances the education provided by schools.

A diverse student body presents students with opportunities to sharpen their skills in bridging cultural differences. A diverse faculty ensures that students take full advantage of the benefits that diversity offers. Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Terenzini (1996) concluded that college students who report interactions with diverse peers (in terms of race, interests, and values) demonstrate a greater openness to diverse perspectives and a willingness to challenge their own beliefs after the first year of college. Interactions with students who have diverse backgrounds promote development and learning (Perry, 1970; Selman, 1980).

Slavin (1995) found that cross-racial friendships among students occur when students engage in racially/ethnically diverse cooperative learning groups. Cooperative learning enhances academic achievement among students from all racial/ethnic groups, and reduces prejudice as students improve their interaction skills with students from different backgrounds (Slavin, 1995; Wolfe & Spencer, 1996).

Orfield (2001) performed a longitudinal study on how multicultural curricula, diversity related campus activities, and interaction with diverse peers affected student development. The study also examined the influence of faculty gender and race/ethnicity on classroom effectiveness. Orfield's (2001) research addressed the following questions: 1) Does the gender or the racial/ethnic background of a faculty member make a difference in the classroom through their attention to pedagogical strategies and curricular emphases that support diversity? 2) Do opportunities to interact with someone from a different racial/ethnic background in a learning situation enhance students' assessments of their own learning? 3) Does the diversity that faculty introduce into the curriculum make a difference in terms of students' assessments of their own learning?

Chi-square tests were performed on 16,000 faculty responses to determine significant gender and race differences in instructional techniques. Partial correlation was used on the random sample of approximately 4,250 students to test how students' diversity-related activities relate to their own growth and development. The study showed that all of the diversity-related activities are more likely to occur with either a diverse faculty or a diverse student body to provide opportunities for interaction.

As for gender and race differences in instructional techniques, the findings of the study suggest that the gender of an instructor affects course content and how classes are taught. In addition, the study indicated that diversity contributes significantly to students' improvement on key learning outcomes associated with both academic development and critical abilities.

Summary

As the number of transfer students enrolling in four-year colleges and universities continues to grow, it is critical for institutions to understand this particular student population, what their needs are, and how to minimize departure. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) reported that “students entering a four-year institution are substantially more likely than two-year college entrants to persist in their education, to complete a baccalaureate degree, and to attend graduate or professional school” (p. 641).

This section of the literature review presented studies comparing transfer students to native students based on Tinto’s interactionist model of integration, Chickering and Reisser’s vectors of development, and Astin’s theory of involvement. Many studies have shown that the key elements of academic and social integration, goal commitment, institutional commitment, and student involvement are all major factors in transfer persistence and success. But that is not the case for every transfer student. Some do not become fully integrated into their new college environment, for various reasons.

As they pass through personal developmental changes, their expectations and needs also change, which greatly impacts persistence and retention. Students who may be doing well in their academics but whose other needs are not being met may still be at risk for leaving the institution. It is crucial that both the academic and social needs of the transfer student be met in order to retain them.

This study aims to identify what students’ needs are in order to help them persist and graduate. The results of the study are critical, especially as the student demographics in four-year institutions continue to change and diversify. The subsequent chapter

presents the research design and methodology, the instrument used, and data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Methodology

This qualitative, participatory research study utilized dialogic communication (Stewart, 1978) with transfer students to determine their needs and experiences at the four-year institution. Stewart (1978) offered four distinguishing characteristics of dialogic communication: 1) complex, dynamic, developing a reciprocal bond between researcher and participants; 2) experiential; 3) focus on self; and 4) holistic. Dialogues in participatory research enable participants to reach critical consciousness in their natural settings and to discover and transform the way they see and experience their own realities.

Park (1993) defined participatory research as a “self conscious way of empowering people to take effective action toward improving conditions in their lives” (p. 1). From the institution’s perspective, participatory research is a way to search for better ways of doing things that will benefit their students’ and their school community’s well being. Knowledge obtained from the research becomes a crucial factor in enabling transfer students “to have a say in how they would like to see their world put together and run” (Park, 1993, p.1). In participatory research, participants undergo a process of change, begin to develop critical consciousness, and become more active, assertive, aware, and creative.

Population and Sample

The research setting for this study was a private university in northern California. This university, an urban campus with a student population of approximately 9,000

students, is one of the most diverse in the nation. Every year it enrolls approximately 1,050 freshmen and 400 transfer students. Given the large number of transfer students this university enrolls each year, it is important that administrators know how to effectively serve this complex population and help them persist and graduate. About 60 percent of transfer students who enroll at the university each year come from two-year community colleges, and 40 percent come from four-year institutions.

Data collected from a small number of transfer students (N=9) was used for this participatory research study. The population criteria were that participants be transfer students from two-year community colleges who were currently enrolled and had successfully completed one year of study at the university. These specific transfer students were considered the sample that could best express in a meaningful and reflective way what their needs and experiences were and how they had persisted through their first year at the university.

Human Subjects Approval

An application outlining the methodology was submitted to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco. An approved copy of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects is retained in the School of Education Dean's Office and appears in Appendix B.

Instrumentation

This participatory study used dialogues between the researcher and the participants. In order to allow the participants to think more critically about the subject, the following questions guided the dialogues:

What are your expectations of the university?

Did the transfer orientation program for new students prepare you for your first semester of study at the university?

Describe your transition to the academic environment (standards/expectations) of the university?

Describe your transition to the social environment of the university.

Did you follow an articulation agreement at your community college prior to your transfer?

How was your first year at the university like?

What are some successes you have had at the institution?

What are some of your challenges at the institution? How do you deal with these challenges?

Have you developed personal relationships with other students? How have they influenced your personal growth, values, and attitude?

What is the quality of your contact with faculty and staff?

Are you satisfied with your meetings and informal interactions with faculty and staff?

How have they influenced your growth, career goals and development, and aspirations?

What types of involvement do you have on and off campus?

What helped you to successfully complete your first year at the university?

What factors most influenced your decision to stay enrolled when you were faced with challenges?

Do you think the university is a good fit for you?

How have you changed since enrolling at the university?

What are your personal and career goals?

What recommendations do you have for the university to help transfer students persist and be successful?

Are there other things that you feel are important in helping transfer students be successful?

Researcher's Profile

The researcher is a fifth-year doctoral student in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco. A female in her early fifties, she identifies as being of Filipino descent. The researcher is originally from the Philippines, where she attended private Catholic schools. She grew up in a family of educators and was encouraged by her father to pursue graduate studies. She received her Bachelor's degree in Economics and a Master's degree in Counseling and Educational Psychology from the University of San Francisco. The researcher moved to the United States in 1978, and now lives in California with her husband and son.

The researcher's professional background includes 19 years in higher education. She was a Senior Associate Director of Transfer Admission at the University of San

Francisco, where she was responsible for the recruitment of transfer students. Her experience working with college students, particularly with transfers, helped shape her interest in this study. It is the researcher's goal to make sense of the experiences of transfer students and transform those experiences into new knowledge that can be applied at the institutional level.

Data Collection

The Office of Admission at the four-year institution helped the researcher identify potential participants for this study. Electronic mail was sent to current transfer students who had completed one academic year at the university and who had attended a two-year community college prior to enrollment at the university. The electronic message described the study, explained its purpose, and asked recipients that they participate in the study. Fifteen interested participants met with the researcher to learn more about the background of the study and the commitment involved. At that meeting, students were asked to fill out a form asking for demographic information, e.g., age, race, gender, and class status. Out of the 15 who initially indicated interest in participating in the study, six opted not to participate in the study, for varying reasons. The researcher identified nine students who ultimately participated in the study.

Dialogues were used in this participatory research study to enable participants to have an active role in the process and to enable their voices to be heard. Dialogues are sufficiently flexible that the researcher can start with general questions while simultaneously establishing rapport with the participants. Two dialogues, each about 90 minutes in length, were conducted and tape recorded with each participant, in a room on

campus. Dialogues were open-ended, structured around three major topics, and transcribed verbatim. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect his/her privacy and identity.

Data Analysis

The researcher created categories and grouped together similar concepts from the themes that emerged from the dialogues.

Research Question #1. What programs and services do community college transfer students perceive as supportive of their needs at the four-year institution?

The following questions provided data to answer research question #1:

What are your expectations of the university?

Did the transfer orientation program for new students prepare you for your first semester of study at the university?

Describe your transition to the academic environment (standards/expectations) of the university?

Describe your transition to the social environment of the university?

Did you follow an articulation agreement at your community college prior to your transfer?

Research Question #2. What factors lead to the persistence and success of community college transfer students at the four-year institution?

The following questions provided data to answer research question #2:

How was your first year at the university like?

What are some successes you have had at the institution?

What are some of your challenges at the institution? How do you deal with these challenges?

Have you developed personal relationships with other students? How have they influenced your personal growth, values, and attitude?

What is the quality of your contact with faculty and staff? Are you satisfied with your meetings and informal interactions with faculty and staff? How have they influenced your growth, career goals and development, and aspirations?

What types of student involvement do you have on and off campus?

Research Question #3. What recommendations do current transfer students have for future transfers and for the institution about persistence and transfer success?

The following questions provided data to answer research question #3:

What helped you to successfully complete your first year at the university?

What factors most influenced your decision to stay enrolled when you were faced with challenges?

Do you think the university is a good fit for you?

How have you changed since enrolling at the university?

What are your personal and career goals?

What recommendations do you have for the university to help transfer students persist and be successful?

Are there other things that you feel are important in helping transfer students be successful?

The first dialogue was transcribed verbatim and summarized. Subsequently, the researcher determined generative themes that were shared with the participants. At the start of the second dialogue, participants were asked to reflect on the first dialogue and on the generative themes in preparation for the second dialogue. The second dialogue was then transcribed and analyzed based on the themes that emerged from the dialogues.

The themes from the two dialogues were combined and analyzed to form larger themes. Each research question in the study was intended “to generate categories by examining the data” (Creswell, 2008, p. 438) and sub-questions were asked to refine “the categories into fewer and fewer categories, comparing data with emerging categories” (Creswell, 2008, p. 438).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter explains the findings of the study. Using participatory research methodology, the study provided nine transfer students an opportunity to reflect on their needs and experiences with the purpose of informing the university how to help transfer students persist and be successful. The chapter also includes a brief description of data analysis as well as profiles and portraits the participants.

As stated in Chapter III, the participants in this study were community college transfer students who had attended the university for at least one year and were in good academic standing. Dialogues were used to gather data for the study. In order to share and express participants' unique experiences, direct quotes from the dialogues are included in this chapter.

The researcher conducted two dialogues with each of the nine participants. Themes and sub-themes emerged and findings were determined after a review of all 18 dialogues based on the three research questions addressed in the study. The first dialogue provided an opportunity for participants to articulate their self-reflective perspectives on their needs and experiences as community college transfer students. The second dialogue provided a forum for their further reflection on their persistence and success at the university. It is the researcher's hope that the dialogues obtained in this study, in combination with further reflections, can facilitate change needed to enhance the persistence and success of transfer students at the four-year institution.

Data Analysis

This qualitative participatory research study collected data from a small number of transfer students (N=9) currently attending the four-year institution. Dialogues were recorded and transcribed to enable the researcher to examine the dialogues closely for emergent themes.

The dialogues were open-ended, structured around three major topics: What programs and services do community college transfer students perceive as supportive of their needs at the four-year institution? What factors lead to persistence and success of community college transfer students at the four-year institution? What recommendations do current transfer students have for future transfers and for the institution about persistence and transfer success? Analysis of data consisted of identifying and organizing new themes and knowledge that emerged from the dialogues to form larger themes.

Participant Profile

To ensure confidentiality, the participants used pseudonyms rather than their actual names. All participants met the study's sample criteria: i.e., they were community college transfer students who had completed at least one year at the university and were in good academic standing. All participants had various and unique experiences and backgrounds that they shared with the researcher.

Two participants were majoring in the Sciences, two were Liberal Arts majors, one had a Business major, three were majoring in Nursing, and one participant was studying Architecture. There were five males and four females in this study, ranging

from 20 to 51 years of age. Three lived on campus; six had on-campus jobs; two worked off-campus; and one did not work. Seven participants were from California, and two were from out of state. The ethnic origins represented by the participants included African American, Filipino/Hawaiian, Caucasian, African American/Samoan, Hispanic, and Chinese.

The mean for their self-reported grade point averages at the university was 3.33, and the range was 2.95–3.75. The educational level of participants' parents ranged from completion of middle school to obtaining a graduate degree. Three participants were first-generation college students. Two participants had learning disabilities, and two who considered themselves “older students” were pursuing a career change.

Table 1

Participants Profile

Name	Ethnic origin (self-reported)	Living on/off campus	Major	Working on/off campus	1 st Generation Student	Semester of Enrollment
1. Reina	African American	On	Exercise & Sport Science	On	No	Spring 2008
2. Lei	Filipino/Hawaiian	On	Environment	On	No	Spring 2008
3. Ely	Caucasian	Off	Science International Studies	Off	No	Spring 2007
4. Nathan	Black/Samoan	Off	Economics	On	Yes	Spring 2007
5. Henry	Caucasian	On	Finance	On	No	Spring 2008
6. Jessie	Hispanic	Off	Architecture	On	Yes	Spring 2007
7. Kay	Chinese	Off	Nursing	NA	No	Spring 2007
8. Eugene	Caucasian	Off	Nursing	On	Yes	Spring 2008
9. Clark	Caucasian	Off	Nursing	Off	No	Spring 2007

Portraits of the Participants

Born and raised in Hawaii, Lei is a 21-year old female who lives on-campus and has a major in Environmental Science. Lei has a work-study job on campus and hopes to become an environmental advocate. She will be participating in a study abroad program in the Fall. Lei comes from a very religious family. Both her parents are immigrants.

Reina is a 22-year old African American female who was raised in California. She did well academically in high school, but attended a community college for a year because she was undecided on a major. Reina lives on campus and is majoring in Exercise and Sport Science.

Kay, a 23-year old Chinese American female, attended two community colleges prior to her transfer. Kay is a full-time student majoring in Nursing, is involved in clubs and campus organizations, and lives off campus. She is the first in her family to attend a four-year institution.

Ely, a 20-year-old Caucasian female, was born and raised on the East Coast. She transferred to the university because of its religious affiliation. She is majoring in International Studies, and hopes to work in public policy and to become a mediator for business and law cases.

Jessie is a 24-year old Hispanic male born in Mexico and raised in California. He comes from a very close-knit family and was living with his parents up until his transfer. A first-generation college student, he attended a community college in southern California for three semesters and is majoring in Architecture. His interest is in Urban Planning, and he intends to apply to graduate school in Architecture. Jessie works both on and off campus.

Eugene, a 39-year-old male raised in the Bay Area, is majoring in Nursing. He attended three community colleges part-time before transferring to a four-year institution. Eugene worked full-time for many years. His professional experiences included grant writing, fundraising, and hospitality management. He has many years of experience working with non-profit agencies serving at-risk youths. He works on campus and is a first-generation college student.

Henry is a 21-year old Caucasian male who grew up California. He is majoring in Business. He works on campus and is actively involved in leadership programs on and off campus. Both of Henry's parents have graduate degrees.

Nathan is a 24-year-old African American/Samoan male. Born and raised in southern California, he is a first-generation college student who transferred to the university because of its small student population and its location. He is majoring in Economics. His interest is in non-profits, and he plans to attend law school in the future.

Clark is a 51-year old Caucasian male from California who is pursuing a career change. His previous professional background includes photography and the food and wine industry. He works as a patient care manager at a Bay Area hospital and is hoping to work as a public health nurse.

Findings Based on Research Questions

Research Question #1: What programs and services do community college transfer students perceive as supportive of their needs at the four-year institution?

The questions that were used to guide the dialogue for this research question asked participants to reflect on their institutional choice and expectations, what shaped

these expectations, and their transition into the social environment of the university. Two major themes emerged from this first research question regarding programs and services that are supportive of transfer students' needs: (a) programs and services that reflect the university's mission; and (b) support programs and services that enhance students' academic success.

Programs and Services that Reflect the University's Mission

This first theme that emerged suggests that the university's mission (2001), i.e., to promote excellence in learning, clearly resonated with all of the participants. In exploring the participants' choice of school, the fact that the university identifies itself as a religiously affiliated university, was a major reason for their transfer. Tinto (1975) proposed that students who maintain values that are in common with the values of the college they are attending are more likely to stay.

Two of the participants reflected on why they chose to transfer to the university. Their declarations clearly echoed Tinto's finding. For example, Clark stated,

I feel like the values of the university are really in line with my own values... So I know that's probably kind of on a bigger level. . . . But the fact the university has kind of core values around giving back to the community and people less fortunate or disadvantaged in the world, I love that. That's kind of how I feel about life, too.

Henry remarked that he is happy to be a part of the university:

It sounds cliché, but the values of the university line up with my values perfectly, and if I could be associated with something that's trying to better people, 'cause I love that. That's makes me feel so good when I help somebody else out. And to be associated with something that can help facilitate that on a greater scale, I mean that's perfect.

A majority of the participants indicated that the university's programs and services that are aligned with its mission are also supportive of their needs. This category

included the following sub-themes (a) core-curriculum (competence); (b) service learning (community); (c) leadership programs (service); and (d) living and learning communities (trust). These programs reflect the university's mission and are perceived to support transfer students' needs on varying levels: intellectually, academically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually.

Core-curriculum (competence). Eugene, a re-entry student, stated that the university's core-curriculum enabled him to speak and write more effectively and express his ideas in an articulate and persuasive way. He developed competence in public speaking and believed that the university has given him a safe place to express himself and be heard. He also acknowledged how much his writing has improved:

I've written some wonderful papers on topics that I never thought I would write. I feel like my writing has gotten a lot better. I've always felt I was a good writer but I've become a really good writer, and I'm hoping I'll become a really – a great writer by the time I'm done, you know.

As part of the core-curriculum requirement, Eugene had to take a religion class, which gave him a better understanding of his own spirituality and come to a deeper appreciation of different religious traditions. He stated,

I became more open-minded with religion and in this class, I had many opportunities to talk about spirituality, not to be judgmental, and I think that every religion is beautiful.

What Eugene found most fulfilling in taking this class was the enlightening perspectives and new knowledge shared with his classmates. As part of the Nursing core, he took a class, which reflects on the university's mission as it relates to the nursing profession and the essence of "service to others." The class made him fully appreciate the nursing profession and the impact it makes on society.

Ely acknowledged that the core-curriculum class she took in Philosophy and Ethics sharpened her critical thinking and writing skills. These classes taught her a new way of thinking, and she believed the university is giving her the tools to be successful in the real world:

I was really frustrated when my advisor told me to take additional courses to complete my core-curriculum requirements. I thought it was a waste of time and money where I could be taking more major classes to graduate. But now looking back, I am glad that I took those classes 'cause they were challenging and I enjoyed them. It made me understand the moral side of the choices we make in our lives.

The university's core curriculum embodies the University's tradition and was perceived by the participants as providing them a well-rounded education. It integrates them with the university on an academic and spiritual level.

Service learning (community). This program is congruent with the university's mission to promote learning by the use of local resources and involvement through learning projects in the classroom or community work. Jessie reflected that his major classes in architecture, intertwined with community service, have made him a more socially conscious person and have given him a sense of fulfillment as a designer:

In my architecture design classes, we get involved with the community. We do hands-on work in the most needy areas in San Francisco. Through service learning courses, I get to interact and work with the poor and under-served.

Jessie added that his work with the community has inspired him to go into urban planning and to help others by teaching people how to build houses and build their own community with the resources they have. Jessie also noted that his community work has strengthened his value of serving others.

Leadership programs (service). This is another program participants said supports the needs of transfer students at the university. Henry's involvement with leadership programs helped him explore his personal leadership style and developed his sensitivity, respect, and appreciation for other cultures. Henry stated the leadership program reflects on the core values of the university in its commitment to offer a quality education and experiences through collaboration and service. He stated,

Through this program, I can appreciate other culture more and not feel - it's almost like giving me more humility . . . just because I think this is the way things should be done does not necessarily mean that's the way things should be done. We need to look at how other people do it and I think that's great. We need to be open-minded and work with others, and respect their ideas.

Living and learning community (trust). Another program that emerged in the dialogues that is congruent with the university's mission is the living and learning community. In this program, students' individual voices are expressed in a safe and caring environment. Reina participated in a living and learning program housed on campus for sophomore students. Students in this program take one core curriculum course every semester concentrating on a specific theme. Reina explained,

I took a class in Human Right and Global Change through the Project . . . and for the first time, I felt supported and felt safe sharing my ideas and opinions with others without the fear of being judged. . . . My friends in the project are genuinely concerned on how everyone else is doing. I felt like what I think matters.

For Reina, the need to express her ideas and being around students who share her interests are important to her. She added that participation in this project increased her intellectual integration with the university because the courses were stimulating and challenging. It has also increased her social integration with the community because of all the connections she has made through the project. Reina further reflected that

participation in the project strengthened her network connections and taught her to be more open to others.

Lei was also involved with the global living community in her sophomore year.

She happily recalled her experiences:

The reason I applied was because I wanted to expand my knowledge about the environment and my major and what a better place to do this. I get to spend time with my friends and share ideas . . . sometimes we agree or disagree on what we believe in but I think . . . that's cool.

Lei further recounted that being part of the project is giving her a well-rounded education that is satisfying her needs for new knowledge and allowing her voice to be heard without her being judged.

Support Programs that Enhance Students' Academic Success

This second theme emerged from the first research question on programs and services that support the needs of transfer students. In their dialogues, the participants defined academic success as doing well academically and meeting students' emotional, social, and psychological needs. Because academic success is so closely linked with student persistence, the university must be able to respond on a variety of levels to meet the needs of transfer students and, thus, help them to become academically successful so that they will persist.

Three sub-themes emerged as support programs that provide mechanisms to transfer students so that they can be academically successful and continue to develop degrees of social and intellectual integration with the university: (a) Learning and Writing Center, (b) Advising, (c) Student Disability Services.

Learning and Writing Center. A majority of the participants indicated that the Learning and Writing Center has helped them sharpen their writing skills and enhance their thinking skills through tutoring, writing seminars, and study skills workshops. The Center has helped them developed collaborative skills through study groups.

Clark realized early in his academic experience at the university that he needed tutoring in order to overcome his physical challenges and to be academically successful.

He emphasized the importance of the tutoring center:

Community college transfer students have this mentality that they can do everything on their own and going to the tutoring center is a sign of weakness. I just think that it would make the transition so much smoother if they ask for support. The Center has helped me with time management and in prioritizing my academic workload resulting in better classroom performance and higher grades.

Eugene described the importance of the Learning and Writing Center in his persistence and academic success:

I think, as a transfer student, being a little nervous about going back to school, I really wanted to take advantage of all the services. The thing the most effective for me was taking advantage of the Learning and Writing Center and the way that they reached out to us I was really impressed. I did take advantage of it my first semester and it helped me with every paper I wrote. I had been writing, you know, professionally for the organization I worked for doing Web site development, things like that. But it's different in an academic setting. And so I wanted to really be on par with what the school expected.

Advising. This support program emerged as a second sub-theme. This program students thought enhances their academic success. Academic advisors offer support and work towards removing academic and bureaucratic barriers to enable students to persist and be successful. The advisors are key players in analyzing transfer credits and graduation requirements and helping students find resources needed to stay in school. This is in keeping with Tinto's (1993) emphasis on the importance of advising in

institutions. Tinto (1993) indicated that students leave college because they are “unable to establish satisfying intellectual and social membership” (p. 99). A sustained, long-term relationship between the student and the advisor can improve retention and students’ academic success.

A majority of the participants stated that advising played a major role in their academic success. Eugene said “having a really good experience with an advisor is critical in every student’s success.” Ely commented that good advising and increased institutional commitment:

I have a wonderful advisor, and she’s able to help me out with my major, minor, and core-classes. She has a good personality. She’s a good person. She knows what she’s doing. We comfortably map out what I’m doing now, what I’ve already done, what I will do, what I can do, it’s just, you know . . . it makes you feel so much better knowing that I’m on track. She makes it not scary to go on to the next semester.

Although a majority of the participants had good experiences with advising, Nathan’s experience was not a positive one. He did not seek help for academic advising, and, as a result, he had difficulty figuring out what classes to take. Looking back, he now realizes the importance of academic advisors in students’ academic success.

Student Disability Services (SDS). Kay described her transition into the university like a “rite of passage.” She shared that although she had an easy transition to the social environment, incorporating with the university’s academic environment and expectations was difficult. She recalled that she was always nervous and had a high level of anxiety when she first started. As a result, she did not do too well in her classes. SDS diagnosed her as having a learning disability. She explained:

It takes me a little bit longer time than a normal student to understand a concept. It was such an emotional roller coaster. . . . I thought that

something was wrong with me until my professor here suggested that I go to SDS and get tested for learning disability.

Kay's inability to get good grades was affecting her self-confidence, and causing her to seriously doubt her potential. Through her support from SDS, she was able to rebuild her confidence and believes she is now even capable of pursuing a Master's degree. She elaborated:

SDS is the one that really helped me get things going, get me back on my feet to keep going forward in the nursing program. They made me feel good about myself again.

Kay stated that, although she is aware that not all students can use SDS services, every student should take advantage of all the resources the university has to offer. That can only help them to persist and be successful.

The support that SDS provides also extends to students like Clark, who is blind in his right eye and deaf in his left ear as a result of an accident. SDS helped Clark work through his emotional healing process and helped him achieve a higher level of academic performance despite his physical challenges. SDS is giving him the tools to function better in the classroom and pushes him to work harder academically. Clark said, "The SDS staff believed in me when no one else did."

Research Question #2: What factors lead to the persistence and success of community college transfer students at the four-year institution?

Institutional success is generally measured by student persistence and defined by continuous enrollment in courses at the same institution and attainment of the baccalaureate degree. The themes that emerged from the dialogues regarding factors that attributed to the participants' persistence and success include the following: (a)

faculty/staff-student interaction, (b) academic engagement, (c) peer support, (d) student involvement, and (e) student development.

Faculty/Staff-Student Interaction

Rewarding interactions between students, faculty, and staff may lead directly to increased intellectual development and greater academic integration (Tinto, 1993). Faculty and staff's positive actions in and out of the classroom and their commitment and involvement in the students' intellectual growth also increase academic integration.

Participants interviewed reflected on many positive interactions and experiences with faculty and staff on campus. They described faculty as caring, helpful, welcoming, open, and personable. Jessie acknowledged that his professors' insightful critiques and observations influenced the way he draws and designs in his architecture classes. Eugene explained that his professor's high expectations of him made him perform well. And Ely stated that some of her professors taught her a new and different way of thinking and how to put things into perspective:

I have had some seriously dynamic professors and they've put a total, completely different spin on learning . . . it is so cool.

Although Kay said that she had difficulty with some of her professors in her first semester, she acknowledged that the majority of her professors helped with her academic integration and persistence. She noted that in her second semester, the teachers were more therapeutic, more personal, worked with her, and did not mind spending extra office hours. They were available to her, which made her second semester a much easier adjustment.

She attributed her persistence to the positive influence of her faculty, which resulted in her earning better grades and attaining a sense of belonging at the university. Kay now feels an emotional fit with the academic and social environment of the school. Some of her professors became her mentors and confidantes and filled an emotional void created by her being away from family.

Henry described how his professors pushed him to perform well, which helped him persist:

My Lending and Mortgage professor approached me when I got a C- in his midterm and said, "You should have done better. ` You know this stuff. . . . You can do a presentation in class and have the opportunity to raise your grade because I believe in you." My professor seemed to genuinely care that made me want to stay at [the university].

Discussing how his professors influenced his values and attitude, Henry reported:

Professors not only teach academics but they teach you how to live life like a healthy, active, responsible person does in society. My professors genuinely care about you as a person. Like my business law professor, he gives extra credit for doing work with the homeless, which really doesn't have anything to do with business law per se, but it's the Jesuit values, like giving back. . . . Giving back to the community is what a responsible person would do, which is great.

A majority of the participants said that their professors engaged them in and out of the classroom to go beyond their comfort zones, and to always broaden and expand their way of thinking and learning. Participants also reflected on the positive interactions and experiences with university staff who helped them persist. Kay shared her experiences with the university staff in various departments:

The professionals here are very selfless and they're always going to be there when you reach out to them. This has really inspired me because they are busy people and still seemed to be enjoying their work even though it is stressful. That has taught me how to balance things in life and in school. And I learned that here, there is a plethora of people who really knows their jobs.

Lei also recognized the assistance provided her by Transfer Center staff, who assist incoming and continuing students with transfer of credits. A majority of the participants acknowledged that the Transfer Center staff were helpful in guiding transfer students to navigate the university and to fully tap into the university's resources. They also emphasized that the Transfer Center had helped them through the transitional phase and with their feelings of isolation.

Academic engagement. Challenging academic courses, small class sizes, and personalized attention were some of the expectations reported by a majority of participants. For instance, Henry stated,

Classes here at the university are definitely more challenging. I remember taking a humanities class at my community college which was a joke. . . . Like all I needed to do was show up for three-fourths of the classes and you'll get an A, pretty much. And here, there are no classes like that whatsoever. You need to be here, you need to pay attention. And it's really cool because a lot of my friends now that I've talked to, and they say when a professor misses you in a class for like a day or two in a row, they e-mail you and say, "Hey, what's going on?" Like what happened, are you ok? And that's awesome. At a community college, nobody does that. They're like you're probably not going to graduate here, so do whatever you want.

Community college transfer students have higher expectations of four-year institutions with regard to academic standards. A majority of students who transfer come prepared for a rigorous academic curriculum and are ready for the challenge. Reina indicated that,

Classes at the university are definitely more challenging. But at the same time, I like that because you know you're going to have higher quality professors here than you will at a community college. I feel like the professors here are much more educated in the field they are teaching. I take my classes here very seriously and I always come to class prepared. I've always been a good student and the university pushes me to work harder. I like that.

Nathan said that in his class he is surrounded by students who want to learn, who are focused, and that motivates him to work harder and to graduate. He added:

Academic engagement is looking forward to the subject matter, you feel challenged, and not bored. Because a lot of my classmates are participating in class, and most of them have different opinions, like a different way of looking at things, and so when they talk and give their perspectives, it makes you see things from their point and it is refreshing.

Jessie shared the importance of coming to class prepared because “the professors will be on you,” which he admitted motivates him to study harder and to persist. In smaller classes, he is able to interact with his professors and exchange ideas with others.

Ely’s transition to the academic environment of the university was actually frustrating. She thought that the university has so many requirements that she felt she was repeating courses she had already taken. But in spite of her frustrations, she acknowledged that completing the additional courses was also fulfilling her minor requirements and a concentration area. She commented, “It is a privilege to be at this university.” Balancing school and work has been a challenge for her, but she attributed her success to the good quality education she is receiving, which is helping her persist and strengthening her commitment to the institution.

Eugene defined academic engagement as being able to express one’s ideas and to be heard. He said, “The curriculum at the university is designed to create leaders and people who are not afraid to have their voices heard. I’ve had really good teachers who’ve allowed that, and it’s pretty cool.”

Peer support. Congruence in social values and preferences with one’s student peers is an important element in students’ social integration. Peers are often a great source of support and comfort for transfer students, particularly during the transitional

phase, and most importantly during the first semester of study at the university. Peers can be a source of psychological safety or, on the other hand, a source of discomfort when feelings of non-acceptance emerge.

A majority of the participants perceived peers as a source of knowledge and a support network for gaining a better understanding of their academic coursework, which reinforced persistence. A majority of the participants also emphasized the tremendous stress that students experience when adapting to a new environment. They considered peer support a key factor in their persistence—just knowing that “you’re not alone,” and “everyone else is going through what you’re going through.”

Six of the participants in the study indicated positive experiences with peers; three, however, expressed discomfort about peers in the first dialogue, but on further reflection stated that peers became a source of comfort for them when they experienced acceptance and established friendships.

Jessie recalled that he had difficulty adapting to the university’s social environment when he first started at the school. He felt that there was a social class divide/barrier among students. He recalled,

I remember that first year I got here, no one would talk to me and they look at you kind of weird, and the first person who talked to me was a girl. She was nice and she was helping me out. Then, even that first project I did in architecture I was working on, the guy who I was working with, he was pretty blunt with everything. He was just, “Ok, we’re doing this,” and that was it. I felt so isolated from everybody. You need time to really develop and to make friendships.

Jessie commented that now his close friends and classmates influence the way he designs and increase his awareness of his environment. His peers have changed his way of thinking in a positive way. When Jessie reflected on how peers helped him persist at

the university, he shared some emotional moments about how much his friends helped him manage his extreme pain and sadness when he lost two of his brothers in a car accident. He indicated that his peers were a source of support during this very difficult time. Peers helped him deal with his emotional pain, and he referred to his friends as family.

For Eugene and Clark, meeting friends was difficult for when they started at the university. Both considered themselves “older students,” and being in a class where a majority of the students was younger was a big adjustment for them. Eugene observed,

Okay, I’m older, I’m in these classes with all these younger people, and it was like the teacher would ask something and people weren’t necessarily prepared. I’m like, “Oh, I could talk for two hours about this.” So it’s like I had to sort of not be the one speaking up all the time in classes and allowing other people to interact and . . . It’s different to go into a new environment. At my community college, I was in classes with people that were older than I was. But coming here, it was like everybody was so much younger, you know? So it was like . . . And I’m a young spirit, as well. I can connect with all kinds of people, from children to seniors – who I love to work with. So it seems it was a natural sort of transition . . . but it did take some getting used to socially, to kind of connect with new peer group of younger people.

Eugene further expressed that his inability to connect with younger peers was due to his own insecurities about being an older student. He realized he needed to get past this challenge and start connecting with peers if he wanted to be successful. He became more proactive in meeting people on campus. He put himself “out there” with his new peers of younger students and shared that he is now connected with everybody in his program. He stated that it would have been nice if there had been a bigger mix of people of different ages in his group, but he also said he learned so much from his younger peer group in terms of academics and on an emotional/spiritual level.

Clark, an older transfer student, described his peers as his support group:

Peers help you see that you're not the only one struggling, and they've just been really supportive. They've helped me realize that I've got to "hang in there" – be persistent. My peers helped me with different study techniques, especially for me who has gone back to school and physically challenged.

Kay considered her peers a support group that helped her undergo rough times academically in her first semester due to her learning disability. She was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. Her peers helped her to be focused, kept her on track, validated her self-worth, and solidified her goal of finishing school. She recounted,

What really got me through the rough times were my classmates guiding me through the hard times, especially when I didn't pass one course. And without them, without that kind of support, more than just my family, I don't think I would have been mentally healthy going into that semester. They've helped me go through the adjustment process and gave me validation that I was not alone.

Nathan said that he persisted because of his friends' influence and support:

With my friends, I experienced new things and helped me grow up. I became close with different groups of people. I already had friends here even before I came to the university so that helped me "fit in" right away in my new environment.

Henry stated that he knew someone who was attending the university before he came, which helped him adjust to his new environment. His friend helped him feel comfortable with the university and the city. He mentioned,

It was really relieving to have somebody else who's been here since freshmen, that knows the city, that knows the university, and that was kind enough to be open with me, and just kind of take me under their wing, I guess, for that first transitional period.

For Ely talked about how her peers influenced her motivation to succeed:

One of my closest friends is so dynamic, energetic, and independent and as am I. . . . I have another close friend who's involved in everything, and she has the same mentality as I do. . . . We want to do things to better ourselves and we help and support one another.

Ely commented that students who are in congruence with her goals motivate her, and that her on-campus roommate during her first semester helped her persist: “She knew a lot about different classes. She knew some professors that I was taking classes with and she knew where everything was on campus.” Ely said that her roommate helped her alleviate some of the frustrations she was feeling when she first started at the university and helped her navigate her way around campus.

Two other participants commented that making friends in the residence halls was a source of social support and a positive experience. Reina stated that she is very close to some of the students in the residential housing where she lives, and that they treat each other like family.

Student involvement. Many programs have been established in four-year universities to more fully involve students, especially new students, as active participants in the learning experience. Student involvement is another sub-theme that emerged as a factor that leads to persistence. In and outside the classroom, student involvement helps promote student learning through actively involving students in different collaborative ways to strengthen social integration and increase institutional membership. Research has shown that promoting greater student involvement leads to students who are motivated to learn more and who are more likely to persist at the institution. For a majority of the participants, social involvement in clubs and organizations helped them incorporate into the life of the university and establish new friendships.

Four of the participants expressed that their involvement in intramural sports helped them feel connected with the university. Henry explained that he joined the rugby team so he could meet more people. Some of the students with whom he played rugby

are now some of his best friends. He recommended that the university strongly encourage transfer students to get involved in intramural or club sports. He stated,

I didn't really know a lot of people and I wanted to stay fit. So I joined the rugby team . . . met some people like the whole camaraderie thing. I've never played rugby before, but they said you don't need any experience to play. So I came out, and met people, and it was nice to have people – "Oh, what's up?" Like see them in the hallway . . . we're on the same team, you hang out together, you practice with them, you play games with them, you protect them when you're playing rugby. I'm committed to the sport and I'm continuing to connect with other students. Now, I don't feel out of the loop and like, I'm now a part of the university. It creates a common bond and you feel connected with the campus.

For three of the participants, particularly students of color, student organizations gave them a whole different perception. Reina appreciated the cultural events that happen on campus. This year she is involved in the planning committee for Vizuri Kabisa (VK), an end-of-the-year celebration for graduating African American students. Reina is also a member of the Black Student Union (BSU). She remarked, "Community colleges do not offer many events and programs that are culturally grounded and through these events I feel like our voices are being heard and diversity is valued."

Lei, a Hawaiian native, also stressed the importance of involvement in cultural clubs. She is actively involved in Hui 'O Hawaii, a cultural organization that promotes the Aloha Spirit and encourages the university's community to embrace and share the Hawaiian way of life. She shared that the reason she transferred to the university was because of the diversity of the student population. Through her participation in Hui 'O Hawaii, she is learning collaboration and relationship building among her peers. It also makes her feel like she is home.

Lei is also involved with the university's Kasamahan, which promotes solidarity in the Filipino American community. Through her involvement with Kasamahan, Lei is

learning more about her Filipino heritage and understanding the beauty of the culture. Lei further reflected on her involvement with the Global Living Community, which is giving her a global perspective that ties in with her goal of being an environmental advocate.

Henry explained having a job on campus is a form of student involvement that leads to persistence. Through his on-campus jobs with the University Life and Counseling Services, he continues to expand his social network:

Working on campus enabled me to meet more students and helped me persist – it helped me to know the university better and know what resources I will need to be happy and be successful, and how to access those resources. Through my involvement with the different departments on campus, I was also awarded the Student Leadership Service Award for coordinating the Drinking Prevention Program for High-Risk Students in conjunction with University Life. I am really proud of this award. . . . I am able to reach out to people and help others who needed help.

Henry also works for the Office of Residential Life as a Resident Advisor. In this capacity, he is able to help create a community environment and is learning how to be a “leader.” He stated,

Being a Resident Advisor is helping me to be successful because I am learning more about my leadership capabilities and myself. I have to maintain a level of respect from the students and peer and still be a leader . . . and also maintain a friendly attitude and openness at the same time.

Henry added that working as a Resident Advisor pays for room and board, which helps him a great deal financially. He also said that all of his involvement with the university strengthens his commitment to the university and makes him “want to stay.”

Eugene indicated that his job on campus, along with his volunteer work at a food bank and with the elderly, is helping him persist. His volunteer work is what enhanced his desire to become a nurse.

For some of the participants, involvement in clubs and organizations gave them a sense of belonging. They started to develop a greater reliance on one another. Having better support mechanisms helps them with their academic and social integration with the university.

A majority of the participants believed that the university was a good fit for them. It opened up all sorts of social connections and helped them persist. For instance, Kay said,

When I did get more socially involved in school, I became more successful, the more connections and more resources to reach out to, and I was just becoming more emotionally fit with the university.

For Ely, having an off-campus job helps her persist and increases her institutional commitment. She explained,

I like having a job off-campus because it's a different world than campus, and living off-campus helps, too. You're not on campus 24-7 and that drives you nuts, just being here all the time. I'm able to go home and going to work and talk with friends, not about school, or having a mentor or someone you can talk to about school who isn't involved with the school particularly, that really helps because it's just like having a sound board and just someone to bounce ideas off. It's like a little retreat...I have people to talk to in a different environment...it refreshes you and then makes you want to go back to campus again, and get back into the groove.

Ely's job off-campus enables her to meet and talk to people from all walks of life. She finds these interactions fascinating. She believes they give her new knowledge and makes her look forward to returning to campus, where she can apply what she has learned outside the world of the university.

Jessie's involvement with the community through his major classes, he said, helps him to persist and solidify his desire to be at the university. He believes that while he is completing his degree to be an architect, he is also helping others. He shared that helping

others is in line with his values in life. The university, he noted, has reinforced the value he already has to serve others.

Student growth and development. Development is a complex process for college students. As transfer students learn to adapt to a new environment and its challenges, they undergo continuous growth and development. Participants in this study indicated that they had made important strides in their development and talked about how these factors led to their persistence.

A major portion of the interview was based on Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of development. When asked to reflect on their successes and challenges at the university, a majority said they were surprised how much change had occurred within them as they were trying to achieve success and to overcome challenges. Three of them talked about how they had developed intellectual and interpersonal competence, which had helped them to persist.

Jessie, for example, now designs his work using an entirely new perspective, based on critiques and observations from his teachers and on his experiences working with the community. He draws with an open mind, looking at things from different perspectives, and he is more aware of his environment. Kay echoed this sentiment: because of her support from Student Disability Services, she has developed new ways of thinking and learning, which is helping her persist. And Eugene stated that at the university he has become creative in his thinking and has developed into an effective communicator: "I've written some wonderful papers on topics I never thought I would write."

Two of the participants reflected on some of their challenges and how they have changed as a consequence their experiences. Eugene and Clark had had a difficult time adjusting socially and connecting with a new peer group of younger students. Eugene explained,

It was a challenge to be a transfer student, especially with my group, who I kind of felt I was the only transfer student, the only older person. It would have been nice if there were a bigger mix of people of different ages and things in my group.

Eugene overcame this challenge by learning control and flexibility. He realized he needed to be more proactive in reaching out to his younger peers, get to know them, and learn from them.

Clark reflected on his having successfully overcome his health challenges presented by an injury, which led him to persist:

Because of the injuries I sustained from my accident, the doctors did not expect me to be able to handle the nursing program. I proved them wrong, I am doing well and getting A's even after being in an accident.

He learned how to manage his emotions by being more aware of his feelings and taking advantage of the resources at the university.

Developing mature interpersonal relationships is the vector all of the participants reflected on when asked how they have changed since transferring to the university. They indicated that since enrolling at the university they have learned openness, awareness, empathy, and curiosity, all of which helped with their persistence. A majority of the participants indicated that the university has taught them tolerance and appreciation for other cultures, and how to develop healthy relationship with others. Kay said she learned a lot about her relationships with peers:

This university has so many different people, not like just race, but different unique personalities that are here for all different reasons. I learned that you can't just judge anyone.

Nathan stated that since enrolling at the university he has grown and experienced new things. He was helped to better understand "how people are, the way they are, or the situations that people are in." It made him more tolerant and accepting:

When I was living on campus, I had roommates that were from another country. They did certain things, I didn't really understand why they would do that. But then, living with them, you kind of got their background and I understood a little bit why certain things happened. Not to sound cliché, but it made you . . . Don't judge a book by its cover. You know, it clarifies, it makes you understand, really, you really have to know someone before you can make that judgment on how they are. So I actually grew closer when I became a roommate with them, just because you kind of understand it.

Jessie commented that the university has taught him to be more aware and focused:

You come across people that, you know, you want to be like them, not only be where they are but better than where they are, so like, basically, enrolling here made me focused and more ambitious about what I want to do.

Henry noted that the university taught him to appreciate and respect differences. The diversity of the student population at the university gave him an opportunity to learn more about different cultures, religion, customs, and traditions, and taught him the beauty of openness, empathy, and acceptance.

Although none of the participants specifically mentioned identity development, much of what they had to say fit into this stage of development. This is the most important of all vectors, and many of their reflections throughout the dialogues indicated self esteem and self acceptance. Kay expressed that for her, "success is feeling good

about yourself.” Ely shared that for the first time she feels stable and grounded. And Henry reflected,

This university has helped me grow up, mature more, and realize that personal stability is a big deal. Consistency in the things you do gives you a feeling of stability. You just need to be consistent in your thinking, feelings and emotions, work study habits – just keep up the momentum and you’ll be happier if you do that.

Henry said that he is learning how to maintain a high standard of performance in both his academic and work ethic. He is more consistent and stable in his actions and decisions.

All of the participants mentioned their career goals and aspirations. Three stated that faculty had influenced their career goals and to pursue further studies. Jessie said that his faculty shaped his goals and development and encouraged him to go into urban design. Jessie wants to continue working with the under-served community. Eugene hopes to earn a Master’s in Nursing and continue working in non-profit organizations. Clark’s goal is to work in public health or travel to a Third World country where he can help the needy. After Henry earns his degree in business, he would like to work in a non-profit agency. He reported,

I came in as a finance major but after hanging out with people who are service oriented, ‘cause I came in being like I’m gonna be a stock broker, like I’m gonna trade on Wall Street and that’s what I’m gonna do, that’s what I’m getting my degree for. And after I hang out with more people who are service oriented, it’s definitely, especially R.A.’s, ‘cause a lot of RA’s just like to volunteer and just help out people, just because it’s what good people do. So it definitely – that had a big impact on me on what I really want to do with my life.

The participants indicated that because of the strong sense of community and service to others that the university has instilled in them as students and as people, they would also like to continue that path in their professional world.

Research Question #3: *What recommendations do current transfer students have for future transfers and for the institution about persistence and transfer success?*

The queries that were used to guide the dialogue for this research question asked participants to reflect on their successes and challenges at the university, their goals, and development. Participants had several recommendations for future transfers. They indicated the importance of getting to know professors and university staff. Positive interactions with faculty give students a sense of belonging and the impetus to invest more of their energy in pursuit of their educational goals. Friendly and knowledgeable staff can also give support and encouragement to students as they navigate their way around campus.

Participants recommended that students take advantage of professors' office hours. Continuing conversations with faculty outside the classroom and getting questions answered early on in the learning process will alleviate students' anxiety and stress and increase academic integration. Participants also recommended that future transfers connect and talk to other transfer students about the academic and social culture of the university. Peers and students can also be a great source of support and comfort, especially in the transitional phase.

Another recommendation they made was that transfer students become involved with university life. Involvement can occur through participation in athletics—intramural or club sports—clubs or organizations, student leadership programs, and in on-campus jobs. Student involvement opens up great connections and increases social integration.

Participants also recommended that transfer students take advantage of all the resources the university offers. They indicated that using university resources made all the difference in their academic performance and social connections.

A few of the participants recommended that transfer students live on campus. All participants shared some personal recommendations about the traits necessary for persistence and success: determination, focus, persistence, and, most importantly, the desire to be successful.

The participants also made several recommendations for the institution, including: (a) the need to pre-advise prospective transfer students in community colleges every semester; (b) what to include in the orientation; (c) the need to create more programming and services specifically for transfer students; (d) the need for academic advisors to prepare a complete curriculum pattern from students' initial enrollment through graduation for students' initial entry to the university.

A majority of the participants recommended the university's Transfer Center pre-advise community college students interested in transferring to the university. Advising should cover classes students can take at the community college prior to transfer and should occur every semester. Such a process would guarantee the transferability of classes to the university and alleviate frustrations on the part of students after they transfer.

The participants had several recommendations for orientation. They talked about the need for separate, more focused programming for transfer students during orientation. A few of the participants mentioned feelings of isolation at the orientation program. They referred to it as more of an informational event than a developmental program. The

orientation program, they thought, should address the specific transitional needs and concerns of transfer students.

They also recommended that more programs and services be offered specifically for transfer students. A majority of the participants mentioned the formation of a Transfer Club, where transfer students can meet and connect with other students. Another recommendation was for a “mentoring” program where new transfer students would be assigned a mentor from the current upper classmen, who could provide academic, social, goal, and institutional connections.

Two participants recommended the College Success course be made mandatory for all transfer students. Participants also recommended transfer gatherings be held three times a year, the first immediately after school starts, the second in the middle of the fall semester, and the third during the spring semester. This would provide opportunities for all transfer students to reconnect and develop a sense of community and belonging.

The final recommendation was that academic advisors prepare a complete curriculum pattern for transfer students that clearly outlines what classes they must take every semester until they graduate. This is being done for only business majors at this time. It was recommended that all majors get a complete curriculum pattern immediately after initial entry to the university, so that students are more focused and have a sense of direction and goals to work toward.

Summary

The participants shared their individual needs and personal experiences as community college transfer students at the university. They were thankful for the

opportunity to participate in the study and were open to reflecting on their needs and experiences. Their involvement in the study, they believed, brought them to a deeper understanding of their needs, experiences, and persistence.

The first and the second dialogues yielded many reflections on these students' expectations, successes, challenges, and personal growth. From these dialogues, themes emerged from each participant's reflections, from which were formed larger themes. The study revealed the following about community college transfer students' needs and experiences at a four-year institution.

The following were findings relative to the research questions:

Research Question #1: *What programs and services do community college transfer students perceive as supportive of their needs at the four-year institution?* Based on the two dialogues, two themes emerged: (1) programs and services that reflect the university's mission, and (2) support programs that enhance students' academic success.

Under the programs and services that reflect the university's mission, sub-themes emerged, including the university's core curriculum (competence), service learning (community), leadership programs (service), and living and learning communities (trust).

A majority of the participants shared that programs and services offered at the university that promote the mission are perceived to be supportive of their needs on varying levels. They said that the core curriculum provided them a well-rounded education through classes offered in different disciplines. They also shared that the university's core curriculum developed their intellectual and interpersonal competency. It sharpened their writing and critical thinking skills and increased their academic performance. They thought that the service learning programs, in combination with their

major courses, met their needs of giving back to the community and helping under-served populations.

A few reported that their participation in the university's leadership programs helped them explore their leadership styles and developed sensitivity, respect, appreciation for others, collaboration, and service. Two of the participants said that the university's living and learning communities is a program helped them explore their intellectual potential through meetings, discussions, and workshops. Participation in these programs also helped them with social connections and, thus, promoted institutional commitment. Some participants expressed that the university is a learning community that teaches trust and openness.

In terms of the second theme that emerged from the first research question—support programs that enhance students' academic success—the following sub-themes emerged: Learning and Writing Center, Advising, and Student Disability Services. Based on the participants' reflections, these are the support programs that helped them persist, through one-on-one tutoring, study groups, workshops, extended time testing, and academic support and guidance.

Research Question #2: *What factors lead to the persistence and success of community college transfer students at the four-year institution?* The themes that emerged from this research question relative to factors that lead to persistence are: faculty/staff-student interaction, academic engagement, peer support, student involvement, and student development.

Participants shared the positive and rewarding contacts they made on campus with faculty, staff, and friends that influenced their personal growth, career aspirations, values,

attitudes, and desire to complete the baccalaureate degree at the university. Some of the participants added that because of their congruence in values with the rest of their peers, they were able to connect with their social environment and expressed a “sense of belonging.” They also found their peers to be a source of knowledge and support.

The participants expressed that their expectations of the university were being met through challenging academic courses and caring and competent professors who challenge their intellectual potential. They also said that involvement either on or off campus increases their social integration and institutional commitment. Involvement in on-campus programs and activities helps them incorporate into the social fabric of the institution and establish new friendships. They emphasized that their involvement off campus, e.g., volunteer work and community service, strengthens institutional commitment that leads to persistence. The participants explained that student involvement encompasses different areas of student life, e.g., jobs on campus, community service, volunteer work, cultural clubs and organizations, internship programs, retreats, athletic involvement, and living on campus.

Finally, they expressed how they have changed since enrolling at the university. All participants acknowledged that they have grown as individuals, developed intellectual and interpersonal competence, independence, tolerance and appreciation of differences, and personal stability. Additionally, they have been able to clarify their goals and career aspirations.

Research Question #3: *What recommendations do current transfer students have for future transfers and for the institution about persistence and transfer success?*

Participants reflected on this research question based on their successes and challenges at the university.

They expressed the value of knowing their professors and seeking their wisdom on academic issues and concerns. Participants also recommended connecting with university staff, who can be allies in student persistence. Participants recommended connecting and reaching out to peers and classmates, as they can be a source of support and comfort.

All of the participants also had recommendations for the institution about persistence and success. They recommended pre-advising prospective transfer students at a community college every semester, and giving all majors complete curriculum patterns upon entry to the university. Participants also recommended that future orientations have separate and more focused programming for transfer students to minimize feelings of isolation. Focused programs for transfer students would include a mentoring program and a transfer club.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS,
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the needs, experiences, persistence, and success of community college transfer students attending the university. This qualitative, participatory research study utilized dialogues to explore the needs and experiences of nine university transfer students and their persistence at the university. The participants were asked to reflect on the programs and services they perceived to be supportive of their needs at the university and what factors led to their persistence and success. Participants also offered recommendations for future transfers and for the university on persistence and transfer success.

The nine participants in this study, five males and four females, ranged from 20-51 years of age. They had diverse ethnic backgrounds and varied in terms of academic preparedness, depending upon the community colleges they had attended before enrolling at the university. A demographic questionnaire, completed by each participant, helped the researcher select a diverse group of students with various perspectives on transfer students' needs and experiences at the university.

Through dialogues, they shared their academic and social experiences at the university, how they persisted, and what success meant to them. Each participant engaged in two 90-minute dialogues. The participants offered sincere reflections on their experiences as transfer students at the university and expressed feelings of empowerment by virtue of their participation in this study. Themes emerged as participants reflected on

three research questions. Findings for each of the three research questions are discussed below.

Discussion

Research Question #1: *What programs and services do community college transfer students perceive as supportive of their needs at the four-year institution?*

Responses to this question suggest that programs and services offered at the university that promote the university's mission and values increase students' institutional and goal commitment, which lead to persistence. According to the participants, the primary reasons they transferred to the university were location, small class size, personal attention, strong academic programs, support services, and caring professors and staff.

Participants strongly believed that the university is doing an excellent job in instilling values through classroom activities, community work, residential halls, and campus sponsored events. The mission is reflected in every major and program at the university, and has greatly influenced students' values, attitudes, and career goals.

The participants reflected on how deeply they have changed since enrolling at the university. A majority added that their values are now congruent with the university's and they "fit in" with the social and intellectual fabric of the campus. They expressed pride in being part of the university.

As part of this first research question, participants were also asked to reflect on the orientation program held for new transfer students at the start of every semester. They indicated that the program did not help them transition into the university. They

felt isolated at the orientation, which they thought was more focused on freshmen. A few indicated that making friends when they first started at the university was a challenge, and that it took a while for them to feel a sense of belonging.

Two felt isolated because they were older; one indicated there was a social class divide between students. These negative reflections did not come as a surprise to the researcher. Community college transfer students' adjustment to a new environment where they are surrounded by younger peers can be socially challenging.

Research Question #2: What factors lead to the persistence and success of community college transfer students at the four-year institution?

In analyzing the responses to this question, the research findings validated Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure, that faculty-student interaction, academic engagement, student involvement, and peers influence students' persistence. Participants were asked to reflect on their first year at the university, their successes, challenges, and relationships they had developed with faculty, staff, and other students. Although many shared that they had had successes at the university, they attributed their challenges as primary factors in their persistence.

The researcher was surprised to learn that the majority of participants' challenges were not academic, but social and personal. A majority indicated they needed to work because of the university's high tuition cost, and that balancing work and school was a challenge. Asked if they ever considered leaving the university because of financial challenges, surprisingly, all participants indicated that they did not mind working and taking loans to stay enrolled at the university. They all recognized they were getting a

good quality education at the university and acknowledged the assistance of the Financial Aid Office as helping them with their financial concerns.

Negative reflections about these transfer students' transition to the university did not come as a surprise to the researcher. One reported that a majority of students coming from community colleges tend to withdraw into themselves and do not look to others for support, which results in feelings of isolation. But most added that this isolation was only temporary and they now have established friendships and a sense of belonging.

Community college transfer students' adjustment to a new environment where they are surrounded by younger peers can be socially challenging. Also, responses to the first research question indicated that being a first-generation college student did lead to persistence. Three of the participants were the first in their family to attend college, and all participants had strong convictions to obtain a baccalaureate degree. Participants shared other personal reasons for persistence, e.g., family pressure, a competitive nature, fear of failure, and the financial investment made in their education.

This research question also yielded reflections on how students changed since enrolling at the university. A majority said that they had developed mature interpersonal relationships with others, which helped them persist. They also said that they have learned to appreciate differences and to be tolerant of others. They have developed awareness, empathy, and openness, resulting in healthy relationships.

Participants also reflected on clarifying their goals and what they want to do after graduation. A majority indicated a desire to pursue careers that will enable them to give back to the community. This is a strong validation that the university has successfully delivered its mission.

Research Question #3: *What recommendations do current transfer students have for future transfers and for the institution about persistence and transfer success?*

An analysis of the findings for this research question determined that participants based their recommendations on their own challenges at the university and how they overcame those challenges. A recurring theme was the importance of getting to know professors, probably due to the rewarding and positive experiences they had had with certain faculty on campus. A majority of the participants expressed how much the faculty had influenced their development and career aspirations.

In reflecting on student development, they made personal recommendations on how to persist, e.g., keeping an open mind to new ways of thinking, appreciating and respecting differences, and strongly desiring to succeed. They also recommended policy changes they would like the university to change or implement. Thus, this research question afforded them an opportunity to recommend changes and have their voices heard.

Conclusions

The nine participants in this study reflected on a wide array of needs and experiences that helped them persist and become successful at the university. In sharing their successes, challenges, and relationships they developed with faculty, staff, and peers, they were able to communicate those academic and social experiences at the university that helped them to grow and develop both academically and personally.

This participatory study strongly suggests that transfer students' needs are not only academic and social, but also emotional. The themes that emerged from the findings

indicated that transfer students' emotional needs are supported at the university through student involvement in programs that are aligned with the university's mission and values. These programs assist the university by validating students' choices and increasing students' institutional commitment.

Tinto (1975) proposed that students who maintain values that are in common with the values of the college they are attending are more likely to stay. The participants' responses supported Tinto's research. They reflected on their need to attend a school whose values are congruent with their own. The participants also expressed their need to develop intellectual and interpersonal competency, their need for involvement and sense of community, their need to serve others, and their need to have their voices heard. The study indicated that students' participation in many of the university's programs shaped their attitudes and strengthened their values about community, service, compassion, responsibility, and openness.

The findings of the study suggest that the university's strong academic support programs and services enhance students' persistence and academic success. Through these academic support programs, transfer students develop competency and self-awareness. The study showed participants persisted to the baccalaureate based on their self-reported grade point averages. They continue to persist despite the inter-institutional adjustment they undergo.

As for the social aspect of this adjustment, the study indicates that it takes time for transfer students to form peer relationships and establish friendships at the university. This is especially true for older transfers. They experience feelings of isolation during the transitional period in their first semester. The researcher attributes this in part to the

fact that the university enrolls a significantly higher number of freshmen than transfer students every year. It becomes more challenging for transfer students to connect if the majority of students around them are younger. To alleviate negative feelings associated with a sense of isolation, there is a need for the university to implement programs specifically focused on transfer students' needs and experiences.

This study found that rewarding faculty and student interaction, academic engagement, connecting to peers, and involvement led to success in academics and socialization. This finding supports Astin's (1985) theory of involvement, i.e., that "students learn by becoming involved" (p. 133). The findings of this study indicated that the emotional and psychological needs of transfer students are critical factors that must be considered when implementing support programs. The findings also showed that student involvement with faculty, staff, peers, and campus events and programming are linked to persistence and institutional commitment.

This participatory study suggested the participants have experienced growth and development at the university in significant and varying ways. They reported that they had acquired the tools to maintain healthy relationships with others and developed an appreciation for people from diverse cultures. The study also found that participants had clarified their goals, career choices, and refined their personal belief systems in a way that ties in with the university's values.

The study also indicated that the impact of finances and the substantial amount of money incurred to attend the university did not affect student departure and, to some extent, increased persistence and goal commitment. A majority of the participants perceived their college experiences at the university as rewarding and were determined to

continue to bear financial burdens in order to complete their degree programs and obtain the baccalaureate degree.

Implications

When students transfer to a four-year institution, they have different expectations and perceptions than they did when they entered the community college. They have unique needs and characteristics that require services that may differ from those available to entering freshman. University administrators and Student Affairs Officers must know who transfer students are. It is important for institutional leaders to understand why students transfer to their institution and what motivates them to persist. Only in this way can administrators begin to respond to these students' academic, social, emotional, and psychological needs.

As transfer student populations increase, so must the attention given to them by the four-year institution. University personnel should map out specific intentions for working with transfer students so that they can ensure these students' academic success and their social, emotional, and psychological development. Many four-year institutions have academic support systems in place, but social support systems must be defined if the institution is to provide a successful transition for students.

Many transfer students encounter difficulty in transitioning to a four-year institution and express feelings of isolation and marginality. This was the case for a majority of the participants in this study. They expressed the need to connect with and be part of the university community. This implies that social support systems need to be enhanced and made visible to the transfer student population. Institutions must engage

transfer students in campus programming in order to ascertain their unique needs and must listen carefully to their voices.

Recommendations for Educational Practice

While this study focused on transfer students' needs and experiences, it is important to remember that it does not provide results that can be generalized or applied to other institutions. Each university is unique, and every student body varies in many ways. However, the questions asked in this study are relevant to a broad cross-section of institutions and, therefore, the results gleaned from this study suggest a number of recommendations for other private, four-year universities.

One would be that the Transfer Center staff at the four-year institution build an ongoing working relationship with community college transfer students early on in the transfer process, even before students arrive on campus. This could be done through frequent visits at community colleges and meetings between students and transfer center staff. This would enable the receiving institution to connect the transfer student's goals to the university early on in the recruiting process. It would also help the university ascertain the actual needs of a student and connect him/her with the appropriate resources needed for success at the four-year institution.

The university should have structures in place to help transfer students in the transition process, to alleviate transfer shock and feelings of isolation. There should be programming specifically focused on transfer students at orientation that addresses their specific concerns and transitional needs.

Transfer students must be made aware of the existence of the Transfer Center at the university and its functions and responsibilities. The Transfer Center must clearly communicate to transfer students that staff is there to help them succeed at the university. Ongoing contact between university personnel and students provides a welcoming feeling and minimizes feelings of isolation.

Another recommendation would be to develop a self-directed web portal designed specifically for transfer students. The web portal, which could be called the “Face of the Transfer Community,” should include a comprehensive profile of the university’s transfer student population. Such a mechanism would afford transfer students an opportunity to meet and connect with other transfer students.

New transfer students need continuous contacts and expanded social connections in order that they be assisted with their social integration into the university community. To this end, it is recommended that a mentoring program be established, where current upper-classmen would be assigned as mentors to provide social, academic, and institutional connection and guidance regarding goals. It is also recommended that a transfer club be created to provide transfer students opportunities to have their own space and a support network for social connections.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is the researcher’s hope that this study added to the research examining community college transfer students’ needs and factors that affect their persistence and success at a four-year institution. This participatory research focused on nine community college transfer students who had been enrolled in classes at the same university for at

least a year. Future research that included students who finished only one semester at the university would help validate the conclusions of the study and compare the two groups' reflections on their needs and experiences to determine if there are differences in the two populations' responses.

A study that evaluates students' semester of entrance to the university would also be valuable. Are there differences in students' needs and experiences if they enter in the fall semester rather than spring semester? The study should be replicated with specific student populations, such as (a) transfer students who have the same major, (b) transfer students from specific ethnic and racial backgrounds, (c) transfer students who are first-generation college students, and (d) older transfer students.

Another area of inquiry would be to develop the findings of this study into a quantitative research study or research that utilizes a mixed method approach. As campuses become more culturally diverse, mixed method research approaches can better serve students and help administrators tailor their services to their unique student populations.

Another valuable area for further research would be a study on the impact of diversity and culture on students' persistence. Lastly, a study of students' social and emotional development in view of today's technological changes is another topic recommended for future research.

Concluding Thoughts

I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to conduct this study with transfer students. Having worked with the transfer population for many years, it has

always been my desire to examine the experiences of community college transfer students at the transfer institution. This process expanded my existing knowledge and depth of understanding about transfer student, and I developed a deeper appreciation of their unique needs and desires. I have come to a better understanding not only of their academic needs, but of their social and emotional needs.

Moreover, I enhanced my knowledge of participatory research and how to conduct meaningful dialogues between researcher and participants. The collection and analysis of data for this study took many long hours, but the findings brought a depth of information that may be useful for new transfer students and four-year institutions.

On a personal level, I feel honored to have interacted with the participants and humbled at hearing their individual voices as they reflected on their successes, challenges, and career aspirations. I truly appreciate the participants' courage, honesty, time, and energy to share their reflections about their experiences at the four-year institution. It is my hope that the participants gained a deeper understanding of themselves and their college experiences.

Finally, I am thankful to my family for their support and to my wonderful faculty for their vision and wisdom as I complete my academic journey.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear _____,

My name is Virginia Rios and I am conducting a study at the University of San Francisco on *Community College Transfer Students' Reflections of their Needs, Experiences, and Persistence at a Private-Four Year Institution*. This research project is part of the requirements for my doctoral degree in the Department of Leadership Studies, Organization and Leadership Program at USF.

I would like to formally invite you to participate in this study. Your reflection on your needs, experiences, and persistence as a community college transfer student to USF is valuable. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to engage in two dialogues with the researcher about your needs and personal and educational experiences at USF. You will also be asked to reflect on how institutional support relate to your persistence. Each participant in the study will receive a \$60.00 stipend once they complete the process. There will be no cost to you during this research project and PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. The findings of this study will help in better understanding the transfer population and how to further enhance the services that promote the success of transfer students at USF.

I appreciate your consideration to participate in this study.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Virginia Rios

APPENDIX B

APPROVAL FROM THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE
PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

June 1, 2009

Dear Ms. Rios:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #09-036). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.
2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.
3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

APPENDIX C

PERMISSION LETTER FROM INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT



Office of Admission
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117-1046
TEL 415 422-6563
TEL 800 CALL-USF
FAX 415 422-2217
www.usfca.edu

April 8, 2009

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Dear Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the University of San Francisco, I am writing to formally indicate our awareness of the research proposed by Virginia Rios, a student at USF, Department of Leadership Studies. We are aware that Ms. Rios intends to conduct a participatory research using dialogues with transfer students at the university.

On behalf of the university, I authorize Ms. Rios to conduct her research at USF.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact my office at (415) 422-6563.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Michael D. Hughes'.

Michael Hughes
Director of Undergraduate Admission
Assistant Dean, Academic and Enrollment Services

APPENDIX E
INFORMED CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Purpose and Background

Virginia Rios, a graduate student in the Department of Leadership Studies in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, is doing a study of community college transfer students' needs, experiences, and persistence at a private, four-year institution.

I am being asked to participate in this study because I transferred to USF from a community college.

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

I will complete a demographic questionnaire.

I will participate in two dialogues with the researcher. Each dialogue will last for an hour and a half during which I will be asked questions regarding community college transfer students' needs, experiences, and persistence relating to academic success.

I will review the transcribed dialogues with the researcher.

I will reflect and collaborate with the researcher on general themes from the two dialogues to form larger themes.

Digital audio recordings will be used for the dialogues.

The total time for the two dialogues will be around three to four hours that will occur at the University campus.

Risks and/or Discomforts

Some questions from the dialogues may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop the conversation at any time.

All data collected in this study including questionnaires, consent forms, digital recordings, computer disks, and audiotapes will be kept in locked files at all times. Only the researcher will have access to the files.

Benefits

I understand that I will receive a \$60.00 stipend upon completion of participation in this study. Full participation in the program is required to receive the stipend. Partial stipend for partial participation will not be offered. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of my own needs and educational experiences and helping future transfer students to succeed.

Alternatives

I am free to choose not to participate in this study.

Costs

There will be no costs for my participation in this study.

Reimbursement

I will receive \$60.00 stipend upon completion of my full participation in this study.

Questions

I have talked to Virginia Rios about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about this study, I may call her.

If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422- 6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Counseling Psychology, Education Building, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

Consent

I have been given a copy of the “Research Subject’s Bill of Rights” and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY

I am free to decline to participate in the entire study or in any part of the study. If I decide to participate in this study, I am free to withdraw from it at any time. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present status as a student at USF.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant’s Signature

Date

Researcher’s Signature, Virginia Rios

Date

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE DIALOGUE

Are your expectations being met?

Yeah, I think so. It's certainly more challenging, and I feel like I'm learning just a ton. I can't believe how much I'm learning. I feel like I've gotten really good support. I mean I've had [inaudible] and connect with a lot of that support. It wasn't just right out there. But I do feel like there is a lot of support there to help me through the program, so far I've felt like if I'm willing to make the effort to connect with the different services, I've been getting a lot of support. I'm not sure I could have done it without all of the support. So I've been pretty happy with that. I'm sure that they could be better, but in general a lot of it is because I've taken advantage of all of the services available. I think a lot of people just don't make that effort, so I've found that just making that extra effort has made all the difference.

Did you have the same for support at community college

Yeah. It actually had even [overlap]. Community college, I think, of course, they have a much lower budget, so they don't have as many services available, but there were services - they had disability services that I could take advantage of, and that was helpful. I mean I think when I was there, because I was sooner after my accident, I actually had greater needs when I was at community college.