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## Unfamiliar Territory: A Preliminary Exploration of the Experiences of International Junior Transfer Students

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The University of San Francisco

UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY:  
A PRELIMINARY EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF  
INTERNATIONAL JUNIOR TRANSFER STUDENTS

A Thesis  
Presented to the Faculty of the School of Education of the  
University of San Francisco

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS  
in  
Organization and Leadership

By  
Nicole McIntyre

Fall 2019

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## ABSTRACT

Over one million international students attend American institutions of higher education each year. For many of these students, community colleges are an accessible and increasingly popular enrollment option because they offer small class sizes, intensive English language courses, and affordable tuition costs. Many international students enrolled in community college seek to transfer to a four-year university and complete a Bachelor's degree. To date, the experiences of international students who successfully complete this transfer pathway have gone largely unstudied. As a result, very little is known about the international junior transfer population. This qualitative study utilizes a phenomenology methodology to explore the shared experiences of three international junior transfer students enrolled at a large public research institution. Using a student involvement theory lens, the study sought to explore the institutional and individual factors that facilitate the populations' persistence, graduation, and sense of belonging. Through in-person interviews, the researcher learned about participants' transition to the university, campus involvement, interactions with peers, faculty, and advisers, success strategies, and sense of belonging on campus. The study found that their time spent in community college helped prepare them for the four-year university experience. However, due to limited time on campus and high international tuition costs, participants often prioritized activities they deemed most efficient—such as coursework and career preparation. As a result, participants rarely engaged in traditional forms of on-campus involvement. Nonetheless, social involvement was an important factor in their overall experience and success on campus. Study findings inform recommendations for administrators and practitioners to improve the experiences of international junior transfer students, including providing efficient and productive programming, creating peer mentoring programs, and addressing the high cost of attendance.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The United States is the world's most popular destination for students wishing to study abroad (Institute for International Education, 2018). According to the Institute for International Education (IIE), over a million international students utilized J1 or F1 visas to enroll at American colleges and universities in 2018. These students primarily visit from China (33.2%), India (17.9%), South Korea (5%), Saudi Arabia (4.1%), and Canada (2.4%) (IIE, 2018). They are drawn to the American system of higher education for a variety of reasons, including the international value of an American degree, interest in forming a global identity, the opportunity to improve their English language skills, and limited availability to pursue higher education in their home country (Anayah & Kuk, 2015; Bohman, 2010).

The benefits of international education are a reciprocal relationship. The nation, its campuses, and their student bodies benefit from international students studying in the United States (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & van Horn, 2002; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013; Volet & Ang, 2012). International students introduce different cultures, values, and languages to the classroom setting and campus environment. This provides valuable opportunities for students, both domestic and international, to learn about a world different from their own. Hailing from educational institutions with different curricula and history, international students provide unique insights and perspectives to classroom discussions. Their presence also encourages the campus community to learn and practice cross-cultural communication skills (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). As the effects of globalization grow, these experiences will prepare students for life in a more multicultural and internationalized world (Volet & Ang,

2012). On a global scale, such cross-cultural interactions lead to improved international relationships and the sharing of knowledge across borders (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Pedersen, 1991).

In addition to the cultural and educational value they bring to the classroom, international students support the American economy. Charged a premium for their enrollment, these students provide additional revenue to institutions and supplement the tuition of domestic students (Hagedorn & Mi-Chung, 2005). The Association of International Educators found that “international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$36.9 billion and supported more than 450,000 jobs to the U.S. economy during the 2016-2017 academic year” (NAFSA, n.d.).

### **International Students at Community College**

Community colleges are known for their flexibility, affordability, small class sizes, and opportunities to interact with faculty. Evelyn (2005) writes that international students enrolling in community college “see advantages in a cheaper route to a four-year degree, an environment much more forgiving of English-language deficiencies, and student populations high in ethnic diversity” (p. A11). As such, international student enrollment at community colleges has been growing over the past 40 years, with a 35% increase since 2000 (IIE, 2018). During the 2017-2018 academic year, 8.6% of international students studying in the United States were enrolled at community colleges (IIE, 2018).

Most international students are not eligible for federal or state financial aid, and many scholarships require US citizenship (Department of Education, 2012). Additionally, many American universities charge international students supplementary non-resident tuition. As a result, international students are drawn to the reduced cost of public community colleges. With



smaller campuses intended to serve local communities, community colleges are often situated in neighborhoods with lower costs of living than University campuses. As 82% of international undergraduates are funded by themselves, their family, and/or their community (IEE, 2018), the reduced cost of attending community college makes studying abroad a more accessible option. Additionally, some international students are able to utilize their time at community college to acquire residency and thus secure more affordable tuition upon their matriculation to a four-year university.

Furthermore, community colleges maintain less stringent admissions standards than many four-year universities. These institutions do not require specific subject requirements or standardized admissions tests, such as the SAT or ACT, which may be difficult to find in a foreign country (Anayah & Kuk, 2015). Dorosko (2017) writes that many community college campuses have lower Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and International English Language Testing System (IELTS) requirements than four-year universities. To assist with the transition to studying in the United States, many community colleges also offer intensive English language programs (Hagedorn & Mi-Chung, 2015). For those students who need to improve their English reading, writing, and/or speaking skills before participating in mainstream American education, these programs provide a large value.

### **Junior Transfer Students**

Studies find that 80% of community college students intend to transfer to a four-year university and pursue a bachelor's degree (Jenkins & Fink, 2015). Research shows that this trend is also reflected in the international student population (Bohman, 2010; Hagedorn & Mi-Chung, 2015). However, students who successfully transfer to a four-year university often experience a difficult transition. Because they are joining a cohort of students mid-way through their college

career, junior transfer students may struggle with social isolation, alienation, or stigmatization of their transfer status (Jackson & Laanan, 2011; Jackson, Starobin, & Laanan, 2013; Zhang, 2016). Additionally, these students transition to a different educational culture and administrative structure. For those transferring to a large institution, this requires adjusting to larger classes, less accessible support programs, and a more decentralized campus administration. Research shows that transfer students experience this change in environment negatively, finding faculty and peers to be disengaged, unsupportive, and unwilling to answer questions (Jackson, 2013; Jackson & Laanan, 2011; Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston, 2011). As a result, transfer students typically experience an initial decrease in grades and GPA during their first semester. This widely studied phenomenon is commonly referred to as *transfer shock* (Hills, 1965; Laanan et al., 2011). In addition to affecting students' grades, it can affect confidence, social adjustment, and persistence (Lakin & Cardenas Elliot, 2016).

The challenges of transitioning to a four-year university may be compounded for junior transfer students who are also international students (Zhang, 2016). These students must adjust to an educational environment different from both their home country and the community college at which they learned the norms of American education. Additionally, international transfer students may find that they are unable to secure the level of assistance to which they are accustomed. International students may rely more heavily on faculty and peer support, as they work to understand and match the social norms, language proficiency, and background knowledge of native students (Ota, 2013). These language barriers and cultural differences may exacerbate the social isolation and stigma commonly experienced by domestic junior transfer students (Sato, Hodge, & Eckert, 2018; Wang, Ahn, Kim, & Lin-Siegler, 2017).

Individual campus programs and services are typically charged with supporting

international students *or* transfer students; they do not account for the intersection of these identities (Zhang, 2016). As such, the unique needs of international junior transfer students are often neglected and these students are required to navigate the difficult transition to a four-year university with little institutional support.

### **Background and Need**

Researchers have extensively examined the experiences of international students studying at four-year universities across the United States; some of their findings will be detailed in Chapter II. As the population of international students within the U.S. has grown, some researchers, such as Hagedorn and Mi-Chung (2015), have also studied the experiences of international students enrolled at community colleges. However, there is little research that explores the experiences of international students' after transferring to a four-year university.

International junior transfer students are a widely unstudied population because research focuses on the junior transfer population *or* the international student population. The literature does not address the intersection of these identities. Furthermore, like research about any minority population, existing literature primarily takes a deficit perspective. In Chapter II, one will note that relevant studies focus on how and why international and junior transfer students struggle within higher education: language barriers, different cultural norms, larger classes, etc. There is a dearth of literature highlighting the successes of these populations. Educational researchers have failed to examine their unique strengths, strategies, and experiences. Additionally, little is known about the systems of institutional support that international junior transfer students utilize to be successful.

As the international transfer population grows, there is a pressing need to better

understand and support this population. Zhang (2016) suggests:

Qualitative data collected from students, faculty, and staff could help institutional researchers and policy makers obtain a thorough understanding of international transfer students' performance on campus as well as institutional and individual factors supporting or hindering their academic success. Additionally, qualitative analysis can contextualize existing quantitative statistics and open the door to explore critically the various mediating influences on college teaching and student learning. (p. 46)

As such, this study will contribute to existing literature by pursuing a qualitative strengths-based exploration of the strategies international transfer students utilize to succeed, and the institutional factors that best support them.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the key individual and institutional factors that support the success of international junior transfer students pursuing a bachelor's degree at a large public research university. For the purpose of this study, success is defined as persistence, campus involvement, and a sense of mattering on campus.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions for the study are:

1. How do international transfer students experience the transition from a community college to a large research university?
2. What institutional services and programs successfully involve these students on-campus?
3. How does on-campus student involvement affect student success?
4. How do international transfer students interact with their peers?
5. How do international transfer students interact with faculty and advisers?

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study will explore the experiences of international junior transfer students through two theoretical frameworks: student involvement theory, and marginality and mattering theory. These theories will provide a strengths-based lens through which to view the interactions between students and their environment.

### **Student Involvement Theory**

Alexander W. Astin founded his theory of student involvement in 1975 in response to the complexity and disorganization of existing theories. He believed that educational practitioners had little understanding of how students process or react to things. He aimed to explain “the behavioral mechanisms or processes that facilitate student development” (Astin, 1984, p. 522).

Astin defines student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (1984, p. 518). Student involvement theory declares that students benefit from being actively involved on their campuses and in their curriculum (Astin, 1975; 1984; 1993). Specifically, student involvement leads to higher rates of

student persistence. The theory is organized into four additional postulates: “Involvement refers to the physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1984, p. 518). It can be measured quantitatively, qualitatively, and on a continuum. Finally, campus policies and practices can be evaluated by how they affect student involvement.

In 1993, Astin found that student involvement is also positively correlated with academic and personal development. Academic development measures include student self-assessment of general knowledge, critical thinking ability, analytical and problem solving skills, and writing ability, as well as standardized test scores and enrollment in graduate programs. Personal development measures include student self-assessment of their leadership ability, popularity, social self-confidence, public speaking ability, cultural awareness, and student activism. With the addition of academic and personal development, student involvement theory can be used to examine a large range of student success measures.

While the focus of student involvement theory is measuring the involvement and outcomes of individual students, Astin also places emphasis on analyzing how institutions facilitate student involvement:

Administrators and faculty members must recognize that virtually every institutional policy and practice (e.g., class schedules; regulations on class attendance, academic probation, and participation in honors courses; policies on office hours for faculty, student orientation, and advising) can affect the way students spend their time and the amount of effort they devote to academic pursuits. (Astin, 1984, p. 523)

Furthermore, programming, policies, and practices should be evaluated by how they produce and promote student involvement. In his 1975 study, Astin found that the best forms of student

involvement to encourage persistence were part-time on-campus jobs, dormitories, and honor societies.

While student involvement theory has not been used to study the experiences of international junior transfer students, Jackson and Laanan (2011) found that junior transfer students benefited from involvement on their campus. Andrade (2007) found a similar result in her study of international students, recommending that orientations, seminars, and extracurricular programming be used to help international students build community and become integrated into the American university.

Student involvement theory will provide a framework through which to explore the key individual and institutional factors that support international junior transfer students. This study will use it to examine how students interact with the institution and how the institution supports students. Additionally, this study will explore how these students are able to overcome some of the marginalizing aspects of being an international junior transfer student through campus involvement and community building.

### **Mattering and Marginality**

Schlossberg's (1989) discussion of mattering and marginality also provides an important frame through which to view the experiences of international junior transfer students on campus. Citing Astin (1984), the author highlights the importance of on-campus community, describing the experiences of marginality and mattering. Marginality is the sense of not feeling like one belongs. She describes the experience of having two social identities:

One who is living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples, never quite willing to break, even if permitted to do so, with past and traditions,

and not quite accepted, because of prejudice, in the new society in which the individual seeks to find a place. (Park, 1928, as referenced in Schlossberg, 1989)

One may assume that this definition of marginality describes the experiences of many international students navigating the duality of their own cultural identity and their new role in American society.

In contrast, mattering is described as “the perception that, to some degree and in any of a variety of ways, we are a significant part of the world around us” (Elliot, Kao, & Grant, 2004, p. 339). It can be broken down into five components: receiving attention, feeling important to others, others depending on us, others appreciating us, and ego-extension. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) write "mattering is a motive: the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension exercises a powerful influence on our actions" (p. 165). Schlossberg believes that mattering is achieved through student involvement, finding that “involvement creates connections between students, faculty, and staff that allow individuals, to believe in their own personal worth” (1989, p. 1). This is a positive feedback loop: involvement causes mattering, and feeling like one matters encourages further involvement. This study aims to learn more about how students experience mattering on campus by exploring the importance of community, campus involvement, and faculty/staff interactions.

Like Astin, Schlossberg urges administrators and practitioners to create programming and policies that inspire student involvement and community. Additionally, institutional leaders should examine why some students get involved, why others do not, why some students feel that they matter, and why others do not. Schlossberg (1989) believes it is an institution’s responsibility to ensure that students feel that they matter. For example, Kodama (2002) found



that students who accessed student services experienced lower levels of marginality, however junior transfer students had less access to services. Additionally, Owens (2007) found that junior transfer students experienced marginality during their first few weeks post-transfer and suggested that more counseling and advising be made available for transfer students.

In conjunction, the theoretical frameworks used in this study suggest that campus involvement creates student community and a sense of belonging. Schlossberg and Astin found this to be correlated with student success, as measured by academic achievement, personal development, and persistence.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Like any population, each international junior transfer student carries their own strengths, preferences, personal history, and cultural norms. Furthermore, these students originate from hundreds of different nations and study across the country. As such, this is an infinitely diverse population. Unfortunately, due to resource and time limitations, this study explores the experiences of a small sample of international junior transfer students at one prestigious research university. In addition to the limitations of the sample size, the conclusions may also be biased by the selective nature of the institution. To be admitted, the participants must have been incredibly successful at their community college; they learned how to successfully navigate their previous campus and chose to continue their studies within the country. Furthermore, the researcher's ability to find and recruit these participants may be the result of an existing level of involvement that colors their campus experience. As recruitment advertisements were sent via campus departments, the junior transfer center, international office, and campus social media groups, students not engaged with these programs likely did not learn of the study. Due to these

limitations in sample, the results and conclusions may not be generalized to the entire international junior transfer population.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **For Researchers**

As discussed previously, this study is one of the first to explore the experiences of international junior transfer students. Future researchers may reference this broad preliminary study and pursue more extensive and specific study of this diverse population. By using a strengths-based framework to examine how these students are able to succeed despite facing many challenges, this study aims to set a positive tone for future research. International junior transfer students are resilient and hard-working and should be celebrated.

#### **For Practitioners**

The results of this study will provide guidance for university administrators, faculty, and student affairs practitioners hoping to better serve this growing population. By learning more about the experiences of international junior transfer students, practitioners will be better prepared to create and fund resources and programming to support their success.

#### **For Students**

Because this study explores participants' success strategies, primarily through the lens of student involvement theory, the study will be helpful for international junior transfer students seeking to improve their own experience on campus.

### Definition of Terms

- *Domestic students*: students who are citizens of the United States and completed their secondary school education in the country.
- *International junior transfer students*: undergraduate students who are not citizens of the United States and completed part of their Bachelor's coursework at two-year community college before matriculating to a four-year university to complete their degree. This thesis exclusively studies those who did not graduate from secondary school in the United States.
- *International students*: students who are not citizens of the United States. This thesis exclusively studies those who did not graduate from secondary school in the United States.
- *Junior transfer students*: undergraduate students who completed part of their Bachelor's coursework at a two-year community college, and then matriculated to a four-year university to complete their degree. The term is used only in reference to those who have matriculated to a four-year university and not those currently enrolled at a community college. Also referred to as transfer students.
- *Native students*: students who began their path of higher education at the four-year university as first-year freshmen and have not transferred to another institution.
- *Persistence*: Continued enrollment towards an educational goal.
- *Receiving institution*: the four-year university to which a junior transfer student matriculates.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

The transfer pathway can be an affordable and accessible way to pursue a bachelor's degree, however it can also be a difficult and lonely transition to navigate. For junior transfer students who are also international students, these challenges may be compounded. These students must adjust to an educational environment different from both their home country and the community college at which they learned the norms of American education. Upon matriculation, international junior transfer students may need to navigate a new social community, a larger and less supportive campus, and increased academic rigor, while also possibly struggling with language proficiency and financial stressors. The purpose of this study is to explore the key individual and institutional factors that support the success of international junior transfer students pursuing a bachelor's degree at a large public research university.

As research about the international junior transfer population is limited, this study will examine existing research through two lenses: the experiences of junior transfer students, and the experiences of international students. The chapter will then conclude by reviewing the current quantitative literature on the international junior transfer population.

#### **Experiences of Junior Transfer Students**

##### **Social Adjustment**

In his foundational study of student outcomes, Astin (1993) found social relationships with peers to be “the single most powerful source of influence on the undergraduate student's academic and personal development” (“Impact of Student Interaction”). These bonds are linked

to student well-being and benefits in all measures of learning and development. Similar trends have been found specifically among the junior transfer population; social relationships and peer support are important to the transition and persistence of these students (DeWine, Ludvik, Tucker, Mulholland, Bracken, 2017; Laanan et al., 2011; Townsend and Wilson 2008). For example, in their study of learning communities, Coston, Lord, and Monell (2013) found that the feeling of belonging was the biggest stress reducer for junior transfer students.

Unfortunately, transfer students often experience difficulty building relationships with their classmates upon transfer. This may be the result of pre-existing friendships between native students, demographic differences (such as age), and/or stigmatization of transfer status. Additionally, transfer students are less likely to live in on-campus housing, structured to facilitate social relationships, and are more likely to be enrolled part-time, commute to campus, work, and/or be a caregiver. These differing priorities leave transfer students with less time to pursue on-campus community and may lead to social isolation (Ishitani & McKittrick, 2010; Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013).

While interviewing junior transfer students at a large public research university, Townsend and Wilson (2006) observed that transfer students struggled to build social relationships with native students. The authors attributed this to three factors. First, the native students had already spent two years together developing relationships with each other; they were said to have little interest in expanding their social group to integrate new students. Second, native students benefited from programming intended to facilitate social relationships among peers, such as residential learning communities and freshman interest groups. These programs were rarely designed for, or extended to, the transfer community. Finally, participants struggled to develop friendships in the large classes typically found on a public university campus. The

authors write that “expecting to find a community of other learners within the classroom, some of the community college transfers were frustrated by their anonymity in large lecture classes” (p. 450). Furthermore, because of the extensive social programming provided to native students in their first couple of years of study, native students may not know how to develop social relationships within a classroom setting. Thus, native students do not easily socialize with the junior transfer population. The authors recommend transfer-specific learning communities to help develop community within the transfer population, and in-class partner and group work to help facilitate social relationships between native and transfer students.

Junior transfer students may be perceived as less capable than students who began their higher education career at a four-year university. In their survey of transfer students, Jackson and Laanan (2011) also found that transfer students struggled to build social relationships with native students. In addition to not feeling accepted, the transfer students felt stigmatized because of their transfer status. The study found that “67.5 percent agreed somewhat or agreed strongly that the abilities of transfer students were underestimated and that there was a stigma or negative perception of transfer students” (p. 44). Additionally, Laanan et al. (2011) found that this social stigma negatively affects transfer students’ adjustment to the receiving institution. It is important to note that Jackson and Laanan’s (2011) study was limited to women pursuing majors in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics. Women in these fields are already a stigmatized population whose knowledge and ability is often questioned.

For some transfer students, social engagement may be less of a priority than it would be to a native student. Lester et al. (2013) found transfer students to be primarily focused on academic enrichment and integration. Participants reported that they were pursuing higher

education for the degree and post-graduation opportunities, not the traditional social experience that may attract native students. The authors write:

For many students in the study, engaging in social activities and events was not included in the list of activities that promoted their sense of belonging. Often, the transfer students connected their sense of belonging to their beliefs about academic engagement. (p. 218)

Furthermore, Wang and Wharton (2012) found that junior transfer students were “less involved socially...and participated less in campus events and student organizations” than their native peers (p. 49). This may be especially true for non-traditional transfer students, including part-time students, those over the age of twenty-five, those with families, and those who commute to campus (Ishitani & McKittrick, 2010; Lester et al., 2013).

Studies show that better relationships with fellow transfer students can be developed through transfer student specific orientations, learning communities, and extracurricular programming (DeWine et al., 2017; Jackson, 2013; Jackson et al., 2013; Laanan et al., 2011; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Walker & Okpala, 2017). While better relationships with native students should also be facilitated, recommendations are limited to encouraging in-class collaboration (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

### **Navigating New Educational Climate & Faculty Relationships**

Many transfer students also experience difficulty adjusting to the new educational climate of a four-year university. While at community college, students may have enjoyed small class sizes, familiar instructor-student relationships, and active learning opportunities (Jackson, 2013a; Laanan et al., 2011). Upon matriculation to a large research university, these students encounter larger student-to-faculty ratios and less available support services.

In their study of transfer students at a large public research university, Townsend and Wilson (2006) found that transfer students felt quite overwhelmed and unsupported during the transition to a four-year university. Students reported that they were not adequately oriented to the new campus and that larger class sizes made it much more difficult to build relationships with faculty. However, these concerns were tempered in smaller departments and/or upper division courses. The authors heard the following from a student:

Here you kind of feel like you're a number because the professors don't know you.

Whereas in the classroom at the junior college...you really felt like they knew you...if you just really asked a question, it was more like a discussion between you and the professor because you knew the professor, and the professor knew you. (p. 446)

Townsend and Wilson conclude that institutions neglect the needs of new junior transfer students when compared to programming and services available for first-year native students. They suggest that junior transfer students may benefit from “a hand hold for a little bit” during their first few weeks of the semester (p. 450).

Finding similar results, Coston et al. (2013) write “Transfer students often feel nameless and have difficulty connecting with other students and faculty. Further, the students often have difficulty navigating the vast university campus, finding the services they need, and learning new procedures and advising systems” (p. 1). The authors recommend that campuses develop learning communities or first semester courses to introduce transfer students to various campus offices and resources.

**Faculty relationships.** Astin (1993) found that “next to the peer group, faculty represent the most significant aspect of the student's undergraduate development” (“Student-faculty Interaction”). To better understand the role of faculty as a support for transfer students, Jackson



(2013b) performed a qualitative study of female junior transfer students at a research university in the Midwest. The study found that while participants experienced their community college faculty to be supportive, they were disappointed by their experiences post-transfer. One participant reported that her community college instructors were available to answer questions, assisted students who missed material, and facilitated exploration of her intended career path. By contrast, university faculty members were said to be resistant to answering student questions. One student shared, "I feel like some of the professors are here teaching because they have to and not because they want to" (p. 27).

Laanan et al.'s (2011) quantitative study of Transfer Student Capital also found that students expected greater support from faculty upon matriculation to the university. The authors determined that supportive faculty relationships are positively correlated with student adjustment to the four-year university. Furthermore, Nuñez and Yoshimi (2017) found that when possible, interacting with "supportive institutional agents", was important for successful transitions. These studies demonstrate that transfer students from community colleges are accustomed to high touch relationships with faculty and must adjust to more distant relationships upon matriculation to a four-year university. In part, this disparity may be explained by the contrasting missions of the two institution types: while community colleges are primarily intended to provide instruction to large subsets of the population, universities also prioritize research and graduate instruction (Coons et al., 1960; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). As such, less focus may be placed on high touch faculty-student relationships.

**Transfer shock.** Many studies of junior transfer students reference transfer shock, described as "a decrease in grade point average (GPA) experienced after transferring" (Young & Litzler, 2013, p. 877). Hills (1965) provides a frequently cited meta-analysis of research on

transfer students' academic performance. Hills reviewed twenty studies with forty-six data sets; forty-four of these showed a decrease in students' grades during their first semester post-transfer. Of the thirty-eight studies that analyzed students' grades in subsequent semesters, thirty-four showed a recovery in GPA. Hills frames the meta-analysis as a discussion between a high school student and their college counselor, discussing whether the student should begin their higher education studies at a community college or four-year university. He concludes that the counselor should advise the student that they will likely experience (a) a decrease in GPA, (b) lower grades than a native student, (c) a lower graduation rate, and (d) a longer time to degree if they begin their studies at a community college and transfer to a four-year university. As such, the author seems to disapprove of the transfer pathway for bachelor degree completion. More recent studies have also confirmed the transfer shock phenomenon (Ishitani, 2008; Laanan, 2007).

**Transfer Student Capital.** In an effort to better understand and “move beyond the transfer shock concept,” Laanan et al. (2011) examined the importance of transfer students' social and cultural capital (p. 175). The authors of this rare, strengths-based study, refer to this capital as Transfer Student Capital (TSC). They write, “TSC indicates how community college students accumulate knowledge in order to negotiate the transfer process, such as understanding credit transfer agreements between colleges, grade requirements for admission into a desired major, and course prerequisites” (p. 177). While the study found evidence of transfer shock, transfer students' learning and study skills from community college were found to benefit their academic adjustment. The authors conclude that “Perhaps, smaller class sizes and intimate class interaction among faculty and students at a community college might contribute to increase students' learning and study skills that resulted in a significant factor in adjusting academically”

(2011, p. 191). They recommend that community colleges continue to build Transfer Student Capital by offering rigorous curriculum and effective advising. Four-year universities should offer transfer specific orientations, workshops, and counselors. Additionally, administrators should share research with student organizations and help them create programming that builds Transfer Student Capital.

## **Experiences of International Students**

### **Social Adjustment**

When international students build community and develop a social network, they are found to experience a smoother transition to American higher education. In his meta-analysis, de Araujo (2011) found that social support was positively correlated with student well-being and negatively correlated with student stress. Additionally, Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002) found that students who had been in the U.S. for six months experienced a better adjustment and less stress if they had frequent interactions with domestic students. Similarly, Tsevi (2018) found that international students who formed supportive friendships with domestic students within the first two years of enrollment experienced a better adjustment to their studies in America.

Affirming Astin's (1975) theory of student involvement, Tsevi (2018) found that participation in student organizations also led to improved persistence among international students. Such results were mirrored by Gómez, Urzúa, and Glass (2014), who concluded that international students who participate in leisure/social events and create a social network experience a better social adjustment to college.

However, like junior transfer students, international students often have a difficult social adjustment to the four-year university. Language barriers (Andrade, 2007), discrimination (Sato

et al., 2018), academic priorities (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011) and student insecurities (Sato & Hodge, 2015b; Wang et al., 2017) may prevent the development of meaningful relationships that would benefit both international and domestic student populations. Sato and Hodge (2015b) observed that Japanese international students experienced anxiety about interacting with domestic students and feared “bothering” them (p. 213). One participant shared “I feel isolation. I realized that I do not have good American friends, and I believe that American friends cannot be my best friends, because of my language barriers” (p. 215). In their quantitative study of sojourners at a Mid-Western university, Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002) found that international students reported experiencing less social support than domestic students. Furthermore, despite being a small population on campus, their friend groups primarily consisted of other international students.

Wang et al. (2017) studied the reasons that international students avoid interacting with domestic students and found that “41% of the attributions participants made about their difficulties in communicating with Americans were related to perceived bias and discrimination” (p. 567). This concern was more prevalent than concerns about English proficiency. Similarly, Sato et al. (2018) found that international students experienced teasing, discrimination, and a lack of collegiality, leading to “a sense of detachment, exclusion, and/or separation” (p. 708). It is worth noting that this study occurred at a historically Black university, therefore the researchers’ conclusions may not be generalizable to other campuses. Additionally, review of existing research indicated that international students experienced higher rates of discrimination than domestic students, permanent residents, and visiting international scholars. Students from Africa, Asia, and South America reported experiencing more prejudice than those from Europe.

To assist the transition of international students, researchers recommend that institutions develop intentional extracurricular programming and offer orientation sessions to teach international students how to communicate with domestic students (Andrade, 2017; Sato & Hodge, 2015a). Better relationships between international and domestic students can be encouraged through mixed housing placements, group/partner assignments, multicultural student organizations, and conversation partnerships (Sato & Hodge, 2015a). Finally, it is important for administrators to make an institutional commitment to diversity and the support of international students (Sato & Hodge, 2015b).

### **Navigating New Educational Climate & Faculty Relationships**

Upon matriculation to an American university, international students must also adjust to a new educational climate and system of values. These differences include changes in classroom structure, pedagogy, and unsatisfactory relationships with faculty (Andrade, 2007; Sato et al. 2018; Sato & Hodge, 2015a; Sato & Hodge, 2015b; Tsevi, 2018).

Through interviews with Japanese students, Sato and Hodge (2015b) studied participants' experiences with faculty at an American university and shared their results through three key themes: professors' negativity, classroom dynamics, and lack of social support. Participants reported being unable to develop supportive academic relationships with their instructors. Additionally, participants were negatively impacted by different dynamics with faculty outside of the classroom, when compared to their home country. These international students were accustomed to faculty who took a proactive approach to building social relationships with students and ensuring their holistic wellbeing. However, when they attended office hours or asked for help, American professors shared concerns that the students would not be able to succeed in the course. The students were encouraged to withdraw. The authors write that

students were “emotionally hurt and disappointed” by the professor’s passive approach (Sato & Hodge, 2015b, p. 218).

When discussing participants’ adjustment to the American classroom structure, one student shared that he was shocked by domestic students’ willingness to raise their hand and disagree with the instructor. He perceived this as very disrespectful. Additionally, the student feared that his hesitation to engage in such an active and challenging nature would jeopardize his grade in the course:

The professor seems to enjoy and listen to students’ voices. I am sure that the professor sees me as quiet and maybe bad student. It seems that he was not happy, because I never raised my hand. That was unusual to see the situation from my academic backgrounds. I was not allowed to share my views with my professors in Japan. I am not used to it. (Sato & Hodge, 2015b, p. 219)

Andrade (2007) also found that international students were not used to playing such an active role in the classroom.

In a similar study, Sato and Hodge (2015a) found that international students were required to adjust to new social values in their American courses. Japanese students were accustomed to interdependent learning environments in which classmates helped each other. In their classes in the United States, these students were disappointed by the lack of support and connection with their peers. For example, one participant shared:

My Japanese friends always helped me when I missed classes or I struggled to study assignments and exams. American friends did not help me at all. It seems that they are not friendly, but I realized that they are much more independent than Japanese students. I

expected that when I came to the USA, I would be able to join in one American student group that mentors me how to study, speak, and read, but I do not see any grouping support from American students. (p. 85)

The authors relate this shift in peer support and collaboration to the collectivist nature of the students' home country. As such, the results of the study may not be reliable for students from more individualistic cultures.

Sato and Hodge's studies detail just four of the ways that international students may experience a dramatic transition from the education system of their home country to that of the United States. Because of different cultures and values, participants struggled to meet their professors' expectations, and conversely professors and classmates did not meet the students' expectations. As a result, students felt unsupported and experienced high levels of stress. The authors suggest that institutions develop mentoring programs and orientation sessions to help international students learn to navigate the American university system (Sato & Hodge, 2015b). Andrade (2017) agrees, writing "orientation and freshman seminars should be designed specifically for international students to help them adapt to the expectations of American university professors and campus life as well as to form strong study skills" (p. 73). Furthermore, the author writes that faculty need to become more aware of students' different cultural backgrounds and unique needs once on campus. This should include developing toolkits of best practices to support these students and encourage their in-class engagement.

### **Language Proficiency**

English may not be the native language of many international students. Mastery of the English language varies widely depending on the education system and colonial history of students' home countries (Tsevi, 2018). Those who struggle with English proficiency find

building community, navigating new educational climates, and performing well academically additionally challenging.

Language proficiency tests, such as the TOEFL, have been found to predict students' academic performance within American classrooms (Johnson 1988; Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi, 2015). Researchers have also demonstrated that language barriers may leave international students struggling to understand lecture material, choosing not to participate in class discussions, taking longer to complete assignments, and/or requiring additional support (Andrade, 2007; Sato et al., 2018; Sato & Hodge, 2015a; Sato & Hodge, 2015b; Tsevi, 2018; Wang et al., 2017). Andrade (2017) heard all of these concerns when interviewing international students at a religious university. She writes "having to study academic subjects in a second language requires a significant time commitment and a strong focus" (p. 68). English proficiency was even a challenge for students in their senior year, and for those who studied the language extensively in their home country. As a result, students often prioritize academics over their social life and must develop strategies to keep up with their classmates. Andrade details one of those strategies:

Mandy (Asia) had difficulty following class discussions and responding quickly to professors' questions because of her English proficiency level. She formed specific strategies to help her develop an active orientation. She learned to be better prepared for her literature class by discussing assignments with other international students prior to class and arranging with her study partners to take turns answering the professor's questions. (p. 70)

Through statistical analysis, Martirosyan et al. (2015) affirm existing research demonstrating that English proficiency is positively correlated with academic performance, as



measured by GPA. The authors suggest that colleges and universities develop language-conscious support services for international students at the institutional and course-specific level. Additionally, they recommend that administrators develop programming to encourage interactions between international and domestic students, as this will improve language skills while helping students adjust to the institution and build community.

In their study of language proficiency, social connectedness, and stress, Yeh and Inose (2016) concluded that international students that are more fluent in English experience less stress: “Specifically, higher frequency of use, fluency level, and the degree to which participants felt comfortable speaking English, predicted lower levels of acculturative distress” (p. 23). Furthermore, their findings connect English proficiency with social connectedness and social support, attributing this to greater ease interacting with domestic students. The authors recommend that practitioners remain conscious of students’ English language skills, adjusting their communication methods and style appropriately. Additionally, administrators should develop a buddy program that matches international students with domestic students for bonding and cultural exchange (Yeh & Inose, 2002; Yeh & Inose, 2016). Other researchers also suggest that international students be offered optional or mandatory English language curriculum, and that domestic students, faculty, and staff are educated in multicultural communication skills so that institutions are better equipped to receive and welcome international students (Andrade, 2017; Wang et al., 2017).

### **Additional Financial Pressure**

While the cost of attending higher education is stressful for many students, international students may experience additional financial burden due to the high cost of non-resident tuition,

lack of financial assistance, and restrictions on their ability to work. Such financial pressure can adversely affect international students' well-being and academic performance (Banjong, 2015).

Students on non-immigrant visas are not eligible for federal financial aid or loans; many scholarships also require that students be U.S. citizens or permanent residents (Hagedorn & Mi-Chung, 2005; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Department of Education, 2012). As a result, the majority of international students pay their own way or must rely on financial support from family (IEE, 2018). The ability to support oneself is limited by strict visa rules, which require international students be enrolled full-time and restrict employment options, often to on-campus jobs (Durosko, 2017).

In a study of international student retention, the Association of International Educators, found finances to be the second most common reason that international students withdraw from their university (Schulte & Choudaha, 2014). Furthermore, three of the top five reasons for students' dissatisfaction with their institution were connected to their ability to support themselves: access to jobs/internships (37%), affordability (36%), and the availability of scholarships (34%). In their study of undergraduate and graduate international students, Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) also found finances to be a common stressor for participants. As such, they recommend that on-campus jobs be made readily available for this population.

### **Experiences of International Junior Transfer Students**

As this chapter has detailed, researchers have extensively examined the experiences of junior transfer students and international students studying at four-year universities in the United States. However, very little research has explored the experiences of international junior transfer students. This is, in part, because research often focuses on the junior transfer population *or* the

international student population, neglecting to account for the intersection of these identities and the unique strengths, strategies, and experiences of the population.

Noticing the lack of research on international junior transfer students, Zhang (2016) conducted a statistical analysis of student transcripts at a public research university in Texas. The researcher found international junior transfer students to be more interested in the fields of business administration and engineering than their domestic counterparts. They completed more academic units, received higher GPAs, experienced shorter times to degree, and demonstrated higher graduation rates than domestic transfer students. Zhang does not explore possible explanations for these differences. Acknowledging the unique challenges that international transfer students may experience, including distance from family, language barriers, cultural differences, social isolation and stigmatization, Zhang recommends that qualitative research be conducted to learn more about these students' experiences.

In a brief article about the transfer pathway, Duroske (2017) recommends that campuses “support international junior transfer students by creating on-campus jobs, year round housing, and advising/programs tailored specifically to the international population” (p. 43).

### **Conclusion**

While there is limited literature regarding the experiences on international junior transfer students, existing research on the junior transfer population and international student population shows similarities in their experiences adjusting to a new university campus. Both populations benefit from social support, however they may struggle to build community. Furthermore, both international students and junior transfer students must adapt to a new campus culture and structure in which faculty and peer support may be less available than their prior education

system. These experiences may be compounded for international junior transfer students due to their intersecting identities.

As this literature review has demonstrated, existing literature primarily focuses on the challenges these students face and how they negatively affect students' education experience within the United States. There is little mention of the skills and strategies they use to overcome these challenges or the unique capital they bring to their four-year institution.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Existing research has demonstrated the challenges that international students and junior transfer students face as they adjust to a four-year university (de Araujo, 2011; Hills, 1965; Sato & Hodge, 2015b; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). However, little research has examined the institutional and individual factors that contribute to the success of these populations. Furthermore, the experiences of international students who are also junior transfer students remain largely unstudied (Zhang, 2016). This chapter outlines the study's research methodology and the rationale for selection. It will then detail the research setting, participant selection process, participant pool, data collection protocol, data analysis process, and processes for protecting the research subjects.

#### **Research Methodology**

This study uses a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of international junior transfer students pursuing a bachelor's degree at a large public research university. German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, is credited with founding the phenomenology methodology in the aftermath of World War I, a time of ideological crisis for Europe (Groenewald, 2004). Husserl rejected the idea of objective knowledge, believing that all experience and knowledge can only be understood through individuals' interpretation of it. He believed that "lived experience—the Lebenswelt, or 'life world'—[was] the real foundation for philosophic understanding" (LaVasseur, 2003, p. 410). Groenewald (2004) writes:

Husserl rejected the belief that objects in the external world exist independently and that the information about objects is reliable...To arrive at certainty, anything outside

immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness. Realities are thus treated as pure “phenomena” and the only absolute data from where to begin. (p. 43).

Phenomenology focuses on “understanding the essence of the experience” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). It is best used in studies that seek to understand the shared experience of a population, community, or group of individuals. Welman and Kruger (1999) write: “the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved” (p. 189). Phenomenology is a well-suited methodology for this study of the shared experiences of international junior transfer students. The phenomenon of this intersecting identity can be better understood by addressing our five original research questions:

1. How do international transfer students experience the transition from a community college to a large research university?
2. What institutional services and programs successfully involve these students on-campus?
3. How does on-campus student involvement affect student success?
4. How do international transfer students interact with their peers?
5. How do international transfer students interact with faculty and advisers?

During the course of the study, two additional research questions were adopted:

6. What strategies do students utilize to overcome the challenges of being international junior transfer students?
7. What contributes to students’ sense of mattering or belonging on campus?

The unit of analysis is a subset of the international junior-transfer student population at Coastal University and the research questions were addressed through one-on-one interviews.

The findings of phenomenological studies are analyzed and the researcher creates a composite description of the shared experience as they understand it. Creswell (2007) writes, “Phenomenology is not only a description, but it is also seen as an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences” (p. 59). While writing of phenomenological studies, Creswell (2007) adds, “It would be important to understand these common experiences in order to develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon” (p. 60). In this study, the data was analyzed by the researcher and the resulting information will be shared with administrators and practitioners at the university’s international student office and transfer student office. Finally, the information will be further disseminated to other campuses via journal articles and conferences. This new knowledge will be shared with the intention of creating more inclusive and supportive campuses for international junior transfer students.

## **Research Setting**

### **Campus**

The study occurred at Coastal University (a pseudonym), a large public research university in the western United States. The campus enrolls approximately thirty-thousand undergraduate students and ten thousand graduate students (CalAnswers, 2019). Coastal University is an award winning institution and its prestigious reputation attracts a large pool of international students. In Fall 2018, over 13% of undergraduate students were studying on non-immigrant visas (CalAnswers, 2019). Pressured by legislative mandates, Coastal University and

its peer institutions have made recent efforts to increase the number of junior transfer students enrolled on their campuses. While these efforts have been more successful on other campuses, the proportion of junior transfer students at Coastal University has been falling over the past twenty years. Additionally, the campus enrolled approximately six thousand junior transfer students in Fall 2018 (CalAnswers, 2019). Of those, one thousand were international junior transfer students, accounting for 3.5% of the undergraduate student population.

### **Research Activities**

All research interviews were conducted in the researcher's private office on the Coastal University campus. The office is a non-descript windowless room decorated with personal mementos, a framed poster from the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing, and a library of student-affairs books. Upon their arrival at the research site, participants were reminded that the study was unaffiliated with Coastal University and encouraged to not let the interview setting affect their responses. The interviewer and participants faced each other throughout the interview with a recording device positioned between them.

### **Participant Selection**

The criterion used to recruit participants for this study were junior transfer students who previously attended an in-state community college and were enrolled in their fourth or fifth year of baccalaureate studies at the research site, or recent alumni of the research site. The participants were also non-citizens who did not graduate high school in the United States.

This study utilized convenience sampling, explained by Farrokhi and Mahmoudi-Hamidabad (2012) as:



A kind of non-probability or nonrandom sampling in which members of the target population...are selected for the purpose of the study if they meet certain practical criteria, such as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, easy accessibility, or the willingness to volunteer. (p. 785)

Potential participants were recruited through department mailing lists, social media pages, and on-campus flyers. Additionally, two students previously known to the researcher were invited to participate. All interested students were asked to complete a short online survey to record their contact information and brief demographic data such as country of origin and country of high school attendance. The online survey was intended to facilitate stratified purposeful sampling, allowing the researcher to intentionally select individuals that represented a diversity of experiences, including different academic majors and countries of origin (Given, 2008). However, the study occurred at the beginning of a new academic year and participant recruitment proved difficult. Participant options were very limited, as seen in the similar ages and majors of the three participants.

### **Participants**

Interviews were conducted with three participants. All three graduated from high school in a foreign country and then enrolled at a community college in the United States. After transferring to Coastal University as third-year students, they enrolled in the university's College of Engineering. At the time of the study, two of the students were enrolled full-time in their final year of study and one had graduated from the university the month prior.

The participant pool includes one woman and two men ranging in age from twenty-two to twenty-four. Two of the participants are East Asian and one is European; their countries of origin

can be found in Table 1. One participant has established permanent residency, and two are studying on non-immigrant student visas. The participants did not disclose any disabilities, their sexual identity, languages spoken, or their marital statuses. With one exception, they did not provide information about their families' socioeconomic classes.

<b>Table 1</b> <i>Demographics of Study Participants</i>				
<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Country of Origin</u>	<u>Student Status</u>	<u>Immigration Status</u>
Toby	24	China, by way of Canada	Fifth year	Permanent resident
Mariko	22	Japan	Fourth year	Student visa
Russ	23	Europe, by way of Japan	Alumnus	Student visa

Due to the convenience sampling method utilized and the limited sample, caution should be used when generalizing the results of this study to students from other backgrounds and/or academic disciplines (Bui, 2014). Future studies should include a greater number of participants from different backgrounds and enrolled at different universities.

### **Data Collection**

The experiences of being an international junior transfer student were studied through semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The semi-structured interviews consisted of ten to twelve open-ended interview questions. Open-ended questions provide an opportunity for participants to guide the discussion and provide detailed personal information about their post-transfer experiences. Creswell (2013) writes that this approach allows participants to “best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (p.

218). This is especially important given the limited existing research on the international junior transfer population. Interview questions were adjusted and added as the interviews progressed to better address the study's evolving research questions.

Individual interviews were chosen over focus group conversations because participants were believed to be more likely to engage and share personal stories in a more intimate setting. International students studying in the United States are primarily from China, India, South Korea, and Japan (IIE, 2018); The cultural norms of these countries do not encourage open discussion of personal struggle or expression of vulnerability. Arora, Carlson, and Metz (2015) write that "traditional Asian cultural values, such as discomfort with self-disclosure outside the family, emotional restraint and self-control, and social conformity" limit students' ability to discuss challenges or seek help (p. 414-415). As such, participants were thought to be less likely to fully share their experiences in the company of their peers.

Interviews occurred in-person at the research site. In-person interviews were preferred over phone or web conversations as they create a more personable environment for participants to feel comfortable sharing personal information and expressing vulnerability. Furthermore, it permitted the researcher to note and respond to body language and non-verbal cues (Ellis, 2016).

The researcher reviewed the interview protocol and informed consent procedures with each participant. They then signed a consent form (Appendix A) and selected a pseudonym to be used in the study. For the duration of the study, the researcher followed an established protocol and asked prepared questions (Appendix B). The interview was audio recorded for later transcription and reference during data analysis. Additionally, the researcher took brief notes during the interview to note prominent themes, comments to follow up on, and/or any changes to the interview structure. At the conclusion of each interview, the audio recording was transcribed

utilizing Temi transcription services. The transcription was shared with the participant, who was invited to review and comment on it. They were also able to provide clarification on unclear or inaudible comments and redact any sensitive information. Once the participant reviewed their transcript, it was considered final and ready for analysis.

After the conclusion of her interview, one participant sent an email elaborating on some of her answers. This information was added to the transcript of her interview and coded through the same data analysis process.

### **Data Analysis**

After participants had reviewed and approved the transcription of their interview, the researcher applied the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method to make conclusions about their shared experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The IPA process embraces the subjectivity of phenomenology. It recognizes that, like research subjects make sense of their experiences, researchers then work to make sense of subjects' experiences through the data analysis process. As such, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis "emphasizes that the research exercise is a dynamic process with an active role for the researcher in that process" (p. 53). The researcher's interpretation of the interviews is a central part of the data analysis process and the resulting information presented in Chapter IV.

The researcher began the analysis process by listening to the interview audio recordings a number of times, paying attention to the recurring topics discussed within each interview and between the interviews. The researcher selected one transcript for initial coding, assigning descriptive words and phrases to Toby's answers. Smith and Osborn (2003) detail this process, noting "the skill at this stage is finding expressions which are high level enough to allow

theoretical connections within and across cases but which are still grounded in the particularity of the specific thing said” (p. 68). After coding the interview, the researcher grouped similar and redundant codes into larger themes. Some of these themes were shaped by the theoretical frameworks of the study, taking note of references of various forms of student involvement, mattering, and marginality. Codes that did not fit into a theme were set aside. The researcher then repeated the coding and grouping process for the other transcripts, adding codes to the existing themes when appropriate and creating new theme titles when necessary.

The coding and grouping process led to a master document of compiled themes and some outliers (Appendix C). The researcher continued consolidating these themes until she felt she had achieved “maximize mutual exclusivity and exhaustiveness”, as recommended by Weber (1990, as cited in Stemler, 2001, p. 2). The researcher then determined how the themes each addressed the study’s research questions, creating a map of each research question and relevant data.

### **Validity**

Joppe (2000) defines the validity of a study as:

The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable. (p. 1)

Noble and Smith (2015) provide eight strategies for ensuring validity of data collection and analysis in qualitative research. The following sections will describe how five of these methods were applied in this study.

### **Researcher Background and Biases**

Noble and Smith (2015) suggest “accounting for personal biases which may have influenced findings” (p. 2). Originally from the United Kingdom, the researcher started her undergraduate education as a non-citizen and the first in her family to attend an American university. While this was a difficult transition, the researcher benefited from having attended an American high school and already being well assimilated into the culture. This experience did not closely match those shared by the study participants.

The researcher previously served as an academic adviser for the largest department at the research site and is now the Education Director for a research center. In these roles, the researcher interacted with many international community college and junior transfer students. Prior interactions and conversations with the international junior transfer population closely reflected the challenges and strategies described in Chapters II and IV of this thesis. While this prior knowledge influenced the research questions and theoretical frameworks selected, study results still included some surprises.

### **Sampling and Methods Bias**

Next, Noble and Smith (2015) describe “acknowledging biases in sampling and ongoing critical reflection of methods to ensure sufficient depth and relevance of data collection and analysis” (p. 2). As previously discussed, this study utilized convenience sampling methods to recruit participants. Due to the similarities in participants, including but not limited to attendance at the same university, enrollment in engineering majors, and similar ages, the results are likely biased towards international junior transfer students with similar characteristics. Similarly, study results are likely to be shaped by the theoretical frameworks selected and the interview questions asked. As this is a phenomenological study, it is important to acknowledge that the interview

data is presented as the researcher interpreted and understood it (Creswell, 2007).

### **Consistency Across Subjects**

Another strategy to ensure validity is by “establishing a comparison case/seeking out similarities and differences across accounts to ensure different perspectives are represented” (p. 2). This was done to the best of the researcher’s ability given the convenience sampling method and limited sample size.

### **Rich Descriptions of Data**

The researcher attempted to include “rich and thick verbatim descriptions of participants’ accounts to support findings” in Chapter IV (Noble & Smith, 2015, p. 2).

### **Record Keeping**

Finally, Noble and Smith suggest “meticulous record keeping, demonstrating a clear decision trail and ensuring interpretations of data are consistent and transparent” and “demonstrating clarity in terms of thought processes during data analysis and subsequent interpretations” (p. 2). The data collection and analysis processes were well documented, including memos created after each interview and precise interview transcription. Additionally, the participants each reviewed and approved the transcripts of their interviews. The data coding and grouping process is clearly documented to ensure transparency (Appendix C).

It is important to note that two of the participants heavily used pragmatic markers such as “like”, “you know”, and “um”, during their interviews. Research shows use of such filler words is common for English language learners and so these words were included in the transcript review and data analysis processes (Rafik-Galea, Ishak, & Marji, 2012). When asked to review and approve her transcript, one participant said the following: “I’m surprised how often I use

‘like’ in conversation and I would want to work on it so I don’t say too much. It’s a unique and great chance to see how I speak in writing, thank you!” For ease of understanding, these filler words have been removed from the excerpts included in Chapters IV and V (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2006).

### **Plan for the Protection of Human Subjects**

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of San Francisco in August, 2019. The IRB approval letter can be found in Appendix D.

Upon their arrival to the study location, the researcher described the interview structure to each participant: the interview would consist of ten questions, as well as possible follow up or clarifying questions. The researcher explained that each participant would select a pseudonym to be used during the interview and in any reporting of the study. Additionally, the interview would be recorded for transcription purposes. Participants were not anticipated to experience any physical, social, psychological, legal, or economic risks, and the selected interview questions were not expected to cause discomfort or distress. Participants were reminded that they may choose to skip questions, withdraw their consent, and discontinue their participation in the study without penalty.

Participants were then asked if they wished to continue with the study. Upon their agreement, they spent time reading and signing the consent form. Participants received a copy of this consent form for their own records. Signed consent forms will be securely retained in a separate, password protected file for three years, as per IRB requirements. At that time, they will be destroyed. Any report of this study will not include information that makes it possible to



identify any participant. The document that links participant names and email addresses to their pseudonym is password protected; only the researcher has access.

Once participants selected a pseudonym, the audio-recorder was turned on to record the interview. These audio-files were password protected through the duration of the study, and deleted upon transcription. Participants received a copy of the transcription of their interview and were invited to correct inaccuracies, make retractions, and provide clarifying comments.

Participants received no direct benefit from their participation in this study but were instead informed that the possible benefits to others include providing guidance for university administrators, faculty, and student affairs practitioners hoping to better support this population. Additionally, the study may be helpful for international junior transfer students seeking to improve their own experience on campus due to the consideration of student strategies and the theoretical frameworks used.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

International students and junior transfer students have been found to experience difficult transitions to their university campuses: many must overcome social isolation, unfamiliar expectations, distant relationships with faculty, and academic difficulty (de Araujo, 2011; Hills, 1965; Sato & Hodge, 2015b; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). In contrast, the experiences of international junior transfer students remain largely unexamined (Zhang, 2016).

In an attempt to remedy this, this study explored the shared experiences of these students, learning about the individual and institutional factors that contribute to their success. The study was originally intended to address the following research questions:

1. How do international transfer students experience the transition from a community college to a large research university?
2. What institutional services and programs successfully involve these students on-campus?
3. How does on-campus student involvement affect student success?
4. How do international transfer students interact with their peers?
5. How do international transfer students interact with faculty and advisers?

However, through the nine-month process of drafting the study proposal, awaiting Institutional Review Board approval, and refining the interview protocol, two additional research questions were adopted.

Agee (2009) writes of the importance of well selected research questions, stating “The reflective and interrogative processes required for developing effective qualitative research questions can give shape and direction to a study in ways that are often underestimated” (p. 431).

She describes the process of developing research questions as interactive, requiring the researcher to be flexible and actively engaged in the research process. As such, the author states that a study's theoretical framework, and thus its research questions, often evolve through the lifespan of the research. Creswell (2007) agrees, noting "our questions change during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem" (p. 43). Such is the case in this study.

While many of the original research questions were inspired by Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement, as the study progressed campus involvement did not seem as central to participants' experiences as expected. As such, the study refocused on individual factors that affect student success. Existing literature regarding the experiences of international students and junior transfer students predominantly make use of a deficit perspective. Studies focus on the challenges these students experience but rarely examine how the students overcome such challenges to persist and graduate from their higher education institution (Hills, 1965; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Wang et al., 2017). In hopes of honoring the resilience, determination, intelligence, and resourcefulness of the international junior transfer student population, this study instead takes a strengths-based approach. As such, a sixth research question was added:

6. What strategies do students utilize to overcome the challenges of being an international junior transfer student?

Additionally, upon realizing that social connections and on-campus involvement was not as connected to participants' feelings of mattering and marginality as Schlossberg (1989) may have predicted, a seventh research question was added:

7. What contributes to students' sense of mattering or belonging on campus?

### **Path to the Research Site**

To contextualize the findings of the study, I will provide a brief overview of the participants' pasts as they relate to their studies in the United States. Despite being citizens of countries in Europe and Asia, all participants had prior exposure to the culture and education systems of North America. Russ had spent two weeks attending a language school in a nearby city during high school. Similarly, Mariko spent a month studying abroad in Canada while in high school, and her sister lived there for a year. Toby completed multiple years of his secondary education in Canada and matriculated directly from a Canadian high school to his community college.

The participants reported three reasons for enrolling at a community college instead of applying directly to a four-year institution. First, all participants had heard from friends and academic advisers that community college would be more affordable. Because international students are charged high non-resident tuition, this was especially important to the participants. Second, differences in the education and grading system between participants' home countries and American universities were said to make direct enrollment in a four-year university much more difficult. Additionally, Mariko's academic adviser in Japan suggested she attend community college to develop her English language skills before matriculating to a university.

After two to three years of community college coursework, the participants each applied to transfer to Coastal University's College of Engineering. Neither Russ nor Mariko expected to be admitted to such a prestigious university. Both shared that Coastal University was not really on their radar as a realistic option. Additionally, Toby spoke frequently of the prestige of the university, sharing that attending Coastal University was a "dream come true".

### **Research Question One: Transition from Community College**

To comprehensively understand the experiences of international junior transfer students, this study first aimed to explore how this population experiences the transition from a community college to a large research university. Two interview questions were developed to specifically address this question: (1) Think back to your first semester here. Please tell me as much as possible about your transition to campus, and (2) What helped you during this transition?

Toby described his transition to Coastal University as “rough but rewarding” He detailed experiencing excitement about being admitted to Coastal University and an eagerness to meet new people and make friends. However, this excitement was followed by a realization of the academic rigor the university would expect from him and how hard it could be to obtain support. This resulted in “frustrations, stress, anxiety.” Classes at Coastal University were much larger and faculty were less available to answer questions than his community college. Toby found that attending office hours often required waiting for forty-five minutes to receive five minutes of help.

Ultimately, Toby described the transition to a large research university positively, highlighting the skills and strengths he had developed

After the excitement I started realizing how difficult school here was, how difficult it [was to] speak with a professor or getting help and stuff like that. So that describes the rough part. But then looking back now I'm like..three...yeah, this is my third year as a [Coastal University] student. Just looking back at this journey, it has really taught me several strengths and skill sets for me to survive here. Without going through all of these rough times and struggles, I wouldn't have become stronger...as a stronger person.

The newfound skills included both academic and personal gains:

One, the actual skill sets is being able to sit down, focus, be patient reading through something you have no idea of, several times to gain a better understanding. And another skill set is to learn to reach out...and the other components that has made me, I think more of a stronger person is the emotional part...I have learned that you just want to do your best.

Toby viewed the transition from community college to Coastal University as an important opportunity to grow and learn more about himself and others.

Russ shared that he primarily found the transition to Coastal University to be a social and cultural adjustment. He had attended a very rigorous high school in Japan and then relocated at eighteen years old to attend community college in Los Angeles. He intentionally chose his community college for its “good reputation.” Therefore, he did not find matriculating to a large research university to be academically challenging. Russ shared that attending community college taught him discipline, time-management, and self-sufficiency. He was required to attend every class session and professors were able to track this in the smaller classes. He shared that attending class, studying, and gathering information about the transfer process kept him busy. As such, he had to build discipline and refine his time management skills:

I was waking up every day at 6:00 AM...and then I come back at 11, because I have this work and then classes and then I was trying to get information, how to transfer...You're literally living an adult life. You have to pay bills, you have to pay insurance, everything. That gave me a sense. Okay. That helps me definitely manage your time.

Russ was accustomed to community colleges which offer less social and extracurricular opportunities, “a place where you drive to school, you go to classes and you drive back home as if you have like a full time job”. After transferring, Russ felt that he had overwhelmed himself, registering for many opportunities that were not available at his community college and being very social:

For me it was really rough but I feel like I made it rough myself because in community college I didn't really have many opportunities...Yeah, I did it all for a month until I just collapsed.

Ultimately, he found that this detracted from his studies. Russ’s participation in extracurricular activities is discussed in more detail later in future sections.

When asked about their transition to a large research university, all participants compared their experience and abilities to other students. These comparisons indicated that participants felt less talented than native students, and academically behind due to their time spent in community college. Toby shared that he had to work harder than his peers to learn material and that his peers appeared to absorb information much quicker than he did:

Coming from the fact that [I am] academically not as capable as my peers. For example, if we both attend lectures, they somehow seem to absorb the material faster, better, and ready to apply. While for me it takes two times the time to understand the material and have to go through more struggles.

Tony also experienced embarrassment when asking questions that he deemed to be less advanced than those asked by his peers. It was unclear if he attributed this struggle to his international status, his junior transfer status, or simply his intellect. Mariko had similar views, believing that

freshmen students were “more talented” and had faster reading skills. She added that she often takes longer to complete assignments than her peers

In addition to feeling academically inferior, participants reported feeling “behind” their peers due to their junior transfer status. At twenty-three years old, Toby shared that he felt much older than other students and often compared his current position to where he expected native students to be at twenty-three years old: “I feel like by the time they became 23 or 24 they probably would be working or establishing a family, things like that.” Russ and Mariko primarily discussed feeling that they had less opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities and develop their resume than native students. Mariko had resigned from a solar car team because she did not have as much experience as students who had participated since they were freshman.

They have so much time to do a lot of things and that's something that I feel I don't have because I don't have a lot of time and I wish I could do research...If I had four years, I would have done much more.

Similarly, Russ had taken summer classes instead of pursuing internship experience to ensure he was able to graduate on time, “In terms of opportunities, you constantly feel like you're always behind and have one or two additional steps that you have to take just to get to [the] same position or status.” He was applying for full-time employment at the time of the interview and was nervous that he would not be able to find work that would sponsor a visa for him to stay in the US.

While all participants did compare themselves to other students through the course of the interview, they also discussed trying not to engage in such comparisons. They believed that excessive competition and comparison detracted from their studies. Toby and Russ shared that these thought patterns had also negatively affected their emotional and mental wellbeing. Toby



had found that excessively comparing himself to others had made him feel sad, so he stopped interacting as much with his peers. When discussing his transition, he shared:

And then times just become difficult. I learned that I just get a little bit sad over time. It became a little bit of a depression symptoms that I have, uh, self-recognized. So I became really guarded and they didn't want to get too much of involvement with my peers. I just want to mind my own business...Just too much pressure, too much competitiveness.

Since that experience, Toby has decided that socially withdrawing was preventing him from growing. He resolved to compare himself to other students less and meet as many people as possible. Similarly, Mariko shared that she did not enjoy the additional stress she experienced when comparing herself to other students: “Stressing myself always kind of lowers myself, [my] ability and everything. So if I take time to stress and compare myself, I should just spend that time to study and work on something else.”

The participants felt that the academic rigor, discipline, and time management skills developed in community college helped with their transition to the large research university. However, when asked to discuss other factors that aided in the transition, the participants struggled to answer. They referenced Coastal University’s pre-engineering boot camp for junior transfer students, but none had participated. Mariko shared that she had not learned of the program in time and Russ was too busy to participate. Similarly, the participants had not accessed academic tutoring options or the transfer student office, which Mariko described as “intimidating.” The participants cited their social circles as the biggest help to them through the transition. Russ transferred with a group of five other international students from his community college and shared the following:

We are still keeping in touch and we share all this information. They were in different programs, but still, you can just, it's nice to have someone to complain about it. Just be like, "Oh my gosh, this place is really hard, I'm so tired" or whatever. And that really helps.

Similarly, Mariko benefited from studying with friends from her community college, as well as new friends she made in classes. Toby lived in on-campus housing during his first year and shared a floor with other junior transfer students. He described this as "very welcoming, very open" and the highlight of his time at Coastal University.

Unlike his peers, Russ mentioned that the prestige of the university also helped him through the transition. He shared that this kept him motivated and feeling that his efforts and distance from his family were worthwhile:

Just the fact that it was [Coastal University], I guess the name and you just Google it and you'll be like, "okay, yes, this is some prestige in university," so it will take some effort to go through this, but kind of keeps you motivated.

Unfortunately, the university's prestige only motivated Russ for his first semester.

All participants voluntarily provided recommendations for other international junior transfer students transitioning to the campus. Mariko and Russ shared that they wish more information would have been made available to them before arriving on campus, such as information about the pre-engineering program. They shared that advising at their community college was inconsistent and that they had to gather much of the necessary information by themselves; Russ had believed that his tuition would be paid for. Toby suggested that transferring students begin their required coursework while still enrolled at community college

and/or during the summer before transferring. He also urged his peers to enroll in some fun classes and become comfortable asking for help.

In conclusion, all three participants appear to have been academically well prepared by their community college. They still noticed drastic changes during their transition to the large research university, including adjusting to the larger class sizes, receiving less faculty help, and access to more extracurricular activities. They have compared themselves to their native peers, but have tried not to spend energy on these comparisons. Although the students were aware of resources created to ease their transition, they primarily relied on their own research and the social support of their peers.

### **Research Question Two: Institutional Programming**

As discussed in Chapter I, Astin's theory of student involvement postulates that active involvement on campus leads to higher rates of student persistence (Astin, 1975; 1984; 1993). Involvement is defined as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (1984, p. 518). In hopes of evaluating the applicability of this theory for international junior transfer students, participants were asked "Are you involved in any student organizations or campus jobs? How do they affect your experience?" and relevant follow up questions. This discussion was intended to address the second and third research questions: (2) What institutional services and programs successfully involve these students on-campus? and (3) How does on-campus student involvement affect student success?

The participants all provided examples of some form of campus involvement. During the excitement of Russ's first semester, he joined a boxing team, fraternity, and a student organization called the Hyperloop team. Within a couple of weeks, he left the fraternity because

he did not think it was a good social fit. Russ also lost interest in the Hyperloop team because he felt that the group was disorganized and unsuccessful at reaching its goals. Although he found the boxing team to be an “amazing experience,” he left after one semester because he felt he had overcommitted himself and his grades were suffering. Similarly, Mariko joined CalSol, a solar car team, but left because she did not have enough time and could not contribute as much as her native peers.

I was in CalSol but the classes got really busy so I didn't get to go there and then I felt like I'm not contributing as much as other students who started from freshman cause. If I keep going then I only have two years, which is kind of short to learn everything and then actually contribute to the solar panel cores.

Toby had not participated in any student organizations but did enjoy student-led classes. Some of these courses were intended to develop his technical skills, such as an IOS course. Another was a meditation course which he described as “super fun, calms your mind and then you share your experiences with others. You gain insights from others. That's very relaxing and fun.” Toby’s participation in a transfer-themed residence hall can also be considered on-campus involvement.

Mariko and Russ had secured part-time employment at the International House dining commons. Both shared that their time at the International House had been positive, providing them with opportunities to meet diverse people and to maintain a flexible work schedule that allowed them to prioritize their studies. Most importantly, because the International House is on-campus, they were able to work and earn money within the limitations of their student visas.

Russ shared the following:

Amazing. I don't have any complaints. The environment, people, the supervisors...they understand that you go to [Coastal], so when you get too busy you can just talk about, and it'd be like, "okay, we'll drop the shift, but for this week you can just come back next week or something like that"....and it's an international house after all. So you just constantly see a lot of people.

Ultimately, the participants had not pursued any student organizations for more than one semester and did not find many traditional forms of student involvement to be a good use of their limited time. On-campus employment and on-campus housing were practical ways to be involved on campus without changing one's routing.

### **Research Question Three: On-Campus Involvement**

The interviews provided limited evidence that on-campus involvement positively influenced the participants' persistence and sense of mattering. This is, in part, because participants seemed to have limited time to pursue many extra-curricular activities. All participants were very focused on their limited time at the research site and ensuring that they used that time as efficiently as possible. They felt that to complete their degree on time, they had to prioritize classes over extracurricular opportunities. For example, this is demonstrated in Toby's decision to enroll in evening student-led classes that taught technical skills instead of joining student organizations or pursuing on-campus employment.

Similarly, Russ initially joined three student organizations to make up for the limited offerings of his community college, however he felt this plan backfired on him. His grades suffered and he realized that this was because he was not making time for class discussion sessions and office hours. When discussing leaving the student Hyperloop team, Russ said "I just

felt like for me it was more efficient to participate in one or two more classes using that time because I can actually learn more stuff.” Russ was conscious of his limited energy and where he chose to commit it. In his final year, Russ chose to quit his part-time job so that he could focus on his coursework. Additionally, instead of pursuing an internship or research experience, Russ and Toby had both spent the summers after their third and fourth years in the classroom, ensuring that they could graduate as quickly as possible.

The pressure to prioritize coursework over extracurricular opportunities was compounded by the high cost of tuition. While Toby is a permanent resident and receives financial aid, Mariko and Russ must pay an international student tuition of approximately \$45,000 per year (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2018). Junior transfer students in Coastal University’s College of Engineering are permitted up to five semesters and two summers to complete their coursework, however Russ and Mariko aimed to complete their degrees quicker to save money. Russ appreciated his parents’ ability to help with his tuition, however in his last year he had to obtain a \$50,000 emergency loan to cover his tuition. This reinforced his desire to sacrifice internships and other forms of student involvement to complete his courses quickly. Similarly, Mariko shared “obviously the tuition is really expensive and that really pressures me to do well.” Despite her courses being “really hard” she was also working to support herself. She described the high cost of tuition and her inability to receive financial aid as a “barrier” that differentiated her experience from domestic students.

Both Mariko and Russ also expressed concern about their ability to secure full-time employment. After graduation, their student visas will expire and they will be required to apply for temporary employment visas (Optional Practical Training and then an H-1B visa). This requires that they find work relevant to their field of study, and that their employer be willing

and able to sponsor visas. Mariko has been stressed about this since her first semester at Coastal University and has sacrificed extracurricular involvement to focus on career preparation. At the time of the interview she was a full-time student and spending many hours a week on an internship. Russ feared that employers would discriminate against him because of the visa-sponsoring process. He had graduated from Coastal University two weeks before the interview and had three months to find employment before his student visa expired; he shared “I'm getting scared.” In preparation for the job search, Russ had added a minor in mechanical engineering and also taken programming courses to be a more competitive candidate:

Because I'm international, I have this feeling that when they hire me, if I had exact same qualifications as someone from here, they would definitely go there in terms of cost and it's just much easier to deal with visa and whatever. So I was like, “Okay, I probably have to do something more on top of it”.

Despite his sacrifices, Russ was finding that the positions that interested him at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, SpaceX, and Boeing were not open to foreign candidates for national safety reasons.

This experience was remarkably different than Toby's experience. Because Toby has obtained permanent resident status, he will not need an employer to sponsor a visa. Toby did not express concern about post-graduation employment during the interview.

In conclusion, the participants' routinely sacrificed various forms of on-campus involvement to ensure they were able to complete their degrees in a timely manner and secure employment after graduation. This is perhaps best demonstrated by this excerpt from Mariko's interview:

[Freshmen admits] have so much time to do a lot of things and that's something that I feel like I don't have because I don't have a lot of time and I wish I could do research. I wish I could do clubs and everything, but because I have to think about getting a full time job or finishing up all the classes, I have to prioritize these two things rather than enjoying as much as I could. If I had four years, I would have done much more. So that's something that I feel I'm missing.

The pressure to complete degree requirements in a limited time frame can be attributed to the participants' junior transfer status and limited time at the large research university. The high cost of international student tuition placed added pressure on Mariko and Russ to complete their coursework quickly. Because of these sacrifices and their visa requirements, Mariko and Russ feared that they would struggle to secure post-graduation employment. Because of the participants' limited time and energy, traditional forms of on-campus involvement were not a central factor to their success.

#### **Research Question Four: Peer Interactions**

Next, the study sought to understand how international transfer students experience interactions with their peers. The participants all seemed to value the friendship of fellow international and junior transfer students. As discussed previously, Russ found that his friendship with a group of international junior transfer students from his community college facilitated his transition to Coastal University. Additionally, he made two close friends during his first semester that he has since travelled abroad with: "They are transfers. That's why they're actually friends. We were new here and then we didn't really know anyone here." Toby initially spent his time with international junior transfer students. This can be expected as he lived in the transfer student



residence hall. Mariko also shared that she had kept in touch with other students that had transferred from her community college.

Although they initially interacted with fellow junior transfer students, the participants reported that their friend groups had diversified. Toby and Mariko frequently interacted with students that were freshmen admits. Mariko met most of her friends at new student orientation and in her courses. She enjoyed eating dinner and studying with them; the latter eased her transition to the rigorous university. She shared that she appreciated the diversity of the university:

I think I have a mix of everything. Cause right now, I'm studying with my friend whose starting from freshman and he's from LA. He's American, he's from freshman, he's a sophomore right now. But I also have friends from internationally, from Ecuador, or Taiwan, Brazil. They're transfers and international probably. But I also have American transfer students and also junior. So it's not really one specific type. I think it's a great mix.

Russ had made diverse friendships through his role at the International House dining commons, where he enjoyed repeated contact with both students and non-students staying there:

And I made good friends just because I was working there. Not necessarily my coworkers, but it was just, I see same people coming and having dinner every night so I can just talk to them.

Ultimately, all the participants described their peers as welcoming. The participants did not feel that their international junior transfer identity affected their relationships with other students and none reported experiencing social discrimination based on their identity.

Russ discussed the “melting pot” culture of the university, “even people who say they're Americans, you actually talk to them and then it turns out they're not from here.” Although he primarily spent his time with other junior transfer students, he did not feel that other students cared about his immigration or transfer status. When directly asked if he experienced discrimination, he said “People will treat you really good here. They never discriminate,” and acknowledged that his experience may have been different somewhere more “conservative.”

I didn't feel absolutely anything. First of all, people don't care. Second of all, people don't know. You're in the class, there's no way to tell this transfer student. I never felt that difference.

He later added “when you go to this place, you feel like, ‘Okay, I'm just one of these people.’” Mariko also felt welcomed by her peers and had not experienced social isolation or discrimination. While Toby was self-conscious that he was older than his native peers, he did not feel that this affected how other students treated him.

Two of the participants discussed the effort required to build community. Toby had initially been very excited to meet other students and develop a large social circle: “I have this new energy, I want to go meet people, I want to be friends with my floormates, things like that.” As the year continued, Toby’s excitement faded and he chose to focus on his studies; it was faster to study alone. Unfortunately, Toby found limited social interactions compounded with the university’s academic pressure led to “depression symptoms.” He has since sought to reach a healthy balance.

Now a graduate of the research site seeking full-time work, Russ regretted not making more of an effort to connect with his peers and build a network. Due to the pressure to finish his degree quickly, he shared that he had limited energy left to focus on friendships:

So I didn't really have time. I feel like we always have time to do anything we want, but the energy to go back from school and just try to connect to someone. I'm just like, "No, I'm exhausted"...I'm thinking about this all the time now. Once you graduate, it's not like you're going to class and you're not surrounded by people anymore and you're dealing with yourself alone. And I'm like, "uhh, maybe I could do more in terms of creating connection" [be]cause I was so into finishing up one semester earlier because I'm international, it takes so much money for one semester.

Russ felt that this would be easier for domestic students who had family nearby and friends from their hometowns and high school at the university.

### **Research Question Five: Interactions with Faculty and Advisers**

To further understand the experiences of international junior transfer students at Coastal University, the study explored how these students interact with faculty and staff advisers. Two questions were asked to gather this information, however, the students referenced their experiences with university staff throughout the interviews.

#### **Faculty**

Toby and Mariko both felt much more distance from their faculty, as compared to their community college professors. The participants discussed the effects of larger class sizes on faculty availability. Upon transfer, Toby discussed experiencing a little shock and sadness when he realized how "difficult" it was to connect with faculty. At his community college, faculty were available to address questions and concerns with wait times of ten minutes or less. At Coastal University, Toby had to wait much longer for very little assistance in office hours, a time each week when faculty are expected to be available in their office to answer questions:

So sometimes to speak with the professor here, you lined up yourself for forty-five minutes knowing that the office hour is only one hour long and then you most likely get to speak with a professor maybe five minutes tops before the professor turns around to help other students.

Thus, he described his interactions with faculty as “very minimal,” adding “I have only talked to one professor during my time here. And the duration of the one-time interaction was less than five minutes. Never went back again.” Mariko had welcoming and helpful interactions in office hours, but also struggled to connect with her professors:

I think it's a little bit harder than at community college...but they're very knowledgeable and they when I ask questions, they're always welcome to answer everything. So yeah, [I] just feel more distance than community college.

While the faculty at her community college knew her name and recognized her easily, she expressed disappointment that her new faculty did not know each of their students.

Mariko and Toby also described office hours as intimidating. Toby was embarrassed to ask questions that he felt others in the office hours session knew the answer to:

Students come to the office hours for professors that are not asking for academic help, that are more like a higher level help. They're not asking “Hey can you repeat when you said that, what that means?” They're asking questions more like “Oh I'm working on this personal project,” or “Well I was Google, I had this big problem I didn't understand...” So you feel like when you are asking something at a lower level, it's quite embarrassing. It's quite difficult. So that adds an element of barrier for you to keep going and asking for help.

Toby later discussed the bravery required to approach a faculty member or attend office hours. Similarly, Mariko shared that some of her friends had been made to feel “stupid” by their professors, stating “I wish like there are more like smaller like, and not like intimidating like office hours.”

After transfer, Russ also felt the impact of the large class sizes. He initially avoided office hours because he believed they would be too crowded and he would not be able to get the help he needed. However, when he did start attending, he found them to be very helpful to his studies and the faculty to be more accessible than he initially expected.

I came here, I was like, “Okay well the difference here is only probably that the classes are huge and less support.” Hmm not really. I don't know, there's not less support. That's why I feel like in the first semester maybe that's why I never went to office hours because there's just no way [the] professor could talk to me personally because there are hundreds or 500 students in this class. But then later if you go, no, there are actually a lot of ways to interact with teaching personally.

While Russ did not provide examples of other ways he was able to connect with his professors, he shared that they were “definitely helpful” and “we were always welcome in office hours.”

The participants also discussed the efficiency of attending office hours. During his first and second semester, Russ believed he did not have time to attend office hours or class discussion sessions. He later realized this to be a mistake, finding that the information gained in these sessions improved his understanding of the course material, performance on tests, and sense of belonging on campus. Toby described asking for help as an efficient practice:

And another skill set is to learn to reach out. Like sometimes you have to ask help from your peers, your TAs, your advisers, your professors. Although it's intimidating and overwhelming, but asking for help when necessary really helps you to get through that bump, be more efficient, save more time and more struggle.

However, he ultimately found waiting forty-five minutes to have one question answered by his Professor to be “an inefficient use of time.” When he considered the emotional energy that attending office hours consumed, Toby decided to stop going, sharing “The line was too long. The help wasn't too significant and it brings me more anxiety, stress, frustration than the amount of resources than I would like to get.” He instead began to rely on his peers, students teaching assistants, and staff advisers for help.

Of the participants, Toby had the least interaction with faculty, just five minutes of one-on-one time. When asked if he felt like he was missing out, he shared:

I definitely feel missed out. Totally. I wish I could just restart this entire experience. I wish I somehow could make the time and mental strengths to talk to more professors because although it may not be as insightful as I wished, but at least I had that component of getting to know the professor just a little bit, knowing the material from a professor's perspective and that's something that to me didn't happen and I wish it was there, so I definitely feel missed out and I don't know how my life might change if I had that component integrated in my life. So if I had the ability at the time, I wish that experience happened.

Participants' interactions with faculty were markedly more distant than the relationships they had at community college. While they found their professors to be helpful and welcoming, they

would have appreciated more accessible and less intimidating opportunities to discuss course material and build relationships with the faculty.

### **Advisers**

Although they had less to say on the topic, participants believed academic advisers to be supportive and helpful. Toby utilized advising services in both his academic department and his college, which he found to be more accessible than faculty help. Similarly, Mariko had accessed advising services, including programming hosted by advising offices:

They're very sweet. I don't really have a lot of experience. I just go there for class course choice. But you and other staff members when they're hosting events, they're very sweet and always trying to get people involved. I think they're trying.

Russ also described his experiences with advisers positively, however he had varying experiences with different advising units. When seeking advising from his college, he did not feel that the Adviser understood his unique needs and limitations as an international junior transfer student. He had been upset when an academic adviser suggested he slow down and space out his coursework: "They give us five semesters. I was like, 'There's no way that can pay for five semesters'. So I had to press it in four." Russ had also experienced frustration when he received inconsistent information from his college adviser and an adviser at the international office regarding his class schedule. The advisers seemed unsure if his summer class schedule would meet enrollment requirements for his visa, causing Russ stress about deportation:

I go to international [office], and once they told me that I'm screwed that I wasn't supposed to do this, I'm under units, I'm illegal here. Later they corrected it, like "Sorry this was actually a mistake. You were actually okay here." So even if you go talk to

professionals sometimes they give you this a wrong feedback and it really scares you.

In contrast, Russ really appreciated the advising services provided by another campus office which employs an international student specialist. He felt that this adviser understood the unique challenges that international students experience and the elaborate visa rules they must abide:

Even [campus office] has a special adviser just for international students and I feel like that's really, that's something that should be praised. That's amazing...I feel like this college really knows that there are people like me too.

Furthermore, the international student specialist was able to provide useful information from her own experience as a former international student. Russ appreciated that she sometimes shared information that he felt was not university endorsed “because it might be, I don't know, illegal or you're not supposed to do it really, but...you just have to survive somehow, even if it might take some dangerous route”.

In conclusion, the participants had sought limited assistance from staff advisers but appreciated the individuals in those roles. Advisers who were familiar with the experiences and visa rules specific to international junior transfer students were especially valuable.

### **Research Question Six: Success Strategies**

As the interviews progressed, the researcher realized that the participants had not accessed as many campus resources as expected. Additionally, they were not participating in many traditional forms of on-campus involvement, such as student organizations, tutoring, Greek organizations, or student leadership positions. Instead, the participants referenced many independent things that they and their peers were doing to ensure their success on campus. As



such, a sixth research question was added to the study: What strategies do students utilize to overcome the challenges of being international junior transfer students? In retrospect, this question should have been included from the conception of the study as it is an important opportunity to acknowledge the strengths of this population. It's important to note that many student success strategies have already been discussed in prior sections, including but not limited to pursuing community, obtaining adviser and faculty help, evaluating the efficiency of different activities, and enrollment in summer school. Therefore, this section discusses only additional success factors: knowledge sharing, creative problem solving, and an implied level of emotional maturity.

In addition to faculty and adviser guidance, all participants valued sharing and receiving information from their peers. This can be traced back to before their time at Coastal University; The participants had primarily learned about their community college via word of mouth. Additionally, once enrolled in community college, participants learned about the transferring process from their peers. Mariko referenced international student-specific organizations at her community college as an important hub of sharing advice for transfer applications.

After matriculating to Coastal University, Russ found that sharing information with fellow transfer students helped ease the transition. Throughout his interview, he expressed frustration regarding the lack of information his community college and university provided and mentioned many things he had learned from peers. He later mentioned that he had not attended the optional new-student orientation for international students. Similarly, instead of accessing faculty assistance for technical and course-related questions, Toby preferred to speak with undergraduate teaching assistants. Mariko discussed learning from friends at other institutions

and suggested the university facilitate and formalize the information sharing process through a mentorship program:

I was also thinking about something that I wished there was at [Coastal University] for specifically international transfer students, and it is a mentorship program that pairs junior transfer with alumni or senior students who are also international transfer students. I gained information about working visa, interview process, etc. from my friends who graduated from other universities. it would be nice to have someone who have gone through difficulties that we will do and can share those information.

Similarly, self-sufficiency and creative problem solving seemed especially important for Russ's success on campus. He discussed arriving in the United States as an 18 year old and needing to buy a car, rent an apartment, build a credit score, and take care of himself. The financial pressures of tuition appeared to affect Russ more than his peers and he had spent a lot of time researching visa regulations regarding employment. Now a graduate of the university, Russ was even more dependent on his independent research skills to find work and secure Optional Practical Training (OPT) extension of his student visa. When discussing his current job search, Russ shared the following advice for future students: "You really have to like talk to so many people and do your own research to survive to just do some tricky hacks the system. That's the way I think about it. Just always hack the system."

These "hacks" were intended to mitigate the unique challenges of living in the United States on a student visa. For example, Russ had to finance his car with cash and find a domestic student to lease an apartment because he and his family did not have US credit scores. Additionally, he secured an on-campus job during his first semester at community college to obtain a social security number and the ability to build a credit score. He suggested international

students return to their home country over the summer to work, or try to work remotely for an employer based in their home country.

Despite the challenges they had faced and the disappointment they had experienced with some aspects of their time on campus, the participants demonstrated varying but high levels of what might be understood as emotional maturity. This was coded through responses that implied self-awareness, acceptance, intentionality and gratitude and was especially prevalent in Toby's interview. In addition to evaluating the efficiency of all activities, Toby seemed to be aware of how his actions affected his mental health. He discussed which activities made him happy and relaxed, which brought him stress and depression, and how his experiences at Coastal University made him "a stronger person." For example, comparing himself to others had caused him a lot of stress, socially isolating himself had made him depressed, and thus he was committed to finding an enlightened balance:

But then they realized that if you just keep yourself to yourself, you are never gonna grow. Growing. A part of growing is to know what others are doing, accept your own success and failure. Now I'm just trying to get back on track in the sense that get to know as many people as you can. It doesn't matter if they are doing good or not. Just making people as a connection turns situations into opportunity. That's now sort of my mindset and perspective.

Ultimately, Toby had "learned to accept" and "learned that you just want to do your best;" he highly advocated for asking for help when needed. Similarly, Mariko believed her more relaxed approach to transferring helped her adjust to the university. She was aware of the unique "barriers" that she faced as an international junior transfer student and resisted the urge to compare herself to her domestic and native peers. Intentionality and self-awareness can also be

seen in Russ's decision to pursue on-campus counseling to address unresolved trauma experienced in high school.

While Russ appeared to be more frustrated than the other participants, I was intrigued by his discussion of gratitude.

But then at the same time you have this feeling that, I'm actually in others' people country, so I shouldn't really be walking around and just complaining about it. They let me in. I'm staying here. So that's, that's a great news already.

Russ acknowledged that many countries do not permit international students to enroll in university and appeared to be genuinely grateful to be permitted to study at a prestigious university and pursue a career in the United States.

Although these results are preliminary, the participants' self-awareness, intentionality, and gratitude appear to make them more aware and resilient scholars. As previously discussed, the participants also depended on sharing information with their peers and found creative solutions to problems they faced during their studies. They are all successful students at Coastal University and it is exciting to celebrate the strengths and strategies of the international junior transfer population.

### **Research Question Seven: Belonging on Campus**

The final research question was inspired by Schlossberg's (1989) discussion of mattering and marginality: What contributes to students' sense of mattering or belonging on campus? This research question implies that participants do feel that they matter and belong on campus. When directly asked if this was true, each enthusiastically shared that they felt that they belonged on the Coastal University campus. For example, Toby shared the following: "So I never felt like I

didn't belong. I was just always finding ways to maximize my experiences here. So belonging, that type of a feeling was always within me and I never had to seek it.” Participants each attributed their sense of mattering on campus to different factors. For Toby, the university’s reputation was most important, Russ valued safety and academic engagement, and Mariko felt she belonged when she was with her community.

All participants discussed Coastal University’s reputation and prestige throughout their interviews. For each, it seemed important to their transition to the university and to their sense of identity as an international junior transfer student. When asked what made him feel like he belonged on campus, Toby shared that the school pride he experiences overshadows any challenges and stress. He celebrated the “human capital” among the student body and alumni and was excited to be a part of it:

So when I am here, even though there's a lot of frustrations, stress, anxiety, to me, those all fade away. To me, I always feel like I belong here. Doesn't matter if I'm doing well or not academically. But just being a student at [Coastal University] gives me so much pride. It gives me so much confidence. I just know that good things will turn out to be fine and I just know that the future is exciting and then there are so many possibilities lay right in front of me.

This theme came up at least five additional times in Toby’s interview. As discussed previously, Russ also cited the university’s rigorous reputation as helping him transition to campus.

In addition to the university’s prestige, Mariko and Russ shared that the university’s political reputation helped their sense of belonging on campus. For Mariko, this included being a part of a diverse student body and having access to political events. The well-known liberal

nature of the campus and surrounding area made Russ feel more comfortable as an international student. He feared that he would experience “aggression” in other parts of the country.

In addition to the university’s liberal reputation, Russ valued the moments he felt academically proficient and engaged in his classes. This was especially true for discussions with his faculty. When asked what made him feel like he belonged on campus, he responded:

That happens when you go to the discussion section or office hours and you just get some good feedback from your professor or GSI and they be like, “It’s great that came up with this”, or “That’s [the] exact solution.” Or when you just start talking beyond the scope of the class because yeah, it feels they’re really enjoying teaching that to you. And, and then you just feel like, “Wow, I can actually really get to this level,” because at first when you attack this kind of problems or it’s just like look through a syllabus, you’re like, “oh my gosh, this looks so complicated”.

Russ smiled as he discussed these experiences. Mariko also found academic success to be important to her sense of belonging, specifically “the fact that I have good grades.”

Aligning with Schlossberg’s (1989) theory, Mariko discussed various aspects of social connection that made her feel that she mattered. She listed her friends as the first factor of her sense of belonging on campus. Via email, she wrote that she felt like she belonged “when I found friends that have been through the same path (e.g. transferred from community college, coming from other countries, studying CS for the first time at school, etc.),” at campus events for women engineers or for transfer students, and when she meets alumni of Coastal University. For Mariko, it seems that social connection with people similar to herself is most important, likely because they have shared experiences. Although she did not discuss events for women engineers

or transfer students when asked about her involvement on campus, it seems that intentional identity-based programming was also important for her experience.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the participants had difficult, but ultimately successful, transitions from community college to Coastal University. They felt welcomed by their peers and benefited from friendships with other international and junior transfer students, as well as domestic and native students. Relationships with their faculty were more distant than expected, however student teaching assistants and studying with peers were helpful. Additionally, advisers were especially appreciated when they understood the experiences of international junior transfer students. Because of the participants' limited time at Coastal University, they prioritized coursework over most extracurricular activities; on-campus employment, residence halls, and student-led classes did successfully involve them on campus. Additionally, the participants' success can be attributed to a sense of belonging on campus, knowledge sharing, self-sufficiency, and emotional maturity.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Over one million international students study in the United States each year (IIE, 2018). The community college transfer pathway is an accessible, affordable, and increasingly popular way for these students to participate in higher education. As such, approximately 94,000 international students are currently enrolled in community college, many of which intend to transfer to a four-year university to complete a Bachelor's degree (IIE, 2018; Bohman, 2010; Hagedorn & Mi-Chung, 2015). Existing literature demonstrates that these international students face many challenges, including peer discrimination, social isolation, tense relationships with faculty, and high financial burdens (de Araujo, 2011; Sato & Hodge, 2015b; Schulte & Choudaha, 2014; Zhang, 2016). However, very little is known about the experiences of international students after they transfer from community college to a four-year university. This study sought to explore these experiences and celebrate the successes of the international junior transfer population.

#### **Discussion**

##### **Research Question One: Transition from Community College**

The study first sought to understand how international transfer students experience the transition from a community college to a large research university. Common themes from the participants' experiences affirm previous findings about junior transfer students' transitions from community college (Jackson, 2013b; Lester et al., 2013; Sato & Hodge, 2015b). These themes include (a) feelings of academic inferiority, (b) the importance of social support systems, and (c) inaccessibility of faculty.



Despite their best efforts not to, all participants compared themselves to domestic and native students, noting the difficulties of transitioning from community college to a large four-year university. As described in chapter four, the participants in this study discussed feeling academically inferior at times. For example, Toby mentioned the need to ask seemingly rudimentary questions of his faculty, and Mariko cited needing additional time to complete assignments. While Toby and Mariko did not share the root causes of these needs, one explanation might be their status as English language learners. As illustrated by Andrade (2017), it is common for international students, even those with high levels of English proficiency, to require additional time and energy to complete their coursework. This may be especially true for students when they first begin their studies in the United States. As discussed by Hagedorn and Mi-Chung (2015) and echoed by Mariko, community colleges help students acquire academic English proficiency by offering special language learning courses and providing more intimate settings to learn the language, including smaller class sizes and faculty office hours. In contrast, large universities do not regularly provide classes specifically for English language learners.

Coastal University does offer transitional programming for new international students and new junior transfer students, as recommended by Townsend and Wilson (2006) and Sato and Hodge (2015a). However, the participants in this study had not accessed these services. Instead, they relied on peer support and cited friendships with other students as important to their successful transition and sense of belonging on campus. Evidence of this can be found in Russ's experience venting and sharing information with fellow transfer students, and Mariko learning from older peers. This reliance on social support echoes the findings of previous studies on both international student and junior transfer student populations (DeWine et al., 2017; Laanan et al., 2011; Townsend and Wilson 2008). The importance of social connections in this study affirms

student development theory which illustrates that social bonds are the “the single most powerful source of influence on the undergraduate student's academic and personal development” (Astin, 1984, “Impact of Student Interaction”).

It is worth noting that none of the participants mentioned their international status when discussing the transition experience. This adds a new perspective to the existing literature, and may indicate that the participants experienced and overcame some of the challenges of being an international student during their community college career. Alternatively, as this study exclusively recruited students who matriculated at least a year ago, it is possible that they have simply forgotten some of their earlier transfer experiences.

Ultimately, the participants in this study experienced challenging but successful transitions to Coastal University. Evidence of this can be seen in the experience of Toby, who describes the transition process as “rough but rewarding.” Similarly, Russ described the transition process by saying, “For me it was really rough but I feel I made it rough myself because you know, in community college I didn’t really have many like opportunities.” This data confirms existing descriptions of some of the challenges experienced by junior transfer students upon matriculation (Jackson, 2013a; Lester et al., 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Additionally, the study participants’ successes echo Laanan et al.’s (2011) discussion of skills acquired in community college and Zhang’s (2016) findings that international junior transfer students perform well on multiple quantitative success measures.

### **Research Questions Two & Three: Institutional Programming & Campus Involvement**

The study next sought to explore how international junior transfer students are involved in on-campus programming and how this involvement affects their success. Through the interviews, it was discovered that the participants chose not to participate in many traditional

forms of programming. The exceptions were on-campus jobs and an identity-specific residence hall, both of which were celebrated as important to the participants' experiences.

According to data collected during their interviews, the international junior transfer students in this study experienced compounded stressors. These included (a) visa restrictions that limited their time in the United States, (b) the high cost of international tuition, and (c) feelings of academic inadequacy when compared to their peers. As a result, the participants resigned from, or entirely avoided, extracurricular activities. Participants prioritized completing their graduation requirements and other tasks that would further their academic and career goals. This is evidenced by Russ's decision to leave the boxing and Hyperloop teams to focus on his studies, and by Toby's choice to take student-led technical classes instead of partaking in extracurricular activities.

The pressure to prioritize coursework over non-academic involvement, is important as it students sacrifice a crucial part of the university experience. This may, in turn, deepen students' sense of being "behind" their peers. This is evidenced by Mariko's decision to quit the solar car team because she felt she could not contribute as much as native students. Mariko also regretted not having the same opportunities to pursue undergraduate research as her colleagues. Astin (1984) and Schlossberg (1989) argue that opting out of opportunities such as these will negatively affect students' persistence, personal development, and sense of mattering on campus.

These findings are not entirely unexpected. Junior transfer students have previously been found to be more interested in degree attainment and career development than campus involvement and social engagement (Lester et al., 2013; Wang & Wharton, 2012). Additionally, international students may opt out of social and extracurricular activities to focus on completing

academic work in their non-native language (Andrade, 2017). Simply put, international junior transfer students may not have the luxury of full participation in the university experience.

Interestingly, despite the participants' limited campus involvement, they appeared to feel well integrated on campus. Evidence of this can be found in each of the participants' responses to questions about their social lives and sense of belonging. Additionally, despite their limited participation in campus activities, all of the study participants have persisted for at least one year and one has successfully completed his degree. This affirms Zhang's (2016) finding that international junior transfer students attempt more units during their first semester, are more likely to graduate, and complete their degrees in less time than domestic transfer students. As such, their limited student involvement may not be as detrimental as Astin (1975; 1984; 1993) would postulate.

#### **Research Question Four: Peer Interactions**

Astin (1993) found social relationships to be the single biggest contributor to students' personal and academic development. The importance of social relationships has since been affirmed for junior transfer students (DeWine et al., 2017; Laanan et al., 2011; Townsend & Wilson, 2008) and the international student population (de Araujo, 2011; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Tsevi, 2018). Similarly, relationships with peers were very important to the international junior transfer participants in this study. The participants had developed beneficial friendships while in community college. Once at Coastal University, they made friends through academic courses and on-campus jobs. These friendships were diverse, including native and domestic students, although participants shared that they especially benefited from relationships with students from similar backgrounds, primarily fellow junior transfer students.

It is important to note that while the participants identified social relationships in positive terms, at times Russ and Toby both chose not to focus on growing friendships because they were focused on academic concerns. This reflects Lester et al.'s (2013) finding that social relationships may be less of a priority for junior transfer students because they are more focused on degree completion and off-campus commitments. Data from the interviews demonstrates that although participants found social networks to be important, they did not take the time to form them through organizations or institutional programming. Friendships were presented as more happenstance, for example participants met new friends in their classes, at work, and in on-campus housing.

Existing literature indicates that both junior transfer and international student populations experience social isolation on campus. Furthermore, Jackson and Laanan (2011) and Laanan et al. (2011) wrote that the junior transfer identity is stigmatized on campuses. As a result, native students may choose not to engage with junior transfer students. Such results were not replicated in this study—the participants did not report experiencing any alienation or discrimination as a result of their time spent in community college. As Russ aptly said, most students did not know and did not care how their peers began their college careers.

Similar to the existing literature on bias toward transfer students, Sato et al. (2018) found that international students experienced discrimination from their domestic student peers, sometimes because English was not their native language. This was also not the case at Coastal University—the participants felt welcome regardless of their country of origin. For example, Russ states “People will treat you like really good here. They never discriminate.” This may be, in part, because the participants had developed high levels of English proficiency while attending secondary school and community college. Additionally, Coastal University is a multicultural

campus and enrolls almost four thousand international students per year (CalAnswers, 2019).

Participants may have experienced discrimination and stigmatization of their international status at a more culturally, ethnically, or linguistically homogenous campus.

### **Research Question Five: Interactions with Faculty & Advisers**

**Faculty.** Astin (1993) found interactions with faculty to be a crucial factor in students' development, second only to their interactions with peers. Similarly, Laanan et al. (2011) and Nuñez and Yoshimi (2017) found that faculty relationships helped junior transfer students' transition to a four-year university. These findings were not replicated in this study and participants did not indicate that faculty interactions were advantageous to their transitions. This is because they found it difficult to access and interact with faculty. For example, Toby had only spent five minutes with faculty members over two years of enrollment. While the participants expressed disappointment that their professors were not more accessible, they were successful regardless.

Existing literature indicates that it is common for junior transfer students to notice a difference in their experiences with faculty when transferring from community college (Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Coston et al., 2013). The participants of this study spoke of supportive and friendly community college professors that they knew personally. However, upon transfer they felt more distance. Mariko shared that she did not feel that any Coastal University professors knew her name, mirroring the findings of Coston et al. (2013): "Transfer students often feel nameless and have difficulty connecting with other students and faculty" (p. 1). As such, faculty were not a central part of the participants' post-transfer experiences.

While previous research has explored the increased distance transfer students experience within faculty relationships, a new theme emerged in this study. Much like the participants

weighed the efficiency of participating in extracurricular activities, they also considered if it was an efficient use of time and energy to seek faculty assistance. For example, Russ initially perceived attending office hours as an inefficient use of time, however he later realized that attendance was necessary to be successful in his classes. Conversations with his professors deepened his understanding of the content and enhanced his performance on tests. In contrast, Toby concluded that waiting for faculty was inefficient and that instead sought the help of more available teaching assistants and staff advisers. While Coston et al. (2013) wrote that junior transfer students often experience difficulty navigating faculty relationship, this did not appear true for the participants in this study. The participants understood how to access faculty and had previously attending office hours. Based on these experiences, and in consideration of time and visa-related constraints, they appear to have made strategic decisions based on whether it was efficient or not to engage.

In summary, faculty relationships did not appear as important to the participants' experiences as existing research would predict. This was because the participants found faculty assistance to be inaccessible. Given the researcher's background knowledge of the research site, there is no reason to believe that this differs from the experiences of domestic/native students.

**Advisers.** Compared to faculty, the study participants viewed staff advisers as helpful and accessible. However, several participants identified that centralizing advising services might have a positive impact on international junior transfer students. For example, Russ, felt that some advisers did not understand his unique experiences and constraints as an international junior transfer student. Additionally, he had to pursue separate processes to ensure schedule changes met both academic requirements and visa requirements.

In conclusion, the findings of this study reflect themes found in existing literature regarding the experiences of junior transfer students: international junior transfer students must also adjust to more distant relationships with faculty. This study added to the existing understanding of students' interactions with faculty by exploring the role of efficiency. The participants in this study weighed whether faculty office hours were an efficient use of time. Those who found seeking faculty help to be inefficient instead sought peer or staff adviser assistance. Participants' experiences with staff advisers were also noted as inefficient when advisers were unable to account for both academic policies and visa regulations. The most helpful advisers were intimately familiar with the experiences of international junior transfer students.

#### **Research Question Six: Success Strategies**

As discussed previously, existing research includes little mention of the skills, success strategies, and unique capital that international or junior transfer students bring to their four-year institution. Data from the interviews conducted during this study demonstrates that the participants utilized existing strategies, as well as developing new ones, in order to persist and succeed on campus. This study considers these success strategies to be part of each student's Transfer Student Capital (Laanan et al., 2016). They may also be analyzed through a community cultural wealth lens, a strengths-based framework that inspired the TSC model. Community cultural wealth refers to "accumulated assets and resources in the histories and lives of Communities of Color" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Community cultural wealth is categorized into six different forms of capital that facilitate the success of students of color but are often not acknowledged or celebrated within the mainstream education system. The strategies exhibited by our participants represent three of these forms of capital: forming social relationships (social



capital), creative problem solving (navigational capital), and emotional maturity (aspirational capital). The following paragraphs describe these strategies in greater depth.

Forming social relationships provided the study participants with emotional support, academic assistance, and a sense of belonging on campus. This reflects the findings of Tsevi (2018) and Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002), who explored the positive effects of social relationships on international students' transitions. The participants, especially Mariko, studied and learned with friends, much like a participant in Andrade's (2017) study improved her language proficiency by discussing assignments and studying with others. Peers were also an important source of information for the study participants. Because they were not able to access faculty assistance, the participants depended heavily on exchanging information with their peers. Similarly, Nuñez and Yoshimi (2017) found that transfer students compensated for less contact with their instructors by depending more on peer support and assistance. These friendships comprise the participants' social capital, defined as "networks of people and community resources" that "can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). As demonstrated, this capital was a core factor of the participants' success on campus.

In addition to cultivating social support, the participants, especially Russ, also engaged in creative problem solving. This was primarily used to overcome challenges encountered because of his international status. Through these non-traditional "hacks," Russ found ways to buy a car, rent an apartment, and obtain a social security number. These were all challenges that one might not always think of when considering the needs of international students. As such, Russ had not received guidance on these matters upon his relocation and enrollment at community college. Strategies such as these, used by international junior transfer students to adjust to campus and

government systems not designed for them may be considered navigational capital. Yosso (2005) explains navigational capital as the “skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind...Navigational capital thus acknowledges individual agency within institutional constraints” (p. 80). All of the participants exhibited forms of navigational capital through the transfer and degree completion processes.

Finally, the participants all made comments that demonstrated a level of emotional maturity, showing self-awareness and acceptance. They were aware of their emotional state and how different actions affected their mental health. This is demonstrated by Toby’s decision to reinvest in friendships and to compare himself to others less. Additionally, the participants discussed accepting the challenges they faced. The researcher hypothesizes that their emotional maturity allowed them to be resilient and persistent in their pursuit of a Bachelor’s degree. Although different terms are used, the emotional maturity observed in this study aligns with aspirational capital. Yosso (2005) writes “Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (p.78). This is well reflected in Mariko’s comment, “And there are a lot of barriers, like financial aid and getting [job] offers, they require like green card or residency...but that shouldn't be the reason I should give up on something. So I just keep going.”

Limited research exists regarding the importance of emotional maturity for international or junior transfer students, however Thompson (2018) found that emotional and cultural intelligence facilitated the social transition of international students. Thompson’s study primarily focused on awareness that supported the students’ adjustment to the culture of the United States, including dormitory food and social norms, but data from this study may provide additional

evidence supporting the larger claim.

The participants' success strategies, including emotional maturity, building community, and creative problem solving, fit into the frameworks of Transfer Student Capital (Laanan et al., 2011) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Both celebrate the assets that marginalized populations have developed in their community and that will facilitate their success on university campuses. For example, possessing high levels of Transfer Student Capital has been found to improve transfer students' adjustment to four-year institutions (Laanan et al., 2011). Similarly, this study found that the skills and strategies gained in community college may have prepared participants for the challenges of a rigorous engineering program at a prestigious university.

#### **Research Question Seven: Belonging on Campus**

Finally, this study sought to explore what factors facilitated the participants' sense of mattering and/or belonging on campus. This question was inspired by Schlossberg's (1989) discussion of mattering and marginality. Schlossberg found that people are more likely to feel marginalized during a transition, such as one to a new university. This happens when individuals do not feel accepted in their new environment and are not able to fully separate from their past environment (Park, 1928). For the junior transfer population, marginality could occur as a result of the transition from their home country to the United States, or their transition from community college to a four-year institution. However, it did not appear that the participants of this study felt marginalized on campus. Furthermore, they shared that they felt like they mattered. This is important because Coston et al. (2013) found that feeling like one belongs alleviates transfer student stress more than any other factor.

In addition to the university's prestige and liberal reputation, participants' sense of belonging was linked to campus involvement. For Mariko, this meant social engagement with

people like her. For example, she states, “When I think about what makes me feel like I belong here, I think about political things. I think about all the events I have access to and my community.” For Russ, belonging meant feeling well integrated into his classes and engaged with the academic material. He articulates this by saying “That happens when you go to the discussion section or office hours and you get some good feedback from your professor or GSI...or when you just start talking beyond the scope of the class.” This aligns with Schlossberg’s (1989) hypothesis that being involved on campus enhances students’ sense of mattering. However, this was not achieved through institutionalized opportunities, such as student organizations. Schlossberg wrote that institutions should evaluate how their programming encourages student involvement and why certain students choose not to access it. My hope is that this study has provided insight into the reasons why international junior transfer students may choose not to access programming—primarily because they are focused on efficiency and prioritizing their academic coursework.

### **Conclusions**

Because existing research on the experiences of international junior transfer students is so limited, all results of this study are significant. This includes information about their interactions with campus programming, faculty, peers, and their sense of belonging. Additionally, three major conclusions can be made by analyzing these outcomes.

The first conclusion is that starting at a community college may improve international students’ experiences studying in the United States. As discussed in Chapter II, international students experience many challenges in American higher education, including social isolation, discrimination, language barriers, academic difficulty, disappointing relationships with faculty,

and the financial burden of four or more years of high tuition (de Araujo, 2011; Sato & Hodge, 2015b; Schulte & Choudaha, 2014). Although they also faced challenges, the study participants' experiences did not reflect those described in prior research about international students. Instead, the participants were well adjusted to American higher education and their experiences appeared to be more aligned with those of domestic junior transfer students. Additionally, because of their time spent in community college, they benefited from existing friendships and Transfer Student Capital, both of which eased their transition to Coastal University (Laanan et al., 2011).

As this study did not explore the participants' experiences while enrolled in community college, we are unable to conclude if they overcame the themes associated with international students prior to their matriculation to Coastal University. However, if they did experience these challenges while enrolled in community colleges, it would have been a more affordable and forgiving environment to adapt to American higher education and learn English. The skills and strategies developed during their time at community college appears to prepare international junior transfer students for matriculation to, and success at, a prestigious four-year university.

There are, of course, trade-offs for those international students who opt to begin their studies at a community college. While they may have an easier transition to campus and experience academic success, their time at the four-year institution is limited. As such, they have less time to take advantage of the unique opportunities not available at community college.

The second conclusion of this study is that international junior transfer students evaluate the efficiency of each activity they engage in. Because community colleges offer very limited professional development and extracurricular activities, the participants felt behind when they matriculated to Coastal University. They then had only 2 to 2.5 years on campus to take advantage of these opportunities and complete their degree requirements. The pressure to

complete their degree quickly was enhanced by the very high cost of international tuition. This prompted a desire to obtain on-campus employment and enroll in as few semesters as possible. The participants also prepared to be competitive candidates for post-graduation positions that would sponsor their visa. To manage the many competing priorities, study participants carefully weighed the time and energy required for each activity and decided which would best support their goals. This can be seen in the participants' choices to take classes instead of pursuing extracurricular activities, avoid long wait times at faculty office hours, and not engage with their peers. Most often, the international junior transfer students prioritized completing coursework over enrichment activities such as student organizations, undergraduate research, and summer internships. This may explain Zhang's (2016) finding that international junior transfer students have a shorter time to degree than domestic junior transfer students.

The recurring theme of evaluating the efficiency of certain actions is a likely explanation for the study's final conclusion. While on-campus community is important to international junior transfer students, Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement may not be fully applicable. Community did help participants through the transfer and transition processes and facilitated their sense of belonging on campus. As predicted by Astin, social integration appears to support the personal and academic development of international junior transfer students. However, this involvement was not commonly sought or developed through institutionalized programming. Instead, the participants primarily met peers at their prior institution or in their classes. As such, Astin's understanding of student involvement needs to be expanded or manipulated to fit the experiences of the international junior transfer population.

Astin's theory may not be fully applicable to the international junior transfer population because his studies, conducted in the twentieth century, did not adequately account for the

diverse identities and experiences present on today's campuses. While student involvement research does briefly explore the persistence of community college students (Astin, 1975), junior transfer students and international students are not mentioned. Furthermore, student involvement theory was developed through studies of freshman-admit, traditional-age, and predominantly white participant students. This homogenous sample does not represent today's campus populations and the results may not be extrapolated to non-traditional age and international students. It is also worth noting that student involvement theory assumes that students have the luxury of time. Any form of student involvement requires that students commit additional time and energy to their college experience, often during evening and weekend hours. As previously discussed, international transfer students do not feel that they have the ability to afford time to traditional forms of campus involvement, instead focusing on their coursework and career preparation.

While international junior transfer students may not fully benefit from on-campus involvement, it appears they have developed adequate skills and strategies to persist, succeed, and feel that they matter on campus. These include community building, knowledge sharing, creative problem solving, and self-awareness. This conclusion is supported by Zhang's (2016) finding that international junior transfer students demonstrate higher persistence and graduation rates than domestic students.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of this study provide ample opportunity to improve the experiences of international junior transfer students through policy changes and on-campus programming. Additionally, more must be learned about the diverse international junior transfer population

through future research endeavors. The following sections articulate recommendations based on the findings of this study, written for an audience of administrators, practitioners, and researchers.

### **Recommendations for Administrators and Practitioners**

Astin (1984) and Schlossberg (1989) wrote that practitioners and administrators should evaluate campus programs by the degree to which they facilitate student involvement. The outcomes of this study indicate that measuring level of student involvement is not sufficient when considering the experiences of international junior transfer students. Campus programming may also benefit from being evaluated by the efficiency with which it provides involvement, services, and benefits to students. For example, Toby found his professors' office hours to be an inefficient use of time and found the office hours of undergraduate teaching assistant to be a better way to obtain academic help. Conducting a comparative analysis of these two services may result in improved efficiency among faculty office hours. In summary, one recommendation from this study is that campus administrators evaluate and improve the efficiency with which their programs provide benefits or services to students.

Administrators can also improve the experience of the population by ensuring that professional development opportunities and programs that allow students to build their technical skills are well resourced and advertised. When possible, students should receive academic credit for their participation. The international junior transfer participants believed career-focused programs for which they received course credit were an efficient use of their time. Thus, allowing students to receive class credit for their involvement may encourage participation and permit students time to take advantage of these important resources without compromising time committed to timely degree completion.



A third recommendation is to provide institutional support for programs that facilitate peer support and knowledge sharing practices among the international junior transfer population. This can be done by developing mentoring programs that connect alumni and/or more experienced students with new international junior transfer students. Data from this study demonstrates that social connections were found to participants' transition to the university and their experience once on campus. Despite having diverse social groups, the study participants particularly valued friendships with people from similar backgrounds, including international students and junior transfer students. Because of the many forms of bureaucracy that affect these populations, including articulation systems, university eligibility requirements, and visa regulations, sharing information with their peers and benefiting from each other's research was incredibly important. Mariko shared "I gained information about working visa, interview process, etc. from my friends who graduated from other universities. It would be nice to have someone who have gone through difficulties that we will do and can share those information." Similarly, Russ spoke of the importance of sharing information with his fellow transfer students. Such information may be more easily crowdsourced and shared if institutions are able to facilitate the development of social networks for new international students. A mentoring program would attend to this need by providing an institutionalized and structured platform to connect students and facilitate knowledge sharing. This identity-specific programming may also result in the population feeling more supported and valued on campus.

Based on the findings of this study, a fourth recommendation is to centralize and align the academic and visa-based advising services for international transfer students. In this study, the participants expressed frustration regarding the limited roles of each campus office. For example, experiences shared in this study indicate that a student may visit one advising office to discuss

enrollment rules and confirm their class schedule, and then later learn that the schedule does not meet visa requirements. This would then require a visit to the International Student Office for a second round of advising. Given their focus on efficiency, international transfer students may benefit from more centralized advising services that are able to account for both campus rules and federal visa rules. If this is not possible, administrators and practitioners should request training from the campus office responsible for visa regulations to ensure they are able to provide basic information and accurate referrals.

Advising services can also be improved by ensuring that Advisers understand the unique experiences of international junior transfer students. This can be pursued through town halls, asking individual students about their experiences during meetings, and investing in research to better understand the needs of the population. This can also be achieved by employing specialists to specifically work with the international and transfer student populations. As discussed by Russ, advisers who were themselves international junior transfer students are perhaps best able to understand and support this population. Institutions might consider investing in their students by sponsoring visas for their own alumni to work in advising roles.

A final recommendation is for universities to address the pressure experienced by this population as a result of the high cost of tuition and limited employment opportunities (Schulte & Choudaha, 2014). International junior transfer students' decision to start at more-affordable community colleges may indicate that they come from less affluent backgrounds than their peers that matriculated as freshmen. As a result, students experience a lot of stress attempting to complete their degree quickly and financially support themselves as much as possible. This concern can be addressed from several angles. Campus administrators may improve the experience of international transfer students by reducing the high cost of international student

tuition. Alternatively, lawmakers could make it easier for these students to become eligible for in-state tuition during their time in community college. Administrators and independent organizations might examine their eligibility criteria for scholarships and consider expanding opportunities to international junior transfer students. Finally, administrators could help alleviate the financial pressure experienced by these students by increasing on-campus employment opportunities and/or giving international junior transfer students priority to some of these roles.

In summary, the results of this study inform five recommendations: (a) evaluate and improve the efficiency of student programming, (b) resource professional development opportunities that build technical skills and incentivize them with academic credit, (c) develop identity-specific mentoring programs, (d) centralize academic and visa-based advising services, and (e) make attendance more affordable for international junior transfer student. Implementing these recommendations may benefit the population by allowing them to better enjoy the holistic university experience and be more involved on-campus without sacrificing degree progress.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was one of the first to utilize a qualitative perspective to understand the experiences of international junior transfer students. Because of the convenience sampling method, participants were all pursuing engineering degrees at the same university. Furthermore, they were enrolled at a large and diverse campus with a liberal reputation. These factors could have biased the study results. One may assume that student experiences are different dependent on many factors, including the nature of their institution, the community college they attended, and their own background. As such, future studies should pursue a larger and more diverse participant pool, accounting for diversity in institution attended, majors pursued, and country of origin.

Additionally, new themes emerged through the course of this study. These include students' tendency to evaluate the efficiency of various activities, peer knowledge sharing, and the importance of emotional maturity. For example, this study's preliminary results imply that a baseline level of emotional maturity, such as self-awareness, intentionality, and gratitude, may facilitate international junior transfer student persistence and sense of belonging on campus. This could be a new form of Transfer Student Capital. As such, further research with specific interview or survey questions should be conducted to learn more about each of the new themes discussed in this study.

### **Conclusion**

The United States is a popular destination for international students wishing to complete a Bachelor's degree. For many of these students, community colleges are an affordable and accessible starting point because of their intensive language courses, small class sizes, and lower tuition rates. However, very little has been known about the experiences of international students once they transfer from community college to a four-year university. Additionally, existing research about international students and junior transfer students has focused primarily on the challenges they face, and not the unique capital that facilitates their success.

This qualitative study has been a first step in understanding the experiences and strengths of international junior transfer students. Through one-on-one interviews with participants at Coastal University, this study explored how international junior transfer students adjust to their new campus and interact with institutional programming, faculty, advisers, and their peers. Additionally, the study explored how international transfer students succeed on campus and what contributes to their sense of belonging. International junior transfer students appear to benefit

from their time spent at community college, however, the transfer pathway means they have less time to take advantage of the opportunities available at their four-year institution. As such, they evaluate the efficiency of each potential activity before deciding how to spend their time. The participants of this study chose to focus on their academic coursework and preparation for the workforce, instead of engaging in traditional forms of campus involvement.

In conclusion, the participants in this study represent international junior transfer students as a hard-working, independent, disciplined, and resilient population. They find their own strategies to navigate university campuses and succeed despite the compounded challenges of being both international and junior transfer students. To support students' in this process, practitioners and administrators may choose to ensure student programming is efficient, adequately resource professional development opportunities, develop identity-specific mentoring programs, centralize academic and visa-based advising services, and make attendance more affordable for international junior transfer students. Finally, more research is needed to better understand this population and how practitioners can support them through the many transitions they face from departing their home country through degree conferral.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**



**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Nicole McIntyre, a graduate student in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco. This faculty supervisor for this study is Dr. Alejandro Covarrubias a professor in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco.

**WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:**

The purpose of this research study is to describe the experiences of international junior transfer students pursuing a bachelor's degree at a large public research university.

**WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:**

During this study, the following will happen:

- The Researcher will explain the purpose of the study and relevant information about confidentiality
- The Researcher will confirm that the Participant wishes to continue with the study
- The Participant will provide a pseudonym. If the Participant is unable to provide one, the Researcher will assign one (see "PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY" section below)
- The interview will be recorded for transcription purposes (see "AUDIORECORDINGS" section below)
- The Researcher will ask the Participant a series of questions about their experiences as an international junior transfer student



**DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:**

Your participation in this study will involve one meeting that lasts one hour or less. The study will take place on the [Coastal University] campus.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:**

We do not anticipate any risks or discomforts to you from participating in this research. If you wish, you may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty.

**BENEFITS:**

You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study; however, the possible benefits to others include providing guidance for university administrators, faculty, and student affairs practitioners hoping to better support this population. Due to the use of student involvement theory, the study may also be helpful for international junior transfer students seeking to improve their own experience on campus.

**PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Any data you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In any report we publish, we will not include information that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant. Specifically, we will:

- Exclusively refer to Participants by a pseudonym
- A document that links participant names and email addresses to their pseudonym will be kept in a password protected file. The document will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.  
Destroy audio files after transcription
- Store transcriptions in a password protected file. No identifying information will be included in the transcription file.
- As per IRB requirements, consent forms will be retained for three years. They will be stored in a separate, password protected file. After three years, they will be destroyed.
- Only the Researcher and Faculty Supervisor will have access to audio files, transcription files, and consent forms.

**AUDIORECORDINGS:**

Interviews will be recorded using audio recording to assist with the accuracy of your responses. Audio files will then be transcribed. Audio files will be destroyed following transcription, and no identifying information will be included in the transcription. Transcriptions will be stored in a password protected file, separate from any identifying information.

**COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:**

There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:**

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any Time.

**OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:**

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: Nicole McIntyre at (916) 768-0145 or [nmcintyre@dons.usfca.edu](mailto:nmcintyre@dons.usfca.edu). If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at [IRBPHS@usfca.edu](mailto:IRBPHS@usfca.edu).

**I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.**

---

**PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE**

---

**DATE**

**APPENDIX B**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Welcome! Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. The purpose of this study is to explore the key factors that contribute to international junior transfer student success here on campus. I hope to use this information to help universities better support international junior transfer students.

**Confidentiality:** There are no questions that should make you uncomfortable, however this interview and research project is confidential. You are welcome to skip a question, or stop the interview at any time. In a few minutes, you will select a pseudonym, or fake name, and we will use that to reference you. You are welcome to skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

This interview is happening at [Coastal University] because I have access to private space here. I am interviewing you as a grad study of USF and this study is not affiliated with [Coastal University]. I say this because I would not want you to bias your answers based on our location or my job.

I will be recording the interview. This is so that I can accurately recall the things that you share. The recording will be transcribed and stored in a secure location. Your real name will not be included in the transcription. I will also take very brief notes as you talk, just to help me remember big themes.

Do you have any questions for me?

Do you still wish to continue with the study?

\*If yes, ask them to sign consent form

**Pseudonym:** \_\_\_\_\_

\*Start audio recording

**Questions:**

1. Can you please tell me about your path to [Coastal University]?
2. Think back to your first semester here. Please tell me as much as possible about your transition to campus
3. What helped you during this transition?
4. Are you involved in any student organizations or campus jobs? How do they affect your experience?
5. Can you please tell me about your interactions with other students?
6. Can you please tell me about your experiences with Professors here?
7. Have you met with Advisers?
  - a. If yes, how was the experience?
8. Tell me about a time when you felt like you belonged at [Coastal University]
9. Tell me about a time when you felt like you did not belong at [Coastal University]
10. What factors do you think influence whether you feel like you belong at [Coastal University]?
11. How do you think your experience is different from students who are not international junior transfers?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share?

**Next steps:** Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I will send you a copy of the interview transcript. You will be able to retract anything, add clarifying comments, or correct anything that doesn't feel accurate.

## APPENDIX C

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### Theme: Transition to campus

- Path to campus
  - Prior exposure to North American education
    - “I have visited though. This is still like really interesting to me because...”  
Russ, p. 2
    - Mariko: One-month study abroad in Canada
    - Toby: High school in Canada
  - Heard through the grapevine that community college would be a better option for them than applying directly to a four-year university
    - About academic adviser in Japan “She had told me like the best way is to...”
      - Woman on bus recommended her future community college
    - “And then I went to [Community College] because...”, Russ p. 1
    - “Coming to the states and planning this whole thing...”
    - Applied to universities. Did not really expect to get into [Coastal University]
      - “Dream come true”, Toby p. 2
      - “Actually it was off of my sight cause I was like..”, Russ p. 1
- Personal narrative: Toby
  - Rough transition but rewarding
    - “Yeah, I would say, I would say it was rough at the same time...”, Toby p. 2
    - “Yeah. So as a transfer student that I was very excited, right? Everything was new...” Toby p. 3
  - Frustrations, stress, & anxiety, Toby p. 8
    - “So when I am here, even though there's a lot of frustrations, stress...” Toby p. 8
  - Difficult to speak w/ professor and get help
    - “Definitely. Just to give you a perspective...at a community, you look up professors...”, Toby p. 3
  - Gained strengths and skills
    - “One, the actual skill sets is being able to sit down, focus, be patient reading...”, Toby p. 2
- Personal narrative: Russ
  - Transition was primarily social and cultural, not academic
    - “I would say like the first year, like I could, I could easily get away with that first...”, Russ p. 20
    - “No, not at all actually, but that's, I think that's specific to me...”, Russ p. 21
  - “For me it was really rough but I feel like I made it rough myself because you know...”, Russ p. 2
  - “My community college was still big, but you know, people go there for like short time...”, Russ p. 2
  - CC taught discipline due to risk of losing visa eligibility
    - “They notice immediately and most classes two or more absences you're out...” Russ p. 19

- Community college taught time management and self-sufficiency
  - “The first time I got here I had to like find a place to live in. Um, that was...”, Russ p. 19-20
- Help
  - All provided recommendations for improving prep before transition
  - Prestige helped transition, Russ p. 4
  - More info needed before transfer
    - Russ thought school would be paid for
    - “The hardest part for me was like not getting to college, university, or transferring...”, Russ, p. 20
  - Dependence on word of mouth for info, Russ p. 18 & 21

**Theme: Competition and comparison to other students**

- Comparison, Toby p. 4
- Competitiveness, Toby p. 4
  - “Just too much pressure, too much competitiveness”
- Comparisons, Toby p. 2
- Comparison, Toby p. 6
- Competition at [Coastal University], Mariko p. 7
- Not belonging = imposter syndrome, Mariko’s email
- Not belonging = competition, Mariko’s email
- Comparison to peers, Russ p. 14
  - “My community college was still big, but you know...”, Russ p. 2
- Competition, Russ p. 2
- Feeling behind peers
  - Behind peers, Toby p. 9
  - Behind native students, Mariko p. 6
  - Higher level of peers’ questions at office hours, Toby p. 3
  - Embarrassment of asking less advanced questions than peers, Toby p. 3
    - “Academically not as capable as my peers,”
  - Work harder than peers, they absorb quicker, Toby p. 8-9
  - Compare age/accomplishments to peers, feel behind, Toby p. 9
  - Study more than other students, Mariko p. 2
  - Less talented than native students, Mariko p. 6
  - Behind native students, Mariko p. 6
  - Comparison to other students, Mariko p. 2
  - Comparison to other students, Mariko p. 1
  - Needs a longer time to work academically, Mariko via email
  - Age, Toby
    - “I feel like by the time they became 23 or 24 they probably would be working..”
- Trying not to constantly compare to peers
  - Not liking to stress, Mariko p. 2
  - Overwhelmed by competitiveness; affected relationships and mental health, Toby p. 2 & 5
  - Don’t compare; don’t like stress, Toby

- “So when I am here, even though there's a lot of frustrations, stress, anxiety...”

### **Theme: Campus programming**

- Less time for fun, Mariko p. 6
  - “I wish I could do like clubs and everything but because I have to think about like getting a full time...”
- Belonging = Programming, Mariko’s email
- Wishes she had mentorship programming, Mariko’s email
  - “I was also thinking about something that I wished there was at [Coastal University]...”
- Programming, Russ p. 4
- Existing programming is good, Russ p. 22
- Trying to be efficient with programming, backfired, Russ p. 2
- Behind in opportunities, Russ p. 16
  - “Uh, well, yeah, in terms of opportunities you can get and you just, you constantly, you feel like...”
- Utilized programming
  - Student-led classes, Toby p. 6
    - Meditation: “Super fun, calms your mind and then you share your experiences with others...”
  - On-campus housing, Toby
    - “Very welcoming, very open”
  - CalSOL, Mariko p. 3
  - Limited time for CalSOL, Mariko p. 3
    - “I was in CalSol but the classes got really busy so I didn't get to go there and then I felt like...”
  - Boxing team, Russ p. 2-3
    - “Amazing experience”,
  - Frat, Russ p. 2
    - “Yeah, I left in two weeks actually. I was rushing I think...”
  - Hyperloop, Russ p. 4
    - Lack of direction and accomplishments
    - “I just felt like for me it was more efficient to participate in one or two more classes...”
  - Work
    - Campus job, Mariko, p. 4
    - Meeting people at campus job, Mariko, p. 4
    - Social integration of job, Russ p. 3
    - Job flexibility, Russ p. 3
      - “Amazing. I don't have any complaints which good about it...”
    - LBL connection made at job, Russ p. 15
    - Paying for work experience, Russ p. 10
      - “Was like, why do I have to pay to get a work here? I would rather just...”

- Not Utilized
  - Pre-engineering program, Toby p. 4
  - Pre-engineering program, Mariko p. 3
  - Not enough information about programming opportunities, Mariko p. 3
  - Transfer centers, Mariko p. 3
    - “Intimidating”
  - Less time to get involved in research, Mariko p. 6
    - “You're like, I don't know, like they have so much time to do like a lot of thing....”

**Theme: Need to be efficient**

- Efficiency, Toby p. 3
- Efficiency, Toby p. 2
- More efficient to study alone, Toby p. 4
- Efficiency, Toby p. 4
- Summer classes, Toby p. 4
- Emotions are inefficient, Toby
  - “Stressing myself...”
- Efficiency of help, Toby p. 7
  - “So sometimes to speak with the professor here....”
  - “An inefficient use of time”
- Efficient time use, Mariko p. 2
- Sacrifice extracurricular for curriculum
  - Sacrifices, Mariko p. 6
    - “I don't know, like [freshmen admits] have so much time to...”
  - Efficiency: prioritize class, Mariko p. 6
  - Too many classes, Russ p. 8
  - Summer program, Russ p. 8-9
  - Behind native students, Mariko p. 6
    - “You're like, I don't know, like they have so much time to do like a lot of things...”
    - “I was in CalSol but the classes got really busy so I didn't get to go there....”
  - Maximize opportunity, Toby p. 8
  - Quit job for more time on classes, parents had to pay difference, Russ p. 9
    - “I just felt like for me it was more efficient to participate in one or two more classes...”
  - Limited energy, Russ p. 6
    - “The fact that I'm not from here originally like adds, you know, additional stress...”
    - “I'm thinking about this all the time now. Once you graduate, you just, you know...”
  - Picking classes over extracurricular, Russ p. 3 & 5
  - Behind in opportunities, Russ p. 16
    - “In terms of opportunities you can get and you just, you constantly, you feel like...”
  - Trying to be efficient with programming, backfired, Russ p. 2



- Sacrifices due to cost of international student tuition
  - Efficiency due to cost, Russ p. 5
    - “My parents are sustaining me uh, that's amazing. But still they know it's not that...”
  - Cost requires getting through quickly, Russ p. 8
    - “They give us five semesters. I was like, ‘there's no way that can pay for five semesters’...”
  - Cost of tuition, Mariko p. 2
  - Pressure of high cost, Mariko p. 2
    - “Obviously like the tuition is really expensive and that really like pressures me to do well”
  - Toby is a resident and receives financial aid, Toby p. 1
- Post-grad outcomes
  - Efficiency and post-grad outcomes, Russ p. 10
  - Pursuit of job prospects, Mariko p. 2
  - Job competition led to minor and more classes, Russ p. 8-9
    - “I'm getting scared”
    - “Because I'm international, I don't know...”
  - Sacrificing paying work for OPT, Russ p. 15
  - Summer classes, Toby p. 4
  - Career search and visa, Mariko p. 2
  - OPT rules Russ p. 21
  - Logistical discrimination = less job options, Russ p. 14
    - “The only thing that I'm getting now is that, I'm really trying to get affiliation status...”
    - Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, SpaceX, and Boeing not open to foreign candidates

### **Theme: Obtaining help**

- Reach out, Toby p. 2
  - “And another skill set is to learn to reach out. Like sometimes you have to ask help from your peers...”
- Help, Toby p. 2
- Reach out and ask for help, Toby p. 9
- Scary to ask for help, Toby p. 9
- Community college prepared him academically, Russ p. 6
  - “good reputation”
  - “No, not at all actually, but that's, I think that's specific to me...but hey like I'm kind of proving my point....”
- Asking for help, Russ p. 4
- Interactions with Advisers
  - Interactions with Advisers: try to get people involved, Mariko p. 5
    - “They're very sweet. Um, yeah, I don't really have a lot of experience. I just go there f..”
  - Advisers, Toby p. 2
  - Adviser help, Toby p. 7

- Used advisers, Russ p. 11
  - “Positive”
- Decentralized advising for international junior transfer students
  - Need advisers that understand experiences and limitations of students like him, Russ p. 12
    - “They were like whatever you do it and then I go to international [office], and...”
  - Advisers don’t have all info, need to see many Advisers, Russ p. 12
  - Career center counseling: understands rules, Russ p. 12 & 17
    - “Even [campus office] has like a special adviser just for international students...”
  - “Because it might be, I don't know, illegal or you're not supposed to do it really...”
- Interactions with Professors
  - Welcoming office hours
    - “Definitely helpful”, Mariko p. 5
    - “We were always welcome in office hours”, Mariko p. 5
    - Office Hours, Russ p. 6
      - “I came here, I was like, okay well the difference here is only probably...”
    - Professors are helpful, Russ p. 8
    - Didn’t think he needed to attend office hours, Russ p. 8
  - Distant
    - Professors, Toby p. 3
      - “Very minimal”
      - “I have only talked to one professor during my time here. Yeah. And the duration...”
    - Professor help, Toby p. 2
      - “After the excitement I started realizing how difficult school here wa...”
    - Barriers, Toby p. 3
    - “Difficult”, Toby p. 3
    - Bravery of approaching faculty, Toby p. 7
      - “Although it's intimidating and overwhelming...asking for help when necessary really helps...”
    - Harder to connect with Professors, Mariko p. 4
    - Office Hours, Mariko p. 4
    - Professors don’t remember her, Mariko p. 4
    - Intimidating office hours, Mariko p. 5
      - “I wish there are more smaller and not intimidating office hours”
      - Other students made to feel stupid
    - More distance with professors, Mariko p. 5
      - “Um, I think it's a little bit harder than like at community college...”
  - Efficiency of seeking Professor help
    - Minimal help from Professors, Toby p. 6

- “The line was too long. The help wasn't too significant and it brings me more anxiety...”
  - Anxiety & stress at office hours, Toby p. 7
    - “Students come to the office hours for professors that are not asking for academic help...”
  - Missed out on faculty, Toby p. 7
    - “I definitely feel missed out. Totally. I wish I could just restart this entire...”
  - Office hours, Toby p. 3
    - “So sometimes to speak with the professor here, you lined up yourself for...”
    - “An inefficient use of time”
  - Limited time, Toby p. 3
  - Learned about the value of discussion, Russ p. 8
    - “I was just wondering how people could possibly answer this question. Then it...”
    - “Mistake”
- Knowledge sharing with peers
  - Peer help in on-campus housing, Toby p. 7
    - “Very welcoming, very open”
  - TA help, Toby p. 7
  - Wishes she had mentoring programming, Mariko’s email
    - “I was also thinking about something that I wished there was at [Coastal University]...”
  - Value of learning from people w/ similar experience, Mariko’s email
  - Dependence on word of mouth for info, Russ p. 18 & 21
  - Share info with others like him, Russ p. 4
    - “So you know, just, you know, cause we are still keeping in touch and we shar[ed] all this...”
  - How they heard about their community colleges
- Independence & creative problem solving
  - Hacking the system, Russ p. 13 & 22
    - “You really have to like talk to so many people and do your own research to survive...”
  - Navigating visa rules himself, Russ p. 15
  - Do own research, Russ p. 21
  - Lack of network and proximity to family = self-sufficiency, Russ p. 16

### **Theme: Interactions with peers**

- Other students were welcoming
  - Welcoming & open, Toby p. 5
  - People are welcoming, Mariko’s email
    - “Some people might have experiences that people without things in common...”
  - Peers didn’t care about international status, Russ p. 4
    - “Melting pot”

- “Even people who say they're Americans, like you actually talk to them and then it turns...”
  - People don't care about transfer status, Russ p. 6
    - “People will treat you like really good here. They never like discriminate”
  - No individual differences in treatment, Russ p. 16
  - Age, Toby
    - “I feel like by the time they became 23 or 24 they probably would be working or establishing a...”
  - Treated well socially, Russ p. 20
    - “I didn't feel absolutely anything. First of all, people don't care...”
  - Fitting in, Russ p. 21
    - “When you go to this place as you feel like, okay, I'm just one of these people”
- Friend groups
  - Similar Identities
    - Belonging = being with similar people, Mariko's email
      - “When I found friends that have been through the same path...”
    - Friends from CC, Mariko, p. 4
    - CC friends helped transition, Russ p. 4
      - “So you know, just, you know, cause we are still keeping in touch and...”
    - Friends: transfers bonded over that identity, Russ p. 6
      - “They are transfers. That's why they're actually friends...”
  - Different identities
    - Mixed friend group, Toby p. 5
      - “I see. So I would say for me is kind of a mix of both. Both. I have friends who are...”
    - Friends from class, Mariko p. 2
      - “Mm, maybe like studying with friends. I didn't really have a lot of like...”
    - Study with friends, Mariko p. 3
    - Mixed friend group, Mariko p. 3
      - I think I have a mix of like everything. Cause right now, like I'm studying...
    - Diverse friends from International House, Russ
      - And I made good friends just because I was working there...”
- Student efforts to build community
  - Toby's social efforts, Toby p. 4 (Extremely social, new energy, balance, socially guarded)
    - “And then times just become difficult. I learned that I just get a little bit sad...”
    - “I have this new energy, I want to go meet people, I want to be friends with my...”
  - Choosing to focus on classes & study alone, Toby p. 4
    - “But then they realized that if you just keep yourself to yourself, you are never gonna grow...”
  - Overwhelming number of people compared to CC, Russ p. 2

- “For me it was really rough but I feel like I made it rough myself..”
- Drop out of frat, socially overwhelming, Russ p. 2
- Connecting requires energy, Russ
  - “The fact that I'm not from here originally like adds, you know, additional stress...”
- Importance of networking
  - Should have done more networking, Russ p. 5
    - “But then they realized that if you just keep yourself to yourself, you are never...”
  - Connection made at job, Russ p. 15
  - Lack of network and proximity to family=self-sufficiency, Russ p. 16

### **Theme: Demonstrated Emotional Maturity**

- Self-awareness
  - Self-insight, Toby p. 4
  - Acceptance, Toby p. 4
  - Accept struggle, Toby p. 2
  - Mental health, Toby p. 4
    - “And then times just become difficult. I learned that I just get a little bit sad over time...”
  - Self-insight, Toby p. 4
  - Barriers, Mariko p. 2
  - Not stressing, Mariko p. 7
  - Better for it, Toby p. 2
  - Growth, Toby p. 4
    - “A stronger person”
  - Insights, Toby p. 6
  - Fun, Toby p. 6
  - Stress fading, Toby p. 8
  - Therapy and trauma, Russ p. 14
- Gratitude
  - Strengths, Toby p. 2
  - Discipline, Toby p. 2
  - Gratitude to be allowed to study here, Russ p. 16
    - “You have this feeling that, okay, you know what, I'm actually...”
- Intentionality
  - Emotions, Toby p. 2
  - Intentionality. Toby p. 4
    - “But then they realized that if you just keep yourself to yourself, you are never gonna....”
    - “One, the actual skill sets is being able to sit down, focus, be patient reading through...”
  - Meditation, Toby p. 6
    - “Super fun, calms your mind and then you share your experiences with others...”
  - Pay attention to positive, Toby p. 8

- “Learned to accept” and “learned that you just want to do your best”
- Don’t let stress detract from memories/friends, Toby p. 9

**Theme: Belonging on campus**

- Always felt he belonged, Toby p. 8
  - “So I never felt like I didn't belong...”
  - “So when I am here, even though there's a lot of frustrations...”
- School pride
  - Prestige, Toby p. 1
  - Dream come true, Toby p. 2
  - School pride, Toby p. 8
  - Human capital of [Coastal University], Toby p. 8
  - Prestige, Toby p. 8
    - “So when I am here, even though there's a lot of frustrations...”
  - Dream come true, Toby p. 8
  - Prestige of US universities, Mariko p. 1
  - Belonging = attitude of self-improvement, Mariko p. 5
  - Prestige, Russ p. 1
  - Prestige helped transition, Russ p. 4
  - [Coastal University] prestige, Russ p. 1
  - Prestige worth it? Russ p. 10
- Politics
  - Belonging = lack of discrimination on campus, Russ p. 13-14
  - Belonging = diversity, Mariko p. 5
  - Political events, Mariko p 5
- Social
  - Belonging = Friends, Mariko p. 5
    - “I don't know, my friends, the fact that I have good grades...”
  - Belonging = being with similar people, Mariko’s email
  - Belonging = meeting alumni, Mariko’s email
  - Belonging = Programming, Mariko’s email
- Academics
  - Belonging = deep discussions with professors, advanced understanding, Russ p. 13
    - “Academically that's, that happens when you go to the like discussion...”
  - Belonging = good grades, Mariko p. 5
  - “My friends, the fact that I have good...”
- Existence of people like Career center adviser make him feel like he matters, Russ p. 18
  - “I feel like this college really knows that there are, people like me too...”

**Note:** Additional themes arose during the data analysis but were not as robust. Therefore, they do not appear here in Chapter IV of this thesis.

## APPENDIX D

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



IRBPHS - Approval Notification

To: Nicole McIntyre  
From: Richard Gregory Johnson III, IRB Chair  
Subject: Protocol #1264  
Date: 08/07/2019

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 research (IRB Protocol #1264) with the project title **Global Transfers: Exploring Institutional Support of International Transfer Students** has been approved by the IRB Chair under the rules for expedited review on 08/07/2019.

Any modifications, adverse reactions or complications must be reported using a modification application to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS via email at [IRBPHS@usfca.edu](mailto:IRBPHS@usfca.edu). Please include the Protocol number assigned to your application in your correspondence.

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

Sincerely,

Dr. Richard Gregory Johnson III  
Professor & Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
University of San Francisco  
[irbphs@usfca.edu](mailto:irbphs@usfca.edu)  
IRBPHS Website





