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THE INTERNAL VERTICAL TRANSFER PHENOMENON: AN EXPLORATION OF THE
LIVED EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNAL TRANSFER STUDENTS
FROM AN EMBEDDED TWO-YEAR INSTITUTION

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

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DEDICATION

To my husband Scott, your never ending love, support and encouragement have kept me going through the many twists and turns of this doctoral program.

To my parents, who instilled in me the value of an education and taught me by example to work hard and never give up.

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ABSTRACT

Existing literature focuses on external transfer students, transitioning from community colleges to a new and separate four-year college and understanding the transfer process and transfer student success. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological inquiry was the examination of the intricacies of the transfer process between a two-year embedded institution to the parent four-year institution and how internal transfer students navigate the transfer process towards successful baccalaureate degree completion. Three research questions guided this study – (1) How do internal transfer students who started at a two-year college within a regional public institution describe their transfer experiences to their four-year programs? (2) How do transfer experiences differ between students who selected to start at the two-year institution and those who intended to start at the four-year level but were placed into the two-year program? (3) What do internal transfer students believe the institution should do to support their retention? Utilizing an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 10 internal transfer students enrolled in four-year programs. Data analysis was conducted in two phases. Phase one involved transcribing the interviews. Phase two consisted of a two-part coding process. Open coding identified areas of comparisons and led to the development of a broad set of codes. In the second phase, the theoretical frameworks of Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory were applied during the axial coding process. Six themes emerged: Sense of Agency; Sense of Identity; Paying for College; Institutional Supports; Institutional Procedures; and Building Transfer Capital. Results indicate internal transfer students often face challenges similar to external transfer students. Of particular interest were the differences in experiences between the participants who were placed at the two-year college and those who chose to begin at the two-year college. The participants who chose to begin at the two-year college described greater difficulty identifying as students of the parent campus whereas the participants who were placed at the two-year college identified as students of the parent campus from the time they began at the two-year college. Institutional recommendations focused on faculty engagement and advising experiences are provided.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

Earning a college credential leads to a greater propensity for increased earnings, elevated socioeconomic status, and better health (Allen, Smith, & Muehleck, 2013; Hout, 2012; Rosenbaum, Stephan, & Rosenbaum, 2010). In spite of this, the opportunities and means of earning a college credential varies amongst students. For a large portion of college students aspiring to a four-year degree, beginning at a two-year college is the best option. Starting at a two-year college requires the navigation of the academic transfer process for students with the intention of ultimately achieving their goal of earning a bachelor's degree.

Early twentieth century community colleges, known initially as junior colleges, were developed as extensions of the local high schools (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014) as college preparatory programs. Historically, the attraction to community colleges has been and continues to be the lower cost and geographic location, allowing students to address financial concerns and remain closer to home for the first two years of their baccalaureate degree program (Bok, 2013; Cohen et al., 2014; Thelin, 2011). Since their creation, community colleges have served a diverse range of important roles in higher education, including transfer into the baccalaureate degree pipeline, career and technical education for workforce development, remediation, and continuing education (Cohen et al., 2014). Given the common mission for community colleges of open-access

admissions, low-cost tuition, and serving the needs of their surrounding communities (Cummins, 2015), community colleges provide an entry point for students who otherwise would likely not enroll in higher education.

In this Western State, the educational institutions available to students vary including four-year research institutions, four-year regional institutions, and a mixture of two-year colleges consisting of community colleges, tribal colleges, and two-year colleges embedded within four-year institutions. Despite the educational options available to students, the number of individuals without college credentials has necessitated the creation of programs designed to increase the number of students entering and earning a college degree (Fisher & Cech, 2011). Recently, the state-level governing body has placed more emphasis on two-year programs and college transfer. Overall, within the state, transfer has become easier given statewide transfer policies encompassing common course numbering, general education transferrable core and articulation agreements. Additionally, the ability to enroll at the embedded two-year institutions provides a low-cost point of entry which in theory offers a seamless transition to their four-year degree program at the four-year institution. While transfer policies and the structure of the statewide higher education system provides more opportunities for successful transfer, similar to other states, the likelihood of successful transfer and baccalaureate degree completion across the state institutions is 29%, much lower than the national average of 42% (Shapiro et al., 2017). Transfer student success is a much larger concern at the institutions identified in this study. The likelihood of successful transfer and baccalaureate degree completion for internal transfer students at the institution of

focus in this study is less than 10%. As the director of the two-year transfer program and advisor to many of the internal transfer students at the embedded two-year institution, it is imperative that I have an understanding of what I and the institutions (both South and North campuses) can do to assist internal transfer students in their transition and successful completion of their four-year degrees.

Students beginning at community colleges face various barriers to successful transfer. These barriers may be personal in the form of academic preparation, financial constraints, family histories, or even social or cultural backgrounds. Although transfer students are not new to higher education, they face a number of institutional barriers to student success in the form of a lack of easily accessible transfer information, credit transfer issues, as well as acceptance socially and academically at their four-year receiving institution, often leading to transfer shock and other challenges (Crisp & Nunez, 2014; Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solorzano, 2011; Renn & Reason, 2013; Santos Laanan & Jain, 2017; Wickersham & Wang, 2016). The transfer process is complex, and transfer students are often left trying to navigate the process on their own. Consequently, both community colleges and baccalaureate institutions are best served by developing strategies including partnerships to support students within the transfer pipeline. At baccalaureate institutions with embedded two-year colleges, the transfer process as it relates to internal transfer students is largely unexplored, leaving questions regarding retention of this specific population.

The literature on college transfer is primarily focused on transfer between community colleges and four-year institutions, highlighting the two- and four-year

institutions and student attributes in the traditional vertical transfer process (Crisp & Delgado, 2014; Santos Laanan & Jain, 2017; Wang, Lee, & Prevost, 2017; Wickersham & Wang, 2016). These studies focus on external transfer students, those students who transition from a two-year college to a new and separate four-year college and play an integral role in understanding the transfer process and transfer student success. There appears to be a gap in the research investigating the transfer experiences of transfer students between embedded two-year institutions, known as internal transfer students as they transition to their intended four-year program at the parent institution. Examination of the internal transfer process is critical to the success of this specific population of transfer students who are in some ways treated the same as traditional transfer students, and in other ways, treated like students merely changing majors. Exploring this internal vertical transfer phenomenon will impact institutional policies as well as contribute to the overall understanding of transfer student experiences.

Problem Statement

Currently, student retention is a primary concern in higher education, including both native and transfer students. According to Jenkins and Fink (2015), around 80% of all community college students enter with the intent to transfer to a baccalaureate degree. Nevertheless, considerable evidence exists that although students enter with the goal of transferring and obtaining a four-year degree, they are less likely to do so (Allen et al., 2013). As such, institutions need to examine their transfer processes in an effort to support students in all phases of transfer. The lack of students successfully transferring and earning baccalaureate degrees has been called a “national issue” (Ellis, 2013, p. 54)

resulting in a loss of talent and skill, therefore, it becomes more important for institutions to work together for the success of transfer students.

The main problem of practice addressed in this study was the retention of transfer students at a regional four-year public institution who began their studies at the institution's embedded two-year institution. Specifically, this study focused on the student experiences and the institutional factors, post-transfer, at the parent four-year institution that impacted internal transfer students' persistence to their baccalaureate degrees. Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory were used to emphasize the student and institutional factors that impacted internal transfer student persistence (Mayhew et al., 2016; Renn & Reason, 2013).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological inquiry was the examination of the intricacies of the transfer process between a two-year embedded institution to the parent four-year institution and how internal transfer students navigate the transfer process towards successful baccalaureate degree completion. Specifically, this study will explore factors related to retention such as the combination of internal transfer student background characteristics including their reason for starting at the two-year program level, advising experiences, relationships with faculty and peers, coping styles, motivation, and their academic expectations. Assessment of institutional factors includes academic support, financial aid and scholarships, information on the internal transfer process, research and internships.

Research Questions

This study sought to understand the transition experience of students who transferred from an embedded two-year college to the host four-year institution. Particularly, I offer a detailed illustration of the internal vertical transfer experience. In addition, I address the overarching problem related directly to the retention and success of the institution's internal transfer student population. The following research questions guided and informed this study.

1. How do internal transfer students who started at a two-year college within a regional public institution describe their transfer experiences to their four-year programs?
2. How do these experiences differ between students who selected to start at the two-year institution and those who intended to start at the four-year but were placed into the two-year program?
3. What do internal transfer students believe the institution should do to support their retention?

Significance of Study

Increasingly, the globalization of economies requires an educated workforce. While educational attainment continues to rise in many industrialized countries the United States lags. During the Education Commission for the States Conference, Kelly (2007), identified the need to produce 64 million more undergraduate degrees by 2025 in order to keep pace with leading industrialized nations. In order to meet the demand, the undergraduate degree pipeline requires examination. Many students maintain the tradition

of entering a four-year university directly out of high school while, millions of others will begin their academic career at a two-year institution with future aspirations of earning a baccalaureate degree. The reasons for choosing to begin at a two-year institution are many including, financial, geographic location, and academic preparation. Of the students that begin their studies at a two-year institution with the intent to transfer and ultimately earn a baccalaureate degree, many are unsuccessful. Although it should not be the case, for internal transfer students, similar outcomes can often be observed.

Previous research focusing on student transfer has identified factors such as academic and social engagement, and a variety of institutional factors such as academic advising and transfer student support including the availability of transfer information and transfer orientation. Literature addressing student characteristics often referred to as student transfer capital (Laanan, 2004), includes academic preparation, support systems, and socioeconomic status, impact persistence to baccalaureate degree completion.

This phenomenological study investigated the lived experiences of internal vertical transfer students post-transfer. The study examined the personal and institutional factors perceived as supporting and affecting internal transfer student baccalaureate degree completion. Additionally, institutional factors and experiences that could potentially be improved to further support internal transfer student persistence were explored. Moreover, through the examination of the internal vertical transfer student population, this study offers a perspective of the transition process from an embedded two-year program to four-year programs at the parent institution and provide insight into

how to better assist this particular transfer student population as well as offers a deeper understanding of transfer student transitions in general.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories, Schlossberg's (1984) Transition Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) provide a theoretical framework suited to this qualitative phenomenological study. Schlossberg's Transition Theory assists in understanding how internal transfer students move through and experience the transition beginning with their entry into their two-year program through their transfer transition to their four-year degree program. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides framework within which the transition can be considered through the interactions of the students to their embedded educational environment.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's transition theory was intended to "facilitate an understanding of adults in transition and aid them in connecting to the help they need to cope with the 'ordinary and extraordinary process of living'" (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 213). The theory, while not originally aimed at college student transitions, is applicable to both traditional and transfer students. Schlossberg further conceptualized the framework in 1995 specifically addressing the transition process and one's reactions to a transition as he or she moves in, moves through, and moves out of the known situation and into a new situation (Flowers, Luzynski, & Zamani-Gallaher, 2014). Specific to transfer students who have already experienced the context of entering a

college environment, Schlossberg's transition theory is used to conceptualize the transfer process prompted by the change to the pursuit of a baccalaureate degree from the two-year environment to the new four-year environment.

In the case of internal transfer students, the transfer process appears much different. One of the major components of Schlossberg's transition theory is the change in environment however, for internal transfer students changing from a two-year to a four-year degree, the transition may be made without a physical change in educational environment. Many internal two-year students are already attending classes on the baccalaureate campus with four-year degree seeking students, therefore, the transition should be insignificant, yet, that does not appear to be the case. Somewhere in the transfer transition, internal transfer students experience challenges similar to their peers undergoing the transfer process from external community colleges. For instance, they are allowed to take classes at the parent institution as two-year students but when they transition to their four-year program, the GPA they earned resets to zero and the start over similar to external transfer students. External transfer students are aware that their GPA will not carry over to the receiving institution. Internal transfer students may not be aware of this policy and don't even realize until after it happens that their GPA starts over at zero. Internal transfer students who do not take classes at the parent institution early do not have the benefit of adjusting to the four-year campus environment prior to transitioning. Similar to other institutions, the site of this study has an orientation designed for external transfer students. Internal transfer students are already students of the parent institution therefore, their orientation occurs as first-time students and the

transition process from their two-year program to their four-year program does not include the transfer student orientation.

The meaning individuals place on a transition is driven by the type, context, and impact of the transition (Schlossberg, 1984). Three types of transitions have been identified as: anticipated, occurring predictably; unanticipated, or occurring unpredictably or unscheduled; and nonevent, those expected but do not actually occur (Schlossberg, 1984). Context “refers to one’s relationship to the transition (personal, interpersonal, community); setting in which transition occurs (self, family, friends, work, health, economics)” (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 47). “For an individual undergoing a transition, it is not the event or nonevent that is most important but its impact, that is the degree to which the transition alters his or her daily life” (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 52).

In order to cope with the transition in the moving through phase, Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) introduced the 4S’s: situation, self, support and strategies as a way to take stock of one’s resources.

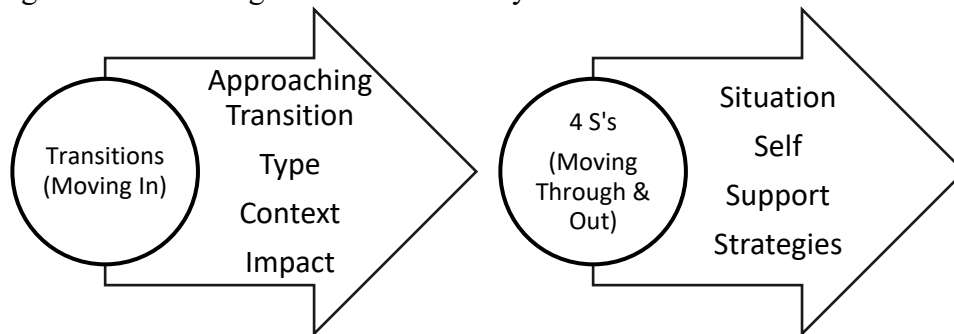
Situation refers to how one views the transition.

Self refers to an individual’s personal characteristics.

Support refers to the sources of external support available to assist the individual in the transition process.

Strategies refers to the coping methods one utilizes during the transition

Figure 1 Schlossberg's Transition Theory



This study was concerned with internal vertical transfer students transferring from their program through an embedded two-year institution within a four-year institution leading to their retention and earning a baccalaureate degree. Applying Schlossberg's transition theory to an examination of the 4 S's to internal vertical transfer students experiencing the transition of moving in, moving through, and moving out of the transfer process towards baccalaureate degree attainment may include the following:

Situation: Academic preparation; was the student admitted to the two-year program based on academic preparation such as test scores, or did the student choose the two-year program although academically prepared to enter the four-year degree program?

Self: What are a student's feelings towards beginning in the two-year program? Is the student feeling like a failure because he/she was not able to start in a four-year program as they had wanted to or are they confident in their decision to start in the two-year program as a way to save money?

Supports: Do students perceive they are receiving adequate support and who are those supports such as the school officials, for instance, are the faculty as willing to work with them if they know the student is or was in a two-year program?

Strategies: Internal transfer students may use coping strategies that help them identify their supports, such as working closely with their advisor; or if they feel like they will be treated differently if it is known that they are officially enrolled in a two-year program, they may refrain from identifying their academic program in class or amongst their peers. Clearly, Schlossberg's transition theory is an appropriate framework to examine internal vertical transfer student experiences given the process of moving into the institution through the embedded two-year program, moving through the program and into the four-year program at the parent institution, and moving out of the four-year program through baccalaureate degree attainment.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

A second framework, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory

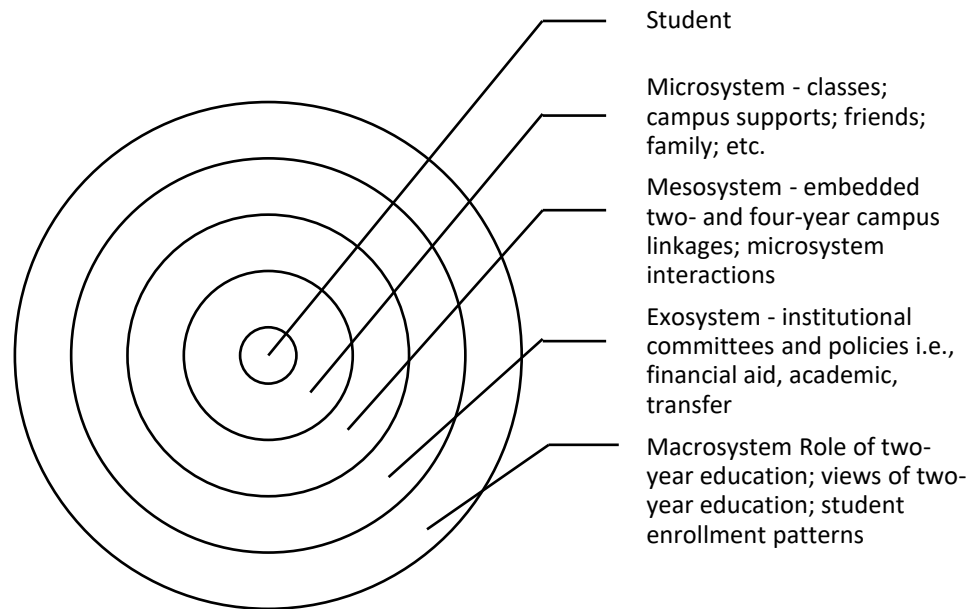
involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (p. 21).

The model identified as the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) Model postulates that the experiences students go through are interdependent and reciprocal in nature within the ecological systems wherein students both impact and are impacted by their environments. The model is most beneficial in gaining an understanding of how "an individual's characteristics (person) mutually shape relationships (process) with people and objects in the environment (context) over time" (Renn & Reason, 2013, p. 124). The concept of time is often referred to by Bronfenbrenner as the chronosystem. The chronosystem consists of three meanings "the times in which one lives, the timing of an event in an

individual's life, and changes in the person and context over time" (Renn & Reason, 2013, p. 130). The chronosystem of internal transfer students changes over time and may coincide not only with their personal characteristics, such as the age they enter college, but also the attitudes of society and the institutions towards two-year education and transfer. Therefore, merging person, process (context) and time creates a dynamic interrelation that impacts internal transfer student development.

Related to Schlossberg's Transition Theory, the ecological systems theory stipulates that development cannot occur without taking into consideration how individual transfer student characteristics interact with and affect the processes and relationships that occur in their environment and ultimately their individual development and retention in their four-year degree. Although the two frameworks are similar in nature and provide sound structure to the study, the addition of the ecological systems approach provides greater context: "the natural, intellectual, relational, and human-built environments in which students live, learn, and work" (Renn & Reason, 2013, p. 126) specific to transfer students within an embedded two-year college as they transition to their degree at the four-year institution. This environmental system or context, identified by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as the ecological environment, consists of a nested arrangement of structures referred to as the "micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems" (p. 22).

Figure 2 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System in the Context of an Embedded Two- and Four-year Institution



Microsystems The microsystem consists of the “activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). Of significance, is the concept experience. Within Bronfenbrenner’s theory experience consists of the objective properties of the environment, as well as the perceptions of the individuals as they interact with the properties within the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For college students, this may include, family, roommates, peers, the classroom environment, the workplace environment, etc. College transfer students may experience microsystems that appear different from traditional college students and will experience two separate transfer microsystem experiences; one as a student at the community college and again post-transfer at the baccalaureate institution. Consequently, internal transfer students, will

experience a transfer microsystem that will look significantly different in the sense that they will be experiencing both their two-year and four-year institutional environments concurrently. For example, traditional college transfer students may encounter positive interactions and relationships with their peers as they enter the community college environment due to shared characteristics, and negative peer interactions at the baccalaureate institution post-transfer, whereas, students choosing to begin in an embedded two-year program may encounter negative relationships based on the misperceived idea that they are not academically prepared to be enrolled in the same classes as their traditional four-year enrolled peers from the beginning and have those interactions continue upon their transition to their four-year degree programs.

Mesosystems The second level, or mesosystems, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979) contain “the interrelations of two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates” (p. 25). The mesosystem of college students changes as students move in and between microsystems. Additional developmental possibilities are created either through interrelated or conflicting interactions between microsystems. The mesosystem of transfer students may include conflicting microsystems financial resources and cost of a four-year education; credits earned at the community college and accepted by and applied to the four-year degree (Packard, Gagnon, & Senas, 2012). The mesosystem for internal transfer students may contain similar conflicts between microsystems however, those conflicts may be occurring concurrently as a two-year student on a four-year campus.

Exosystems Contained within the exosystem are the micro- and mesosystems which may be impacted by the components of the exosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to the exosystem as having “one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (p. 25). In a collegial context, the exosystem would include those policies, policy makers and committees that have an impact on and may be impacted by students (Evans et al., 2010). In some instances, conflict may arise between the exosystem and the mesosystem. Poch (2005) found tensions between the exosystem and mesosystems, specifically related to transfer students. “Transfer students complained about the administration and the institutional structure. They complained that the credits did not transfer correctly, that classes needed to be retaken, that preparation for transfer was not good” (p. 255). Although the exosystem for internal transfer students will contain the institutional policies, policy makers and the various committees, one policy in particular; the change of major/GPA policy for students currently follows the external transfer policy rather than the policy for students changing their majors. The GPA policy for all transfers regardless of internal or external resets to zero upon entry into a four-year degree program whereas students who are changing majors from a four-year to another four-year program keep their GPA. While the GPA policy is the same for all transfer students, the process is different. Internal transfer students complete the same change of major form just like students changing from one major to another whereas external transfer students must complete the admission application and go through the entire transfer process.

Macrosystems The macrosystem refers to “consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). Encompassing the other systems, the macrosystem represents the historical, cultural, and social forces that influence a student’s perceptions of the world (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Evans et al., 2010; Renn & Arnold, 2003). Vertical transfer students enter higher education through the community college pipeline for a variety reason. Students often identify economic factors, and familial obligations and expectations as reasons for beginning at a community college (Packard et al., 2012). Additionally, historical trends representing the lack of transfer student retention and success may influence transfer student transitions. Comparable assumptions can be made concerning internal transfer students around their motivation for beginning in a two-year program at the embedded institution.

A phenomenological analysis explored the lived experiences of internal vertical transfer students enabling this study to describe and interpret the meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of factors identified by participants contributing to their retention and success. Consequently, both Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory are relevant frameworks through which to consider the literature and data collected in this study. Both theories describe the internal characteristics and institutional factors that support internal vertical transfer students, providing an essential perspective. Combining the two theoretical frameworks allowed

for a greater exploration of the context of student transfer within an embedded two- and four-year institutional structure through an emphasis on the ecology of the system.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to explore the experiences of internal vertical transfer students who transfer to four-year programs at the parent institution in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. Using phenomenological methodology allowed for the exploration of student perspectives and lived experiences during the course of the transfer process through their individual stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Students' narratives provided insight into the transfer process and their persistence due to or despite factors related to their personal backgrounds and those encountered at both the embedded two-year and parent four-year institution. A qualitative approach provided an awareness into the differences in perspectives between internal transfer students who were required to begin in a two-year program and internal transfer students who chose to begin in a two-year program with regards to their lived experiences.

Although the transfer student population at this institution consists of both external and internal transfer students, the focus is on the internal vertical transfer student population. The sample consisted of internal transfer students, divided into two groups: those who were required to begin in a two-year program due to academic deficiencies, and those who, while academically eligible to begin in their four-year program chose to begin in a two-year program. All participants have been in their four-year degree program at least one semester with some scheduled to graduate at the conclusion of the current semester when the interviews took place. Data was collected through individual semi-

structured interviews. Follow-up questions and interview transcripts were emailed to participants for clarification and accuracy. Participants were asked to complete a brief demographic survey at the conclusion of the initial interview.

Operational Definitions

The identification of key terms with their operational definitions is an integral part of the research process. Providing meanings for terms used throughout the study provide context and understanding for both the study and the findings.

Embedded two-year college: Also known as the child institution, these institutions are linked to the main administrative institution responsible for all data reporting to IPEDS (NCES, 2006). Additionally, the two-year college is considered another college within the institution. In this instance, it is one of four colleges at the institution and houses the transfer program as well as the two-year career and technical education programs and will be referred to as South Campus throughout this study.

Transfer: The often complex process of students moving between institutions of higher education. Students may move horizontally between two-year institutions or four-year institutions, vertically from two-year institutions to four-year institutions, and through reverse transfer from a four-year institution to a two-year institution.

External transfer students: In general, the term transfer student is used to identify any student that moves credits and enrolls at a different institution. For this study, external transfer students are those students who transfer into the four-year institution in this study from a separate two-year or four-year institution.

Internal vertical transfer students: Defined as those transfer students currently enrolled in a four-year program at the parent institution that have transitioned from the embedded two-year institution.

Parent four-year institution: “the administration unit or institution in a multi-institutional system through which all the system’s institutions, branches, and programs are linked” (NCES, 2006). For the purpose of this study, the parent four-year institution refers to North Campus.

Persistence: In this study, persistence is defined as the continuation through the transfer process working towards a baccalaureate degree beyond their time as students enrolled in their two-year program.

Assumptions

A phenomenological study describes “the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). Philosophical assumptions for phenomenological research rely on common standards: “the study of the lived experiences of persons, the view that these experiences are conscious (van Manen, 2014), and the development of descriptions of the essences of these experiences, not explanations or analyses (Moustakas, 1994)” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). Additionally, the following assumptions were made regarding this study:

- The participants provided honest representations of their experiences.
- The researcher bridled her experience as much as possible taking the time to identify and remain aware of potential bias throughout the study.

- Within a social constructivist approach and the due to utilization of a phenomenological methodology, I recognize that my positionality may not have allowed for impartiality in interpretation of the findings however, to the best of my ability, findings were presented without bias.
- Using a social constructivist approach, multiple meanings of the internal transfer phenomenon were constructed through the lived experiences of the participants.

Limitations and Delimitations

I am interested in the exploration of the lived experiences of students identified as internal transfer who began at an embedded two-year college within a four-year university. Specifically, this phenomenon was explored through the utilization of an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The nature of IPA is individuals making sense of their lived experiences. In essence, “the meaning given to an experience can thus be viewed as an actual representation of the experience” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 33). In this study, IPA provided the opportunity understand what it was like for students to live the internal transfer experience rather than just their response to it. My positionality within the study is a critical component of IPA due to double hermeneutics element of this approach. Double hermeneutics allowed both the students and I to look at the same phenomena from different angles (Smith et al., 2009). The ability to capture multiple interpretations of the experiences between the students and I as the transfer advisor, enabled a deeper understanding of the internal vertical transfer process.

Additionally, the use of a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm supported my role as researcher. The aim of the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm is the gained

understanding of a phenomenon between the researcher and the students through co-constructed meanings around shared interactive conversations and interpretations by way of reflection (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). Furthermore, I as the researcher am a part of not only the institutional setting but the transfer process as required by not only phenomenological research (van Manen, 2016) but also to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993; Vagle, 2018). I employed semi-structured, in-depth interviews with students as the main source of data collection. The use of open-ended questions allowed the participants to share their stories and reflect on their experiences. Additionally, institutional and state transfer policies will be examined to provide additional understanding and triangulation.

Given the phenomenological nature of the study, the focus was on the shared experience of internal vertical transfer students between an embedded two-year college and the parent four-year institution, as such there were several limitations. First, a significant limitation in the study was the focus on internal vertical transfer students from the embedded two-year college. This criterion was set due to the unique nature of the experiences this specific population of transfer students therefore, deliberate exclusion of the external population of transfer students at the four-year institution may have resulted in findings that may not be applicable to an external transfer student population who are experiencing the four-year institution for the first time upon transfer. Second, data collection occurred at one institution with specific parameters. The information gathered cannot be assumed to be generalizable to other institutions, including other four-year institutions with two-year programs. Third, given the qualitative design of the study,

students were asked to provide information that may be personal and difficult to share and a number of the participants were advised previously by me while they were enrolled in their two-year program, consequently, there is a possibility that they may not have been completely honest when providing their responses during the interviews. Any threats to validity due to reactivity was addressed within the researcher statement of positionality. Finally, the initial interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes, and although additional information and clarity was gained through email, the time and need to conduct follow-up through email may have limited the ability of the researcher to really understand a participant's transfer experience.

Summary

The lived experiences of transfer students impact their retention and success at their four-year institutions. Considering the diverse populations of transfer students and their diverse needs, identifying institutional supports can be difficult. This study focused on only one population of transfer students, thereby, identifying topics that are specific to internal vertical transfer students from embedded two-year colleges.

While chapter one provided a preliminary overview of the issues related to transfer student retention and introduced the internal vertical transfer student population, Chapter two delved into the literature focused on transfer students as it related to the decision to begin at a two-year college, institutional resources, the transfer process, and post-transfer retention. Chapter three provided the methodological outline for the study. Unlike the synopsis provided in chapter one, chapter three provided a significant amount of detail addressing the research questions as well as the design of the phenomenological

study intended to examine and understand the lived experiences of internal vertical transfer students. Chapter three included the participant selection process, data collection and coding process, the role of the researcher, and finally the methods of achieving authenticity, trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability. Chapter four contained the study findings. Given the qualitative nature of the study, the findings are exhibited through participant narratives and quotes. In addition, a biographical passage was included for each participant providing background information and context for their transfer experiences. Chapter five considered the themes identified in the data coding process as they associate with the participants, the research questions, conceptual framework and the literature. Implications and areas needing further investigation are also presented.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The qualitative design of this phenomenological study offered an opportunity to expand the understanding of the transfer process and transfer student experiences through the exploration of the lived transfer experiences of internal vertical transfer students. This study examined factors related to transfer student persistence post-transfer, such as but not limited to academic and social experiences, support services, financial considerations, and policies. The review of the literature encompassed a variety of interrelated studies, within four broad areas, 1) systemic and environmental factors related to transfer; 2) student transfer capital; 3) transfer student academic and social adjustment post-transfer as they relate to transfer student persistence and degree completion; and lastly, 4) the use of the identified theoretical perspectives as they relate to transfer students within the literature. Section one included statewide student transfer policies and institutional response to student transfer. Section two covered the characteristics students bring with them in the transfer process and those developed as they navigate the transfer process that support bachelor's degree completion. Section three covered literature specifically related to transfer student academic and social adjustment post-transfer. Section four examined how previous studies have incorporated Schlossberg's transition theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as an approach to understanding transfer students. The review of the literature concluded with a summary section highlighting the relationships between the elements and identification of areas requiring further investigation.

Systemic and Environmental Factors

Section one of the literature review incorporated those factors that are part of the larger exosystem of higher education comprising statewide governance and policies as well as those institutional factors that make up the mesosystem of the education environment and microsystem specific to college student transfer. The section opened with a history of the community college including the two-year structure of the western state where the study was conducted; and student enrollment patterns. The second component reviewed literature specifically related to state mandated transfer policies. Finally, the literature addressed the institutional environmental factors and responses to transfer students.

History and Role of the Community College

Originally known as junior colleges, community colleges were established as extensions of local high schools (Cohen et al., 2014), providing college preparatory programs for area students in the early twentieth century. Since their establishment, students have utilized community colleges as the entry-point to a baccalaureate degree due to their close proximity to home and lower enrollment costs (Bok, 2013; Cohen et al., 2014; Thelin, 2011). It was only after World War II that the dual mission of junior colleges was created with the establishment of technical and vocational education programs driven by local workforce needs.

Due to their low-cost of attendance, geographical proximity to home (Cummins, 2015; Jabbar, Sánchez, & Epstein, 2017), and the ability to provide developmental education to students (Bahr, Jackson, Jon, Oster, & Gross, 2016), community colleges

have become an entry point for students who otherwise would likely not enroll in higher education (Starobin, Jackson Smith, & Santos Laanan, 2016; Wang, 2012, 2017).

Irrespective of the reason students choose to enroll, the community college is often their first chance for a college education. As of 2015, over 6.2 million students were enrolled at public two-year institutions, and of those, over half were underrepresented ethnic and racial populations, and over half at 3.6 million were female (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Given the dual and often competing goals of two-year institutions: 1) transferring students and 2) preparing students for the workforce; the teaching pedagogies of the two-year faculty are reflective of their backgrounds as well as those of the students (Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006; de la Torre Jr. & Wells, 2014; Montague, 2012). The workforce development mission of the community college provides education and training needed to prepare students to go to work while also providing skills in critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006) whereas, the transfer mission provides the education and skills necessary to successfully transfer into and complete a baccalaureate degree. In view of competing goals, Fosnacht, McCormick, Nailos, and Ribera (2015) state, “the diversity and complexity of America’s higher education system virtually necessitates that students receive a wide variety of advice from informed persons before and after matriculating to college” (p. 12). Career education programs prepare students for specific occupations by providing technical knowledge and skills (Hirschy, Bremer, & Castellano, 2011). Therefore, faculty in career education programs provide career related activities in the classroom and academic advising.

Accordingly, faculty working with transfer students will provide guidance specific to the transfer process through activities such as academic advising.

The Two- and Four-year Institutional Relationship

A dynamic relationship exists between two- and four-year institutions (Forster-Cox, Corran, Collins, Gallegos, & Rao, 2016). The differing levels of education and the various backgrounds of both two- and four-year faculty often establishes a level of elitism that can make student transfer more difficult. To a large extent, “the faculty who are ultimately responsible for determining the content, focus, and desired outcomes of the curriculum, and therefore are in the best position to determine equivalency” (O'Meara, Hall, & Carmichael, 2007, p. 15) fostered issues around which programs, courses, teaching pedagogies, are the best between two- and four-year faculty. Senie (2016) pointed out the hierarchy in higher education with highly selective research institutions at the top, comprehensive master's level institutions in the middle and community colleges at the bottom.

The stigma that exists towards two-year education continues to serve as a barrier to student transfer. Senie (2016) found that state four-year institutions continue to maintain reluctance in recognizing the quality of education provided by community colleges. Often assumed to be less educated, students have expressed experiencing an environment post-transfer that is not engaging and in cases openly hostile and discriminatory towards two-year transfer students (Townley et al., 2013). While state-wide transfer policies can assist in developing clearer pathways that are easier for students to navigate, the policies do not eliminate the culture of elitism that continues

within the higher education system and as such it is left to the institutions to address the creation of a welcoming environment for transfer students.

State Transfer Articulation Policies

For many students, the transfer process serves as a hindrance to transfer. Specifically, the lack of clear and accurate information related to credit transfer, degree requirements, prerequisites and time to completion, and cost serve to impede successful transfer (Starobin, Jackson Smith, & Santos Laanan, 2016; Wang, 2012, 2017; Wang, Wickersham, & Sun, 2017). As a result of low transfer rates and institutional reliability in the acceptance of course credits, many states have developed statewide transfer policies and procedures, designed to enhance uniformity and consistency across institutions and systems (Bautsch, 2013; Ceresino Neault & Piland, 2014; Millard, 2014; Montague, 2012; Root, 2013). This western state has set guidelines regarding transfer which also allow the institutions some leeway in their interpretation and enactment on the individual campuses.

Public two- and four-year institutions are generally a part of a larger state governed higher education system. At least “23 states have been identified as having laws regarding articulation agreements; while another 23 states authorize articulation agreements through board or regents or state agency policies, or through institutional agreements” (Bautsch, 2013, p. 2). Accordingly, while colleges and universities may have some freedom in how they are enacted, the institutions must adhere to policies as written by their state governing bodies of higher education. Often these policies also include those directed at in-state student transfer. Currently, state directed transfer

policies include common course numbering systems throughout the state higher education system; identified general education core accepted by all institutions; and facilitated direct vertical transfer of a two-year degree to a four-year university (Bautsch, 2013). Statewide transfer policies ultimately help both the student and the state. Students are able to transfer between state institutions more efficiently thereby saving states money in tuition subsidies (Bautsch, 2013).

Articulation Also referred to as 2+2 programs in some states or institutions, articulation agreements are often the most encompassing of statewide transfer policies. Articulation policies are designed to align two- and four-year curricula to eliminate the credit loss during transfer and decrease the time and cost of baccalaureate degree completion (Bers, 2013; de la Torre Jr. & Wells, 2014; Garcia Falconetti, 2008; O'Meara et al., 2007; Roksa, 2009; Roksa & Keith, 2008; Root, 2013; Senie, 2016; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). To a large extent, articulation policies guarantee students awarded a two-year associate degree the ability to transfer all of their earned credits to the four-year institution, entering as an upper classman, usually junior standing, having met all of the general education requirements for the four-year institution.

While articulation policies are the most comprehensive, they can also be the most confusing for students. Articulation policies lack the flexibility necessary to support students who enter a two-year institution undecided, therefore, students can actually end up increasing their time and cost to baccalaureate degree completion if they are not on the correct pathway from the beginning (Roksa & Keith, 2008). Furthermore, while articulation policies allow admission to the institution, they may not guarantee admission

into a specific program, therefore, students may be admitted to a four-year institution only to be shut-out of their intended four-year degree program with the credits counting towards electives rather than program-specific coursework (Hodara, Martinez-Wenzl, Stevens, & Mazzeo, 2017). Given the identified limitations it is important that transfer students have access to and clear understanding of the institutional interpretation and implementation of articulation policies.

The state's articulation policies are governed by a Board of Regents for the state's higher education system however, not all institutions are required to follow the policies and there is some leeway into interpretation and implementation (Regents, 2006, 2007, 2013). For instance, there are two transfer policies that depending on how they are interpreted conflict. Whereas the other four-year institutions with embedded two-year institutions employ a single transcript, the policy loophole has allowed the institution identified in this study to continue to utilize separate transcripts for students at the two- and four-year levels. In this capacity, the two-year students are considered transfer students in the transition to the four-year programs and their GPA resets to zero similar to external transfer students entering from other institutions. Internal transfer students often do not realize this is the case until they run into issues post-transfer.

Enrollment Patterns

Nationally, 80% of students entering two-year institutions intend to transfer to a four-year baccalaureate degree program (Jenkins & Fink, 2015), yet of those students only 40% persist to a baccalaureate degree (National Student Clearinghouse, 2017). It should be recognized that the traditional linear matriculation route to a baccalaureate

degree is no longer the standard, as more students begin their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree through nontraditional pathways (Borden, 2004). In pursuit of a four-year degree, more than one-half of college students attend more than one institution (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). The growth in the number of community colleges over the last several decades has generated a wider array of entry points for students seeking access to four-year degree programs. The U.S. Department of Education (2017), reported over 6.2 million students enrolled at public two-year institutions in 2015. With the increased number of access points to a baccalaureate degree available to students, the variety of transfer patterns has increased. According to Wassmer, Moore, and Shulock (2004), there are several patterns of transfer, including what is referred to as vertical transfer, where students complete transition from a two- year to a four-year institution, perhaps upon completion of an Associate's degree, or prior to associate's degree completion. Multiple studies have shown transferring with an Associate's degree increases the likelihood of baccalaureate degree completion, as opposed to transferring prior to associate's degree completion (Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Wang, 2012; Wang, Lee, et al., 2017).

Additional transfer patterns include reverse transfer, horizontal transfer and swirling. Reverse transfer is another type of transfer where students transition from a four-year program or institution to a two-year program or institution. For many students, reverse transfer becomes an option when there is a need for remediation or for financial purposes. Horizontal transfer is the pathway students pursue when transitioning from one two-year or four-year institution to another two-year or four-year institution at the same level. Swirling enrollment is where students attend a number of institutions without a

specific goal or pathway (Goldrick-Rab, 2006). Finally, are students who are considered “double-reverse transfer students” (Coley, 2000, p. 23). Double-reverse transfer students begin at a two-year institution, transfer to a baccalaureate institution and then transfer back to a two-year institution. In this western state, the number of students without college credentials necessitated a push for the creation of programs designed to increase the number of students entering the state higher education pipeline. In doing so, the focus was directed at two-year institutions and transferability (Unknown, 2018). Although not as common, reverse transfer, swirling and double-reverse transfer enrollment patterns occur between embedded two-year and the parent four-year institutions.

Such nontraditional enrollment patterns may negatively impact credit transfer between the institutions leading to increased costs and time to baccalaureate degree completion and further cultivating negative attitudes towards transfer students at four-year institutions. Articulation agreements were discussed previously as they relate specifically to vertical transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution. They are just as crucial to student success when examined in the context of such nontraditional enrollment patterns as swirling, reverse and horizontal transfer. In their review of 34 state-level articulation agreements Ignash and Townsend (2000) found “only 21 states addressed articulation among two-year colleges, 22 among four-year colleges, and 19 from four-year colleges to community colleges” (p. 6). In this western state, while articulation agreements continue to focus more on transfer degree completion, the use of common course numbering has been beneficial to both institutions and students in providing additional clarification regarding credit transfer specifically in the framework of general

education courses. The use of common course numbering is supported by Gross and Goldhaber (2009) who suggest common course numbering creates additional transfer course parity amongst statewide institutions, specifically between two- and four-year institutions. In addition, the reporting structure of the state's university system has provided the research universities the opportunity to work with their regional and two-year colleges to develop course-taking patterns for students that promotes degree completion through seamless transfer or enrollment at multiple institutions at one time, within the guidelines of state policies. Unfortunately, the institution examined in this study is not part of this system and as such, credit mobility between even the embedded college and the parent institution remains an issue.

Institutional Factors

A number of institutional factors influencing transfer student retention and success have been identified in the literature. A key factor which was addressed previously was the creation and implementation of clear transfer policies addressing credit transfer. Additional factors include the establishment of a transfer culture; and faculty/staff and student interactions including advising, and research opportunities; orientation programs; and financial barriers specific to transfer students.

Transfer Culture For most four-year institutions, transfer students represent a small percentage of the total student population but they are an important group that should not be overlooked. The success of transfer students is directly related the transfer culture of the institution they are transferring to. Institutional transfer culture has been

defined by Jain et al. (2011) as the “ institutional commitment by a four-year college or university to provide the support needed for students to transfer successfully - that is, to navigate the community college, take the appropriate coursework, apply, enroll, and successfully earn a baccalaureate degree in a timely manner” (p. 237). The transfer culture of the institution dictates how institutions respond to the barriers transfer students face throughout the transfer process. Areas specific to a strong institutional transfer culture are prioritizing transfer students, providing programs and resources in the areas of orientation and advising specific to transfer students, financial aid and academic support that present opportunities for transfer students to achieve at high-academic levels, acknowledgement of transfer capital and the lived experiences transfer students bring to the four-year institution post-transfer, and including transfer students in assessment, evaluation and institutional accountability measures (Dowd, 2012; Jain et al., 2011; Packard, 2012; Wang, Wickersham, & Sun, 2017; Zamani, 2001).

Academic Advising In addition to the creation of a transfer culture, the student-faculty interactions are a necessary component in the retention and success of transfer students; specifically, the area of academic advising. According to Fosnacht et al. (2015), “the diversity and complexity of America’s higher education system virtually necessitates that students receive a wide variety of advice from informed persons before and after matriculating to college” (p. 12). For all students, academic advising provides the roadmap needed to successfully navigate the higher education academic and institutional environments. Without effective academic advising, transfer students are often left trying

to plot their own courses through the complex system of higher education, particularly throughout the transfer process.

Academic advising is critical to transfer student success in terms of student persistence, grades, and intentions, and as such, institutions need to assess the effectiveness of advising practices (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). According to Wiseman and Messitt (2010), “a strong advising program can provide the academic support needed to empower students and contribute to their academic success” (p. 35). At both the community college and four-year institution level, institutions are encouraged to implement policies and practices that emphasize the importance of student contact with academic advisors (Jorstad, Starobin, Chen, & Kollasch, 2017). For transfer students, establishing connections with faculty at the four-year institution may be challenging and occur less frequently which further enhances the need to establish robust academic advising practices with their program faculty (Lee & Schneider, 2018; Nunez & Yoshimi, 2016). Faculty conducted academic advising offers the ability to provide accurate curricular information as well as openings to develop mentoring type relationships with transfer students who are often junior and senior level.

Research Opportunities Although the literature clearly establishes the need to provide academic advising as a means of developing faculty connections, another approach in establishing the student-faculty connection is through undergraduate research opportunities, especially in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) programs. The capabilities to participate in undergraduate research is often difficult for students enrolled in community colleges given the lack of available research projects

however, for students enrolled at an embedded two-year college, research opportunities may be greater. Eagan Jr et al. (2013), Hurtado, Cabrera, Lin, Arellano, and Espinosa (2009), and Laanan, Starobin, and Eggleston (2010) found that participation in undergraduate research had a positive impact on student success and retention, especially for underrepresented student populations. Along with developing relationships with faculty, research activities have been found to promote student sense of belonging and academic confidence among transfer students (Lopez & Jones, 2017; Wang, 2017; Wang, Chan, Soffa, & Nachman, 2017). The literature provides significant insight into the importance of research on transfer student retention specific to transfer students from stand-alone community colleges, who experience research opportunities post-transfer. The question remains, if the same is found among internal transfer students from embedded institutions who may have research opportunities much earlier and prior to transfer.

Orientation. Access to institutional information comes in a variety of forms yet, the best introduction to an institution is often through an orientation program. The problem with most orientation programs is absence of an emphasis on transfer student concerns. Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) found that four-year institutions are “generally concerned with the first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students” (p. 403) as a result of reporting and funding interests. Essentially, because transfer students are not included in most tracking measures for retention and completion rates, transfer student specific needs are often not addressed. Additionally, because transfer students have previously experienced the first-time college experience, institutions often assume that they do not

require the same level of support in making the transition to the four-year institution. Granted transfer students do enter with some higher education experience however, Percival et al. (2016); Townsend and Wilson (2006) found that transfer students require information specific to their new institutions, regardless of the type or size of institution students are coming from. In the case of internal transfer students, Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) observed that “change-of-campus students are treated as students who are switching majors” (p. 404). Internal transfer students then, are not provided information critical to their success because the institution no longer views them as transfer students in the traditional sense although they are working with new advisors, encounter a higher cost of attendance, and in the case of this western university, experience a GPA reset similar to external transfer students. Orientation or transition programs highlighting the topics important to both internal and external transfer students are needed to support transfer student success not unlike first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen on their four-year campuses.

Financial barriers The rising cost of a college education has led many students to begin their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree at a community college. Together with the cost of attending a four-year institution, transfer students experience challenges with financial aid including “sticker shock” with the cost of the upper-level course work at the four year institution as well as the lack of financial resources, specifically scholarships (Dowd, 2012). Many students transfer with familial obligations often requiring financial support which further impacts their ability to afford the cost of a four-year degree. Previous studies have identified the need for increased financial support from the four-

year institutions in the form of specific aid packages that include transfer scholarships and grants (Alexander, García, González, Grimes, & O'Brien, 2007; Wang, Lee, et al., 2017). The cost of higher education can be of significant impact to most college students. For transfer students, the cost can come with much greater risks financially whether they begin at a stand-alone community college or as a student within an embedded two-year institution. Regardless of the transfer type, the research is clear, transfer students should be given the same opportunities to scholarships as traditional first-time freshmen at their four-year institution.

Student Transfer Capital

Previous research has established the influence of race/ethnicity, marital and parenting status, socioeconomic status, and first-generation student status on student transfer intent (Kurlaender, 2006; Wang, Chan, et al., 2017). Furthermore, life experiences shape how students think about college and the transfer process, as well as how they engage socially and academically on the community college and university campuses (Myers, Starobin, Chen, Baul, & Kollasch, 2015; Wickersham & Wang, 2016). Understanding student background characteristics and the development of transfer capital, provides insight into the individual factors students have or need to gain in order to effectively move through the vertical transfer process.

Student transfer capital refers to the knowledge and skills acquired that will assist in navigating the vertical transfer process to a baccalaureate institution (Laanan, 2006). Student transfer capital encompasses the coping mechanisms, learning and study skills, motivation and self-efficacy students need to flourish socially, psychologically and

academically throughout the transfer process in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. Students begin developing transfer capital at the community college through advising experiences, interactions with faculty, staff and peers, and social and academic engagement activities. On the other hand, Hodara et al. (2017) argued that building transfer capital should begin at the high school level during college counseling sessions. The more transfer capital a student acquires, the more likely the student is to transition through the transfer process and adjust academically and socially at the four-year institution.

Transfer student capital has been positively associated with the persistence and retention of students post-transfer. In a study of nontraditional transfer students, Rosenberg (2016) found that the more transfer student capital students accumulate, the more likely students are to complete the transfer process and persist to baccalaureate degree completion. Expanding the research to include nontraditional students demonstrated the need for institutions to develop programs and services that assisted more mature students in acquiring transfer student capital.

Mobley and Brawner (2018) focused on the transfer student capital components of academic counseling and experiences with faculty in their study of first-generation engineering transfer students. Utilizing a qualitative approach to the study of transfer student experiences, participants identified encounters that supported their success as well as challenges that had to be overcome. Specifically, advising experiences at both community colleges and four-year institutions were viewed as negative and students felt they had to rely on their ability to “work things out on their own” (Mobley & Brawner,

2018, p. 14) indicating a need for institutions to place greater emphasis on the development of advising programs that build on students' motivation and increase transfer student capital.

Academic Adjustment

While social adjustment is important to retention, academic adjustment has been found to be of greater importance to transfer students. Lester, Brown Leonard, and Mathias (2013); Nunez and Yoshimi (2016) found that transfer students tend to develop their sense of belonging more through academic engagement than their peers who began at the baccalaureate institution. The approachability of faculty (Santos Laanan, 2007) in addition to academic activities that provide active learning experiences, collaboration with peers, and mentoring opportunities with faculty enhance academic adjustment (Chan & Wang, 2016; Lester et al., 2013).

Coursework completed at the community college was a significant factor in academic adjustment at the baccalaureate institution. Bahr et al. (2016) found that entry level in courses such as math, chemistry and physics were key predictors of student retention and advancement in STEM programs. Specifically, the need to complete developmental coursework in mathematics not only created a barrier based on time and money but led to feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy regarding academic abilities for many students at both the community college and post-transfer at their baccalaureate institution (Crisp & Delgado, 2014; Packard, 2012; Wang, 2012, 2017; Wang, Chan, et al., 2017).

The research also found that students felt that the community college had not adequately prepared them for the rigor of the baccalaureate institutions leading to what is known as transfer shock. Townsend (1995) defined transfer shock as the temporary dip in GPA and academic performance during the initial year post-transfer at the baccalaureate institution. Factors contributing to transfer shock were class size, the expected academic work load, institutional mission and culture focused on the retention of traditional students and the competitive nature of their peers that transfer students were unprepared to encounter at the baccalaureate institution (Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf, & Santos Laanan, 2013; Santos Laanan, 2007; Townsend, 1995, 2008). Stronger collaboration between community colleges and baccalaureate institutions through specific transfer oriented interactions and engagement with institutional agents may provide the information and preparation students need to avoid transfer shock (Wang, Chan, et al., 2017).

Social Adjustment

The college environment can often be intimidating not only academically but also socially. Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) identify “becoming integrated into the social life of college, forming a support network, and managing new social freedoms” (p. 281) as important elements of social adjustment. Assisting in the adjustment are student interactions with their peers and informal contact with their faculty. These interactions occur through social events, activities, clubs and student organizations often very early in their college career. Traditionally, students are introduced to a variety of social experiences through on-campus living, as well as through orientation and first-year experience programs. Such programming is designed to create positive relationships early

in students' college lives which assist in overcoming negative incidents while in college (Mayhew et al., 2016). Conversely, transfer students arrive on campus later than their class-standing counterparts and in general live off-campus thereby encountering difficulties establishing positive peer relationships (Chrystal et al., 2013; Núñez, 2014; Wang, 2009) and often have additional responsibilities such as work and family obligations that can hinder their ability to engage socially unlike their peers who began as traditional students at the four-year institution (Wang & Wharton, 2006). As stated previously, the utilization of orientation programs specific to transfer students can help alleviate some but not all social engagement issues.

The development of a sense of belonging is integral to student retention and success (Tinto, 2017). Transfer students often encounter feelings of social isolation which delays the development of their sense of belonging upon transferring. Transfer students frequently transfer with high expectations around social and academic engagement only to be met with what would be considered hostile transfer environments (Townley et al., 2013). In particular, the literature identified transfer student perceptions of four-year campuses as “unwelcoming, faculty and advisors as unsupportive, classroom atmosphere as chilly and peers as overcompetitive and unfriendly” (Jackson, Starobin, & Santos Laanan, 2013, p. 71). Ultimately, transfer students who feel more social adjusted with a greater sense of belonging are more motivated and committed to their academic success (Marra, Tsai, Bogue, & Landa Pytel, 2015; Townley et al., 2013).

Theoretical Frameworks in Literature

The review of literature identified several studies applying Schlossberg's transition theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach to the examination of transfer student retention. Transfer students experience transitions and interactions as part of the transfer process and in their attainment of a baccalaureate degree. Applied in the research, both theoretical frameworks provide the opportunity to investigate how individual transfer student characteristics interact with environmental factors to adjust socially and academically throughout the transfer process. In doing so, the literature provides opportunities to further advance the understanding of transfer student needs and experiences in order to develop programs that increase transfer student retention and success.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

All too frequently, the use of student development theories focuses on traditional college students with the expectation that they will react similarly to similar events or situations. Schlossberg's Transition Theory operationalizes the notion of variability among individuals who are sharing the same or similar experiences identified as transitions (Schlossberg, 1984). Originally intended to counsel adults in transition, Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) applied the theory to college students. As such, a significant amount of literature applying transition theory focuses on the initial transition from high school to college and then from college to their adult careers.

More recently, Schlossberg's transition theory is being applied in the literature concentrated on transfer student transitions in attempts to understand transfer student

experiences and to identify institutional practices that should be included as part of transfer programs. Unlike traditional four-year degree seeking college students entering and remaining at one institution throughout their academic career, transfer students experience multiple transitions. Having already experienced the transition from high school to college, students in the process of transferring, experience yet another transition as they move into their four-year degree at a baccalaureate institution.

Two studies identified in the literature utilized a quantitative approach: Luo, Williams, and Vieweg (2007) examined the interactive factors influencing the first-year retention of transfer students post-transfer; while Lakin and Elliott (2016) included Schlossberg's transition theory in their analysis of transfer shock and its impact on STEM enrollment and persistence. Each of the studies addressed the 4S's of transition theory with an emphasis on self and supports. Both studies generalized their findings to student characteristics and institutional interactions that contributed significantly to the likelihood of academic and social adjustment both during and after the transfer transition. The support guidelines identified related to supports applicable to internal transfer students are advising, scholarships and financial aid, faculty and peer engagement, and curricular pathways. Additionally, the studies identified as a limitation the lack of complete data such as student background characteristics. This study builds on the previous work by employing a qualitative methodology and focusing on the experiences of the internal transfer student population related to advising, scholarships and financial aid, faculty and peer engagement, and curricular pathways at both the embedded two-year college and parent four-year institution.

Efforts to understand transfer student transitions employing a qualitative methodology were observed in two studies aimed at specific populations of transfer students. The first, Flowers et al. (2014) applied transition theory to the understanding of male transfer student athletes' transition experiences. The findings indicate that the student athletes employed strong personal characteristics, as well as their coaches and others within the athletic department in making the transition (Flowers et al., 2014). The results suggest that for some transfer student subpopulations, such as athletes, there is a built-in support network that facilitates an easier transition, especially in transfer students' social adjustment. In the second study, as a component of a mixed-methods study, Rodriguez-Kiino (2013) examined a cohort of transfer students entering a teacher education program. Results from the study identified three institutional recommendations focused on assisting and supporting the academic adjustment of transfer students.

Research methodology aside, each of the studies addressed situation, self, support, and strategies essential to transition theory to varying degrees with emphasis clearly placed on self and supports. Recommendations stemming from the literature in terms of institutional supports highlight areas geared toward academic adjustment (e.g. advising, faculty engagement, scholarships and financial aid, and curricular pathways). Social adjustment, while not expressly addressed in the two quantitative studies, was inherent in the qualitative studies due to the exploration of subpopulations where faculty and peer support were more expected within the context of the situations

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Renn and Arnold (2003) encouraged the application of the ecological systems framework to the study of college students, specifically to gain an understanding of the influence and intersections of identity, experience and psycho-social influence that impact college student development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is appropriate in the exploration of transfer student experiences in order to understand the meanings students attach to the transfer transition. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), an ecological transition occurs whenever a person's position in the ecological environment is altered as the result of a change in role, setting, or both" (p. 26). In the case of transfer students, their transition begins with the process of leaving the community college for the baccalaureate institution. Within the ecological systems approach, it cannot be assumed that every transfer student will have the same experience and have the same development from the transfer process. Instead, development is individualized as students engage with the environment during the transfer process through the actions they take, and the relationships they establish. Development cannot be measured without considering the social context of the individual's life and interventions can occur through policies, curriculum and direct contexts. (Renn & Arnold, 2003).

Like Schlossberg's transition theory as well as other development theories, much of the literature is directed at traditional college students. Because ecological systems theory concentrates on the individual it is occurring in literature related to campus peer culture as it impacts underrepresented student populations, and first-generation college

students (Evans et al., 2010). More recently, ecological systems theory is being applied to the study of transfer student experiences in the literature although it appears to be limited.

In their analysis of the delay experiences of transfer students on the STEM pathway, Packard, Gagnon and Senas (2012) employed the ecological systems framework in their examination of the college environment, transfer policies and economic factors influencing transfer student progress. Delay experiences as identified by Packard et al. (2012) are those experiences that hinder or halt student progress along the transfer pathway. The findings identified three institutional elements contributing to student delays: dissatisfactory advising, curricular alignment between community colleges and baccalaureate institutions, and college resource limitations (Packard et al., 2012). While it is important for transfer students to develop transfer capital, it is clear that the baccalaureate institutions play an integral role in whether or not a student will successfully navigate the transfer process.

The second study identified in the literature examined time-to-degree completion of transfer students at institutions under new state-level accountability goals. According to Poch (2005), “the ecological model was one way to explore the interactions of students and institutions using student voices, their experiences, and their perceptions of time-to-degree” (p. 248). The application of the ecological model provided a visual representation of the interconnectedness of the policies, the institutions and the students. The outcomes indicated the transfer process is not isolated; institution policies and environment both impact and are impacted by transfer student perceptions regarding the transfer process and time-to-degree.

As stated previously, the application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory in the literature examining transfer student experiences appears to be limited. The two studies investigated transfer student perceptions regarding transfer with both identifying the significant role the baccalaureate institutions hold in the success and retention of transfer students. Of interest in both studies was the lack of emphasis the level of transfer capital the students developed prior to and throughout the transfer process that contributed to their progress.

Summary

There is a considerable amount of literature examining the barriers transfer students face in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. Both quantitative and qualitative studies have identified various institutional factors including credit transfer; cost and financial aid; and social and academic engagement opportunities that promote or hinder transfer student retention and success. While researchers have utilized a number of theories in an effort to gain an understanding of transfer student experiences, both Schlossberg's transition theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory appear to be relatively new lenses through which to examine transfer students' perceptions of the transfer process. Given the distinct transitions internal transfer students go through when moving from a two-year program at an embedded institution to a four-year degree program at the baccalaureate degree institution, both Schlossberg's transition theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory may be more applicable than traditional theories due in part to students dividing their time at both institutions while in their two-year program.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was the examination of the intricacies of the transfer process from a two-year embedded institution to the parent four-year institution. Specifically, this study explored factors related to retention such as internal transfer student characteristics including their reason for starting at the two-year program level, advising experiences, relationships with faculty and peers, coping styles, motivation, and their academic expectations. Institutional factors were examined, including academic support, financial aid and scholarships, information on the internal transfer process, research and internships. In addition, this study addressed the overarching problem of practice related directly to the retention and success of the institution's internal transfer student population.

The following research questions guide the study:

1. How do internal transfer students who started at a two-year college within a regional public institution describe their transfer experiences to their four-year programs?
2. How do these experiences differ between students who selected to start at the two-year institution and those who intended to start at the four-year but were placed into the two-year program?
3. What do internal transfer students believe the institution can do to support their retention?

The chapter identifies and explains the research methodology I utilized in the study. The research paradigm, the interpretive phenomenological analysis approach as

relevant to the study and researcher reflexivity are discussed. Additionally, site, sample and participant selection, data collection and data analysis are presented. Finally, research authenticity, trustworthiness, credibility and transferability are addressed.

Rationale

According to Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 57), “qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 8). Qualitative research methods are appropriate in the examination of the success of internal transfer students because they provide a complex and detailed understanding of a specific element of the college student transfer phenomenon. Internal vertical transfer students were interviewed; interview questions sought to gain an understanding of the identifying the features of the college transfer process that best support internal transfer student retention and successful completion of a baccalaureate degree through the exploration of their lived experiences contributed to a deeper understanding of vertical college transfer.

Philosophical Approach

The design of a study is guided by one’s philosophical assumptions and theoretical paradigm specific to how knowledge about reality is constructed (Krauss, 2005). Within qualitative research, “two major assumptions include a predisposition that reality is socially constructed and that the variables in a situation are highly complex, interwoven and difficult to measure” (Szyjka, 2012, p. 111). Both Schlossberg’s transition theory and Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems approach to development

address one's development and meaning-making through their experiences and interactions with their environment and others (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Essentially human development occurs through various phenomena or "the ways in which we find ourselves being in relation to the world through our day-to-day living" (Vagle, 2018, p. 20). In addition, understanding and interpretation of a phenomenon within IPA involves the researcher bringing in previous knowledge and experience therefore, having been a participant in the setting or having held a similar role in the phenomenon. Including both the researcher and participants in the interpretation and co-construction of a reality through the shared experience of the phenomenon is associated with the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm.

Constructivist-Interpretivist Paradigm Interpretive paradigms influence the purpose and design of a research study. Interpretive paradigms are those "beliefs or frameworks that guide the actions of the researcher in conducting the study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 325). The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm views knowledge as co-constructed and knowledge may change as circumstances alter one's perceptions. Ultimately, the goal of the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm is the creation of a shared understanding of the world between the researcher and the participants through the co-construction of meanings from their shared interactive dialogue and interpretations via reflection (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). Essentially, the nature of reality or the ontological perspective of the constructivist-interpretivist thought is the existence of multiple realities and one reality is no more right or wrong than others (Goldkuhl,

2012; Lee, 2012; Ponterotto, 2005). Consequently, the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm allowed the ability to present the multiple viewpoints (realities) through the exploration of participants' individual lived experiences as internal transfer students.

The role of the researcher is integral to the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. Central to the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm is the interaction between the researcher and the participants (Ponterotto, 2005). The positionality of the researcher within the phenomenon and the study should be acknowledged, but not separate. The researcher is often the starting point for phenomenological research (van Manen, 2016), and the researcher's lived experiences within the phenomenon become a part of the co-construction of the meaning-making along with the study participants.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenology is the “study of lived or existential meanings; it attempts to describe and interpret these meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness” (van Manen, 2016, p. 11). Emphasis is directed to the individuals' personal perception of the phenomenon. Developing an understanding of participant's views of an event, in this instance the internal vertical transfer process is often accomplished through interpretation.

A relatively new approach to qualitative research, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with beginnings in psychology (Smith & Osborn, 2004) evolved from sources such as Husserl and Heidegger. Husserl considered by many to be the father of phenomenology, surmised an epistemological understanding of knowledge as that which is known. Phenomena are not things to be studied in a vacuum. Rather they are lived

experiences and the human influence on the phenomena cannot be removed and are a product of consciousness based on the meaning of the human experience (Reiners, 2012; Vagle, 2018), whereas Heidegger, a student of Husserl established an ontological understanding of knowledge as being. Phenomena for Heidegger are the interconnectedness of the consciousness and the world (Reiners, 2012; Vagle, 2018). Interpretive phenomenology developed by Heidegger is an expansion of hermeneutics. Whereas hermeneutics searches for meaning fixed within everyday experiences rather than focusing on the description of the experience, interpretive phenomenology studies the concept of being within the experience. While distinctly different in scope, both Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenological perspectives influenced the development of a qualitative approach to research valuing the experiences of the participants who lived them.

More recently, IPA has employed Heidegger's application of interpretation within phenomenology. Specifically, the interpretation of a phenomenon cannot be completed separate from researcher presuppositions. With IPA, "the researcher 'brings their fore-conception (prior experiences, assumptions, preconceptions' to the encounter, and cannot help but look at any new stimulus in the light of their own prior experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 25).

Role of Researcher

Within qualitative research, the researcher is the tool, utilizing open-ended questions, interviews, observations and documents, as such, it is integral for the researcher to position themselves within the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Forman,

Creswell, Damschroder, Kowalski, & Krein, 2008; Vagle, 2018). Integral to phenomenological research as well as Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, is the requirement of the researcher to have been a part of the setting or have shared a similar role in the phenomena as the participants in order to understand and interpret the phenomena appropriately (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Vagle, 2018). I have been employed in higher education for the past nineteen years – the last seven as the director and academic advisor for the transfer program at an embedded two-year college. I am also an instructor at the institution, having taught Freshman Seminar, Introduction to Public Speaking and Records Management. My role as the academic advisor for students planning to transfer to a four-year degree programs at the parent institution has led to the establishment of multiple stances. First, similar to other institutions, it is my sincere belief that four-year institutions, including the parent institution examined in this study can do more to increase the retention and success of all transfer students and specifically do not do enough to support internal transfer students. Second, I believe that internal transfer students are an invisible population in the eyes of many within the university administration and for others are seen as academically weak and undeserving of administration's attention and support. Finally, I believe that students have lived experiences that should be shared with university administration and that their perceptions are such that policies and processes should be reevaluated in order to enhance internal transfer students' transition and support their retention and academic success.

As a qualitative investigator I understand that my experiences advising students through the transfer process guide my perspectives and lead to biases and values related

to the internal transfer process and that these should be openly acknowledged. The traditional method of addressing researcher bias and values within qualitative research involves bracketing, or setting aside my experiences, focusing on the transfer experiences of internal transfer students from their perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2018). Conversely, Smith et al. (2009), IPA acknowledges the researcher in a dual role as both like and unlike study participants. IPA involves the researcher utilizing second-order meaning-making wherein the researcher accesses participants' experiences through the interview process while considering the reported experiences through his/her own experientially-informed lens (Smith et al., 2009).

Taking into account the need to consider internal transfer experiences through my own experientially-informed lens, bridling is more appropriate than bracketing in this study. Whereas bracketing requires shelving one's preunderstanding or judgments of the phenomenon, "bridlings does not remove, set aside, or render the researcher non-influential as bracketing implies, but animates and illuminates the researcher more fully in his or her intentional relationship with the phenomenon" (Vagle, 2009, p. 592). Because I have occupied the advisor role to several of the study participants it was important to recognize and understand the impact that previous role had on my current role as the researcher in this study. Within this study it actually assisted in establishing a rapport with the study participants, specifically those who had worked with me in the past. Having developed a high level of trust through the advising experience, the participants were confident in providing information related to their transition that was not only beneficial but also reflected both positive and negative experiences working with

me in my capacity as their advisor. As a member of the faculty of South Campus the participants who did not directly interact with me had seen or heard of me which offered an additional level of comfort and familiarity during the interviews. Acknowledging both my previous and current position in the study proved to be a reflexive act. Furthermore, continuing to bridle and acknowledge my personal reflexivity throughout the process allowed me to recognize and clarify assumptions and biases stemming from my experience as an internal transfer advisor as they influenced the study design as well as the interpretations of student experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

My role as researcher working with this population of transfer students affords me the ability to utilize the study findings in several appropriate ways. First, I have the opportunity to apply the findings in my work with students who will be internal transfer students. Second, the results of this study will be shared with key personnel and administrators at both campuses with the aim of further examining the processes and services utilized or needed by internal transfer students in an effort to improve the internal transfer student experience. Finally, the results in this study will inform papers and presentations on topics specifically related to transfer students which will be disseminated through applicable journals and conferences within the higher education community.

Site Selection

Within phenomenological research it is important to collect data at the site where the participants are experiencing the phenomenon under examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Along with that, setting is an integral component within Bronfenbrenner's

ecological systems approach to development specifically; the site provides ecological validity when the properties adheres to the properties it is supposed to have by the researcher (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In other words, in order to study the internal transfer environment, it has to be at a place where there was an embedded two-year college that provided internal transfer students. The study was designed specifically because given my role as the main transfer advisor at the embedded-two year college (South Campus), I identified a need to examine the internal transfer student phenomenon.

The higher education system in the western state where this study occurred, consists of two research universities, several regional four-year institutions and a variety of two-year colleges. Specifically, the two-year system is made up of three community colleges, seven tribal colleges, two stand-alone two-year colleges reporting directly to one of the two research institutions, and three two-year colleges embedded within a regional four-year institution (Fisher & Cech, 2011). The institutions emphasized in this study are one the state's embedded two-year institutions and the regional four-year parent campus (North Campus). The embedded nature of the institution has made the possibility of transfer more straightforward given the ability of students enrolled at the embedded two-year institution to transition directly into the regional parent four-year institution. The transfer process for students enrolled at and attending an embedded institution can be as simple as the completion of a change of major form. The site characteristics reinforce the internal transfer process phenomenon:

- Student headcount for the 2018-2019 academic year is 739 at South Campus; and 1591 at North Campus.

- Approximately 450 transfer students are enrolled at North Campus for the 2018-2019 academic year. Of those approximately 180 were internal transfer students.
- The embedded two-year college (South Campus) is not physically located on the same campus as the parent four-year institution. The distance between the two campuses has created the impression that the two campuses are distinct and divided which may lead to the assumption that the two-year students are traditional transfer students.
- The programs at South Campus include the Associate of Science transfer degree and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs focused in the areas of Healthcare, Trades and Technical programs, and Business and Accounting Technology.
- The North Campus programs emphasize STEM programs including Healthcare and Business.
- According to Chrystal et al. (2013); Santos Laanan (2007); Townsend (1995, 2008), transfer shock occurs due to class size, the expected academic work load, institutional mission and culture focused on the retention of traditional students and the competitive nature of their peers that transfer students were unprepared to encounter at the baccalaureate institution. Many two-year students at the study site take classes at both campuses concurrently often beginning their first semester in their two-year program prior to transferring to their four-year program which should reduce the likelihood of internal transfer students experiencing transfer shock however, it often causes confusion with their status as either

transfer or continuing students. Furthermore, taking classes at both campuses concurrently allows two-year students to interact much earlier with their four-year program peers much earlier than traditional transfer students.

- Most student services and administrative offices are located at North Campus. Only Enrollment Services and Student Counseling Services are available at both campuses.
- Academic advising is performed by program faculty, therefore, internal transfer students have at least two academic advisors before they graduate with their four-year degree.
- There are opportunities for students to participate in four-year program research while still two-year program students.
- Internal transfer students do not participate in any orientation program beyond the new student orientation they attend when they begin as new students at South Campus.
- Students are eligible to participate in student activities such as organized collegiate athletics at the two-year level and continue as long as they have eligibility remaining through their four-year degree program.
- Qualitative research is “context-dependent” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 44). The contextual characteristics of the setting may impact participant experiences. As the researcher and the director of the two-year transfer program I am familiar with the characteristics of the institutions that are likely to influence internal transfer student experiences.

Sample

Unlike quantitative research, where the focus is the identification of a sample that is representative of a larger population, the goal of the sample in qualitative research is to provide the description of “a particular situation in enough depth that the full meaning of what occurs is made apparent” (Borrego, Douglas, & Amelink, 2009, p. 57). The depth of the data collected is more important than the size of the participant sample as long as it corresponds to the study purpose and knowledge claims (Jones, 2013). Significant to qualitative research is the selection of participants that will provide information that allows the development of a rich description, interpretation, and explanation of the phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013; Vagle, 2018). The sample size reflects the number of participants needed to reach saturation. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012), saturation is attained when participants are providing the same responses, perspectives and descriptions of the phenomenon.

IPA makes use of “small purposefully-selected and carefully-situated samples” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). The sample for this study was selected from the internal transfer student population. North Campus has a current enrollment of approximately 1800 undergraduates. Of those, approximately 100-120 are internal vertical transfer students. Upon receiving IRB and institutional approval, I recruited participants using what is known as non-probability convenience sampling through an announcement (in the weekly student government electronic newsletter. The announcement included a link to an online Qualtrics survey (see Appendix B) which helped identify internal transfer students. In addition, I reached out to the faculty at South Campus who forwarded the

announcement and survey link to internal transfer students they had previously advised at the two-year level. The study site requested I conduct recruitment in this manner in order to abide by FERPA (Family and Education Rights Privacy Act) regulations and to ensure that the students self-selected to participate, especially those who had been advised by me during their two-year program. The following criteria was used in the identification of the sample population:

- Participants are currently enrolled in a four-year program at North Campus after initial entry in a two-year program through South Campus.
- Participants are completing or have completed at least one semester in their four-year degree program.

Initially, 38 students responded to the participant recruiting survey. Seventeen were immediately ineligible to participate as they did not start their education at South Campus. Of the 21 that had started at South Campus, 15 identified that they would be willing to talk to me about participating the study. Fourteen students provided their name and contact information for me to contact them to discuss their participation in the study. Of the 14 that I spoke with, one did not meet the criteria having just changed her major to the Associate of Science for fall semester 2019. Three others chose not to participate after speaking with me. The final number of participants was 10. Table 1 provides a brief description of each participant, including the given pseudonym, age, cultural background, first generation status, parental status, veteran status, employment status, whether or not they earned a 2-year degree, their financial aid status and year four-year degree is expected.

Table 1. Participant Demographic and student status characteristics

	Barb	Bob	Charlee	Karen	Mark	Mike	Sharon	Spider	Terri	Wesley
Age	23	28	29	39	27	36	54	54	28	24
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Cultural Background	White	White	White	White	White	White	American Indian	White	White	White
First Generation	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Parent	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Military/Veteran	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Earned 2-year degree	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Employed	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Financial Assistance/Federal Aid	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Chose/Placed at South Campus	Chose	Chose	Chose	Chose	Placed	Placed	Chose	Placed	Chose	Chose
Expected Graduation Date	Unknown	2019	2019	2020	2019	2020	Unknown	2021	2020	2019

Because the four-year institution also has Bachelor of Applied Science programs, Career and Technical Education (CTE) students who have transferred to a four-year program were included as well as students from the Associate of Science transfer degree program. The inclusion of CTE internal transfer students increased the size of the sample population and provided a greater capacity to compare students who were placed in two-year programs and students who chose to begin in two-year programs prior to transfer.

Limitations to the sample included the following:

- The limited number of participants gave rise to the possibility that their responses may not fully encapsulate the population of internal and/or external transfer student experiences at North Campus.
- There were an equal number of students who were enrolled in the two-year Associate of Science (5) and CTE programs (5); three of the participants were placed at South Campus, while the other seven chose South Campus in either the AS or CTE programs.
- Because the participants ranged from their second semester post transfer to their final experience post transfer, their recollection of the experience may not be fully accurate or complete.

Consent Procedure

I initially intended to request contact information for participants that met the study criteria from the study site. After initial IRB approval was obtained from my Doctoral program institution, I submitted my request for the contact information of

internal transfer students to the study site and I was requested to modify my recruitment procedures out of concern regarding FERPA regulations. I agreed send out a general survey via the weekly student newsletter and emails from two-year faculty to potential participants. This required an addendum to and approval from the IRB. Once the final participant were identified and scheduled for their interviews, they were sent a confirmation email which included the interview protocol (see Appendix C) and the consent form (see Appendix A) for them to review, sign and return to me at the time of the initial interview.

At the beginning of their initial interview, each participant was given a \$10 coffee gift card as a thank you for their participation. Additionally, I read the consent document and informed them again that their interview was going to be recorded using audio equipment and that the recordings would be protected on a secure server. The consent document provided general information about the study, an explanation of the voluntary nature throughout the study, the potential risks and available services should the questions trigger a negative response, the forms, and the confidentiality processes in place to protect participants. Once the consent document was read, I spent time with each participant addressing questions they had about the process and the study. The participants then signed the consent form and the interview began.

Data Collection Strategies

Qualitative research requires the use of multiple sources of data in order to (1) create a complete understanding of the phenomenon; and (2) as a means of triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One-on-one interviewing, audio recordings of the interviews,

and written notes and observations were employed during the data collection phase of the study. Utilizing audio recordings as well as written documentation provided detailed information that further contributed to the participants' interview responses.

As one of the most popular methods of gathering qualitative data, interviews provide the opportunity to obtain information in a format that is more open and conversational (Vagle, 2018). While unstructured interviews provide the most opportunity for candid dialogue, semi-structured interviews were utilized. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me the ability to prepare an interview schedule covering specific topics with prompts that kept the conversation moving while providing the participants the flexibility to steer the conversation in the direction they felt was most relevant in their transfer experiences. The use of generalized, present-tense and specific, past-tense questions allowed for more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013). The interview protocol included topics addressing students' experiences at South Campus, the transfer process, as North Campus students after the transition, their obligations outside of the institutions and advice they would like to provide the institution and other students (see Appendix C).

I completed the interviews in late spring 2019 semester. Initially, I had planned on completing the interviews in earlier in the spring 2019 semester however, due to participant recruitment issues and scheduling, the interviews were conducted in late spring 2019 semester. Given the timing, the last of the interviews was completed two weeks before the end of the semester. Follow-up emails with questions were sent to the participants in early summer 2019.

A key component of qualitative research is the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Maxwell, 2013). In developing the researcher-participant relationship, the participants were given the ability to identify where they were interviewed. Allowing the participants to have input into where they are interviewed provides them with an interview setting where they are more likely to be comfortable and engaged. The location of each interview was prearranged and took place in a conference room at either South Campus or North Campus with the participants choosing the campus. In the case of North Campus interviews, it was in a building that has very little foot traffic in a conference room that is relatively hidden. The conference room used for the interviews at South Campus was again in a more obscure location and occurred at times when most of the faculty, staff and students had departed campus for the day. Because the participants were able to pick the time and the location, it tended to be where and when most individuals had already left campus which provided additional privacy and limited distractions and background noise during the interview.

During the interview, in order to ensure clarity in the audio recording, I sat on one side of the table, while the participant sat on the other with the recording device between the two of us. Using a smart pen, I took minimal notes during the interviews. The notes contained interview details such as observed responses; non-verbal exchanges and areas for follow-up questions in order to limit distractions. The use of the smart pen allowed me to track when in the interview the note was recorded which provided an additional level of accuracy and understanding. All field notes as well as the signed consent forms were scanned, and along with the audio recordings and interview transcripts were

uploaded and all data is stored on the university's Box service on university secured servers where it will remain for the duration of the study. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire. Completion of the questionnaire was completely voluntary and was provided at the end of the interview to reduce potential stereotype threat for participants. The demographic questionnaire used is included (Appendix D). Upon completion of the transcription process, follow-up questions were sent along with the interview transcripts to the participants because they had already dispersed for the summer which made scheduling and completing interviews difficult. The follow-up emails provided the ability to ensuring transcript accuracy through member checking but also to explore additional topics or themes that may have arose during the initial interviews. Email responses to follow-up questions were received from six participants and those six also participated in the ongoing member checking process throughout the data analysis.

Data Analysis

According to Gay et al. (2012), data analysis is the process by which the researcher “summarizes data, collected for a study, in a dependable and accurate manner” (p. 625). Data analysis in qualitative research often involves coding and the identification of patterns or themes within the narrative. Data analysis should not be confused with data interpretation where the researcher seeks meaning from the data.

The data analysis process was conducted in two phases. Phase one involved the transcription of each interview using a pseudonym in order to maintain confidentiality and protect the identity of the individual study participants. I transcribed the first

interview personally including all pauses, ums, ahs, etc., and while I still feel it is an important element of authenticity, it was difficult to read and follow when I reviewed it while listening to the audio recording for accuracy. After transcribing and reviewing the initial interview, I employed a secure and confidential online professional transcription service for the nine remaining interviews and made the decision not to include the various pauses, ums, ahs, etc. in the transcripts. Once the transcripts were returned I reviewed each transcript while listening to the audio recordings. Reviewing each transcript while listening to the audio recordings allowed me to ensure accuracy and provided me the ability to immerse myself in the data and to develop insights based on what was read, heard and observed within the transcripts (Vagle, 2018).

During my review of the transcripts phase two of the data analysis began. Within IPA, phase two consisted of note-taking, coding, theme connections and pattern identification and the write-up. The note-taking process involved making notations in the margins as a means of recording initial thoughts and questions as the transcripts were reviewed. Note-taking also involved the creation of memos noting my reactions as the researcher; including emotional responses, researcher reflections, and possible interpretations or inferences used to address the research questions.

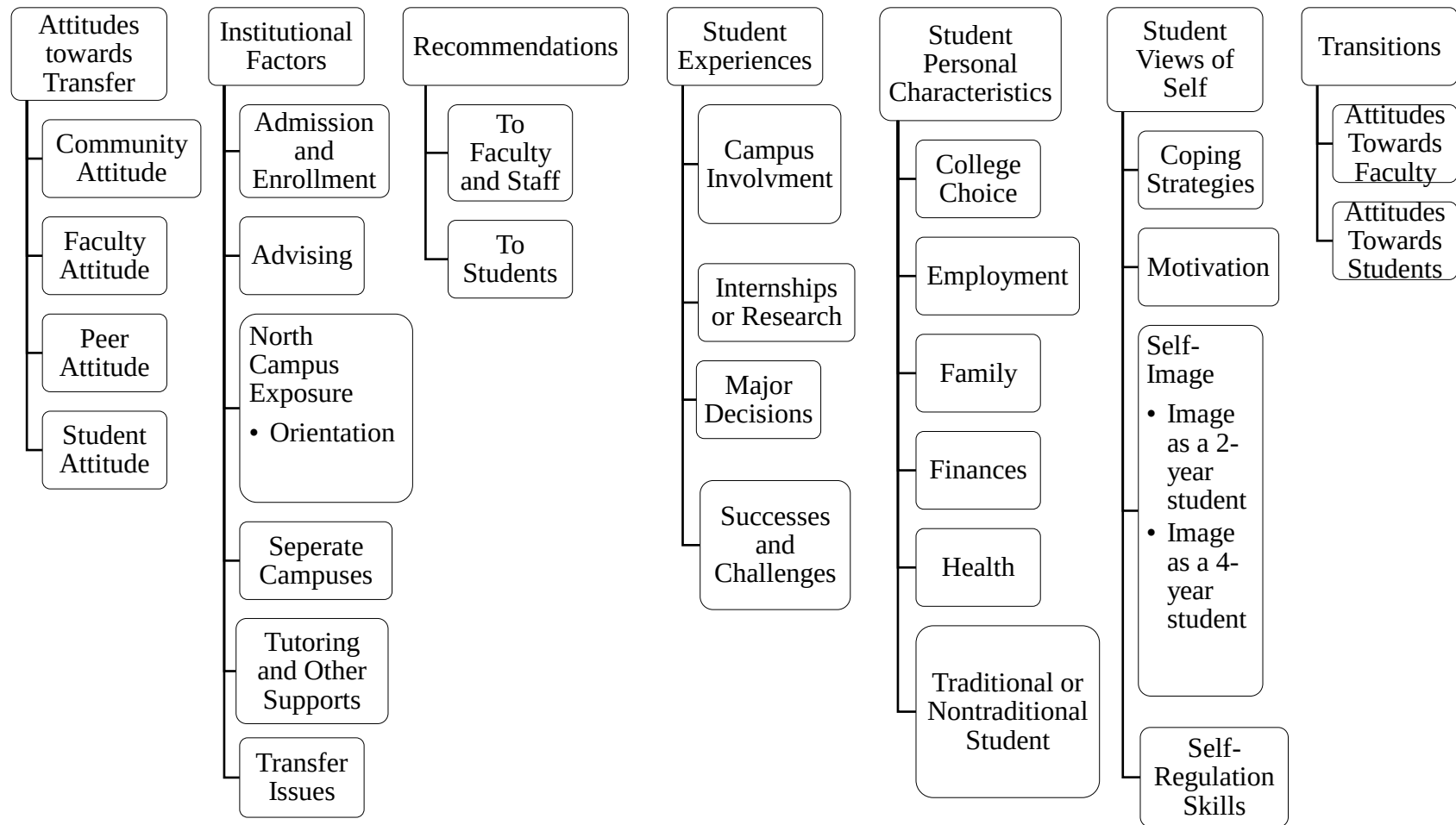
Coding Process

Open coding is the initial categorization and rearrangement of data in a manner that facilitates “comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107). Open coding was completed first on the hard-copy transcripts and again using the data analysis software

NVivo installed on my personal computer. After the preliminary review and note-taking process, I re-read each interview transcript in its entirety. I then re-read each line of text individually to identify and determine text fragments that were relevant to the research questions. Codes were developed and assigned to appropriate codes of text. As new codes emerged in the interviews emerged, I made notes and returned to previously coded transcripts to ensure that I had not missed an occurrence of the code in them as well.

The initial codes developed in the course of the open coding process were considered provisional (Saldaña, 2015). The initial coding analysis tree provided in Figure 3 highlights how I established the codes in phase one of the data analysis.

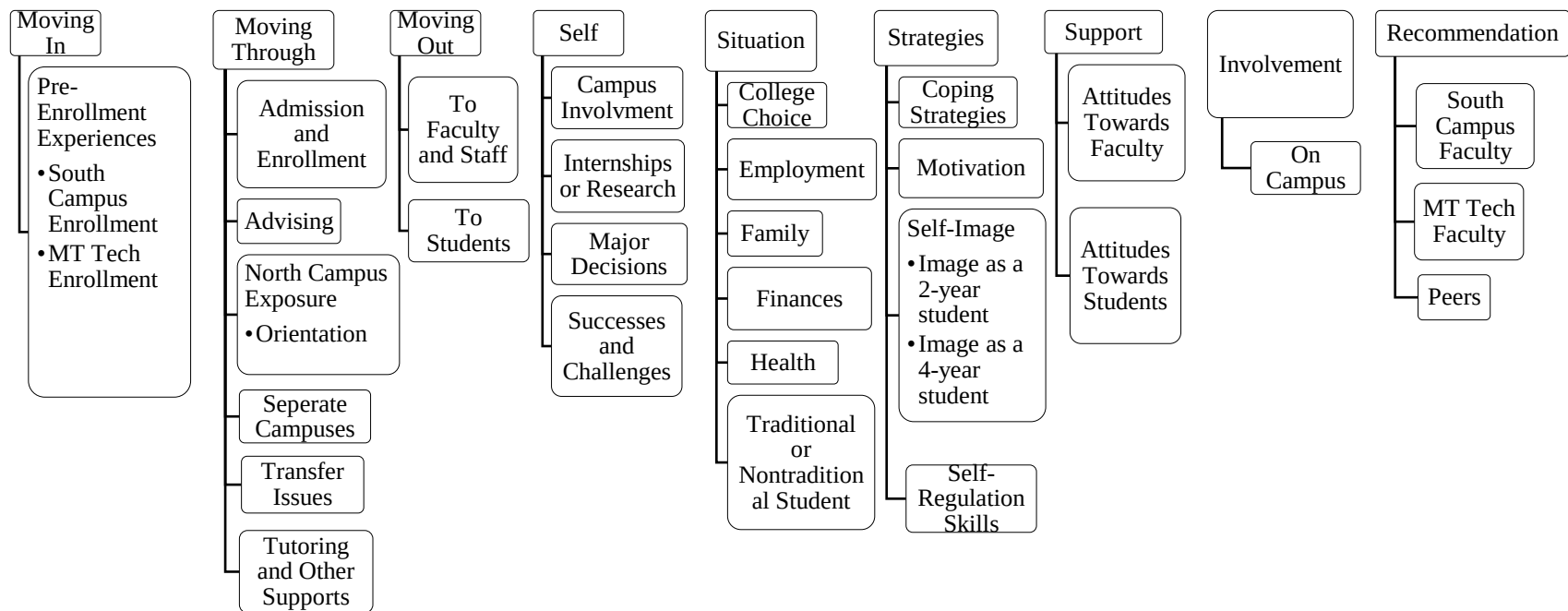
Figure 3: Initial Coding Analysis Tree



Stage two of the coding process involved axial coding utilizing both Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. The function of axial coding according to Saldaña (2015), to provide "descriptions of a category's properties and dimensions and explores how the categories and subcategories relate to each other" (p. 236). As recommended in IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2004), upon completion of the open coding process, I returned to the coded transcript text identified in the initial coding process to identify those pieces that corresponded to different elements of the theories. Continuing the coding process the previously coded texts were recoded and assigned to coding categories as they related to either theory with many of them becoming new main codes or sub-codes.

Using Schlossberg's transition model, I sought to understand how internal vertical transfer students explained their transfer experiences from South Campus to North Campus. At this point in the axial coding process, I needed to identify whether the transition was anticipated or unanticipated as he or she moved in, moved through, and moved out of the transition. Additionally, the 4S's within transition assisted in understanding the phases of the transition through the identification and understanding of participants' experiences as they relate to Self, Situation, Supports, and Strategies. Figure 4 exhibits the various themes and subthemes that appeared within the participant interviews.

Figure 4: Axial Coding Tree Using Schlossberg's Transition Theory Lens



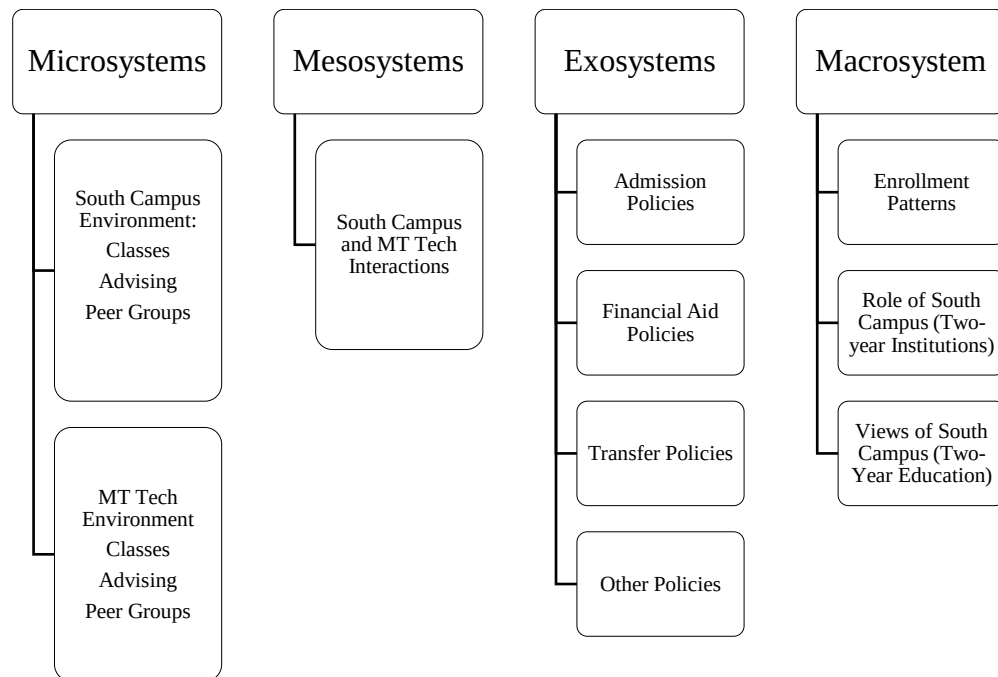
The internal transfer student transition experience was examined through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory in order to gain a better understanding of how the different systems influence the transition. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, Ecological Systems Theory

involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21).

Whereas Schlossberg's Transition Theory provided insight into the aspects of situation in terms of the participants' selves and their individual experiences within the internal transfer transition, it lacks the capability to assist in understanding the impact various environmental systems have on their transition. Utilizing Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, I sought to gain clarity into how the unique environmental systems of an embedded two-year college and the parent four-year institution impact internal transfer students and their navigation of the transition process.

All of the participants began their studies in either the Associate of Science or a CTE program at South Campus. Each of the participants shared their experiences as both a two-year and a four-year student and the perceived impact of beginning in a two-year program has had on their academics. The dual role of South Campus, similar, to that of other two-year institutions provided the participants the opportunity to begin as a student of North Campus regardless of program. As a result, institutional influences on and between both campuses became even more relevant to the participants' academic success.

Figure 5: Axial Coding Tree Utilizing Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory Lens



Theme and Pattern Identification Given the hermeneutic conventions utilized in IPA, themes and patterns appear from not only the original words of the participants but also researcher interpretation gathered through the initial note-taking process (Smith et al., 2009). In building the “structure of the experience” (van Manen, 2016, p. 79), identified themes are grouped together in a meaningful fashion. The patterns and connections between the established themes when expanded across all of the interview transcripts led to the development of six overarching themes: (1) Sense of Agency; (2) Sense of Identity; (3) Paying for College; (4) Institutional Supports; (5) Institutional Procedures; and (6) Building Transfer Capital. The hermeneutic approach within IPA suggests that once themes have been identified, the themes should become the object of a reflective follow-up conversation between the researcher and the participant(s) (van

Manen, 2016). As such, I reviewed the patterns and connections with the participants as part of the process and to maintain trustworthiness.

Throughout the data analysis process, it was important that I bridled myself within the research. Bridling during data analysis involved remaining an intentional part of the process. It was essential to continuously remain aware of my own pre-understandings and position within the phenomenon (Vagle, 2009). Utilizing a reflective journal and memos during both the data collection and data analysis processes allowed me to consciously and systematically discover and understand the internal transfer phenomenon (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2003)

Authenticity, Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Transferability

Throughout the research process, it was critical to ensure the study was conducted in a valid and reliable manner. The terms validity and reliability used in quantitative research studies give way to authenticity, trustworthiness, credibility and transferability in qualitative research. In quantitative research where validity and reliability are examined separately, authenticity, trustworthiness, credibility and transferability consider both validity and reliability simultaneously (Golafshani, 2003).

Authenticity

A study is said to be authentic when multiple realities are represented and the findings are beneficial to a variety of campus stakeholders (Billups, 2014). This study specifically sought out internal transfer students from a variety of programs as shown in the participant demographics to ensure that the issues identified by internal transfer

students were addressed from different perspectives. Seeking out a diverse internal transfer student population from a variety of programs, generated a study useful to myself as a professional as well as institutional administrators, academic programs and student service departments.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a study is based on the methodological rigor employed in the research design (Forman et al., 2008). Within qualitative research, trustworthiness encompasses strategies involving the participants, peers and other researchers (Billups, 2014). Trustworthiness strategies utilized in this study included member checking, triangulation, thick and rich description, and researcher journaling and memoing as an audit trail.

Member Checking Respondent validation, or member checking is the process of “systematically soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). After the interviews were transcribed, the transcripts were sent via email to the study participants for review and feedback on the accuracy of the responses. As part of the member checking process, each participant was encouraged to make changes or add clarification to any portion of the interview transcript. Additionally, early drafts of findings were discussed with study participants as required within the IPA process and feedback was elicited on the credibility and accuracy of the phenomenological account. Allowing participants the ability to review and comment on their interview transcripts as well as the researcher interpretations and conclusions added to the trustworthiness and credibility of the study but also followed the

social constructivist framework of a co-constructed reality of the internal transfer student phenomenon.

Triangulation According to Creswell and Poth (2018), triangulation is the utilization of variety of methods, sources, investigators and theories as a means of identifying evidence substantiating the accuracy of the study. The identification and comparison of previous research studies related to the phenomenon and theoretical constructs and aligning them with codes or themes identified within the transcript analysis as they appeared further confirmed the accuracy and credibility of the study. The social constructivist framework took on a pluralistic approach through triangulation (Frost & Nolas, 2011) and provided “deep and rich insights into a particular shape the phenomenon has taken” (Vagle, 2018, p. 109). In this study, triangulation involved the use of previous studies identified within the literature review as well as within the conclusions, interviews recorded via audio but also through researcher analysis, and reflective researcher memoing. Additionally, the following institutional resources were referenced:

- Student admission letters (see Appendices E & F).
- The institutional catalog
- State Board of Regents Policies
- Financial Aid Director
- University Registrar
- Dean of Students

Lastly, my personal experience with institutional processes and policies were bridled and used to confirm the accuracy.

Researcher Memoing Memos can be written on anything related to the study including methodological processes, researcher positionality and reactions, as a means of making sense of the topic, data or ideas as part of a reflective and analytical process (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, IPA includes researcher memos and initial notes are coded and utilized in the identification of themes (Smith et al., 2009). Reflective memoing provided the opportunity to bridle my reflexivity and illustrated the analysis process as it occurred, further adding to the depth and position of the research. Memoing also provided a trail through the research process. Memos presented a detailed account of the data analysis process as well as how the interviews were conducted including the setting and other observable details which in addition to the audio recordings of the interviews augmented the interview transcripts.

Credibility

The credibility of the study in qualitative research essentially addresses the believability of the study. The study and researcher credibility was addressed through the member checking process. In addition, the inclusion of negative cases and peer review addressed credibility.

Negative Cases The inclusion of negative case analysis or disconfirming evidence provides a deeper picture of the phenomenon adding to the credibility of the study (Billups, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Negative cases may be found within the

participants or may be specifically identified as part of the participant selection strategy in order to gain an accurate understanding and depiction of the internal student transfer phenomenon. Negative cases were included in the findings and conclusions.

Peer review The peer review process involved the incorporation of feedback from a colleague unassociated with the study. The role of the peer reviewer is that of “devil’s advocate” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263) essentially posing questions or inquiries regarding methodologies, themes, interpretations in an effort to keep the researcher honest (Billups, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Peer review occurred on multiple occasions throughout the writing process. First, during my dissertation seminar spring 2019 semester, a fellow doctoral student reviewed the first interview transcript and my initial codes and provided feedback on the codes which included additional codes or recoding fragments. Additionally, I had a colleague with a doctoral degree and a background in qualitative research code three separate transcripts and then review the codes I had identified during my analysis. In both peer review instances; the reviewers examined the data with fresh eyes and found data that I had either misinterpreted or excluded in my analysis. Finally, as is the case in doctoral dissertations, my dissertation committee chair and the committee reviewed and provided feedback including questions regarding theoretical frameworks, points of clarification, study direction and findings.

Transferability

Known in quantitative research as generalizability, transferability in qualitative research “seeks to generalize through thick description of a specific context, allowing the reader to make connections between the study and his or her own situation” (Borrego et

al., 2009, p. 57). The use of thick description of the examined phenomenon allows the reader to transfer study elements to their own situations (Borrego et al., 2009).

Thick and rich description “Thick description means that the researcher provides details when describing a case or when writing about a theme” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263). I included rich description in the research findings, thereby increasing the likelihood that other readers such as college and university administrators, professionals and other researchers will be able use the information (Billups, 2014).

Summary

The intent of this interpretive phenomenological analysis was the examination of the intricacies of the transfer process from a two-year embedded institution to the parent four-year institution. The research method utilized in this study was designed to collect information reflective of student experiences related to the internal transfer process. This chapter provided the research methodology, my role and positionality within the research, site and sample selection, a break-down of the data analysis process, and the strategies utilized to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical manner. The following chapters completed the IPA process through the analysis write-up (Chapter 4) and a discussion of the findings (Chapter 5).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the intricacies of the transfer process from a two-year embedded institution to the parent four-year institution and how internal transfer students navigate the transfer process towards successful baccalaureate degree completion. Specifically, this study explored factors related to retention, such as the combination of internal transfer student background characteristics which included their reasons for beginning at the two-year program level, their advising experiences, relationships with faculty and peers, coping styles, motivation and their academic expectation. Additionally, the exploration of institutional factors such as academic support, advising experiences, financial aid and scholarships, an examination of the internal transfer process, and access to research and internships provided insight into areas where changes may be made to better facilitate internal transfer student transitions. The study also examined the overarching problem related directly to the retention and success of the institution's internal transfer student population. This chapter addresses the research questions which guided this study:

1. How do internal transfer students who started at a two-year college within a regional public institution describe their transfer experiences to their four-year programs?

2. How do transfer experiences differ between students who chose to start at the two-year institution and those who intended to start at the four-year but were placed into the two-year program?
3. What do internal transfer students believe the institution should do to support their retention?

The chapter begins with profiles for the participants that provide background information relevant to the study. Following the participant profiles, the key findings gleaned from the 10 semi-structured interviews and follow-up email questions are presented. Utilizing Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) in the data analysis, six major themes emerged: (1) Sense of Agency; (2) Sense of Identity; (3) Paying for College; (4) Institutional Supports; (5) Institutional Procedures; and (6) Building Transfer Capital. Within the discussion of each theme I will address, participant experiences, differences identified between the two groups of participants and participant advice to both the institution and peers who are or will be transitioning to a four-year degree program.

Participant Profiles

A total of 10 current North Campus students who began their studies at South Campus before transitioning to a four-year degree program participated in this study. Seven of the participants chose to begin their studies in a two-year degree program and the other three were placed in a two-year degree program based on admission requirements. These students represent several different disciplines at both the two- and four-year level. Six of the participants had at least junior standing at the North Campus

and 4 of them were scheduled to graduate in either May or December of 2019. The profiles provide a brief summary of each participant as a foundation for understanding their reasons for coming to college and beginning at the two-year program level, and other background information relevant to the study.

Barb Barb is a 23-year-old junior engineering student. She just finished her second year in her bachelor's degree at North Campus after earning two Associate of Applied Science degrees at South Campus. Barb is a traditional-aged college student but she identifies as nontraditional having Autism. Barb helps take care of her grandparents in a neighboring town; therefore, location was a big factor in choosing South Campus and North Campus. Beginning in her two-year program and continuing now into her four-year program, Barb maintains a part-time job, volunteers on campus, and has been active in student activities.

Bob Bob is a 28-year-old senior in engineering. Bob graduated spring semester with his baccalaureate degree in engineering after having obtained his associate of science degree at South Campus. A military veteran, Bob was unsure the direction he was going to take for his college degree. As an associate of science student, Bob had the ability to choose whether or not to complete the two-year degree before transferring to his four-year engineering degree. Using the GI Bill to pay for school, Bob did not have to carry a part-time job still he did work as a tutor and a teaching assistant for two classes. During his time as a South Campus student, Bob did not participate in any student clubs

or organizations. As a four-year student, Bob is a member of a couple of engineering clubs, although he stated that he is not very involved.

Charlee Charlee is a 29-year-old senior in business. Charlee graduated this spring with her Bachelor of Applied Science in Business. Charlee's path to her two-year and subsequent four-year degree was not direct. Charlee, like the other participants in the two-year trades and technical degree programs completed her associate of applied science prior to entering her four-year degree program.

Karen Karen is a 39-year-old senior in engineering scheduled to graduate in spring of 2020. Having earned a two-year degree previously, when Karen returned to school, she was still working full-time, with a senior graduating from high school and one child still at home. After her transition to the four-year degree, Karen began taking more credits which required her to work less, focusing more on her academics.

Mark Mark is a 27-year-old senior in Occupational Safety and Health scheduled to graduate at the end of fall semester 2019. Mark chose not to earn his two-year degree prior to transitioning to the four-year engineering program. Mark's main priority has been his coursework at both the two- and four-year levels. Though Mark chose not to participate in any student clubs or organizations he was connected to the campus through an on-campus job.

Mike Mike is a 36-year-old senior in Occupational Safety and Health scheduled to graduate in Spring of 2020. A military veteran, Mike applied to the engineering program but was placed in the two-year degree program upon his entry to college. Mike's family

guided not only his choice of college but ultimately his choice of four-year degree. Having multiple responsibilities including a full-time job, and a family along with carrying a full-time course load has kept Mark from becoming too involved in student clubs and organizations.

Sharon Sharon is a 54-year-old student in Business. Sharon is four classes away from completing her four-year degree yet, when asked her graduation date, Sharon explained that she had run out of funding and would have to pay for the last semester's courses out-of-pocket so she was unsure when should would be able to graduate. Sharon chose to complete her two-year Associate of Applied Science in Accounting prior to transitioning to her four-year degree. In addition to going to school full-time, Sharon works part-time and cares for her family. Sharon was a member of AISES (American Indian Science and Engineering Society) during both her two- and four-year programs.

Spider Spider is a 54-year-old student in Interdisciplinary Studies on track to graduate in 2021. Spider is the most recent of the participants to make the transition to his four-year degree, having transferred this past year. Spider did not earn his two-year degree prior to transitioning into his four-year degree program. Spider became the father of a baby girl while enrolled in his two-year program but was not working at the time choosing instead to focus on his academics. Spider did not begin working until the summer before is transition to his four-year degree program. Now that he is in his four-year degree program, his time is divided between school, work and time with his daughter.

Terri Terri is a 28-year old student in Business scheduled to complete her four-year degree in 2020. Working full-time during her two-year program along with taking a full-time schedule as a single parent with two children, Terri found it difficult to participate in any clubs or organizations on campus. Returning to school for her four-year degree, Terri is no longer working full-time. Nonetheless, as her children have gotten older she stated that the extra-time she would have not working is being taken up with her kids so the time demands are similar to the first-time when she was a student at South Campus.

Wesley Wesley is a 24-year-old recently graduated with his Bachelor of Applied Science in Business. As a student at South Campus, Wesley was involved in multiple student organizations and participated in a number of campus activities. Although he remained a member of some clubs and organizations as a four-year student, he was not as active in campus activities. In addition, during his last year in his four-year degree program, he took on a part-time job which provided him with the challenge of juggling school, work, and time for social activities.

Major Themes

Six major themes emerged from the interviews: (1) Sense of Agency; (2) Sense of Identity; (3) Paying for College; (4) Institutional Supports; (5) Institutional Procedures; (6) Building Transfer Capital. Several of the themes included subthemes. Sense of agency includes the subthemes choosing to enroll in college; reasons for starting in a two-year program; and finally the timing of and reasons the participants chose to continue to their

four-year degree. Within sense of identity is the subtheme nontraditional students. Paying for college consists of the subthemes financial aid and scholarships. Institutional supports consists of the subthemes advising (both north and South Campuses), faculty interactions (both north and South Campuses) and nonacademic supports. The building transfer capital theme consists of the subthemes social adjustment (both North and South Campuses) and academic adjustment (both North and South Campuses). Additionally, the themes will identify differences between those who chose South Campus and those who placed at South Campus. Participant recommendations of what can be done by the institutions as well as what their peers that will be transitioning can do will be included when applicable within the major themes and subthemes.

Theme One: Sense of Agency

Schlossberg's Transition Theory identifies three key phases in a transition: Moving-in, Moving-through and Moving-out. Recognizing the sense of agency participants had in the decision to start at South Campus is important in understanding decisions the participants made directed at enrolling in a four-year program as well as how they perceived their experiences as internal vertical transfer students. Within the college choice process, students tend to focus on geographic location, economic and academic factors (Bateman & Spruill, 1996).

Two-year community colleges offer an attractive alternative to four-year colleges and universities due to the lower cost of tuition and fees, geographic location and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programing designed to prepare students and allow them to enter the workforce much earlier. In addition to preparing students to enter the

workforce, two-year colleges serve to remediate academically underprepared students wanting to earn a four-year degree. Students in the remediation category generally are not given a choice of where they will enroll. Montondon and Eikner (1997) affirmed “although students who attend community colleges do so for economic reasons, some students attend community colleges because they have no other choice. Their high school grades or college admittance test scores (SAT, ACT) are too low to gain admittance to the university of their choice” (p. 21). All 10 participants made the anticipated choice to enroll in college thereby initiating the moving-in phase of the college transition process (Schlossberg,1984).

All of the participants chose to enroll in college based on their academic aspirations. For several of them, their academic aspirations were guided by career changes. Three of the participants made the decision to utilize education benefits such as the GI Bill and Veteran’s Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc. Rehab) after their separation from military service while three participants chose to enroll in college in order to make a career change. Sharon had to find a new career that accommodated her physical limitations while both Charlee and Karen reported reaching the limits of their ability to advance in their respective jobs. Said Karen, “I had reached the limits of my education at work. Some of the administrative staff had retired from jobs that I was competent to do however, due to my lack of education they were assigned to others.” Spider chose to enroll in college in order to overcome and “get off disability.”

Starting in a Two-Year Program The trigger (Schlossberg,1984) or reason identified for beginning college included wanting a career after a disability (2), separation

from the military (3), traditional students enrolling right out of high school (2) and enrolling to finish or earn a degree (3). Although the choice to enroll in college was anticipated, the participants' reasons for beginning at South Campus provided the context of the transition. In order to fully understand the context of the participants' reasons for enrolling in their two-year programs, the setting, in this case South Campus, must be considered. Beginning at South Campus is critical not only to understanding why the participants enrolled in their two-year programs but to the overall construction of the internal transfer student experience.

The seven participants who chose to enroll in their two-year program appeared to adhere to several of the themes "They Said I Couldn't Do It; Life Happens; Educational Aspirations; Influence of Peers and Family; Price and Location; and Institutional Characteristics" identified by (Somers et al., 2006, pp. 58-63) in their 2-year college choice model. Barb knew she was going to go to college and her main reason for choosing the institution was location. "The location. I have two grandparents, and I normally help them on the weekend. My grandfather just died over the summer, so I go home every weekend and help my grandma." In addition, Barb was influenced by other sources. "To be honest, I was told by Voc. Rehab. that I wasn't smart enough to get a degree." Location and program were major factors in both Charlee and Wesley's choice to begin at South Campus. Still Charlee's transition into her two-year program had a rough beginning.

[When I spoke with my advisor] he was like, we put that program into a moratorium., and I am not a crier. I cried so hard I almost puked. I was like what am I supposed to do? Luckily [my advisor] was there. He was like, well, why don't you take a look at the other programs? We'll see what we

can get you into, at least to transition, and then go from there. So, I kind of told him what I was into, kind of my background, and he said, you know what, I think you would do great in the construction program. it's kind of my thing. I always like to see more women in trades, and I was like, you know what, let's do it. It ended up being a bump in the road. I absolutely love the carpentry.

Terri, Karen and Bob's reasons for beginning at South Campus was based on their indecision of whether or not they wanted a four-year degree and working towards their associate's degrees was a way to initiate their education and assess their academic abilities. In addition to his placement scores requiring him to begin at South Campus, Bob stated,

Because I am a veteran, I never imagined going to college when I graduated from high school. I went into the Navy, and then when I got out, you have the GI Bill. I researched some universities, and I guess I just felt, I don't know, an associate's degree would be easier for me to start with because I had no experience with college at all and I didn't know what to expect. For me, I just rolled with what life gave me, and I just went down there, and I just took the classes I had to take. I don't know because I didn't have a definitive plan to come to North Campus.

Schlossberg (1984) states "the relationship of the individual to the event or nonevent resulting in change is central to understanding transitions" (p. 47). Although the choice to enroll in college was anticipated, beginning at South Campus was an unanticipated event for three participants. The amount of control an individual has over his or her situation is essential to evaluating the transition situation (Goodman et al., 2006). Three participants applied with the expectation that they would be enrolling in their chosen four-year degree. Their sense of control was lost when they were required to start at South Campus. The need to begin at South Campus in a two-year program after applying for their four-year degree added an additional stressor to their transition.

The participants' recollection of their placement experiences pointed to two reasons: placement scores and their status as nontraditional students. Three of the participants were placed in two-year programs at South Campus based on their COMPASS scores. Coming out of the military, Mark and Mike knew they were going to have to work on their skills, especially in Math so they weren't necessarily surprised when they had to start in the Associate of Science at South Campus before transitioning to their four-year programs. Additionally, had he not chosen the Associate of Science (AS) route, Bob's placement scores would have required him to begin in the AS.

Sharon and Spider believe that their status as nontraditional students was the reason they were placed in two-year programs at South Campus. Their responses to their placement was quite different. Sharon appeared confused and frustrated as she described her experience

Because of my age. What I did was I had signed up on North Campus and had started classes. Halfway through the semester, I was called into the office up there and I don't remember the lady's name, but she informed me that I was in the wrong program. She said for older students, you were to start down here. I'm like okay, and I said will this change what I am going for? Well, no it wouldn't. So I agreed and then I had to get ahold of my advisor. At the end of the semester, because I had to finish that first semester out up there, I went to [my advisor] and he says, you're not on my roster. So, I had to go back to the office, find out what was going on and then found out you were my advisor. So, then I had to come down and find you, but that kind of threw a monkey wrench in everything for me, because I didn't really understand. All I knew was I wanted to come in for the Associate's, and then I had to come down here.

Taken in its entirety, Sharon's statement is somewhat contradictory. Sharon began by stating that it was because of her status as a nontraditional student and the confusion that it triggered however, at the end she explicitly acknowledged her goal was the Associate's degree and she had to start down here. It could be then that when she was told she was in

the wrong program, she truly was supposed to be in the Associate's based on her application and somehow ended up at North Campus rather than with an advisor in the correct program at South Campus.

Spider, on the other hand had a different response to beginning at South Campus. Although the reason for beginning at South Campus was Spider's status as a nontraditional student he chose to look at as a step he had to take. "The only reason I came down to South Campus was because being a nontraditional student they thought it would be better or easier for me to get back into school this way." For Spider it was a way to make the transition a more positive experience. In both instances, Sharon and Spider recalled being told that nontraditional students start at South Campus however, neither could remember who gave them this information. It is important to note here that this is not an institutional policy although nontraditional students make up 25% of the student population at South Campus (Dickerson, 2019b).

An additional "setting" must be considered, which provides additional context for participants' reasons for beginning at South Campus. The exosystem within Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory consists of "one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). The institutional admissions policies influenced participants' ability to choose their academic program and point of entry to either the North or South Campus. The four-year admission policy at North Campus follows the western state's Board of Regents' policy on admissions specifically related to

Demonstrated Mathematics Proficiency which states “students must meet Math and English proficiency standards. Math proficiency may be demonstrated with an ACT math score of 22 or SAT math score of 520 (prior to March 2016) or 27.5 (current SAT scoring)” (Dickerson, 2019a). Although there is Board of Regents' policy that allows four-year institutions to provisionally admit students who do not meet the minimum admission standards into the four-year programs, most applicants at the time the participants were applying for admission were automatically placed into the Associate of Science program at South Campus and received the Does Not Meet Standards Acceptance Letter (see Appendix F). Conversely, the admission requirements for the two-year programs at South Campus are much more open as are most community and two-year colleges (Bahr et al., 2016). The institution catalog (2018) states

Applicants to [South Campus] are considered and accepted on a first-come-first-served basis. It is advisable to submit an application early as some programs have waiting lists. Applications are accepted throughout the year. Applicants must be able to provide proof of high school graduation or its equivalent (GED). Students applying for admission must schedule an Accuplacer exam. The Accuplacer test is used by [South Campus] as a diagnostic and advanced placement measurement. The results of the test will be used to counsel students concerning their program choice, class schedule and credit load.

The participants who chose to enroll in a South Campus program experienced what is often termed open admissions and received South Campus Program Acceptance Letter (see Appendix E). Differences in the two acceptance letters show that from the beginning the participants who were required to begin at South Campus after applying to a four-year degree program were treated differently than both their peers who started in their four-year programs as well as their peers including the participants who chose to start in their two-year degree programs.

The final component of the moving in phase is the impact the transition or “the degree to which the transition alters one’s daily life” (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 52). The participants in this study who chose to begin at South Campus identified mainly positive experiences. The participants placed at South Campus identified initial feelings of “shots to pride,” “confusion and frustration,” and “concerns regarding the length of time to degree” which will be addressed in the moving through phase.

Timing is an important part of any transition (Schlossberg, 1984). In terms of timing, the participants all began their college education at times that were appropriate in their life. Two of the participants, Barb and Wesley chose to begin college directly out of high school. The other eight participants enrolled as nontraditional students. The label nontraditional in reference to adult students represents an atypical entry and status in higher education which does not conform to the high school to college pathway. In addition, it can be argued that timing is unconventional for all of the participants including Barb and Wesley, as they deviated from the high school to four-year degree traditional pathway.

In this study, reasons for beginning at South Campus impacted the decisions the participants made specifically related to two-year degree attainment and the timing of their transfer to their four-year degree programs. The participants who chose to begin at South Campus in a CTE program as well as the two participants who initially thought they were North Campus students but were actually enrolled in two-year programs all earned their two-year Associate of Applied Science degrees in their respective CTE programs prior to enrolling in the Bachelor of Applied Science programs. In contrast, all

but one of the participants who began in the Associate of Science Program at South Campus transitioned to their four-year degree as soon as they were academically eligible without completing the two-year degree.

Entering a Baccalaureate Degree Program The participants in this study experienced a second transition when they entered their baccalaureate degree program. Again, the conscious decision was made by all 10 participants to continue their studies in a four-year program. The decision to continue their education for some of the participants was triggered by unanticipated events that occurred during their two-year degree programs. Furthermore, all 10 participants had to make the decision whether to graduate with their two-year degree prior to transfer or to transfer prior to completing their two-year degree. After receiving positive feedback during the ASC (Associated School of Construction) student competition, Charlee and Wesley chose to continue after completing the Associate of Applied Science into the Bachelor of Applied Science. Charlee shared her experience stating,

I never planned on doing the four-year. I was just going to do the two-year, especially because the sustainable thing was only a semester. So, I was like, okay, well if it's a semester let's do four. Then I never really planned on doing the switch up to north campus. It wasn't until we were in Reno for the bidding and estimating competition. I was at the job fair, and everybody kept asking me, we'll give you a job. We'll give you a job, but are you going to stay another two years or are you going to be done now? I was like, Oh man, I really don't know. I kind of went home and thought about it and I thought, the last two years went by, why not another two. So that's when I actually decided to make the switch to do the four-year.

For Barb, the decision to continue was predicated on her ability to obtain a job after completing her two-year degree.

My plan was to get my two-year and go off into the workforce. But there was not jobs available when I first started off, and the reason why there were not jobs available because as you know the ages of retirement is about right now versus four years ago it wasn't. So I kind of didn't find a job very easily, so I said hey, I may as well go for another one [two-year degree], and then another one [four-year degree].

Unlike the others in CTE programs, Barb's two-year degrees did not transfer directly into a four-year program so other than the requirement to complete some of her general education courses, Barb was essentially starting over in her four-year program.

Sharon also chose to complete her Associate of Applied Science prior to entering the four-year program. For Sharon, it was part of the process and it also held meaning personally to her.

Well, I got the two year degree first because that was my understanding that when I came down here, I'd get the two-year and then when I went up there for my bachelor's, that was just the decision, I thought well, I've gone this far, and I knew a friend who was having a hard time with just his associate's trying to find a job, so I thought, well... I talked it over with my husband and decided well, I'll go on and try to get my bachelor's, and that's what I am trying to do. Just a matter of choice, because I wanted that degree. I've always wanted that. I've always wanted to learn something new. I've always tried to instill in my children that if you can learn something new every day, I don't care how small it is you're a better person for that. Education has always been on my list of wanting to learn.

It was previously established that Bob enrolled in college after his separation from the military focused on earning his degree in a STEM field. Unlike the other two Veterans who were required to start in a two-year program, Bob chose to earn his Associate of Science prior to transferring to his four-year program.

I'll just go with the associate's and see what happens because at least I'll have an associate's degree in case I quit. At least we have that two-year degree to put on a resume and to prove to people that you can at least do a degree even though it is only a two-year degree. I got to that point. I can

still continue with this. Like I said, for me, it was a good stepping stone to the bachelor's degree, so I liked it.

The remaining four participants had planned on enrolling in a four-year degree program so their transition had been anticipated. Although Karen initially chose to start at South Campus, her ultimate goal was the four-year degree, therefore, her decision to begin in the AS program was to complete the prerequisite courses she needed for her four-year program and finishing the AS prior to making the transition would have cost more in term of time and money taking the required courses for the Associate of Science that were not required for the engineering program. Mark, Mike and Spider made the decision to transfer to their four-year programs as soon as they were able without obtaining their associate of science first. The participants attributed their goal of wanting the four-year degree and not the two-year degree to their decision for transferring early. Mark summed it up best stating

Once I was caught up and able to transfer, I just did so. I don't know. It wasn't something I considered. I guess I just came in here, I guess just to get caught up in math and then once I did that, I just moved on. An associates wasn't something that was a goal, I suppose.

Participants' sense of control was represented in their enrollment patterns and may be related to their persistence. Five of the participants followed what is considered the traditional transfer pattern, beginning at the two-year college and vertically transferring into their four-year programs. The other five participants entered their four-year programs from what would be considered nontraditional enrollment patterns. Barb earned two Associate of Applied Science degrees before enrolling in her four-year program. Sharon and Terri began at the four-year level, reverse transferred during their first semester to their two-year degree programs and transferred back to the four-year

level after earning their two-year degrees. Terri did not enter directly into her four-year degree choosing instead to take some time off to work before coming back. After earning her Associate of Applied Science in 2016, Terri went to work to provide for her family. “I have two children at home. I’m a single parent, so it was a way for me to build my career in a quick way, and like I said, can continue onto my bachelor’s if I decided that was what I wanted to do.” At the time of the interviews, Terri was completing her first semester in her four-year program. Similar to Terri, Karen also worked after her two-year degree however, because her previous two-year degree was not directly transferable into her four-year degree she chose to reenroll in a two-year program before transitioning to her four-year program. As the participants’ experiences have shown, the institutional structure in place gives students the ability to identify the route to a four-year degree that works for their individual situations.

In addition to the timing of their enrollment in their four-year degree programs, control may be related to persistence. Research suggests that students who earn their two-year degree prior to enrolling in a bachelor’s degree program are more likely to persist to bachelor degree completion regardless of two-year degree type (Crosta & Kopko, 2015). Three of the participants in this study, Charlee and Wesley earned their Associate of Applied Science degrees and Bob earned his Associate of Science prior to the transition and all three graduated with their Bachelor’s degrees at the end of the spring semester 2019 shortly after the interviews were completed. Two of the participants who earned their AAS degrees prior to transitioning are enrolled and working on their four-year degrees. Terri is now in her second semester of her four-year program having taken some

time off after graduating with her AAS and Barb is in her senior year in her engineering program, scheduled to graduate in May or December 2020. Mark and Mike who were required to begin at South Campus and Karen who chose to start at South Campus also chose to transition to their four-year degree programs prior to earning their two-year degrees. All three will graduate with their bachelor's degrees during academic year 2019-2020. Spider is a junior in his two-year program and is on track to graduate in the six-year window with his bachelor's degree after transitioning without earning his two-year degree. For Karen, Mark, Mike and Spider, the choice to transition without earning their two-year degree has not appeared to hinder their progress towards degree completion as the literature suggests. Sharon is the only participant who is no longer enrolled and working towards her bachelor's degree. In Sharon's case her credit accumulation has caused her financial aid to run out before completion of her degree. As we will see throughout the remainder of the data analysis and the subsequent discussion, student choice versus placement will impact attitudes and experiences in other areas. The first place we will see a difference is in theme two: sense of identity.

Theme Two: Sense of Identity

According to Chickering and Schlossberg (2002), "Entering college involves letting go of the way you were and creating a new identity" (p. 5). During their interviews, the participants discussed multiple perspectives of their sense of self or belonging. The participants identified as college students, for some they identified both as South Campus and North Campus students, others identified only as North Campus students, and seven identified as nontraditional students. Furthermore, their identity as

transfer students was predicated on their definition of transfer and for some there were additional role changes beyond that of student that impacted their sense of self or belonging.

Identifying as college students was more important for Barb, Bob, Mike and Spider than the institution at which they were enrolled. In expressing her thoughts Barb stated “I consider myself a student that is trying to get an education. Not of any school or anything like that.” For Spider, becoming a student meant fulfilling a goal.

It means everything. It means that I am fulfilling a life goal. I am actually going to graduate from college and you know that is all I’ve, I could never do it in the past because it was always work, work, work you know or family and stuff and God just put me in the right position to, to allow me to fulfill this goal. So, being a student means everything to me.

The participants’ views of sense of identity differed between the participants who chose to enroll at South Campus and those that were placed at South Campus. Five of the participants who chose to enroll at South Campus either did not feel a part of North Campus until they were in their four-year programs or in the case of Barb, not at all. In contrast, two of the participants who chose South Campus and the three participants placed at South Campus, after the initial shock referred to themselves as North Campus students from the beginning. This may be due in part to their ability to take courses at North Campus very early in their programs as well as their stance that South Campus was a stepping-stone to their four-year degree.

When asked the question “While enrolled through South Campus did you consider yourself a North Campus student?” Barb responded

No. Very separated, and also the communication [between] South Campus and North Campus is lessened. They’ll send you emails but then you don’t

feel like you're really invited onto this campus, even though I've lived in the dorms all this time. It still didn't feel like I was a part of this campus.

Charlee had mixed thoughts on whether she saw herself as a North Campus student or a South Campus student.

I think I did always just, from the get-go, felt like a North Campus student, but I honestly more would consider myself a South Campus student just because it seemed like there was this invisible barrier between the two.

Spider and others identified as North Campus students from the beginning. Other than separate locations, they saw the campuses as one institution ... North Campus.

Spider: I don't know, I bought all of the swag that said North Campus on it and I probably wore it. I never considered South Campus not to be a part of North Campus. From the gate, it was ingrained in my brain that I was attending North Campus. Even though I was at South Campus I was still a part of North Campus.

Mark: I guess I've always viewed South Campus as just being a part of North Campus. Obviously, they're physically in different locations. But when I came here I just looked at it ... Because really the only thing that was keeping me from being technically a full-time north campus student was those lower level math classes. I looked at it like I was just playing catch up a little bit. But I was still I guess as student at North Campus.

When asked at what point in your education did you consider yourself a North Campus student, the responses were again mixed, although more so for those participants that began in a CTE program. The students who began in the Associate of Science program initially identified as North Campus students, although for some it really became a reality once they were in all of their classes at North Campus. Spider again insisted he never distinguished himself as one or the other. "I never considered myself a student of South Campus, I always considered myself a student of North Campus. The fact that I am a student of North Campus just blows my mind." Karen summed it up in one simple statement. "Fully is when I stopped taking classes at South Campus. I could come straight

to [North Campus]. I didn't have to drive, because it is a long drive back and forth." Bob like Karen explained the change occurred when he was at North Campus full-time.

I felt I wasn't a real North Campus student until I actually graduated with my associate's, and then I ... because even while I was still enrolled down there, even when I went to class here [North Campus], I think you'd feel more like a North Campus student if you took more classes here at North Campus. I didn't really feel like a North Campus student until I was in the actual bachelor's program. That's just me personally.

Considered on a macrosystems level, the attitudes the participants experienced from community members, peers, faculty and even their own perceptions of two-year education contributed to their sense of identity as either a South or North Campus student. Several of the participants recalled being subjected to what they felt to be negative attitudes towards South Campus and the education they received while students there. Barb and Sharon described experiences where they were led to believe "two-year education is nothing" by individuals in the community and within the faculty at North Campus. Wesley discussed feeling a sense of rivalry between the two campuses amongst both the students and the faculty. Although Bob, Charlee, Karen and Sharon did not have the same sense as Wesley from the faculty, they acknowledged feeling that their peers at North Campus treated them differently at least in the beginning until they had proven themselves capable academically. Bob spoke of hearing the name and the location of South Campus on his initial visit but did not receive any details about the programs offered. Charlee recounted a situation out in the community indicating there was confusion over the programs available to students at the campuses.

Sometimes, in the community, [telling] people that I was at South Campus. They're wondering, well, why didn't you decide to go to North Campus? As if you could choose between the two for...if I wanted to do Carpentry up North that I could in a sense.

Charlee, Sharon and Wesley used the word “elite” in comparison to South Campus to describe how the community and individuals of North Campus perceived the four-year institution. Charlee couldn’t believe there was such a hierarchy “I just feel like the whole North Campus versus South Campus is a little more known. It’s almost more elite, but that sounds silly now that I say it out loud. They mean the same to me, but I think they mean different things when you tell them to people.” Sharon felt that the elitism she perceived from North Campus towards South Campus was reinforced in the media and funding activities.

North Campus is in the media all of the time. You never hear anything about South Campus, very rarely. Even online, if you’re looking up stuff ... I can recall a program here at South Campus being advertised maybe once in all the years I’ve been at the North or South Campus. It’s not something that’s out there. It should be more, and I feel that South Campus should get more money ... and I feel that North Campus gets most of the money because it’s more ... I don’t know. They give you the impression that they’re more elite than South Campus.

Another consideration in the examination of participants’ sense of identity was their status as transfer students. When asked if they considered themselves transfer students, the responses were mixed and based on the participants’ definition of transfer. Bob, Charlee, Mark and Terri agreed that technically yes, on paper, they are transfer students but, on a personal level no; they just moved or transitioned to their four-year programs. Mark illustrated the reason on paper or “technically” they are considered transfer students.

Well, I guess technically, yeah, I do because all the classes I took, regardless of which campus those classes were taken at, are considered transfer credits on my transcript displays. That those credits were transferred in from South Campus to North Campus, which readjusted my GPA and everything like that. That was kind of strange. I guess technically I would consider myself a transfer student. Personally, no, because I’ve never really looked at it as

there being that division. Or that dividing line between the two institutions. I guess I just kind of always thought of them as one.

Terri also had mixed thoughts on her status as a transfer student. Unlike the other participants who viewed transfer status as a technicality, environment was the contributing factor for her.

Yes and no. Yes, because now that I'm up here [North Campus] full-time, it does feel really foreign to me. Just being every single one of my classes is fairly large. That does make it difficult, and not being able to get almost that one-on-one time with each of your instructors. It makes it more difficult, and it makes me feel like a transfer. But I guess from a logical perspective, no. I feel its kind of one and the same.

Karen and Spider did not consider themselves transfer students because they were already on North Campus for classes and in Spider's case he didn't move. "No because I didn't change cities, you know, all I did was go from downtown [South Campus] to uptown [North Campus]. Yeah, I don't consider myself a transfer student ... Am I?" Mike too did not consider himself a transfer student he chose to look at it in a different way.

I don't consider myself to be a transfer student any more than I consider myself an Aquarius. It's an arbitrary term. I consider myself pretty fortunate to unknowingly walk into a situation into a lesser college quotation figures, lesser college and then transfer to a new bigger establishment. It's like moving from JV to varsity. You're still doing the same sport. It's semantics really.

Nontraditional Student Identity The participants in the study ranged in ages from 23 to 54. Seven of the participants identified as nontraditional students. They considered their age and status affecting their sense of belonging most. Spider laughingly explained

I'm not 30 years and coming back to school. I'm 54 and coming back to school. Sometimes when I get in a class before class starts and kids are talking about their parents and stuff, I'm the parent their talking about you

know and it's like I said, it doesn't bother me, it isn't keeping me from coming to college. It's more comical than anything else.

Karen too somewhat jokingly stated

It's nothing about South Campus. Because there's nothing that shows me. I don't wear a badge saying, I'm South Campus. I don't wear anything that says I'm any different than any other students besides gray hair.

Although, Spider initially joked about his age, he went into more detail and explained why age was a contributing factor in his contrasting comfort levels at both the North and South Campuses.

It has nothing to do with South Campus or being out at South Campus but being a nontraditional student. Sometimes, I feel like I don't belong. I am 54 years old. Sometimes it is hard for me to sit in some of those classes with all of those younger kids. I ran into more nontraditional students here at South Campus. I was in classes with more nontraditional student than I am up at North Campus. All of the classes I am in now, I'm the guy, I am the nontraditional student except in World History, there's a couple of other students that are, that I went to school with down here at South Campus.

Sharon not only identified challenges she perceived as a nontraditional students, but shared her opinion of what the institution should do to assist the nontraditional student population.

My biggest thing going from here [South Campus] to there [North Campus] was competing with the younger kids, that's how I felt. I felt they had more preference than I did with some of the professors, which is understandable.

Be more open to your older students. Be more willing to talk with them, be able to talk with them and get what ... what don't they [students] get, what do they [students] get? Be more open and understanding, I guess. I know, like I said, they're busy, it's a faster pace up there [North Campus], it really is. Maybe slow down or I don't even know if that is possible up there.

Regardless, of the participants' sense of identity, there were role changes that contributed to and were impacted by their transitions.

Role Change The situation of the transition to college student may come with multiple role changes. Including becoming college students, some of the participants experienced additional role changes at different points along the way to becoming students in their four-year degree programs. In addition to making multiple transitions first as college students at South Campus and then as North Campus college students, two of the students transitioned into another role as parents. When he began as a student at South Campus, Mike was going through the divorce process and still living in Helena commuting every day. As Mike transitioned to the four-year degree program, he met his current wife and became a father and also became employed full-time. Spider's situation was similar to Mike's in that he too began working and started a family right at the time of his transition to his four-year degree program.

I had a child in the spring of 2018 and I started a job in the summer of 2018 so all during this school year I have worked and it has been kind of challenging. Just trying to balance work with school and then time with my daughter because when I was down here at South Campus all I had was school. Now, I have my little girl, I have part-time work and I have school so, I'm growing up.

Taking more credits in upper-division courses necessitated changes in the number of hours worked for several of the participants. After their transitions Karen, Sharon, Terri, and Charlee found themselves working less. Karen had this to say about her work schedule "While I was at South Campus, I still had full-time status at work and at school. [At North Campus I had to go to part-time status at work because] I was signed up for more credits, so I wasn't able to get in as many hours during the week."

Unlike some of the participants who were already working while going to school, Mike, Mark, Spider and Wesley started working while in their four-year degree. Mike

and Spider had to begin working to support their families, while Wesley decided to get a job when he changed from a full-time to a part-time student as a result of needing only one class each semester during the final year of his four-year degree “ I was pretty much a full-time student until this year, when I was taking just three credits. And since I had the time, I decided to get a part-time job.” Mark started working as a student but chose again to be unemployed during his last year for no reason other than he had been working “for spending money” and decided he didn’t want to keep his job on campus.

Theme Three: Paying for College

Paying for college is a significant concern for most college students however, for the participants in this study, it was an important part of the conversation. Three of the participants reported using Veteran’s benefits to pay for college. For Bob, the GI Bill provided the catalyst for enrolling “When I was deciding whether to leave or stay in the military, I had the GI Bill to pay for college so that was my primary reason of being able to go to college. If I didn’t have the GI Bill I most likely would not have gone.” Three of the participants reported using Voc. Rehab. in addition to financial aid to pay for their education, while the other participants reported using financial aid.

Identified previously by Dowd (2012) as “sticker shock,” Karen raised the issue of the increased tuition and the additional fees generated by the transition to her four-year degree program. “Well, the tuition went up, and paying for holy hyper fees, and hyper fees, and another set of hyper fees, it seemed like. And then the medical center, which I still have yet to use, because of the limited hours of it. So, yeah, the cost.” As Karen pointed out, there is a distinct difference in the cost of attendance between South Campus

and North Campus. The Board of Regents (2010) provides institutions the ability to set their tuition and fee levels, with the understanding that costs remain competitive but also low enough that access to education remains affordable and that the cost of education will increase as the education level increases (Regents, 2010). Karen's experience is symptomatic of a financial issue some of the internal transfer students experience based on the timing of their transition (mid-year) where the amount of their financial award does not cover the increased tuition and fees of the four-year program.

In addition, Sharon recounted running out of funding from both financial aid and Voc. Rehab. as of the end of the spring 2019 semester which will hinder her ability to complete her four-year degree in a timely manner. Sharon's experience parallels the issues many students who begin at community colleges encounter with financial aid. Campbell, Deil-Amen, and Rios-Aguilar (2015) found students who are required to complete developmental coursework begin at community colleges or attend multiple institutions or change majors multiple times often accumulate more credits than financial aid policies allow prior to graduating from their four-year degree programs. The experiences identified by both Karen and Sharon are two examples of financial situations that could cause students to leave colleges or universities. In Karen's case, the transition occurred mid-year creating challenges paying for the semester when her financial aid did not cover a significant portion of her total bill.

When I made the transfer, I was not offered a loan because it was in the middle of a semester. And even though I talked to enrollment services, they said, "Oh, it should be there. It should be offered." And it still wasn't. So, that first semester went on my credit card which is where it still sits. That first transfer semester. So I didn't have the ... yeah. Because before that time, my Pell Grant paid for it, all but like 100 of it.

Unlike Karen, Sharon isn't able to cover the remaining tuition and for her the outcome is not as clear. At the time of the interview and follow-up, Sharon was unsure when she was going to be able to afford to pay for the courses she needs to complete her four-year degree and did not register for any fall 2019 semester courses.

Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) found that while there are a great number of scholarships available for diverse populations of students, scholarships for transfer students are much more limited. When asked about scholarships, all 10 participants reported that they were not awarded scholarships during their two-year programs at South Campus and only three of the 10 had received scholarships while enrolled in their four-year programs at North Campus. Barb, Bob and Karen have all received scholarships as students in their four-year programs.

Asked why they did not apply for scholarships, both Bob and Karen discussed their lack of knowledge about the continuing student scholarship application as students at South Campus as their main factor for not applying, while Charlee, a CTE student, stated she knew scholarships were available, she was under the impression that she had to maintain a very high GPA and given her perceived abilities and working multiple jobs, felt that she would not be able to keep a 4.0 so she never bothered to apply. The lack of knowledge and understanding the participants have regarding the costs of their four-year programs and the scholarship process caused challenges that can and should be addressed during orientation and advising appointments.

Theme Four: Institutional Supports

In general, individuals receive support from family, friends, and through institutional resources such as advisors, faculty, and various student services. The participants in this study spoke of a number of institutional resources they have utilized throughout their time at both the South and North campuses. The support used most by all of the participants was academic advising.

Advising As one of the areas identified in the literature as critical to student success, it was important that the participants were able to articulate their advising experiences at both the two- and four-year level. It should be clarified that faculty at both South Campus and North Campus are responsible for advising students in their two-year programs. Only the AS program advisor would be considered a professional advisor as a non-tenured instructor. In addition to all of the positive advising the participants received, they were not shy reporting a negative experience, even if the advisor they were identifying in the experience was me. Executed well, academic advising provides accurate and timely information while connecting students to their institutions (Fosnacht et al., 2015; Smith & Allen, 2006).

Two-year Advising The advising students receive at South Campus has been described as developmental with faculty advisors taking the time to build connections or relationships with students (Morley, 2015). During their time at South Campus all of the participants described positive relationships with their advisors. Sharon and Mike spoke

specifically about the support they received from their advisors allowing them to grow in their role as students. In describing his experience, Mike had this to say

If it wasn't for you as my advisor, I wouldn't be here. It's probably my own issues with PTSD and your husband having a lot of the same issues. You were able to understand my personality, but would have been much easier for somebody with none of your experience to just push me off to the side as, oh this guy's difficult. I can say the one reason I'm successful is because of that one relationship that I've dealt with you specifically to turn me from not understanding anything to being proficient and good enough to where I am going to graduate a year from, well, almost exactly a year from today.

Although advising interactions were positive, it does not mean that the information they received during their advising experiences was advantageous to the participants in preparation for transfer. The participants identified a lack of understanding about not only the demands of their upper-level coursework, but reported that they hadn't even considered applying for scholarships mainly because they didn't know about their availability, the process, and the requirements. Bob had this recommendation to advisors at South Campus.

I think they [advisors at South Campus] should almost talk more about different degree programs at North Campus. I think they should actually ask [students] their plain if they were planning to transition and actually discuss with them the different fields that you can go into and then how, if they're actually trying to do a specific associate's then which one would apply better to the four-year degrees. If it's just a general associate's like mine, that's even trickier because I could go to any bachelor's program. For me, I think the general associate's is more difficult, so you don't really know where to go. It's based off your own interests. I think they should talk to students more about that. Ask, what are your interests?

Four-year Advising Making the transition, the challenge for participants wasn't the paperwork. In fact, the process was seamless enough that a couple of the participants didn't even remember completing the form to change their major from their two-year

program to their four-year program. An advisor change is triggered when the change of major form is processed and an email is sent to the student, the two-year program advisor and the four-year advisor. Frequently, it is the responsibility of the student to initiate contact with the four-year advisor. Mark, Mike and Spider recalled their two-year advisor telling them who their new advisor was going to be and they took the prerogative to reach out to their new four-year advisors. Charlee and Wesley were lucky in that they were able to keep the same advisor. Sharon described struggling to connect with her four-year advisor. Karen, Bob, Terri and Barb all reached out to their new advisors after they were assigned. None of the participants were contacted initially by their four-year advisors. Advisor accessibility has been an issue in previous research and it is recommended that institutions implement policies that make advising a priority for transfer students (Lee & Schneider, 2018).

Participants' relationships with their advisors at North Campus were more divergent. Only two of the participants were able to keep the same advisor through both their two- and four-year degree programs which is uncommon for the majority of transfer students including internal transfer students who are required to change advisors. When the participants did not experience the same positive relationships with advisors at North Campus as they did at South Campus, they expressed frustration with what they perceived as negative advising experiences. Barb felt that she had three advisors while at South Campus that recognized and supported her academic abilities and pushed her to continue to engineering. Once she transitioned to her four-year degree program, when her first advisor left, she felt that her new advisor didn't care about her. Thinking there would

be a conversation with her new advisor regarding her thoughts towards changing to a different engineering program, Barb was discouraged when the advisor did not attempt to discuss her decision and instead approved the change and sent her on her way.

They had some changing in Civil the last semester before I changed over to Mining. I wasn't aware that my advisor in the Civil program had changed because my advisor left. I didn't receive an email or any notification. I went to the advisor I thought was mine and said I think I want to change to Mining and he said you know, at this point in time you should switch over to Mining. I think he knew something was about to happen.

When I switched to Mining I had to go to my new advisor in Civil to complete the paperwork and I wanted to talk about if this was what I really should be doing. I felt that my new advisor didn't really care that I was considering moving, he didn't really want to talk to me about it. He just said alright bye.

Sharon described having a great relationship with her advisor in her two-year program but was left feeling lost and on her own when she could never reach her advisor and had to work with whomever she could find to assist her at North Campus.

I know my advisor up there [North Campus], I don't know how many times I've had to go to [Enrollment Services] because he never returned my emails, was never in the office to ... or if he was, he wouldn't answer the phone. You go hunt him down and you're lucky if you ran into him. He's here but I don't know where he is at.

Bob did not have a negative experience with advising, he merely identified that the experiences were different, and it was an adjustment.

For me, that's where the roles entirely switched where I felt the advisor at South Campus was way more involved in your life and what you're doing with your degree. When I got here [North Campus], I don't know how many students advisors have here, but I almost felt like the advisor at North Campus, it was a complete 180 degrees where they can answer your questions, but they're not really ... it's almost like they could care less almost what you're taking or what your plans are. When I was at South Campus, that's what I guess I missed where the advisor was more in your life. You can do this. They actually gave you a cutout plan on what you can

do and give you suggestions. It just changed when you come here [North Campus].

The majority of the participants who were required to begin at South Campus reported positive experiences with their academic advising. The biggest issue that they encountered was in registering for classes. Because they were not always in sync with their program requirements, they experienced issues creating their schedules and registering for the appropriate classes. Although not necessarily a sign of frustration, Karen expressed wanting greater participation from her advisors at both South Campus and North Campus in developing her next semester schedule to ensure she is staying on track to graduate. Academic advisors at both the South and North campuses are in a unique position to work together and provide internal transfer students with schedules that keep them on track to complete their program requirements as seamlessly as possible.

Faculty Interactions Many of the participants identified going to their faculty for support or assistance with problems at both the South and North campuses. As South Campus students Barb, Bob, Sharon and Terri found the faculty to be approachable and willing to work with the students. Barb, Bob and Sharon not only found the South Campus faculty approachable but felt that they had in getting to know them, challenged them to go further. For many nontraditional students, past life experiences may have led to the creation of self-doubt, a perceived lack of academic skills, lack of purpose and direction, family demands as well as other preexisting circumstances driving the need to provide a more developmental approach to advising (Hensley & Kevin, 2001). Knowing he had to work on his Math skills before he could transition to his desired engineering

program, Bob resigned himself to the fact that he would need several semesters of developmental math before he reached the Pre-Calculus course which would allow him to begin his engineering courses. Bob specifically spoke of his experience with a South Campus instructor that helped him advance faster in math.

[The instructor] gave a test in the beginning just to see what level the students were at. I thought that was cool where she gave a test of her own. She determined what your skills were, and then she actually bumped me up to the next class because she's like, well you know this. Even though your COMPASS placed you in this, I think you should do this. For me, that actually saved me a semester most likely because I was able to move up.

Sharon too had an experience with a faculty that made her want to continue.

At the [South Campus] I would go to [my Accounting instructor]. She's my favorite person, I tell you. But she made me feel more ... I mean I was able to meet with her after class or catch her in the hallway and we'd set up a meeting or something. Just being in her classes and seeing how adamant she is about the subjects she has taught. It makes you want to learn more. At least it did for me. Just that encouragement, to see how much she enjoyed this, that made me feel like there is a reason why I am here.

As nontraditional students, both Bob and Sharon described experiences that illustrate a developmental approach to the teaching and advising they received at South Campus.

Although mixed, in their interactions with faculty at North Campus, the majority of the participants did report mostly positive experiences. The more developmental approach to education is often less prevalent in four-year programs than two-year programs given the increased demands on faculty due to larger class sizes, and research requirements. Quotes from Karen, Mike and Spider exemplify the characteristics of interactions that would be considered developmental and indicate faculty that were willing to connect with students on a more personal level contributing to their satisfaction with faculty interactions at North Campus.

Karen: My department. I feel like they're really supportive of their students. They know who they are. They know what they are doing. They know where they are going. And during this time of the year, they're always trying to figure out who has summer jobs or what everybody's doing for the summer, so that they can get them.

Mike: [My engineering advisor]. He's not even my advisor anymore, hasn't been for two years. I still go in and just sit down and talk to him. I mean, that dude is irritatingly intelligent. We have a good relationship. We can still sit down and talk. If I have a question concerning something, I can always go in and talk to him. He'll stop whatever he is doing, help me out. Even if I just want to go in and chat with him for a little bit, he's been really good.

Spider: You guys have taught me that I can do stuff, that I can get through this stuff and there is no reason for me to fail. I've been told, hey these guys are here to help you. They want you to succeed. They don't want to see you struggling. They don't want to see you not showing up for class and stuff. They WANT you to succeed.

With the positive comes the negative, and the participants, both those who chose to enroll at South Campus and those placed at South Campus found some faculty to be less engaged with students at North Campus. Sharon, Terri and Barb aired negative experiences with their faculty both in and out of class, drawing comparisons between the faculty and South Campus and faculty at North Campus. They acknowledged the attitudes they encountered from faculty at North Campus were not due to their status as transfer students but the size of the classes and the faculty's approach to education in general. Whereas they felt the faculty at South Campus were accessible and supportive both in and out of the classroom, some of the faculty at North Campus were perceived to be focused more on themselves rather than the success of their students. Sharon summed up the differences saying,

There's so much difference there. I don't know if it's the academics that are so totally different. I think a lot of it too was the professors. Like I said,

When you transfer from South Campus to North Campus, I don't want to say they're any more busy than the ones down [at South Campus], but the one's down [at South Campus], they made a point of taking time out to help you, talk to you, encourage you through this.

In addition to expressing positive interactions with faculty, Mike also identified closed doors as a barrier to access.

The administration up here I believe forgets sometimes they're dealing with humans. Everybody has their own stuff, their own worries. Up here [North Campus] it's still a small student body. It's different from department to department. Other departments just really don't care. It's hard to find an open door on this campus sometimes. Leave your door open. I tried to talk to a couple of people, sometimes they door was closed, which is still a physical barrier. They weren't willing to necessarily put forth the time, be it caseload or I don't know what it is.

To Mike a closed door was not only a physical barrier to faculty but symbolized faculty and administrators that were unavailable or too busy to meet with students. In addition to an advisor that was often unavailable, when she was able to meet with faculty, Sharon felt some of her North Campus faculty were unresponsive to the challenges she faced working with groups in their courses.

A waste of time. I was told, well hang in there, just keep doing what you are doing. You're doing fine. "That's not the point. What about my partners? I don't want to fail because they don't want to listen to any advice I've got." So, what do you do? They ended up passing, but I didn't. I ended up failing and I had to retake the class with another group.

Although Mike, Sharon and the other participants who experienced negative interactions with faculty struggled somewhat in their adjustment at North Campus, it did not appear to have a long-term impact on their persistence in their four-year degrees. Nevertheless, Mike recommended that faculty and administration work to be more accessible to students. In addition, Terri would like the faculty to understand that she and the other students from South Campus have a place at North Campus. "Be open-minded.

Don't intentionally or unintentionally think that they [South Campus students] are inferior in some way, or that they don't know what's going on. But also realize they might need a little extra help here and there." That help may come from the faculty or through various institutional supports and services available to students.

Student Services Three of the participants acknowledged utilizing Disability Services at both the South and North campuses most often for accommodations such as extended test time or testing in a quiet area. The Enrollment Services Office although used by all students was specifically identified by two participants Charlee and Sharon, as being helpful when they ran into issues with a scheduling issue (Charlee) and difficulties tracking down an advisor (Sharon). The Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) was identified and used at both the South and North campuses by Wesley and Spider however, they did not find it very useful at North Campus. Wesley visited ACE at South Campus for tutoring quite often but did not go nearly as much at North Campus. When prodded, Wesley responded:

The tutoring is a bit more limited there [North Campus], and you have to rely more on the professors and going to see them and taking their time. It seemed like tutoring is more for general courses than any specialized courses, like I'm currently in now.

Spider also found the tutoring resources limited at North Campus, but, unlike Wesley who thought the tutoring was more general, Spider found it to be geared more for STEM and not the general courses.

A lot of the classes I'm taking are not STEM related, so there is not a lot of tutors. I have no idea how I am going to work around that yet. Last year I took a Statistics course at North Campus and they couldn't find me a tutor and I was really blown away by that and they said, no, math and engineering tutors is all we supply and I was like, well, Statistics is kind of Math. Well,

we don't have tutors for Statistics. I was just blown out of the water and I thought, if they don't have tutors for Statistics, I'm really going to be screwed when I get to Drama and Poetry and Philosophy.

Spider and Wesley's experiences are indicative of the tutoring experiences many students both traditional and transfer have at North Campus where the majority of the walk-in and private tutoring is directed at Math, Chemistry, and Physics courses with additional private tutoring appointments available for available for Organic Chemistry, Economics, and lower-level Engineering courses. Tutoring in other areas is extremely limited and is mainly offered online. Since the time of the interviews and when Spider took the course, private tutoring appointments for Statistics courses had been added. In addition to the various student services that were utilized to provide support and assistance, the Success course was identified as beneficial by some of the participants.

The Success Course First-year seminar courses have not been directly addressed in the majority of the literature on transfer students. The Success class is the institution's version of the freshman seminar/skills development course. It should be noted that at the time of this study, only students in the Associate of Science and those on academic probation were required to take the course, therefore it is unlikely that majority of the CTE participants would identify it as a support and much more likely that students in the Associate of Science program would bring it up.

During the interviews three of the participants identified the course as being beneficial. Mark, Mike and Terri talked about the value of the course with regards to the skills taught and their continued use of those skills in their later courses, especially after their transition to their four-year degree programs. Mike expressly stated the tools he

learned in the course especially time management have kept him in school. Terri also considered if the course or something similar should be offered for transfer students.

I had to take the Success class and I almost wonder if it wouldn't be beneficial to have some type of class that's, whether it's required or just available to transfer students. I mean, call it a homeroom or something, just where they can utilize that extra help for whatever reason. Because it is kind of hard when you've got a lot going on, or if you're not from here, knowing where you can go to get tutoring, or when your instructor is in their office. It's a lot, so if you had some kind of avenue like that where you can just reach out and it's like, they're just there to help.

Terri clearly viewed the course as a tool to help transfer students and from her perspective signifies the need for an orientation directed towards the specific needs of transfer students.

Orientation to North Campus Orientation programs provide new students access to information about the institution. Internal transfer students attend orientation at the beginning of their two-year programs but are not involved in the transfer orientation when they transition to their four-year degree programs. In lieu of an official orientation, the ability to take classes at North Campus while enrolled in two-year programs may serve to familiarize internal transfer students to the North Campus environment before their transition to their four-year programs.

Although the participants shared a number of difficulties they experienced when taking courses at both campuses in the same semester, which will be addressed in a later theme, they also shared positive qualities. In this study, only one of the participants who chose to begin at South Campus took courses at both campuses at the same time, while all of the participants required to begin at South Campus were enrolled in courses at both campuses during the same semester at least once. Bob, Spider, and Terri found the

experience beneficial. They appreciated the ability to acclimate to North Campus environment while they still had the support at South Campus. Spider summed it up best when sharing his thoughts. “The experience was awesome because I got a taste of both worlds. I was down here [South Campus] with my nontraditional friends and then I was up at North Campus with all of the little teeny-bopper kids. I loved it though.”

Bob and Terri recommended that students spend time at North Campus prior to transitioning including taking classes while still students at South Campus. Bob stated

Spend time at North Campus early in your program. In that way, you’re not graduated with your associate’s and then now you feel like a freshman again. You get a feel for the shift. I think I got Pre-Calculus up here [North Campus] one of the semesters. You do feel like you’re transitioning, which that was nice where you do start down here [South Campus], but after a few semesters, well, then, you have to come up here [North Campus] for a class. To me, that was a good transition to where it’s not like you’re starting over again.

Jackson (2013) affirmed the more community colleges can provide an environment similar to the university environment that transfer students will experience the more likely the students will transition and adjust easier to their new university environment. South Campus is one of four colleges at North Campus and although it is in a different location, students have the ability to interact with and learn in the university environment. In describing her experience, Terri illustrated how she saw the two campuses as one institution.

I think just the integration, like even upon enrollment, I mean, you’re dealing with Enrollment Services up there [North Campus], you’re dealing with Financial Aid up there [North Campus], you’re getting your books up there [North Campus] and your parking permit and all that stuff. So, I think just having to spend that time, even if that’s the only time you get to spend up there, I think makes you realize the two are working as one, in at least some ways.

Taking into consideration, institutional structure and input from the participants, it should be recommended to advisors at South Campus to try and persuade students who may be considering a four-year degree to register for at least one class at North Campus while still enrolled in their two-year degree programs.

Theme Five: Institutional Procedures

The ability to take classes at North Campus was beneficial to the participants who were required to begin at South Campus. They not only viewed the experience as an orientation of sorts but it also contributed to their sense of identity as a North Campus student and not just a South Campus student. Nevertheless, taking classes at both campuses was not without complications, specifically, the distance between the two campuses which created scheduling issues for the students. They discussed scheduling challenges related specifically to the travel time between the two campuses. Feelings of frustration and wasting time driving between the two campuses were expressed in participants' narratives of their experiences. Karen's description is representative of what other participants shared.

The experience of taking them at both? It's frustrating because you lose study time by driving back and forth. And then distractions along the way. You can stop somewhere; oh, you're going to be out by the store and yeah, I think South Campus is a distracting drive. At times it was more difficult to access my advisor because I wasn't always on the same campus so I had to make an appointment.

While traveling between campuses created timing issues related to scheduling classes, another challenge to students was scheduling classes in the proper order in their four-year curriculum. Although the majority of the participants in this study did not identify the lack of a clear transfer pathway as a challenge, three of the participants, two

of whom chose to begin their studies in a CTE program at South Campus brought up the challenge of navigating the four-year program requirements post-transfer. An examination of the participants' scheduling challenges through the Exosystem of Bronfenbrenner's illuminates the weaknesses within the established pathways.

The Bachelor of Applied Science in Business was established at North Campus a number of years ago and the students who complete Associate of Applied Science degrees in Business Technology or Accounting Technology experience a relatively smooth transition given that the requirements of the AAS degrees fulfill many of the prerequisites for the BAS program. The same should be said for the Associate of Science program which is a transfer degree designed specifically to create a seamless transition into four-year degree programs yet, that does not necessarily appear to be the case with every student. Karen in particular addressed the need for clearer advising after getting out of sequence in her Engineering program. For students such as Karen, it may be attributed to fulfilling the general education requirements for the four-year programs early while they are working through the developmental courses to get into their program. Because many of the AS students have completed all of the required General Education requirements by the time they transfer, they end up taking program specific courses that do not have pre- or co-requisite requirements earlier than they would as traditional four-year students so they have to work more closely with their four-year advisors to get a full-time schedule.

Charlee and Wesley were students in a relatively new program and like Karen, they experienced sequencing issues. For them it wasn't that they had completed the

General Education requirements early, it was related to the specific requirements for the BAS in Construction Management requiring course pre-requisites that they did not complete as part of their two-year program. The required Math for the two-year program was considered a terminal Math; it did not transition to a higher Math so for Wesley his transition actually came with a set-back. Wesley had to take a number of developmental Math courses before he could take the required Math for his four-year degree. “I took five years because I didn’t know I was going to take a four-year degree, so I had to catch-up and do the generals required of that four-year degree.”

Charlee had an issue trying to schedule her last semester classes and had to seek out courses through an online program in order to graduate on time.

This semester I ended up taking Statistics through [an online company] StraighterLine. I had a hard time getting into my sixth class. I needed the senior capstone class and statistics. I was waitlisted for the online Stats class and emailed the instructor to see if she would up the enrollment and get me off the waitlist. I went to the head of the department and was asked why didn’t you take it sooner? Well, because I had prerequisites I needed to take. I did everything that I could by the book when I did. I think a lot of it was just the fact that when the Business and Construction programs linked up they didn’t pay enough attention to the fact that all of those classes were at the same time that were required.

Furthermore, when Charlee had to take the Statistics course through an online alternative, it triggered a financial aid refund which required her to return a portion of her award that was to cover the course at the institution and she had to pay for the online course herself without the use of financial aid.

Barb also had issues related to her “pathway.” Unlike Karen, Charlee and Wesley, the experience she had was related to what she felt was the duplication of course content. Within the Drafting program, Barb took two semesters of Computer Aided Drafting

(CAD) courses which did not transfer to her four-year program. She experienced the same issue with the Surveying courses she took as part of her Civil Engineering Technology program.

I took Surveying by [the instructor at South Campus], and they're saying that he doesn't teach the way they teach up [at North Campus] and I've watched them teach [at North Campus] and it's exactly the same stuff I was taught. I took three semesters of surveying [at South Campus]. They want me to take one, just Plane Surveying, and then one Underground Surveying, and I have more equivalent knowledge from [South Campus] than I would if I took the Plane Surveying class. I just don't understand, I took more classes than [North Campus].

Barb's situation is not unique, especially to students from CTE programs who decide to enroll in four-year programs that are not supported one of the specifically designed Bachelor of Applied Science degrees. The majority of the courses within the CTE programs, especially those with similar content are not articulated to replace or at a minimum act as prerequisites for program courses at North Campus therefore, students will take courses that appear to replicate those that were taken as part of their two-year degrees. There is then an additional cost both in time and money for students to "retake" course content within their four-year program courses that they already completed in courses as part of their two-year programs.

There has been some movement at an institution level to address some of these issues. The institution as a whole has moved to a co-requisite model to address the need to provide remediation in Mathematics courses in which the entering students in need of developmental math will take a lab along with their entry-level mathematics course alleviating the additional time and cost previously attached to the developmental math courses. Additionally, all two-year AAS programs will require a terminal Math that feeds

into the four-year degree program pathways. In doing so, students are able to progress into their four-year degree courses earlier and with less confusion. The challenge related to retaking courses with similar content is more difficult however, there appears to be some movement in this regard as well. At least two of the Engineering programs have begun offering electives through South Campus which is significant in that it represents a move towards acknowledging the value of the more applied CTE courses specifically those offered in Automotive Technology, Civil Engineering Technology and Machining Technology.

A policy that impacts all internal vertical transfer students is the institutional requirement that their GPA resets when they transition to their four-year degree program. The North Campus catalog explicitly states “a separate transcript and GPA is maintained for students at the various levels of the College. These levels include Technical, Undergraduate, Post-Baccalaureate, and Graduate” (Dickerson, 2019a). Although only Karen and Mark identified this issue during their interviews it is a policy that impacts all of the participants as well as the other internal vertical transfer students. The transcript and GPA policy mirrors the policies traditional transfer students encounter when they try to transfer credits to their four-year programs (Chrystal et al., 2013), but unlike the findings in previous research, the internal vertical transfer students are often taking the same classes as four-year students, only they don’t have the ability to include it in their four-year GPA which may lead to issues post-transfer with registration as illustrated by Karen “Even though it was said to be the same school, I had to wait to register because now I didn’t have enough credits.” When internal transfer students make the transition, in

terms of their class standing they have to follow the registration schedule based on credits accumulated so depending on the timing of their transfer they often have to wait longer to register as four-year students at least in their first semester, when as two-year students they had the ability to register on an earlier date.

Theme Six: Building Transfer Capital

According to Goodman et al., (2006) the moving out phase of the transition includes endings, changes in relationships and routines. The moving out phase for internal transfer students occurred once they had established themselves in their four-year degree programs. The phase began with the transfer process, which included the paperwork and receiving their new advisors. From that point, they are bachelor's degree-seeking and full students of North Campus.

Many of the participants describe a straightforward transfer process consisting of the completion of the Change of Major form and updating their financial aid paperwork to reflect their status as four-year degree seeking students. For some it was so easy they forgot they even completed the Change of Major form. Mike's description of the process depicts just how easy they found the transition.

Seamless. I literally went to my advisor down there at South Campus and registered, and I went to school. The hardest part of the whole transition was getting rid of my old advisor down at South Campus and finding a new advisor who was just as amazing. It was, I think, one piece of paper. I was officially a student up here [North Campus] and it was easy.

Although other participants described the process a bit differently they still felt it was pretty easy overall. After having issues when she first entered her program, Sharon made

sure everything was in place correctly for her transfer to the four-year program after graduating with her two-year Associate of Applied Science degree.

I just resigned up. I went up to the main office [Enrollment Services] and told them I wanted to get my bachelor's and I talked to Voc. Rehab., because I am going through Voc. Rehab. and just did the FAFSA and got everything ok'd. I also made sure and asked right away when I went in and signed the paperwork.

Returning to school for her four-year degree after taking time off, Terri also had found a straightforward process.

It was really easy for me. I called up the head of the department up there [North Campus] and just said I need to come back to school, and he told me to get enrolled, and he got me registered. So I mean, there wasn't really anything I had to do other than reach out and it was kind of all just handled for me.

Karen acknowledged the ease in changing to her four-year degree still, she described experiencing problems once her program was officially changed. "I had to wait to register because now I didn't have enough credits. When before I was able to register sooner. And then, I'm afraid I might have missed scholarship opportunities because my GPA also did not transfer." Karen's experience may be indicative of institution policies that unknowingly disadvantage internal transfer students during early registration for continuing students and within the scholarship process.

The knowledge and skills transfer students acquire while attending two-year institutions that will assist them in navigating the transfer process is referred to as transfer capital (Laanan, 2006). Transfer capital consists of both the academic and social capital developed at the community college. During their time in their two-year programs and through the transfer process into their four-year programs, the participants were moving through the transition. In the course of completing their two-year programs or the

prerequisite classes for their four-year programs the participants began to identify and utilize resources, make connections with institutional faculty, staff, and their peers, and develop the skills needed in order to establish themselves academically. Their success did not come without challenges but the participants were able to adapt and overcome.

Community college students who are more engaged pre-transfer tend to be more educated on the transfer process and made their adjustment at their four-year institutions. (Starobin et al., 2016). For many students, making the decision to enroll at a community college pre-transfer may mean restricting their social and academic engagement. “The unique, yet different institutional cultures of two- and four-year institutions create different social and academic adjustment experiences for community college transfer students” (Jackson & Santos Laanan, 2015, pp. 134-135).

Social adjustment Social adjustment was exhibited in different ways. First, a number of the participants spoke of South Campus environment as a community as illustrated by Wesley.

South Campus seemed more like a community kind of deal, where all the programs, they all know each other and they all get together regularly. If it's in the common area or bringing in companies that present, and they bring students down, or when they do that Thanksgiving meal or events like that. That's more like a community.

Second, most of the participants did not identify as transfer students, therefore, they did not feel that their status as transfer or South Campus students really impacted their social standing at North Campus. Bob, had this to say about his status as a previous South Campus student of his connections at North Campus.

I personally feel like I, out of most students, relate to people that do associate's degrees first or they did transition from South Campus to here

[North Campus]. I feel like I would be more understanding and more sympathetic to people who started at lower classes and lower levels because I've had to help people in their classes with math and stuff because they started here and actually struggled. I think it makes you a little bit more humble I guess because you did start at a lower level and you worked your way up to it, I guess.

Bob's experience allowed him to develop a sense of empathy towards other students who began their studies at South Campus which he could then use as a tutor and teaching assistant during his four-year program. As a Veteran recently separated from military service and suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), managing the increased stimuli associated with a larger and more diverse campus proved difficult for Mike after his transition to his four-year program.

As a student, at North Campus, we've got a much larger student body. The student body is a little more diverse. I had a hard time with my PTSD adapting to that. Down at South Campus it was a lot easier to just be yourself, talk with people.

Finally, the participants discussed their engagement in on- and off-campus activities. Student interactions with their peers and informal contact with their faculty through social events, activities, clubs and student organization assist in students' social adjustment. The participants in this study discussed their involvement as both students at South Campus and North Campus with varying levels of engagement. The participants in CTE programs, specifically Barb, Charlee and Wesley appeared to be more actively involved in a variety of clubs and activities especially during their time at South Campus. They were three of the younger participants in the study and were also enrolled in programs that provided opportunities to be engaged beyond the formal classroom setting.

Karen revealed her membership in Geology Club as student at South Campus and several others as a North Campus student although she is a member "by name only" as

are several of the other participants. When asked why they are members in name only, Mike illustrated a couple of reasons, first, his time demands in other areas, and second, he alluded to his age versus the more traditional aged students on campus.

I'm currently in ASSE. With me taking 15 credits a semester, working 40 hours a week, having a wife, two kids, and another baby on the way, I am with ASSE, but I simply paid a subscription. My name's on a list. I don't have anything to do with them. I really don't. I meant to. Then I just got caught up with all my domestic responsibilities. I'm not going off without my wife and kids to go bowling and drink beer with a bunch of 20-year-old kids, 22-year-old kids. I could be more involved, but I'm just not. Got too many things. I've got way too many irons in the fire right now to deal with something like that. My name is on the list. I don't know. It's kind of silly.

Charlee described an experience that shed light on an institutional policy that impacted her ability to engage in a more active manner at the institution. Charlee expressed wanting to join as a Senator when a spot opened up while she was still a student at South Campus. She described going through the process and gathering the required student signatures needed to get on the ballot only to be told in an email that she was unable to be a Senator as a South Campus student. The Associated Student Government Constitution in effect at the time Charlee attempted to run for Senator stated "one (1) student from the [South Campus] elected by the students of the [South Campus]. The election shall take place at the same time as North Campus. In the event that the position becomes vacant during the academic year, the Executive officers of the [South Campus] shall appoint a replacement" (ASMT, 2007, p. 7). The only other Senators specified are two Freshman Senators and one Graduate student Senator, otherwise the other seven Senators-at-Large that are not separated based on class, college or program. North Campus Senators including the Freshman and Graduate Senators are all elected by the entire student body (ASMT, 2007). There was already a South Campus Senator

serving and the open Senator position was for the North Campus therefore, as a South Campus student she was deemed ineligible to run.

Neither Mark or Terri were involved in any clubs or organizations. Mark stated he just didn't have any interest in joining, while Terri wanted to become involved as both a student at both campuses but time demands have made it difficult.

It's hard with my kids. They have so much going on and I just don't know. When I was at South Campus, I did want to join the cheer team, but it just, because of the times and stuff, I couldn't make it work.

Barb, Bob and Karen spoke of their time engaged in activities off-campus through volunteer work, and internships.

Overall, the participants reported very little to no participation in student clubs and organizations as either students at the South or North Campuses. Given the rigor of the academic programs and overall environment at the institution, the findings in this study seem to mirror the overall social engagement of the traditional four-year student body. Although there is a variety of student clubs and organizations, the majority of students are members in name only. Clubs and organizations directly connected to academic programs such as the Association of General Contractors (AGC) student chapter and the Mining Team tend to have the largest number of active members who prepare and compete in student competitions.

Academic Engagement Like other two-year institutions, South Campus maintains a dual role in educating students: 1) preparing and transferring students to four-year institutions and 2) preparing students for the workforce. Having begun at South Campus, all of the participants were representative of both South Campus roles. Bob, Mike and

Wesley addressed the different roles of two-year education in their responses. Mike discussed the “training” he receiving in relation to the writing and time management skills he needed as he moved into his upper-level coursework. Wesley was clear in describing the hands-on Construction “field training” he received at South Campus before transitioning to the four-year program where he learned the business side of the program. Bob specifically articulated both two-year functions in his response.

I know it's the same system, but I guess I looked at it where South Campus was, I would say more of a community college or certificate programs, like two-year degrees, or you could do the Lineman Program. I felt that was separate from here [North Campus], where they're more focused on bachelor's, master's and even a PhD's. For me personally, I think I was better for me to start at lower level classes to get my building blocks started, and then I could come here [North Campus] with what you already should have, and then I would be more ready I guess for a four-year degree.

By and large, the participants were happy and felt prepared for the transition to their four-year programs. Even so some of the participants acknowledged there were areas where they felt underprepared. Charlee and Wesley shared the need to “prove” themselves working with the “Engineers.” Charlee stated

When we went to the bidding and estimating competition, and I was representing South Campus, a lot of the kids that were up here [North Campus], they always, they treated us like we were the dumber slow [North] kids. I don't know if it's just maybe because that's their perception and there was a teacher up here [North Campus] was all, North campus all the way, and I feel like he treated South Campus differently. Then once I got up here [North Campus] into the Civil Engineering classes where they're all engineers and we're the construction management, we came from South Campus. I definitely feel that they just see us differently.

Karen and Sharon, two of the participants who enrolled later in life admitted feeling like they had to prove themselves to their traditional aged peers. Karen recalled the instructors seeing her abilities in the classroom immediately and feeling as though her peers judged

her for being older. “They don’t know why we’re here. They wonder why we’re even bothering because we should be retired by now.” Once she was able to prove to her peers that she could keep up things were much better and referred to some of them as friends. Conversely, Sharon felt like both the faculty and peers judged her and treated her differently as an older student. Sharon shared feeling as though the traditional-aged students received preferential treatment from the faculty because “they are getting them [traditional students] prepared for the real world.”

In addition to feeling like they had to prove themselves, the participants felt they were underprepared for the work their upper-level courses demanded. The participants described having “more writing assignments,” “adjusting to group projects” and “higher expectations from faculty.” Terri’s reaction is indicative of the participants’ reactions to their upper-level coursework.

I’m in my first semester at North Campus and I’ve never written this many papers in my life. Not that it’s not expected to work hard in college, but I think that it is a different way of learning. At South Campus I think it’s just more hands-on, a lot of in-class learning and you’re able to retain that, and you’re able to stop and ask questions and not hold up the whole class. At North Campus you don’t get that, and I think that it’s definitely hindered my abilities.

Unlike some of the other participants, Wesley did not share a class with four-year students during his two-year degree program so for him, having classes at North Campus with other students who were traditional four-year students was not only a big change but also a benefit to the students and the institution.

In the classes, there are engineers and then there are construction management students. But I really think, even though there is a difference, there is a strength there. Partly because I have the hands-on, knowing what effort it takes to swing the hammer, and they have the knowledge that I don’t have. You’re going to feel a difference, but at least in my program,

that's going to be a strength, especially in our industry, where contractors and engineers are constantly working together to complete a project. I really think if South Campus and North Campus do work side-by-side, they're going to probably offer something that other colleges don't offer and actually create a niche where people will want to come here because that's how real life is.

Wesley's interpretation of taking courses with engineering students and his belief that the institution could use such collaborations as the one he experienced in a strategic manner was a result of strategies he employed in order to experience a successful transition.

Transition Coping Strategies Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) identified four strategies for coping with and managing stress: changing or modifying the situation; changing the meaning of the situation; managing reactions to stress; and do nothing. In building transfer capital, the participants in this study employed a number of strategies at different points during their transitions. Strategies included looking at the positives; adjusting work schedules to accommodate their course demands; drawing on previous life experiences; and relying on their motivation to keep going.

One of the biggest issues a two of the participants encountered was beginning at South Campus when they had planned on beginning at North Campus. Having been in the military, both Mark and Mike felt they could do anything and faced with beginning at South Campus when they wanted a four-year degree was a shock. After adjusting to the situation both realized it was in their best interest to start at South Campus and that it would provide the skills they needed to be successful in their four-year degrees. Mike had this to say

I saw it as the route I had to take given my placement scores. I just looked at it as a ... It was a positive experience just based on the fact that, if I was going to go into engineering, obviously you need those math skills. Since it

had been so long since I've even sat in a classroom like that, it helped. I guess I just looked at it like, not necessarily a stepping stone, but I didn't have a negative outlook at it. I wasn't bummed that I had to start here [South Campus]. It was more or less a good thing.

When the question focused on what assisted in their transition academically the participants' responses focused on topics of self-efficacy or the belief in themselves that they can be successful as well as such self-regulation skills as time management as demonstrated by Karen.

Academically, I set high standards for myself. Typically, the first assignment/test helps to gauge how the teacher grades, what information they use in testing and I work towards that. Also, my time management skills are key. When you don't have a lot of free time, you tend to be more apt to spend it wisely. This is true for both South Campus and North Campus, nothing changed from one location to the next.

Bob and Mark felt their time in the military developing traits such as "self-discipline and work ethic" contributed significantly to their success, while Mike and Sharon used words like "tenacity" and "stubbornness" to represent the personal characteristics that have assisted in their success.

Knowing their disabilities, Spider and Barb utilized strategies that will potentially limit some of the challenges they face with time management (Spider) or difficult faculty (Barb). Already struggling with time management, Spider encountered personal issues that further hindered his ability to handle the demands of school, work and parenting. Going forward, Spider knows he has to "put his academics first" and more than anything else, has to ask for help, something he has not done well in the past.

In dealing with depression this semester, I know next semester, I'm going to see more of this stuff and I'm just going to have to fight through it. What happened before is I just let myself get too far behind and there was no way I could catch up. Next semester I am going to go back to the old ways where school is a job. I've already talked to my boss and he understands that school

is my main priority, not work. You know it's got to be school and my little girl. I also need to spend more time in the [ACES]. I have to get help. I have to ask for help when I need it.

Recognizing that she has difficulty connecting with some individuals and adjusting to meet the expectations of people in certain situations, Barb chose to forgo taking a class from an instructor if she thought there could be issues.

When I know I am going to bump heads with somebody I just don't take classes from them and try to avoid them, and I try to be okay with that. If you're going to bump heads, you're going to bump heads, there's nothing you can do about it. It could just be a personality thing, it could just be the way you work or the way you do something, verses how somebody wants you to do it. Yeah, it's good to see both sides but it's also ... from my view because I am disabled, it's harder to go from what you're doing to somebody else's thing in just a couple of months. And it is especially hard when you were trained all your life to do something one way.

After transitioning to her four-year program, Charlee knew she would need to take heavier loads in courses that were different than those she was used to in her two-year program. Her plan was to take more credits each semester knowing she could drop classes if the demands got to be too much. What she didn't realize was her ability to handle the demands of a heavier schedule which came as somewhat of a surprise when she didn't have to withdraw from any classes.

Every semester, I would load up as many classes I could with credits, and then thinking you know if I need to drop a few, if I can't handle it, then I can, but I wanted to take on as big of a class load as possible so I didn't have to worry about it towards the end. It turned out that pretty much every time I'd stack up those classes that I didn't really need to drop any. I was able to handle them.

Wesley chose to view his courses at North Campus with engineering students as he would working in industry. He identified and used the different strengths of his group members in getting coursework completed.

So, one example would be in the estimating class taught by Larry Hunter. I and my other construction classmates were together with an engineer. Being the only two construction students in the class, our group was a lot different from [the other groups] in the class, and we actually got the highest grade in the class because we worked our differences together into strengths.

Changing majors was an additional strategy used by three of the participants. It was during the moving out stage, post-transition, Barb, Mark and Mike changed their four-year majors. Barb remained in Engineering but changed from Civil to Mining. Barb jokingly played on words in discussing her decision to change to Mining stating she's "not very Civil" in reference to her lack of interest in Civil Engineering and her challenge connecting with people. Mark and Mike left Engineering and will graduate with their degrees in Occupational Safety and Health academic year 2019-2020. Mark did not provide a specific reason for making the change. Mike's values and belief that he would not be successful in the advanced Math required for the Mechanical Engineering degree led to his decision to change his major.

I wanted to go into a more challenging discipline. I settled on engineering first. I started as Petroleum Engineering but changed my major to Mechanical. Then I changed my major, yet again, to Occupational Safety and Health. Not the smartest thing to do but, again, say I could climb every mountain. I'm not very good in Math, decided to go this route. With my wife, my kids, my new one on the way, I wanted to make sure that I was raising my kids where I wanted to raise them. I refuse to leave [the state] unless I absolutely have to. Going with Occupational Safety gave me the best chance at staying in [the state] and keeping my family in a rural setting.

Ultimately, the participants acknowledged that students are also accountable; the institution is not solely responsible for their success. Regardless of their reasons for starting at South Campus, Mark and other participants felt the education they received prepared them to be successful at North Campus. As Mark said, "take your experience

down here [South Campus] and get as much as you can out of it. If you're here [South Campus] like I was, just take all those lower-level Math [courses] to really get a grip on them." Spider reminded students to treat their education like a full-time job, he did not and he paid for it after falling behind. The North Campus environment can be intimidating to students. Mike and Spider shared the need for students to take the initiative to build connections with North Campus faculty. They explained that if the faculty see students putting forth the effort, they are more likely to want to help. The faculty are willing to assist but will not do the work for you. Mike summed it up best stating

Get established in whatever department you're going into. Know the faculty, know your advisor. Find those open doors. They're here but they're not always going to be open right off the bat. You have to build rapport. You have to speak to the administrator, that professor, that advisor. You have to make sure they know your name when they see your face. They have to know that you are not just another student trying to get a C to pull through. They're going to see if you are really trying. If you're really trying, they will really try to help you. If you're just going through the motion, they'll sit back and they're going to watch you just tread water and it's not skin off their teeth.

Beginning at South Campus meant something different to each of the participants and each of the participants gained something from the experience. Combining what they learned during their time at South Campus with their motivation, skills and personalities the participants built the transfer capital needed to be successful in their four-year programs. Consequently, their time at South Campus was not looked at as a setback but as an opportunity to be taken advantage of by the participants in this study.

Summary

This chapter presented a significant amount of data. Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provided a lens through which I was able to examine and understand the transition experiences of internal vertical transfer students. Overall, the participants were honest and forthcoming in their narratives and provided a great deal of information that led to the emergence of six themes and subthemes which underscored their whole experience as students of both South Campus and North Campus.

Sense of identity was significant to the participants. Many of them are nontraditional students and that more so than being a transfer student has in some ways made their transition difficult. Whether it was in their interactions with their peers, their interactions with faculty, or juggling multiple responsibilities, the participants identified the complications their age or status as parents created. The participants who began at South Campus in a CTE program by choice tended to have courses at North Campus later in their programs, with some not having any until the transition to the four-year degree which supported their personal identification as a South Campus student more so than as a North Campus students. On the other hand, the students who were placed at South Campus took classes at North Campus much earlier, often as early as their first semester in their two-year degree which assisted in their personal identification as a North Campus student.

In general, paying for college is a huge stressor for college students. Multiple participants acknowledged funding sources such as the GI Bill and Voc. Rehab. as

playing an integral role in their ability to enroll in and pay for college along with federal and state aid. Noteworthy in this area is the lack of scholarships, not because they weren't awarded but because the participants did not apply for them, with all but three of them never applying for any scholarships at any level. The reasons presented ranged from lack of knowledge about the scholarship process, to just not believing they would be qualified.

Taking classes at both campuses created scheduling and time management issues. The participants talked about the time wasted driving between the two campuses and the need to carefully build schedules to account for travel time. Many also saw this as an opportunity almost like an extended orientation where students can get used to North Campus without having to be up there full-time.

Scheduling issues were also addressed related to creating a seamless transition between the two-year and four-year program. The majority of the challenges were brought up by the students in the CTE programs who had not originally planned on getting a four-year degree after completing the two-year degree. The students who began in the Associate of Science had some difficulties but none at the level of the CTE students. Recommendations from participants to the institution focused on better curricular alignment between the two-year and four-year degree programs. Recommendations to their peers focused on scheduling classes at both classes as well as keeping careful track of their own program requirements to ensure they were staying on the correct pathway to graduate on time in their four-year degree programs.

A number of campus supports proved useful to the participants. Relying on their advisors, the participants reported advising experiences that were mostly positive with

some concerns raised directed at advisor availability and providing more knowledge about four-year programs. Recommendations were made by several of the participants to improve the advising experiences at both campuses.

The final theme identified centered on how the internal transfer experience assisted in the participants' development of transfer capital. The subthemes reflected the key components of transfer capital consisting of social adjustment, academic adjustment, the participants' motivation and the various strategies the participants employed during their transitions. In terms of differences in the strategies employed, the biggest differences between the two groups of participants involved engagement in clubs and organizations with the students who chose to begin in a CTE program demonstrating more active participation than those who were placed at South Campus.

All of the participants conveyed mostly positive transition experiences as internal transfer students. The experiences highlighted both the similarities and differences between the participants who chose to begin at South Campus and those that were required to begin at South Campus. Participant responses and the emergent themes supported findings previously identified in literature focused on transfer students. Chapter five will discuss the findings and research questions in relation to the literature and the theoretical constructs employed in the study; the implications and recommendations for practice; and the implications for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter I will focus on a number of discussion points to address the following: (1) the initial study purpose and research questions; (2) conclusions relating internal transfer student experiences to previous literature concentrated on vertical transfer students transition to their four-year programs; (3) study limitations; (4) implications and recommendations for practice; (5) implications for future research; (6) ethical considerations; (7) researcher reflections; and (8) overall conclusions.

Study Overview

Based on my experience advising students in the Associate of Science program at South Campus, I had a specific interest in gaining an understanding of their experiences as internal vertical transfer students in four-year programs at North Campus. In order to understand the overarching problem related directly to the retention and success of the institution's internal transfer student population. Additionally, I sought to understand their experiences compared to those of CTE (Career and Technical Education) students at South Campus who also entered four-year programs at North Campus. Unlike traditional transfer student populations, the internal transfer population has gone largely unexplored, and North Campus presented a unique opportunity to explore this particular transfer population.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological inquiry was the examination of the intricacies of the transfer process between a two-year embedded institution to the

parent four-year institution and how internal transfer students navigated the transfer process to successful baccalaureate degree completion. Specifically, the use of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Schlossberg; 1984; Schlossberg, 1989) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1993) provided the lens through which this study explored factors related to retention such as the combination of internal transfer student background characteristics especially their reasons for beginning at the two-year program level, advising experiences, relationships with faculty and peers, coping styles, motivation, and their academic expectations; and institutional factors related to academic support, financial aid and scholarships, and policies.

The study sought to understand the transition experience of students who transferred from South Campus to North Campus. Participant interviews provided an illustration of the internal transfer experience. The following research questions guided and informed this study.

1. How do internal transfer students who started at a two-year college within a regional public institution describe their transfer experiences to their four-year programs?
2. How do transfer experiences differ between students who selected to start at the two-year institution and those who intended to start at the four-year level but were placed into the two-year program?
3. What do internal transfer students believe the institution should do to support their retention?

As previously discussed, this study explored the experience of 10 internal vertical transfer students at North Campus. Three of the participants were placed at South Campus in the Associate of Science and seven of the participants chose to begin their studies at South Campus in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. Participant narratives illuminated an overall positive experience that was punctuated by differences that appeared to be based on their interactions with North Campus while students at South Campus. Included within the experiences the participants provided recommendations they believe if addressed by the institution will assist internal transfer student success. The following conclusions and related literature section will address the findings as they are related to each of the research questions as examined through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

Conclusions and Related Literature

The themes presented in the previous chapter provided insight into the perceptions and experiences of 10 internal vertical transfer students who began at South Campus and transitioned to North Campus. A number of the participant narratives echo previous research on transfer student experiences at their four-year institutions in a number of areas such as paying for college, academic and social engagement, among others (Cabrera, Burkum, LaNasa, & Bibo, 2012; DeWine, Bresciani Ludvik, Tucker, Mulholland, & Bracken, 2016; Lee & Schneider, 2018; Packard et al., 2012; Townsend, 2008). Taken as a whole, the responses from the participants were supported by previous literature focused on transfer students with some interesting divergence which warrant further examination. The complex environment associated with an embedded two-year

college within a four-year public institution created unique circumstances the participants in the study had to navigate in pursuit of their four-year degrees.

In describing their transfer experiences, the participants provided insight which when analyzed led to the development of these six themes and their subthemes: (1) Sense of Agency (choosing to enroll in college, reasons for starting in a two-year program, timing of and reasons participants chose to continue to their four-year degrees); (2) Sense of Identity (nontraditional student identity, role change); (3) Paying for College; (4) Institutional Supports (advising, faculty interactions, student services success course, north campus orientation); (5) Institutional Procedures; (6) Building Transfer Capital (social adjustment, academic adjustment, strategies). Utilizing Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provided a guide through which to understand participants' experiences beginning with their entry into their two-year program and through the transition to their four-year program and for several graduation.

Question 1

How do internal vertical transfer students who started at a two-year college within a regional public institution describe their transfer experiences to their four-year programs? The first research question was focused solely on identifying and understanding the participants' experiences. The participant experiences will be discussed by theme.

Sense of Agency The admission policies established by the Board of Regents as well as their interpretation by North Campus impacted the ability of the participants to

choose whether they began their college education at either North Campus or South Campus. Comparable to other students, the participants in this study entered the moving in phase of the transition making the choice to begin college at either South Campus or North Campus based predominantly on the programs available and the geographic location of the institution.

Eight of the 10 participants identified location as their reason for choosing the institution which aligns with previous research on transfer student college choice (B. Tobolowsky & Bers, 2019). Only three of the participants explored other institutional options before choosing to enroll at the institution which is in direct contrast to the college choice model of Hossler and Gallagher (1987) which suggests students will explore a large number of institution options before making a decision on where to attend. Three of the participants did not anticipate starting at South Campus. Those students were required to begin at South Campus after originally applying to North Campus. That is not to say that the other participants had a smooth entry into South Campus. Sharon and Terri experienced confusion when they found out they were in the wrong program after enrolling as four-year students and then having to transition to their two-year program. Charlee thought she would be enrolling in one program only to find out it was no longer available and had to choose a different path. While each of the participants had their own moving in experience at South Campus each of them felt as though they were able to navigate South Campus and moved through their two-year programs relatively smoothly.

Examined through the macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) lens, the pathways or enrollment patterns of the participants entering their four-year programs are representative of several of the enrollment patterns identified in previous studies (Coley, 2000; Goldrick-Rab, 2006). Three of the participants identified experiences describing reverse transfer or swirling. Two of the participants stopped out after completing their two-year degree, however unlike Terri who returned and began her four-year degree, Karen returned to earn her four-year degree but had to essentially start over at the two-year level before transitioning up to North Campus for her four-year engineering degree. Barb earned two AAS degrees before continuing into her four-year engineering program. Although all of the participants ultimately transferred up from their two-year to their four-year degree, Bob, Mark, Mike, Spider and Wesley would be considered the more traditional vertical transfer students having followed a pathway beginning their education at the two-year level and transitioning to their four-year programs without any deviations.

Sense of Identity A student's sense of identity and their ability to adjust socially and academically has been shown to be an integral part of a student's persistence at their institution, resulting in feelings of connection, and support (Lee & Schneider, 2018; Townley et al., 2013). The participants in this study identified themselves in a number of ways. They are college students; some saw themselves as both North and South Campus students; some saw themselves as only North Campus students; and seven identified as nontraditional students.

Though the participants all identified as college students at both North Campus and South Campus the institution itself did not appear to matter to most. Only Mark and

Mike spoke of knowing North Campus is a good school with a good reputation. In contrast, Bob in his interview stated that the name on his diploma wasn't critical, "It's not like I am attending Harvard." This finding along with the participants' choosing the institution due to location appears to contradict the findings of Tobolowsky and Bers (2019) who observed the importance of the institution's reputation to transfer students in their study.

The identity of seven of the participants as nontraditional students appeared to be the biggest factor related to their capacity to connect with faculty and especially peers at either North Campus or South Campus. The number of participants who identified as nontraditional in this study relates to the statistics related to the influx of nontraditional students entering through two-year colleges. The National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2015, over 40% of full-time students on two-year campuses were over the age of 25. The percentage of nontraditional students at South Campus over the age of 25 is about 25% (Dickerson, 2019b) which lends itself to the assumption that there are going to be nontraditional internal transfer students making the transition to North Campus. Moreover, the number of nontraditional students enrolled in two-year programs continues to increase as programs are developed and strengthened with the need to educate and serve an aging population (Cummins, 2015).

Several of the nontraditional participants identified challenges not related to their classes such as work and family creating issues with engagement away from classes. One participant in particular, Sharon, spoke at length of problems she had working with two traditional-aged classmates on a group project. Time constraints did not allow her the

ability to work on the project at times suggested by the other group members and when she was able to go to meetings, she felt she was not respected or listened to. Where Allen and Zang (2016) found that the life experiences of adult students was advantageous in creating different world views which allowed them to be a source of information and insight for their traditional-aged peers, Sharon found that to be a hinderance when collaborating with her traditional-aged group members. Additionally, Sharon's experience was in direct contrast to the findings of Zastavker, Ong, and Page (2006) in their work with traditional-aged STEM students which found "a positive correlation between student participation in small group work (both inside and outside the classroom) and the extent to which students report that group work positively impact their own engagement, enjoyment, motivation, satisfaction, and understanding" (p. 3). In Sharon's case her group members did not have a problem with working as a group, just working with her as shown by them "shutting her out" of the group process.

On a macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) level, previous research has identified a stigma towards two-year education which has created a barrier to student transfer (Senie, 2016; Townley et al., 2013). While not considered barriers, the participants in the study identified a variety of attitudes towards their time at South Campus. The word "nothing" was used by two of the participants to describe what they had heard in the community and on campus. The words "rivalry" and "elite" were used to describe differentiations between South and North Campus faculty. The participants' perceptions are supported in previous research identifying a level of elitism and a hierarchy within higher education which places the abilities of the faculty, students and programs of the

community colleges at the bottom in relation to four-year institutions (O'Meara et al., 2007; Senie, 2016).

The participants' varied definitions of transfer led to assorted views of their identity as transfer students. Four of the 10 participants agreed that "technically on paper" they are transfer students however, they did not view themselves as transfer students because they are still North Campus students, they only changed programs. On a mesosystem level, environment also played a role in their definitions of transfer. One participant, Terri, identified as a transfer both on paper and because she had a change in environment when she changed classes. Spider's environment did not change in that he was already taking classes at both campuses and he didn't change towns therefore he did not consider himself a transfer student. The unique composition of the institution makes it difficult to compare the participants' identities as transfer students given that the existing research focuses on external transfer student populations.

Becoming a college student requires a role change. The participants in this study underwent role changes upon enrollment at South Campus that contributed to and impacted their transitions. Although at least one other participant is a parent, only Mike and Spider described the challenges they faced managing the responsibilities of becoming parents with the demands of their four-year education. The challenges they and the other parents faced are not unique and have been identified in previous studies focused on transfer students (e.g., Wang, Lee, et al., 2017). Role changes at work occurred for several of the participants during their four-year degrees. As the perceived demands increased as they enrolled in their four-year programs, three of the participants made the

decision to become part-time employees at their jobs. The change from full-time to part-time or decreasing the amount of jobs they worked (Charlee) did not appear to hinder the participants financially, at least initially. In Sharon's case, her finances became an issue when her funding ran out.

Paying for College One of the principal concerns for most students is how they are going to pay for college. All ten of the participants in this study utilized some form of financial assistance to pay for college. Three of the participants reported using Veteran's benefits; three of the participants used Voc. Rehab. (Vocational Rehabilitation) in addition to federal financial aid; while the other four reported using federal financial aid. In addition, at some time during their college education, every participant reported having been employed either part-time or full-time with more having worked while enrolled in both their two- and four-year programs, while others obtained employment after their transition to their four-year degree programs.

On an exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) level, financial aid policies tend to have a greater impact on the ability of transfer students to persist to their four-year degrees. Two of the participants encountered financial issues related to their funding. The increased tuition and additional fees posed a problem for Karen when she changed to her four-year degree program. Given the amount of aid awarded, and having already received funding for summer session and fall semester, the transition, having occurred mid-year created challenges paying for spring semester when Karen's financial aid did not cover a significant portion (about half) of her total bill requiring her to pay the remaining balance out-of-pocket. In contrast, students who change from one four-year program to another

rarely experience tuition changes although they may have some specific program fees which are usually covered by their financial aid. Sharon too, faced financial issues when her funding from both her federal financial aid and Voc. Rehab. ran out at the conclusion of Spring semester during which the study was conducted. Due to a lack of funding, Sharon reported that she is not going to have the ability to cover the costs of her remaining credits out-of-pocket and does not know when or if she is going to be able to complete her four-year degree. Sharon's experience parallels the issues many students who begin at community colleges encounter with financial aid. Campbell et al. (2015) found students who are required to complete developmental coursework, begin at community colleges or attend multiple institutions or change majors multiple times often accumulate more credits than financial aid policies allow prior to graduating from their four-year degree programs. The experiences identified by both Karen and Sharon are two examples of financial situations that could cause students leave colleges or universities. In Karen's case, she was able to cover the additional costs for the semester. In contrast, the outcome is not quite as clear in Sharon's case. At the time of the interview and follow-up Sharon was unsure when she is going to be able to afford to pay for the courses she needs to complete her four-year degree.

None of the participants were awarded scholarships as South Campus students and only three were awarded scholarships as North Campus students. On the surface, the participants' experiences appear to support previous research however, upon further questioning all of the participants reported they had not applied for scholarships as two-year students and only the three participants who received scholarships as four-year

students had applied for scholarships upon transitioning to North Campus. This finding appears to support previous literature regarding transfer student scholarships which found that transfer students did not receive scholarships at their receiving institution (Townsend, 2008), until the participants began explaining their reasons for not applying for scholarships. Whereas Townsend (2008) found a lack of scholarships specific to transfer students, the confirmed lack of clear understanding regarding four-year costs and the financial aid policies, as well as participants' reported nonexistent scholarship application activity are indicative of issues identified in previous studies such as Aheron (2009); Alexander et al. (2007); Dowd (2012); Wang, Lee, et al. (2017) recognizing the lack of knowledge regarding the costs and financial information external transfer students often receive prior to transferring to their four-year programs.

The increased cost of enrolling in their four-year degree programs often creates a challenge for transfer students necessitating the need to create financial aid and scholarship awards specific to transfer students (Alexander et al., 2007; Dowd, 2012; Wang, Lee, et al., 2017). The state's university system 2 Plus 2 Honor Scholarship is essentially a tuition waiver available to students who earn a two-year degree at any of the two-year campuses within the state's university system or the state's community colleges and transfer to one of the university system four-year institutions. The waiver is awarded based on both academic achievement and financial need and will cover the two years or four semesters of the students' four-year degree program (Unknown, 2019). While it is unknown if the participants in this study met the eligibility requirements, it is likely that they were not aware about it given their responses during the interviews.

Institutional Supports The microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) examined in this study were South Campus and North Campus environments experienced concurrently. Regardless of when the participants started taking classes at North Campus, there were still interactions with the administrative offices, the bookstore and student activities while enrolled through South Campus. Comparable to previous literature (DeWine et al., 2016; Nunez & Yoshimi, 2016; Santos Laanan, 2007), the participants reported positive experiences interacting with faculty, staff and administrators at South Campus while the results at North Campus appeared to be mixed.

Advising Satisfied with their advising experiences at South Campus the participants identified areas where they felt more could be done. The participants believed their advisors could have done more to assist them in certain areas such as scheduling planning and course registration, preparation for their upper-level coursework at North Campus, and scholarships. Packard, Tuladhar, and Lee (2013); Wolfe (2018) and Alexander et al. (2007) and others identified similar findings and recommended advisors at the community college level spend more time not only building relationships with students but also getting them the information they need that will assist them in developing the transfer capital they need to successfully navigate the transfer process and succeed at the university. Packard et al. (2013) went a step further with their recommendation to embed advising into class time as a way to reach more students and build transfer capital.

Whereas all of the participants expressed satisfaction in their South Campus faculty advising experiences, the same cannot be said for all participants regarding their advising experiences at North Campus. Two of the participants felt that their faculty advisors at North Campus were unavailable and unsupportive. The lack of what the participants felt was a personal connection with faculty advisors in their four-year programs was supported in previous research (Chrystal et al., 2013; Lee & Schneider, 2018; Nunez & Yoshimi, 2016). Based on participant narratives as well as previous research, more focus should be directed at encouraging internal transfer students to interact with four-year faculty early, while they are still students at South Campus in order to begin developing relationships prior to making the transition to North Campus. In addition, Townsend (2008) and Nunez and Yoshimi (2016) found that greater interaction with advisors focused on building the proper program pathway at both the community college and university levels is an essential component of the academic advising experience.

Faculty interactions Reflecting on their experiences in the classroom, a number of the participants in the study identified their ability to engage with their faculty more in the classroom while enrolled in classes at South Campus, whereas at North Campus, engagement was not as prevalent in the classroom with faculty and most academic engagement occurred with peers outside of the classroom in the form of group projects. Based on previous research, this finding may be problematic. In his review of previous literature, Panacci (2015, 2017) found that adult students want classroom experiences that are active, collaborative, and provide opportunities for interaction with faculty. In

recounting their experiences at South Campus, several of the participants shared their ability to interact with and engage faculty easier in the classroom, whereas at North Campus due in part to larger class sizes, they felt that the faculty had less time and were not as likely to be available or engaged. Compared to findings related to negative faculty interactions in the literature that decrease their academic adjustment (Jackson, 2013; Jackson & Santos Laanan, 2015) the participants in this study did not see a lack of faculty engagement at North Campus as significant or detrimental to their academic adjustment.

In describing their interactions with faculty and staff at North Campus and South Campus the participants emphasized differences in their perceptions of the teaching styles and engagement of faculty at both campuses. In addition, they described South Campus environment as more of a community whereas North Campus was more separate. Similar to the findings here, Herrera (2018) found that both traditional transfer and concurrent enrollment transfer students engaged more with their faculty at their community college than at their transfer university.

Student Services The prevalent services utilized by the participants were Enrollment Services, Disability Services and ACE as both North and South Campus students. In general, the participants were happy with the services and the support offered. Their biggest criticism was the lack of tutoring in courses not directly related to engineering and the sciences. Unlike Jorstad et al. (2017) where it was recommended that community colleges provide more attention to tutoring, the participants in this study have access to tutoring services at both campuses. The criticisms they expressed in relation to tutoring were similar to those found in the study completed by Ellis (2013). In the study

successful transfer students identified the limited times both for appointments as well as the hours the tutoring center is open and the limited number of tutors available for certain subjects as challenging.

The Success Course Only three of the participants addressed the benefits of the success course. The benefits gained from enrolling in the course such as time management and study skills helped Mark, Mike and Terri build the transfer capital and strategies needed to support their success as both North and South Campus students. Even though, the three participants found the benefits obtained from the course as significant enough to discuss, research on the effectiveness of first-year seminar courses focused retaining students between their first and second year has been mixed with some showing success (Burgette & Magun-Jackson, 2008; Gardner, 2013; Mayo, 2013) and others showing inconsistent results (Clark & Cundiff, 2011). Regardless, the literature focused on transfer students does not address the need for seminar course, preferring instead to address the need for a more in-depth orientation program for transfer students.

Orientation Programs The participants experienced orientation as new students at South Campus however, because they are not considered transfer students in the traditional sense, they did not take part in the transfer student orientation upon changing to their four-year programs at North Campus. This practice is similar to Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) who found that “change-of-campus students are treated as students who have switched majors” (p. 404).

In her discussion of the Success course, Terri felt that a similar course should be offered to transfer students as a way to orient them to North Campus. Although all of the participants had interactions with North Campus throughout their time as South Campus students, it did not appear to be enough for some of the participants to successfully acclimate themselves to the North Campus environment. Previous research has identified the need for orientation programs that are specialized to the needs of transfer students, providing information specific to the receiving institution (DeWine et al., 2016; Percival et al., 2016; Townsend, 2008). In lieu of an official orientation program, two of the participants identified their ability to take classes at North Campus as a means of familiarizing themselves with the environment prior to transitioning to their four-year program.

Institutional Procedures Although the participants have identified benefits to taking classes at both campuses during the same semester, it was also a challenge identified by five of the participants. Given the distance between the campuses and the need to drive across town, taking classes at both campuses required an additional level of time management that the participants were not necessarily prepared for. Previous research addressed the outside obligations such as family and jobs had on transfer students' ability to enroll in a traditional course load at their institutions (Laanan et al., 2010; Wang, Lee, et al., 2017). The need to travel between campuses appears to be a challenge unique to students enrolled at embedded campuses that are separated by distance from the parent campus.

The need for clear transfer pathways has been a significant finding in numerous studies (Alexander et al., 2007; Castro & Cortez, 2017; Herrera & Jain, 2013; Townsend, 2008) and is supported in the findings of this study as well. Although none of the participants lost credits in the transfer, four of the participants experienced issues specifically related to the institutional policies such as the need for additional remediation post-transfer, the perceived retaking of courses they already took in their South Campus program and taking courses out of sequence. For Wesley, the need to take the prerequisite Math courses at South Campus in order to take the required Math for his four-year degree increased Wesley's time to degree reflected findings in previous literature (Wolfe, 2018). Barb spoke of the requirement that she take courses with the same content as South Campus courses she had already completed (Ellis, 2013). Karen and Charlee discussed having to work with their advisors to "get back in sequence" having taken courses out-of-sequence as South Campus students. In Charlee's case sequencing became an expensive problem during her last semester when she could not take two of her final courses at North Campus when they were scheduled for the exact same days and times. Charlee was forced to pay out of pocket for an online course so that she would graduate on time at the end of the semester.

The scheduling issues experienced by Barb, Charlee, Karen and Wesley are not new issues transfer students face and stress the need for not only strong transfer pathways but also for faculty advisors from both South Campus and North Campus to work together to ensure internal transfer students have a positive experience transitioning to their four-year degree program (Ellis, 2013; Roksa, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Regardless of the challenges, the participants faced with scheduling classes at both campuses, retaking courses, taking courses out-of-sequence, and the need for remediation, they were able to persist which suggests they have been able to establish the transfer capital necessary to make the transition to their four-year programs and remain on track to graduate.

Transfer Capital The dual role of 1) preparing and transferring students to four-year institutions and 2) preparing students for the workforce is found in every two-year college mission including that of the South Campus (Anderson, Alfonso, & Sun, 2006; de la Torre Jr. & Wells, 2014). The participants in this study not only represented both roles but a number of the participants particularly Bob, Mike and Wesley acknowledged the responsibilities South Campus maintains in both areas as well as the college's position within North Campus. Bob and Wesley spoke to the hands-on and workforce development role of the majority of the programs at South Campus, whereas Mike addressed the skills he received while at South Campus that prepared him for what he felt were the increased demands of the courses in his four-year program.

The transfer capital gained during the moving in and moving through phases provided the knowledge and skills needed to successfully complete the transfer process. The experiences of some of the participants indicates that they may have not been as prepared for their upper-division courses as they should be. Four of the participants addressed the increased workload and academic demands connected with their 300- and 400-level courses. Of the four, three of the participants were students who had been exposed to classes at North Campus while students in their two-year programs. This

appears to align with previous research establishing the increased academic rigor encountered by transfer students at their four-year institutions (Chrystal et al., 2013; Laanan et al., 2010; Santos Laanan, 2007) indicating a lack of preparation at the community college level. According to Schwehm (2017), the academic rigor experienced at four-year institutions involves more reading, writing and research when compared to many two-year courses. While the increased demands of their upper-level courses was not identified as a challenge by all of the participants it cannot be assumed that it was not experienced by all of the participants, rather, it was not perceived to be as significant to them as other challenges they experienced.

Even though some of the participants felt they had not been adequately prepared which speaks to a lack of academic adjustment while at South Campus for the increased demands of their upper-level courses, the participants described the experiences that illuminated their development of transfer capital. Karen encountered difficulties initially when attempting to register for classes however, once she had established herself in her four-year program she excelled academically, earning scholarships and has participated in two internships. Having overcome problems during her initial enrollment, Sharon made certain everything was correct when she transitioned to her four-year program and although she has since encountered funding difficulties and has had to stop-out she has stated she will finish her four-year degree at some point. Terri is the only participant who just recently began her four-year program and although she stated she has had a difficult adjustment with her return to the classroom, she is confident in her abilities to settle back into the college environment. Mike and Mark both drew on the skills they developed in

North Campus Success class to balance their time and remain successful in their four-year programs. Charlee was able to seek assistance to find a solution and get the final course she needed to graduate in her last semester when she encountered a time conflict that was going to extend her time to degree. Wesley looked at his experiences in the four-year classroom as what it would be like on the job, working together with engineers to complete the project. Barb, Spider and Bob did not offer specific tools they have used to be successful, but they did discuss at length the support they received at South Campus and North Campus that assisted in their transitions.

A large number of nontraditional students enroll in community colleges who often have external commitments making social engagement more difficult. Community college transfer students often encounter barriers in the form of social interactions with their peers and informal interactions with faculty upon transfer to their four-year institutions (Chrystal et al., 2013; Núñez, 2014). On the other hand, (Deil-Amen, 2011) suggests that at the community college interactions occur that are socio-academic integrative experiences. Such experiences are found in the classroom through interactions with peers and faculty and through academically-related activities.

Mike and Spider experienced changes in their personal lives that impacted their transitions. Not only were they entering courses that they perceived required more time and effort, but they both became parents. Similar to this study, a significant number of transfer students have responsibilities beyond the classroom walls and attempting to balance family, academics and work is an issue identified in the literature (Jackson, 2013; Jorstad et al., 2017). Charlee, Karen, Sharon and Terri found themselves dropping their

hours at work to part-time after they enrolled in their four-year programs, yet they too continued to struggle to find balance between their personal and academic lives. The findings in this study support those of Patton and Davis (2014) which reinforced the need to provide a supportive environment for transfer students related to advising, faculty engagement both in and beyond the classroom walls, and in some ways alternative course scheduling to account for nonacademic responsibilities.

Previous research details the need to engage transfer students early and often both academically and socially at their receiving institutions (e.g. Jackson, 2013; Wolter, Millenbah, Montgomery, & Schneider, 2011). South Campus students are already students of North Campus as the parent institution, therefore, it could be assumed that the students would be engaged earlier than external transfer students, yet that is not entirely accurate. There are barriers in place between South Campus students and clubs and organizations at North Campus, that make it difficult for South Campus students to participate. One example is the student governing body the Associated Students of North Campus (ASNC). Charlee expressed wanting to join ASNC as a Senator when a spot opened up while she was still a student at South Campus. Charlee would have been the second South Campus student on the student government and the ASNC Constitution only allows for one student representative from the South Campus at a time” (ASMT, 2007, p. 7). The ASNC Constitution found on North Campus website was last amended in May of 2007 and remained in place until they were again amended in 2018 with the updated Constitution going into effect academic year 2019, however, even within the new Constitution there is only one South Campus representative allowed to serve on ASNC at

a time. Until the institution as a whole, addresses those policies that either directly or indirectly target South Campus students, there will continue to be concerns regarding the sense of identity South Campus students feel at North Campus. The experience described by Charlee is characteristic how systems interact as well as an example of how policy within the exosystem can impact internal transfer students.

Question 2

Research question two asked “How do transfer experiences differ between students who selected to start at a two-year college and those who intended to start at the four-year level but were placed into the two-year program?” Results revealed differences in five of the themes between those participants who chose to begin at South Campus and those that were placed at South Campus. While some of the differences coincide with previous research, there are differences that deviate from the literature.

Sense of Agency The five participants who chose to enroll in their two-year program appeared to adhere to several of the themes “They Said I Couldn’t Do It; Life Happens; Educational Aspirations; Influence of Peers and Family; Price and Location; and Institutional Characteristics” identified by (Somers et al., 2006, pp. 58-63) in their two-year college choice model. The five participants who had to start at South Campus had to make the adjustment to entering through South Campus after preparing for a transition to beginning at North Campus. For these participants their adjustment included the stress of adapting to their perception that they “weren’t good enough” to begin at North Campus.

The conscious choice to continue into a four-year degree program as well as the timing of the transition was a significant difference between the two groups of participants when it came to why and when they made the decision to transfer to their four-year degree programs echoing the findings from Tobolowsky and Bers (2019). Three of the participants who chose to enroll in CTE programs did not enter South Campus with aspirations of continuing to a four-year program and did so after receiving feedback from individuals in the community related to the knowledge and skills they exhibited at a student competition; and when the job market took a downward swing. Findings from Jabbar et al. (2017) indicate the location of four-year institutions in relation to transfer students' locations factor into their transfer decisions. The fact that the students had access to the BAS programs connected directly to their two-year degrees at the four-year institution where they were already enrolled as South Campus students in addition to supportive feedback from others provided the incentives, they needed to continue their education.

All of the participants who chose to enroll first in a CTE program and only one student who was placed in the Associate of Science completed their two-year degrees and graduated prior to transitioning, while four of the participants who were placed in the two-year programs chose to transfer to their four-year degree programs without first completing their two-year degrees. Similar to the findings of Roksa (2006) a lack of two-year degree attainment did not appear to have an effect on transfer and does not appear to impact four-year degree completion for the participants in this study with the exception of Sharon who was forced to stop-out due to financial issues. In addition, previous studies

have found that community college student intent to transfer has a larger impact on bachelor's degree attainment than completion of a two-year degree prior to transfer (Roksa, 2006; Wang, 2012).

The four participants who transferred to their four-year programs without earning their two-year degrees never intended to get them, having applied initially to their four-year degree programs in the beginning. Moreover, Karen not only never intended to earn a second two-year degree, her decision to transfer early was also based on the need to take courses for her two-year degree that are not required for her four-year degree. Again, the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in place illustrates the differences between two and four-year programs that make it difficult for students to earn both two- and four-year degrees. Completing a two-year degree first would have forced Karen to spend more time and money in order to earn her four-year degree as well. Of concern to transfer students in previous research are lost time and credits when transfer students take coursework at their community college that is outside the degree plans for their four-year programs (Ellis, 2013). Having never wanted to earn their two-year degrees, the four participants who transferred early also never really considered themselves South Campus students so their decision to transfer was easier.

Sense of Identity Examined through the mesosystem lens, there were interactions between the two campuses that warrant discussion. The participants who chose to enroll at South Campus specifically addressed feeling like the two campuses were separate institutions rather than separated only by distance. They described feeling an invisible barrier between the two campuses. Literature in this area is lacking with the research

focusing on the post-transfer experiences rather than opportunities to engage two-year students pre-transfer at their four-year institutions (e.g., Chrystal et al., 2013; Lee & Schneider, 2018). Participants' sense of identity as either South Campus or North Campus students was driven by their reasons for beginning at South Campus. Those participants who chose to begin at South Campus identified as South Campus students and had a difficult time identifying as North Campus students even after their transition to North Campus. The participants who were placed at South Campus, on the other hand, identified much earlier as North Campus students often from the beginning. Mark, Mike and Spider understood they were not going to remain in the two-year program long and chose to view themselves as North Campus students using the courses at South Campus as building blocks to their four-year degrees. Furthermore, the participants who were placed at South Campus began taking courses at North Campus much earlier which assisted in their adjustment to the North Campus environment. The participants who chose to begin at South Campus described a more familial environment at South Campus. The contrasting perspectives identified in this study support the findings of Chrystal et al. (2013); Lee and Schneider (2018); Santos Laanan (2007) in that in addition to environmental influence, interactions with faculty, staff and peers impacted not only the participants' identity but also their academic and social adjustment.

Institutional Supports The participants identified a number of supports at South Campus they felt contributed to their success including their advisors, the Success course and their faculty. The participants who chose to start at the South Campus did not report the same experiences at North Campus. Engagement with faculty has been recognized as

an important factor in academic adjustment (Flaga, 2006) and while the participants experienced engagement in their CTE courses, they did not feel as engaged in their four-year program courses. Sharon described having a number of negative interactions with North Campus faculty when she approached them for assistance, whereas Karen, Mike and Spider described positive experiences interacting with faculty. This may be attributed the participants' ability to take courses at North Campus earlier than their peers in many of the CTE programs. Sharon chose to begin at the South Campus and all of her courses were located there prior to enrolling in her four-year program at which time she began taking classes at North Campus. Karen, Mike and Spider on the other hand, began taking courses much earlier at North Campus suggesting that they were able to adjust to the different teaching styles of the faculty at both campuses at the same time so they were not as prone to experiencing transfer shock when they officially transition to their four-year programs. Once more, earlier interactions with North Campus faculty appeared to contribute to the participants' satisfaction with their experiences. Previous research cannot specifically address the findings in this study however, the literature does support the need for faculty at North Campus to engage internal transfer students in positive interactions and experiences both in and out of the classroom (DeWine et al., 2016; Lee & Schneider, 2018; Nunez & Yoshimi, 2016). Faculty engagement also impacted participant advising experiences.

The biggest difference in advising experiences between the groups may be the lack of what the participants who chose to begin in a CTE program was felt was the personal connection to their advisors after the supportive advising experiences they had

had at South Campus. This finding appears to support the findings by Herrera (2018) who found the more connected transfer students are to faculty at the community college has a negative impact on their advising experiences at their four-year institutions.

Another difficulty the participants had regarding advising at North Campus was their availability. Sharon and Mike discussed issues finding assistance when they needed it basing it on what they felt were the increased demands on North Campus faculty, a finding related to research by DeWine et al. (2016) who observed transfer students describing faculty as unapproachable due to reasons such as larger class sizes.

Institutional Procedures Two differences appeared between the participants who chose to begin at South Campus and the participants who were placed at South Campus in relation to institutional procedures. First, were the challenges the participants encountered trying to complete their four-year program course requirements. Second, was the participants' ability to take classes at North Campus while enrolled in their two-year programs.

The AAS in Business Technology, the AAS in Accounting Technology have been organized to transfer directly into the Bachelor of Applied Science in Business, while the Associate of Science is designed to correspond to the first two years of the four-year programs at North Campus as closely as possible. Due to the more structured pathways, the coursework required to transfer is much clearer for two-year students to transition into their respective four-year programs within these specific areas. Still, there are times as was the case with Karen that students find themselves off track having taken all of their general education requirements while they were completing their remedial Math

courses. In Karen's case, it did not impede her progress, it just took some work with her advisor to move courses around so that she remained on schedule to graduate on time.

In contrast, the participants from other CTE programs who transfer into four-year programs often encounter issues when their coursework and sequencing in their two-year programs do not match the coursework and sequencing required for the four-year programs. Charlee and Wesley experienced challenges with their transition in a newer four-year program when they found themselves out of sequence in their coursework. Barb also had issues with coursework. Her situation was such that she found herself repeating course content when the surveying courses she took at South Campus did not count towards her four-year program. The struggles experienced by Barb, Charlee and Wesley are not new issues transfer students face and stress the need for not only strong transfer pathways but also for faculty at South Campus and North Campus to work together to ensure internal transfer students have a positive experience transitioning to their four-year programs (Ellis, 2013; Roksa, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

By far the most prevalent difference was the ability of participants to take classes at North Campus as South Campus students. Aside from Terri who had classes at North Campus her first semester, the CTE students didn't take classes at North Campus until they had transitioned into their four-year programs. In comparison, the students who were placed at South Campus enrolled in courses at North Campus often as early as their first semester. The ability to take North Campus courses earlier was in some ways perceived as an orientation to North Campus by the participants. Moreover, the participants who did

not have the experience of classes at both campuses concurrently were unable to identify with the benefits those who did described in during their interviews.

There is a gap in the existing literature related to embedded two-year institutions still connections can be made regarding the recommended measures institutions should take on to assist transfer students. One such program comparable to taking classes early at North Campus is the bridge program. Bridge programs for transfer students provide the academic and social engagement earlier with some extending back into the community colleges (Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2017). Structuring the two-year programs in a manner that requires students to take courses at North Campus during their two-year degree offers students the ability to engage and, in some ways, integrate much earlier thereby decreasing concerns surrounding social and academic adjustment.

Building Transfer Capital The participants in CTE programs at South Campus, most of whom chose to enroll in their two-year programs communicated their satisfaction with the engagement they encountered in their classes at South Campus. Conversely, they reported a lack of engagement in the courses for their four-year programs at North Campus. The majority of the CTE participants did not take classes at North Campus prior to transitioning to their four-year programs and related experiences where they struggled to engage with the faculty and students in the classes. The experiences of the CTE participants post-transfer are not unique to other transfer students (see DeWine et al., 2016; Lee & Schneider, 2018; Townsend, 2008).

Community college transfer students often encounter barriers in the form of social interactions with their peers and informal interactions with faculty upon transfer to their

four-year institutions (Chrystal et al., 2013; Núñez, 2014). Deil-Amen (2011), suggests that at the community college interactions occur that are socio-academic integrative experiences. Academically-related activities in the CTE programs, such as the AGC student chapter participates in the ASC Bidding Competition provided two of the study participants not only to opportunity to compete in estimating competitions but also occasions where they were able to interact with their peers in engineering programs at North Campus as well as industry professionals prior transitioning to their four-year degrees. When the participants made the transition, they already had the experiences of working with engineering students through AGC which should have made the integration into their four-year courses easier yet that does not appear to be the case. Charlee and Wesley described classroom experiences where they felt judged by faculty and peers in their four-year program courses. To counteract perceived judgments, Wesley approached the experience as if he was on a job site and worked with teammates in an Engineering course by utilizing his expertise and allowing the engineering students in his group to utilize their expertise. Despite the fact that he was able to adjust academically, he still found the community environment at South Campus more welcoming even after he was no longer a student there.

Although the participants who were placed in the Associate of Science program did not participate in such student organizations as the AGC, they were able to interact earlier with their peers and faculty at North Campus than the CTE students because they were taking classes at both campuses simultaneously. Overall, this group of study participants reported feeling a part of North Campus both as South Campus students and

post-transfer in their four-year degree programs. For them, it wasn't their status as transfer students, but their status as nontraditional students that was a challenge. As nontraditional students, they often had to juggle multiple responsibilities which hindered their ability to not only engage with their faculty and peers academically and socially but to utilize institutional supports as seen in the research by Rosenberg (2016).

Question 3

Research question three asked "What do internal transfer students believe the institution should do to support their retention?" The final research question involved gaining an understanding of the institutional supports and services the participants consider important to their retention. The recommendations provided by the participants are in response to the experiences identified in question one and in many ways support previous research recommendations identified in the literature focused on transfer students. Recommendations stemming from the participants' feedback will be introduced here and discussed in greater detail in the Recommendations for Practice section later in this chapter.

It is worth noting here, that many of the suggestions are more of a reflection of their status as nontraditional students and less a reflection of their status as transfer students. As more nontraditional students experience success in two-year programs, it is likely that they will aspire higher and continue into a four-year degree program. To assist the adjustment of internal transfer students who identify as nontraditional students after their transition to North Campus, both Sharon and Terri recommended faculty remain open-minded, slow down and find ways to engage nontraditional students more; having

conversations and asking questions about what they are experiencing in order to address areas they may be struggling in their courses or with institutional processes. Sharon and Terri's recommendation illustrates recommendations imparted by Schaefer (2009) intensifying the need to develop institutional supports that contribute to and support nontraditional student success thereby becoming "more adult-friendly higher education environments" (p. 87) .

Sharon recommended that South Campus faculty try to find ways in their classes to prepare students for the academic demands students will encounter upon transferring to North Campus and into their 300-level courses. Packard et al. (2013) determined that strong preparation consisted of faculty incorporating transfer information and the course material and demands required at the four-year level into their coursework at the community college. Integrating more writing and group assignments early in the two-year programs within the courses or utilizing the ability to enroll in classes at North Campus can help decrease the perception that internal transfer students transition underprepared for the increased demands in the upper-division courses.

Advisors at South Campus need to provide more information about North Campus programs and scholarships early and often. Even though Bob thought South Campus advisors did more to get to know their students, he believed they could spend more time discussing the four-year program options with students. He entered knowing what four-year degree he wanted but it wasn't until his first engineering course that he was introduced to all of the engineering programs. While Bob did not change his program of study his recommendation does follow the research of Musoba, Jones, and Nicholas

(2018) which explored the transfer student major choice process when they are unable to enter the major of their choice. Similar to Bob's recommendation, Musoba et al. (2018) recommended that community college advisors provide information on the various pathways and majors available to students early.

Whereas DeWine et al. (2016) found that transfer students often did not make attempts to engage faculty at their four-year institution, Mike described experiences where he encountered closed doors. In comparing his experience at South Campus to his experience at North Campus, the closed door was perceived as both a physical and symbolic barrier. Looking for assistance at South Campus, Mike did not experience closed doors and felt acknowledged and cared about. Seeking assistance at North Campus, Mike ran into closed doors, which he described as an added challenge and he took this to signify a lack of care towards him as a student. In response, Mike recommended North Campus faculty and administrators "keep their doors open."

Study Limitations

The methodology employed in a study generally determines the limitations of the study. Limitations within a study may restrict the reach of the study's recommendations and applicability. Qualitative research by nature is not intended to be generalized, however it can be transferrable and therefore, it is important to address limitations within this discussion. IPA requires the use of a small purposefully-selected sample of participants. The experiences of 10 participants who all began at South Campus and transferred to four-year programs at North Campus were examined in this study.

The uniqueness of the sample may limit the discussion to institutions with similar internal transfer student populations. The sampling method utilized did not allow for the purposeful selection of participants. I had to rely on those participants who responded to the survey and met the requirements as well as those that we directed to the survey by their former advisors at South Campus. Additionally, the sample is roughly 10% of the total internal transfer population of 100-120 students therefore, it can be assumed that the study has not captured many of the experiences the overall population of internal transfer students have encountered. The sample did not consist of an equal number of participants who chose to begin at South Campus (7) and participants who were placed at South Campus (3). Moreover, the only program area that was not represented with the sample was healthcare. The programs represented with the exception of healthcare provided a substantial amount of information which assisted in understanding the internal transfer student interactions and experiences within programs.

An unexpected result of the sampling method was that the majority of the participants in the sample identified as nontraditional students. This raises questions regarding the intersection of the various identities internal transfers bring into their experiences. The focus of the study required only that participants be internal transfer students from South Campus to North Campus. Limiting the participants to one aspect of their identity may have left gaps in understanding their overall experiences which may be based on other facets of their identity than their internal transfer student status as illuminated by the participants' responses to challenges they faced that they believed to be directly related to their nontraditional student identity.

All but one of the students who participated in the study had been in their four-year degree program at least one full year and three of them were graduating less than a month after the interviews for this study were conducted. Given the time that had elapsed between the participants' initial transition and the study interviews, it is likely that although they were able to describe their experiences to the best of their ability, their recollections may not be exact. Had the study included students who had more recently made the transition to their four-year degree program it is possible that their transitions may have appeared different in comparison to those who participants. For instance, had any of the participants been in the first semester of their four-year program, they may not have had enough interaction with their four-year advisor to be able to say they do or do not have a connection after only one or two four-year advising experiences. Moreover, within IPA the constructed meaning of the experience is more important than the memory of the experience therefore full recall of the experience may not be necessary.

IPA is designed to allow room for researcher presuppositions in the co-construction of the internal transfer experience. Developing and framing the research questions may have impacted the study as well. First, I had to ensure that both the research and interview questions asked informed but were not improperly directed by the theoretical perspectives utilized in the study. Additionally, having used IPA, I consciously and continuously had to bridle or be intentional (Vagle, 2018) about my position in the study with my experience at the institution to ensure that I was asking a broad range of questions designed to gain an understanding of the experience from the student perspective and not merely leading them through the internal transfer transition

from my perspective. Bridling my positionality as the researcher may have allowed more flexibility in the interpretation of the experiences still, it was important to avoid letting my position lead the participants' responses, data analysis and interpretations of the experiences, therefore, it cannot be stated that this study is fully free from bias.

As a South Campus advisor for about half of the participants in the study, my position as the researcher could also have impacted participant responses. I took specific steps as the researcher within the interview procedures to alleviate concern regarding their status as students and as participants in the study. It was explained in great detail that their participation in and responses to the questions would not in any way impact them as students at North Campus or South Campus. I also took the time to make sure the participants were comfortable with the process and had all of their concerns addressed prior to asking any questions. I tried to safeguard against participants responding in such a manner as to want to please me as the interviewer and to limit response bias. I cannot guarantee that response bias not occur however, from the responses I received during the interviews that were both positive and negative including those directed specifically at me as an advisor, the likelihood that response bias occurred is small.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The low rate successful baccalaureate degree completion amongst the internal transfer student population at the institution necessitated the need to examine the internal transfer student transition phenomenon at the institution. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was useful for understanding internal transfer student experiences in a manner that directs practice working with transfer students. The

following recommendations emphasize what can be undertaken at North Campus and South Campus, within the colleges and as an institution in the form of policies and procedures.

The structure of the system between North Campus and South Campus leads to the assumption that internal transfer students should have an easy transition. An examination of the participants' experiences through the Ecological Systems Theory lens illustrates the need to review the institutional policies, practices, and attitudes in place that contributed to the perceptions and experiences depicted by the participants in this study. Furthermore, illustrating the need for and benefits of technical education programs at the institution and in the community may foster the support that the participants felt was lacking.

Place emphasis on their identity as North Campus Students

There is no differentiation on the student identification cards for all students including those enrolled at South Campus; they all state North Campus as the institution. South Campus is listed as one of the colleges within North Campus along with the School of Mines and Engineering; the College of Letters, Science and Professional Studies; and the Graduate School. The students enrolled in programs within the other four schools do not identify by their school, only as North Campus, yet, students enrolled at South Campus are referred to and often refer to themselves as South Campus Students. The participants in this study, specifically those who chose to enroll CTE programs at South Campus do not see themselves as North Campus students whereas those that were placed at South Campus see themselves as North Campus students. Many of the activities and

policies currently in place contribute to the impression that the campuses are two separate entities. There are changes that could be made to alter student, institutional and community perceptions.

Change the dialogue. While there is a distance separating the two campuses, *at* implies more than location, it suggestive of one's position which lends itself to the continued hierarchy between two-year and four-year programs. Instead use language that is inclusive such as *through*. Additionally, *at* insinuates that the students are taking all of their classes at South Campus, which as the participants who were placed through South Campus demonstrated may not be the case.

Examine policies that discourage South Campus student involvement in student clubs and organizations. As students of North Campus they have access to clubs and organizations yet most of the participants in the study did not take part in student clubs and organizations. On the North Campus during fall semester there is a club rush which is considered the recruitment period for student activities. There is no club rush at South Campus so the lack of participation by South Campus students may be due in part to not knowing what clubs and organizations are available. Furthermore, policies such as the ASNC Constitution limiting student participation need to be adjusted or eliminated.

Restructure the existing orientation program to include an introduction and time at both campuses. Orientation programs provide opportunities for institutions to share accurate information and introduce the support systems students need to be successful (DeWine, et al., 2016; Nunez & Yoshimi, 2016; Santos Laanan, 2007). Internal transfer students are not considered transfer students in the traditional sense, therefore they do not

participate in the transfer orientation which serves to introduce new transfers to North Campus. Because they are beginning as North Campus students they participate in the traditional new student orientation their first semester. The current orientation program includes time at both South Campus and North Campus. Yet, in order to attend South Campus orientation, the students miss information and opportunities to connect with support services at North Campus. The current schedule has two-year students attending orientation when the informative and education sessions are conducted at North Campus and the remainder of the time scheduled at North Campus is mainly social activities. Scheduling can be adjusted within the orientation program to allow students in two-year programs the ability to be introduced to the South Campus without losing out on the opportunity to gain the knowledge they need to be successful as college students.

The needs of transfer students appear to overlap those of nontraditional students in terms of scheduling out-of-class academic and social activities to a larger extent than traditional students. A number of participants in this study identified challenges they faced as nontraditional students at North Campus. The participants did not explicitly state issues within the classrooms, however, their ability to participate in social activities as well as the need to prove themselves to their traditional-aged peers was a challenge. The likelihood of nontraditional students having the ability to participate in activities in the evenings remains limited and although research suggests creating more family-centered activities it is unclear at this point if internal transfer students would participate if such activities were made more available. Moreover, of bigger issue is the challenge nontraditional students encounter when assigned group projects. Their inability to meet at

times their traditional-aged group members decide to meet creates conflicts within their groups. If group work is required, more care should be taken to ensure the ability of all to students to participate equally whether it is in the form of group work during class time or faculty availability to address and assist in the management of group conflicts.

Using Advising to Prepare Students

The previous literature addresses utilizing advising to prepare students at the community college level for the university environment (Ellis, 2013; Fauria & Fuller, 2015; Flaga, 2006; Rosenberg, 2016). South Campus and North Campus are in a position to be able to address the academic preparation of internal transfer students from the beginning of students enrollment through South Campus. Advising is a support service provided at all institutions including both South Campus and North Campus. The participants in this study were relatively complimentary of their advising at South Campus. Participant attitudes towards advising at North Campus were mixed. Advising is an area that can become more collaborative between programs.

An examination of the participants' experiences with advising at South Campus revealed advising practices that leaned more toward appreciative advising. The participants described experiences where they were able to interact with their advisor in way which promoted their growth as learners (He & Hutson, 2016). Advising should be more than registering students for their classes and making sure that they are on track to graduate with their degrees. Appreciative advising is a strengths-based approach to advising in which advisors "build rapport with students by asking positive and intentional open-ended questions to allow the student to explore their aspirations, create a

plan to achieve those aspirations, provide feedback and encouragement to achieve goals and act beyond those goals” (English & Kruger, 2016) and assists students in engaging in a more complex and deeper educational experience (Hutson & He, 2011). Operating with an appreciative advising approach, advisors at South Campus are in a position to foster students’ preparation for their transition to North Campus.

Advisors can work with their advisees to not only identify but expand on their personal goals. This is already done within the advising for the students in the Associate of Science because the degree is designed specifically for transfer to a four-year degree program. In the CTE programs where the Associate of Applied Science is a terminal degree and designed to allow students to enter the workforce upon completion of the degree advising often does not include as much transfer related information. Identifying and working with students early in their CTE programs within the advising relationship to encourage students to evaluate their goals may increase the number of students who want to go beyond their two-year degrees. In doing so, it also allows students to begin taking the prerequisite courses in conjunction with the required two-year courses so that they remain on the appropriate pathway to continue to a four-year degree without the added time and cost having to take extra courses to catch up for their bachelor’s degree. Additionally, it increases the likelihood that they are ready for the increased demands the upper-level courses require in the four-year degrees.

An area of concern identified during the interviews was the participants’ reasons for not applying for scholarships. As advisors, we need to do a better job of not only promoting the availability of scholarships, but also explaining the scholarship processes

and requirements. The fact that the state provides a fee waiver for transfer students to complete their four-year degree program after earning a two-year degree and only one student between South Campus and North Campus has applied for and received the waiver is discouraging. As the cost of completing a four-year degree increases, scholarships such as the 2 Plus 2 Transfer Honor Scholarship become much more valuable to students and may motivate more students who would not have considered a four-degree initially to continue their education in a bachelor's degree program. At South Campus and North Campus, in addition to internal transfer focused financial packages, the institution, specifically advisors need to do more to inform potential internal transfer students of the scholarships available for instance the 2 Plus 2 Honor Scholarship.

Advising in their four-year programs was an issue for some of the participants who were used to a more developmental approach to advising as South Campus students. The experiences described by the participants in their four-year programs were a combination of developmental and prescriptive advising. Barb's experience advising at North Campus appeared more prescriptive in that there was little engagement (Broadbridge, 1996) she took her schedule into her advisor, her advisor approved it and registered her for the classes. On the other hand, Spider described an experience with his four-year advisor that was more developmental and allowed him the ability to consider his options and make the best-informed decision for him based on his academic goals and the personal issue he was dealing with at the time. North Campus faculty have to balance teaching, service, and research in addition to serving as advisors to students. Unfortunately, when prioritizing responsibilities in preparation for tenure and promotion,

advising is often very low on the list (Baker & Griffin, 2010). An institutional commitment to retention for not only internal transfer students but all students would need to include advising, specifically appreciative advising in the requirements for promotion and tenure (McArthur, 2005). In order to accomplish this task, it would be beneficial to incorporate professional advisors into the institutional advising structure. Doing so would allow faculty to take on more of a mentoring type role in academic advising while professional advisors could focus on the prescriptive or procedural advising processes such as registration and schedule issues.

Along with the commitment to advising at the four-year level, the process for changing advisors needs to be reevaluated. The current process allows advisors to wait for the internal transfer students to reach out to them and it occurs after the transition has been made. I recommend earlier engagement with four-year program advisors through informal interactions. During their two-year program students should have opportunities to engage with faculty in their desired four-year programs through informal advising situations, or by taking classes at North Campus. For instance, instead of automatically enrolling two-year business students in all of their classes at South Campus, if there is the ability for them to choose whether to take the course at South Campus or North Campus in a semester have them take at least one of the courses from the Business faculty at North Campus. Not only will that connect them with the four-year faculty member, it provides them the ability to experience the North Campus classroom environment before they actually make the transition. Additionally, it may encourage North Campus students to take more classes at South Campus, thereby reducing some of the stigma directed at

the two-year campus. Also, faculty from both institutions could rotate semesters at the two campuses. Looking again at Business as an example, BGEN 105 Introduction to Business is taught by a faculty member from each campus every semester one online section and one face-to-face section. A faculty member from the two-year campus teaches the online section while the face-to-face section is taught at North Campus. Options exist where the faculty rotate teaching the two sections and could include face-to-face sections at North Campus one semester and at South Campus the next semester.

Schedule Classes at Both Campuses

The participants in the study simultaneously expressed frustration, and acknowledged the benefits, with taking classes at both campuses. The biggest frustration was traveling between the two campuses, still it allowed them to adjust to the four-year campus environment slowly so that when they were at North Campus full-time they didn't have the additional shock of the class sizes, as well as the workload demands including the need to work in groups. Taking classes at both campuses should be promoted more by advisors at South Campus as part of the development process for students. That said, the institution needs to address the challenge the distance between campuses creates for students. Again, this requires an institutional commitment to address the overall schedule and look at alternative scheduling options. The implementation of advising practices that include recommending classes at the "other" campus and working with students to build a schedule that accounts for travel time is also a possibility.

In considering how this finding may transfer to other settings, students attending community colleges in areas with access to four-year campuses could be provided opportunities to take some of their courses at those institutions. It is likely that students will experience similar challenges and the benefits of taking classes at both institutions. For community college administrators to implement this study's findings and recommendations, they will need to collaborate with administrators at four-year colleges to address scheduling challenges (and handling registration, admissions, and credit transfer).

Are They Transfer Students or Not?

Confusion remains with regards to status of internal transfer students' official standing as transfer students or continuing students. The institution no longer calls them transfer students as they are considered students who changed their major between programs however, their transcripts remain separate. During the course of the study it was brought to my attention by North Campus Registrar that the issue of separate transcripts between South Campus and North Campus is being investigated and a one transcript system will be tested academic year 2019-2020 with full implementation projected to begin academic year 2020-2021. If the change is made to one transcript and their GPA is incorporated into their four-year program GPA the issue should fix itself. Should the transcripts remain separate the institution will need to address how they are going to classify internal transfer students. The institution will need to make it very clear in policies and to the students how the GPAs are separated and what that means for scholarships and internships. Clarifying GPA policies as well as policies impacting the

awarding of scholarships and applying for internships ensures internal transfer student will have the same opportunities as their traditional peers who began in four-year programs.

Aside from the transcript issue, challenges remain for internal transfer students in their transition to their four-year programs. The participants in this study, especially those who did not take courses at North Campus prior to transitioning experienced issues adjusting to the North Campus environment. Similar to external transfer students they were expected to reach out to their new advisor and to engage their North Campus faculty and peers. Those in the CTE programs also described feelings of isolation as South Campus students. This speaks to the larger issue of distinction between North Campus and South Campus. As such, the institution needs to do more to increase interactions between North Campus and South Campus both academically and socially regardless of whether or not students are going to transition to North Campus programs.

Implications for Future Research

The literature on transfer students is significant still a research gap remains highlighting internal transfer students from embedded two-year colleges. The current study examined the perceptions and experiences of students transitioning from South Campus an embedded two-year institution, to North Campus, the parent four-year institution. Internal transfer students are only one type of transfer student and the experiences of internal transfer students will expand the range of experiences covered in the literature on transfer students.

Although the findings in this study may not be generalizable to other institutions, the setting provided a unique opportunity to study a single population of transfer students. There are certainly other four-year institutions with embedded two-year colleges around the state and nation where this study could be replicated with other samples of internal transfer students to identify points of convergence and divergence to build on our knowledge of transfer student populations. It may be possible to transfer the methodology and compare the internal transfer student experiences at the other four-year/two-year institutions around the state to determine similarities and differences among the policies, strategies and supports embedded and parent institutions utilize pertaining to the internal transfer student population as well as research comparing internal transfer students and students who have completed dual-enrollment or bridge programs between community colleges and universities.

Of interest was the gender breakdown between those participants who chose and those placed in two-year programs at South Campus. All of the participants placed at South Campus identified as male whereas only two of the participants who chose to begin at South Campus were male. An examination of gender as a confound in addition to or in place of placement may provide further insight into their overall experiences as transfer students.

Existing research regarding transfer students tends to limit populations of transfer students to one type because only external transfer student populations were available. This study compared two different types of internal transfer student populations. That said, internal transfer students are not the only type of transfer students at North Campus.

An assumption may be made given the structure of the institution, that internal transfer students will have an easier transition to their four-year program than external transfer students. This setting provides an opportunity to add to existing research through the exploration of a comparison of the experiences between internal and external transfer students at an institution.

Finally, at North Campus once the institution has changed to the one transcript system for South Campus and North Campus, it would be beneficial to do a study comparing the experiences of internal transfer students who transition within the current two transcript system to the experiences of students who transition from their two-year to their four-year degree under the one transcript system. Conducting research through a comparison of internal transfer students who transitioned with two transcripts and those who transition with one transcript would help understand the overall impact the policy had on student success. It would also provide insight into the symbolism of having one transcript would have on the way internal transfer students perceive themselves and are perceived by others at the institution. As well as whether there is an increase in scholarship and internship applications and opportunities for internal transfer students.

Ethical Considerations

Within research involving human subjects, there are several ethical considerations researchers must adhere to specifically related to the care, respect and confidentiality of study participants. Following the requirement of the institutional review board, in order to guarantee the study participants understood they were volunteering and could end their participation at any time, I emailed them the consent form in advance and reviewed it

with them at the beginning of the interview and obtained their signature on the consent forms which were then scanned and stored on a secure MSU server. In addition to reviewing the consent form, I explained the purpose of the study and again ensured participants that their status as a student would not be impacted as a result of participating in the study. I also discussed how their identity and confidentiality would be protected including the use of pseudonyms which they were allowed to pick. Many of the participants had been students in the Associate of Science program and had worked with me as their advisor. I was careful not to ask any leading questions or to respond in a way that may have impacted participants' experiences or generated bias in their responses. All recorded interviews, interview transcripts and interview notes were uploaded and stored on the secure MSU sever. Along with participant confidentiality, I felt it was important to guard against the unwarranted naming of institutional agents. Therefore, I was careful not to identify individual institutional agents such as faculty, staff or administrators by name in the participants' responses. I did provide enough information that the reader is able to identify and understand the context but not enough that any one individual could be recognized. Finally, my role as researcher was of concern given that several of the participants had previously been students in the Associate of Science and had worked with me as advisees. There was concern that given my previous status as their advisor, the participants would be less willing to identify experiences that would display less than favorable encounters they may have had with me specifically. That did not appear to be the case as the participants were just as quick to point out negative as well as positive experiences they had working with me directly.

Researcher Reflection

When I decided to embark on my journey as a doctoral student, I was aware of the culminating dissertation at the end. I understood or thought I understood what that meant. Now having completed the process, I see that it is much more than that final project resulting in one becoming an expert in his or her area. Taking the time to reflect on the process, I have reached several conclusions about myself as a researcher, as a higher education professional and as an advisor to students.

First, I believe the dissertation process is supposed to be uncomfortable to some extent, as is all learning, and throughout the process I was extremely uncomfortable. Within my position at the institution, working with students who will eventually transition to a four-year degree program, it is important to understand what they experience that supports or inhibits their success. In order to gain an understanding of the experiences I had to identify a research method that addressed the questions. According to van Manen (2016), “the questions themselves and the way one understands the questions are the important starting points, not the method as such” (p. 1). Considered from this perspective it became clear that I would need to utilize a qualitative approach which I was not as familiar and definitely uncomfortable with. The IPA approach provided the opportunity to bridge my experiences within the analysis and conclusions in a manner that led to the construction of a shared meaning of the transfer student experience. As such, while I cannot say I am an expert in qualitative research, I am much more comfortable approaching a qualitative methodology.

As a higher education professional, this study and the process has reminded me that students should be the ultimate focus in the decision-making process, especially those decisions that lead to policies and procedures that create barriers to access and success. Listening to the different perspectives of students, I was often shocked to find areas that I thought were working for the students were actually not beneficial from their perspective. The need to examine previous literature for this study has improved my ability to seek out and find the appropriate information needed to effectively administer the Associate of Science program.

Finally, this study has opened my eyes as an advisor. As I said previously, the participants were not shy or uncomfortable about voicing their opinions and experiences even those related to their time working with me in the Associate of Science program. Knowing that there are areas where I can improve that go beyond retention and attrition rates have pushed me to make changes to my advising practices. I have made the conscious effort to incorporate scholarship conversations during advising appointments and have begun talking more with students about what they think is expected of them in their four-year programs and what is really expected of them in their four-year programs. In my mind, even if the findings and recommendations in this study are not implemented at an institutional level, I can still do my part working with future students as well as continue to examine and investigate transfer student transition experiences.

Conclusions

The existing literature on transfer students addressed what institutions can do to increase the likelihood of transfer student success at the community college and

university level for different populations of transfer students. I was interested to see if the experiences of internal transfer students would be similar to other transfer student populations. Given my position at the institution, I thought I had an understanding of the internal transfer experience, yet, as I conducted my interviews I quickly realized the participant experiences sounded very similar to the experiences of transfer students in the literature.

Utilizing the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory this study explored answers to three research questions.

1. How do internal transfer students who started at a two-year college within a regional public institution describe their transfer experiences to their four-year degree programs?
2. How do transfer experiences differ between students who chose to start at the two-year institution and those who intended to start at the four-year level but were placed into the two-year program?
3. What do internal transfer students believe the institution should do to support their retention?

The experiences of 10 internal transfer students were explored. The participants included three students who were placed at South Campus and seven who chose to enroll at South Campus. The experiences shared by the participants mirrored many of the transfer student experiences observed in previous research. The data analysis reiterated that regardless of the type of transfer student, they experience challenges finding their place at the four-year institution, worry about paying for college, and building

connections with faculty and their peers. Their status as nontraditional students was also addressed in the literature and is indicative of the need to include the intersection of identities within the research on transfer students. The ability to take classes at both campuses simultaneously and what that did for internal transfer student adjustment was not addressed in previous research but contained similarities to the goals of transfer orientation and bridge programs.

The data analysis unearthed two key differences between the experiences of participants who chose to begin at South Campus and those placed at South Campus. First, the students who were required to begin at South Campus identified as North Campus students much earlier with some never truly seeing themselves as South Campus students. In their minds they were using South Campus as a stepping-stone and because they weren't planning on earning a two-year degree, they were always going to be North Campus students. In addition, they were taking courses at North Campus very early in the program, even in their first semester so they still had a connection to the four-year campus. On the other hand, the participants who chose to begin in the two-year CTE programs at South Campus conveyed identifying most as South Campus students even after they had made the transition to their four-year degree program. The question remains as to why they felt this way though one participant did share that he had looked at it as a rivalry between students as well as the faculty at both campuses.

Second, taking courses at both campuses was identified as a positive and negative experience for the participants although not all of the participants were able to have that experience. A couple of the participants who chose to begin in the two-year CTE

program did not take classes at North Campus until they had made the transition to their four-year degree program. Those participants discussed feeling “less-than” in the eyes of the faculty and their peers in their Engineering courses. Again, this supports the finding of the literature, especially studies emphasizing the transfer student transition into STEM programs.

Two major areas were uncovered during the data analysis that I was not aware of before the interviews. First, an emphasis needs to be placed on informing students at South Campus of the various scholarship opportunities available including the MUS 2 Plus 2 Transfer Honor Scholarship. None of the participants in the study applied for scholarships as two-year students both because they didn’t know about them and they thought they wouldn’t be eligible for them. Prior research identified the need to create financial aid packages specifically for transfer students. The recommendation here is not to necessarily create specific financial packages, more focus needs to be placed on educating two-year students about the various scholarship opportunities available as well as the process for applying for scholarships.

The second concern was the nontraditional status of many of the participants playing a role in their adjustment in their four-year programs. Balancing the various personal and academic demands was a challenge for many of the participants which caused them to avoid getting too involved in student activities and caused problems during group projects. Both the participants and the literature recommended doing more to include nontraditional students and create an environment was that more adult-friendly.

Taken as a whole, this interpretive phenomenological analysis provided insight into another group of transfer students; those transitioning from a two-year embedded institution to the four-year parent institution. Examination of the experiences through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provided opportunities to create and understand knowledge from the data analysis in multiple ways. The knowledge gained from the data analysis led not only to institutional recommendations but additional personal insight into the internal transfer student transition and the role I play in that transition. Whether or not any of the recommendations included in this study are implemented at South Campus or North Campus, I will be implementing some of them in my own advising practices.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
For the Protection of Human Subjects
FWA 00000165

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 c/o Microbiology & Immunology
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 Bozeman, MT 59718
 Telephone: 406-994-4706
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 E-mail: cherylj@montana.edu

Chair: Mark Quinn
 406-994-4707
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Administrator:
 Cheryl Johnson
 406-994-4706
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Michelle Morley and Bryce Hughes

FROM: Mark Quinn *Mark Quinn CJ*
 Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

DATE: March 4, 2019

RE: *"The Internal Vertical Transfer Phenomenon: An Exploration of Lived Experiences and Perceptions of Internal Transfer Students from an Embedded Two-year Institution" [MM030419-EX]*

The above research, described in your submission of March 1, 2019, is exempt from the requirement of review by the Institutional Review Board in accordance with the Code of Federal regulations, Part 46, section 101. The specific paragraph which applies to your research is:

- _____ (b) (1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
- X (b) (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation; and (iii) the information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by section 16.111(a)(7).
- _____ (b) (3) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph (b)(2) of this section, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) federal statute(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
- _____ (b) (4) Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available, or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.
- _____ (b) (5) Research and demonstration projects, which are conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.
- _____ (b) (6) Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed, or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the FDA, or approved by the EPA, or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the USDA.

Although review by the Institutional Review Board is not required for the above research, the Committee will be glad to review it. If you wish a review and committee approval, please submit 3 copies of the usual application form and it will be processed by expedited review.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
FOR
PARTICIPATION IN HUMAN RESEARCH AT
MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

Project Title: The Internal Vertical Transfer Phenomenon: An Exploration of the Lived Experiences and Perceptions of Internal Transfer Students from an Embedded Two-year Institution

Description: You are invited to participate in a research study to examining the internal transfer experience at Montana Tech. If you agree, you will be asked to participate in one interview with and the researcher, which will be audio recorded and last between 60 and 90 minutes. An additional follow-up interview with the researcher may be required which would again be audio recorded for clarification purposes and last between 15-30 minutes. This study will be used by the researcher and possibly the institution to assist internal transfer students in their transition between Highlands College and Montana Tech.

Risks and Benefits: Your participation is voluntary and your participation will not affect your class standing or relationships at Highlands College or Montana Tech. The risks of this study are minimal. The nature of the data is not especially sensitive and the questions should not invoke embarrassment or personal or legal risks. In the event that your participation in this research directly results in emotional stress to you, Montana Tech offers free counseling services to students. Further information about the counseling services available may be obtained from calling Cricket Pietsch at (406) 496-3730 or Amy Lorang (406) 496-4429. Additional information regarding services can also be directly obtained from the researcher Michelle Morley (409) 496-3778 or email mmorley@mttech.edu. There are no direct benefits to you. However, results of this study may be used by the researcher and possibly the institution to improve the internal transfer process.

Time Involvement: Your participation in this research study will take approximately 60-90 minutes and possibly an additional 15-30 minutes in a follow-up, clarifying interview.

Confidentiality: Your name and contact information will be strictly confidential and only your first name will be used during the interview and any follow-up interviews. Your name will be replaced by a pseudonym at the time of transcription and in any subsequent write-ups. A key with first name and pseudonym will be kept secure and confidential until all follow-up interviews are completed at which time, the key will be destroyed and only pseudonyms will be used. Once the key has been destroyed, data will no way be connected to individual participants. Further, the audio recordings will be kept on a password protected MSU Box Service on a secured server at MSU and will be destroyed after the interview transcripts are completed and have been reviewed for accuracy and clarification by participants.

Participant Right to withdraw from the Study: Additionally, you may withdraw from the study at any time just by letting me know you would not like to continue further without any consequences to your academic setting or grades in any of your courses.

Participant Rights: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to choose to not answer any questions you may find objectionable without any consequences to your academic setting or grades in any of your courses. This research has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at Montana State University. If you have any questions or concerns about this research project, you may contact Michelle Morley, Highlands College, Butte, MT (Phone: 406-496-3778 and Email: mmorley@mttech.edu). If you have additional questions about the rights of human subjects, please contact the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Mark Quinn, 406-994-4707.

AUTHORIZATION: I have read the above and understand the discomforts, inconvenience and risk of this study. I, _____ (name of participant), agree to participate in this research. I understand that I may later refuse to participate, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPROVED
MSU IRB
03/04/2019
Date approved

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT SURVEY

Internal Transfer Student Experience

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Did you begin as a student at South Campus and continue to a four-year degree program at North Campus? (For example, you started in Accounting Technology and are now in the four-year Business program, or you started in the Associate of Science and are in Business, Nursing, Engineering, OSH, etc)

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Did you begin as a student at South Campus and continue to a four-year degree program at Mon... = No

Q2

My name is Michelle Morley. I am the Director of the Associate of Science program at South Campus and a doctoral candidate examining the transition experiences of students at North Campus who began their studies at South Campus for my dissertation.

As a student who began in a two-year program at South Campus and is now enrolled in a four-year degree program at North Campus, you are eligible to participate in this study.

All you will be asked to do is take part in an individual interview which is expected to last between 60-90 minutes and will occur on campus at time convenient to you. Additionally, you may be asked to participate in a brief follow-up conversation in order to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcripts and clarify responses.

Interviews will be audio recorded however, all participants will be allowed to choose a pseudonym which will be used beginning with the interview transcription as well as in the study write-up in order to maintain anonymity. In appreciation of your participation, you will receive a \$10 gift card.

Would you be willing to talk to me?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If My name is Michelle Morley. I am the Director of the Associate of Science program at South Campus Co... = No

Q7 Please provide your name and preferred method of contact

☐ Name (1) _____

☐ Phone/Text option (2)

☐ Email option (3) _____

End of Block: Default Question Block

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Your willingness to participate in this study exploring the experiences of students who began their studies at South Campus before transitioning to a four-year degree program at North Campus is greatly appreciated. The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of internal transfer students from an embedded two-year institution. The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes, and will focus on your academic, and social experiences as a student at South Campus and North Campus. I will be audio recording the interview so that I can later transcribe the interview accurately. The records, transcripts and notes will be stored on a secure MSU server for the duration of the study and will not be shared with anyone else. A pseudonym will be used, and all data will be coded to ensure and protect your privacy. Your participation is completely voluntary and will not influence your standing or grades at the institution. If at any time you are uncomfortable answering a question, please do not hesitate to let me know. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Why did you begin your studies at South Campus?
2. Did you earn your two-year degree prior to transitioning to your four-year degree program at North Campus? Why or why not?
3. While enrolled through South Campus did you consider yourself a North Campus student?
4. Have there been times you have felt that you don't belong at North Campus either before or after your transition to the four-year degree? Can you explain and/or provide an example?

5. When did you begin taking classes at North Campus? Was there a time when you were taking classes at both campuses? Please describe the experience.
6. Have there been times you have felt beginning at South Campus has affected the way you are treated at North Campus? Can you explain?
 - a. *Think about social interactions you have had with other students at South Campus/North Campus. Has there ever been a time where there has been a negative interaction based on your status as a South Campus student either before or after your transition to North Campus? Please explain and if possible provide an example.*
 - b. *Was there anything South Campus did that made your educational experience challenging? What about North Campus?*
7. What was changing from your two-year program to your four-year program like? *Did you experience any issues in the transition from South Campus to North Campus?*
8. Do you consider yourself a transfer student? Why or why not?
9. Please describe a meaningful academic experience or interaction you have had with a South Campus faculty/staff member. At North Campus. Do you still have a connection with that individual? How did that relationship come about?
10. What was your advising experience like at South Campus? What is it like at Tech?
11. When you need assistance where did you go as a South Campus student? Where do you go as a student at North Campus? What was the experience like?
 - a. *Were you involved in any student organizations or activities at South Campus? At North Campus?*

12. Did you have any obligations outside of South Campus that made your educational experience challenging? What about North Campus?
13. What advice would you give to South Campus faculty or staff regarding students who are enrolled at South Campus who are or will be transitioning to a bachelor's degree program at North Campus? At North Campus?
14. What advice would you give to other students transitioning from South Campus to North Campus?
15. Is there anything that hasn't been addressed that you think I should know about your experiences and success at South Campus and North Campus?

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please take a moment to complete this voluntary demographic information form. Any information you provide here will be held confidential and used only in aggregate in the study findings.

Pseudonym:

Age:

Gender:

Race/Ethnicity:

Please mark all that apply:

____ First-generation student

____ Parent

____ Military Veteran or Active Duty

Did you receive your two-year degree prior to transfer?

Expected four-year degree graduation date:

Are you working while in school?

If so, how many hours per week?

Are you receiving federal financial aid?

Are you using scholarships awarded by North Campus?

APPENDIX E

SOUTH CAMPUS PROGRAM ACCEPTANCE LETTER

Dear XXXX,

Congratulations! On behalf of the faculty and staff, I'm pleased to inform you of your acceptance to North Campus. Your decision to join our community will shape your future both personally and professionally.

At [South Campus], we pride ourselves on providing a hands-on education in a supportive and personable environment. Because [South Campus] is a part of [North Campus], students have the unique opportunity to gain the valuable knowledge and skills of a two-year degree while enjoying the benefits of a four-year campus. [South Campus] will prepare you for the workforce in the tradition of quality that has characterized [North Campus] since its founding.

In the upcoming weeks you will continue to receive information with exciting details about completing your transition to [North Campus]. In addition, please review the back of this letter to confirm that the information related to your enrollment is accurate. If at any time you have questions or need assistance with this process, please reach out to us.

[South Campus] is a great place to prepare for your future and I'm glad that you agree. I look forward to welcoming you to campus!

Sincerely,

Leslie Dickerson
Registrar, Director of Enrollment Services

APPENDIX F

DOES NOT MEET STANDARDS ADMITTED LETTER

Dear «FNAME»:

Congratulations! On behalf of the faculty and staff, I'm pleased to inform you of your acceptance to [North Campus]. Your decision to join our community will shape your future both personally and professionally.

Based on the information you provided, we are able to offer you admission into the **Associate of Science *Business Pathway*** at [South Campus]. Because [South Campus] is a part of [North Campus], AS students have the unique opportunity to take classes on both campuses while preparing for full admission into a bachelor level program. Most courses are transferable into bachelor degrees at [North Campus] and throughout the [State] University System. In addition, AS students pay tuition at [South Campus] rate which is significantly reduced.

Once you demonstrate preparedness to enter Introductory Algebra (by completing Pre-Algebra or testing out of it via the ACT/SAT or Accuplacer exam) *and* your cumulative GPA is at least 2.0, you may change your major to a 4-year program by submitting a *Change of Major* form.

We know this is an exciting time, and our commitment to your success begins with ensuring you have a smooth transition to [North Campus]. Please review the enclosed information as it pertains to your enrollment. If at any time you have questions or need assistance with this process, please reach out to us.

[North Campus] is a great place to prepare for your future and I'm glad that you agree! I look forward to welcoming you to campus and wish you continued academic success.

Sincerely,

Leslie Dickerson
Registrar, Director of Enrollment Services