DISSERTATION

THE IMPACT OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT ON THE TRANSFER STUDENT

EXPERIENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Submitted by

Elizabeth A. Romba

School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2013

Doctoral Committee:

    Advisor: Linda Kuk

    James Banning
    Kristina Binard
    Malcolm Scott

ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT ON THE TRANSFER STUDENT

EXPERIENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The purpose of this dissertation was to understand the experiences of students who have transferred from two-year institutions to large, public four-year institutions. An estimated 40-60% of enrollment at four-year institutions is comprised of transfer students (Miller & Hillis, 2006). As community college enrollment and transfer student populations continue to increase, it will become increasingly more imperative that the experiences of these students are understood and programs are implemented to endure these students make a smooth transition from the two-year institution to the four-year institution. Using Tinto's model of college student departure as a theoretical lens, this study illustrated the experiences of transfer students through the direct experiences of students who have made the transition from a two-year institution to a four-year institution.

This qualitative study utilized an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach. This study was comprised of interviews with ten students who all attended the same two-year institution and who are all currently enrolled at the same large four-year institution in the Rocky Mountain Region. The analysis used personal and in-depth detail ascertained from the individual interviews and perspectives used to describe the experiences each student encountered through the transfer process and the subsequent engagement experiences each encountered.

Analysis of the data presented five overarching themes, connection to the institution, academic integration, involvement, confidence, and transfer student transitions. The data from these interviews yielded can be utilized to develop transfer student resources and programming

to facilitate a stronger institutional connection among transfer students, as well as provide

students intending on transferring with valuable information into the transfer student experience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The concept of engagement has appeared in the literature for more than seventy years, with the meaning of the construct evolving over time (Kuh, 2009). Despite all that is unknown about student engagement, one thing is certain: students who are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities, both inside and outside the classroom, are more likely than their disengaged counterparts to persevere through graduation (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Once students start college, a key factor to whether they will survive and thrive in college is the extent to which students take part in educationally effective activities (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2011).   Students who transfer from a two-year institution to a four-year institution are faced with a unique set of circumstances; if engagement is critical to success, these students must then find those activities twice.

Background and Historical Context

Because of the numerous opportunities for students to pursue higher education, many individuals choose to start their postsecondary education at the community college (Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston, 2010). Nearly 35 percent of undergraduates at four-year institutions actually earn a bachelor's degree within four years; only 56 percent of undergraduate students enrolled at four-year institutions graduate within six years (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, Whitmore, & Miller, 2006).   Student enrollment in higher education has been increasing significantly during the past two decades. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (Snyder & Dillow, 2009), enrollment increased by 17% between 1984 and 1994, and an even a larger increase of 21% was found between 1994 and 2004 (Nakajima, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012).

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that, for the 1989-1990 academic year, approximately 22% of students who began their postsecondary education at a two-year institution eventually transferred to a four-year institution within 5 years (McCormick, Carroll, Improvement, & Statistics, 1997).   In the academic year 1995 – 1996, the rate of transfer to four-year institutions for those who began at two-year institutions was about 29% (Wirt et al., 2003). Between 1995 and 2006, transfer student enrollment at four-year institutions has steadily inreased (Ishitani, 2008).   Between 2000 and 2010, undergraduate enrollment at 4-year institutions increased from 7.2 to 10.4 million students and is expected to reach 11.8 million in 2021. Enrollment increased 34 percent at public 4-year institutions, 22 percent at private nonprofit 4-year institutions (from 2.2 to 2.6 million), and 513 percent at private for-profit 4-year institutions (from 0.2 to 1.3 million). During the same period, enrollment at 2-year institutions increased from 5.9 to 7.7 million students and is expected to reach 8.8 million students by 2021 (Aud, Hussar, Johnson, Kena, Roth, Manning, . . . Nachazel, 2012). In the Fall of 2006, over 6.2 million students (35 percent of all postsecondary students) were enrolled in community colleges nation wide (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). In 2012, forty-four percent of all undergraduate students in the United States were enrolled at a two-year institution (Colleges, 2013).

Knowing why students leave does not indicate, at least not directly, why students persist. More importantly it does not tell institutions, at least not directly, what they can do to help students stay enrolled and succeed (Tinto, 2006).   The lack of data on students past their first year in college is largely based on the shortcomings associated with large national databases. While those data sets are longitudinal in nature, the depth of information on individual students is limited (Berger, Blanco Ramirez, & Lyons, 2005). Community college students represent a large and growing pool of potential students for four-year institutions in an increasingly

competitive admissions market. There is a great deal of work that needs to be done, however, to help the millions of students who enter community colleges with aspirations of eventually earning a bachelor's degree (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

This study focused on Tinto's model (2012b) of college student departure, specifically on academic and social integration and its impact on student persistence and the student's perceived success. Tinto's model of individual student departure is one of the most widely discussed and explored in the higher education literature (Milem & Berger, 1997). Tinto posits that students are more likely to remain enrolled in an institution if they become connected to the social and academic life of that institution. Students who become integrated into a college by developing connections to individuals, participating in clubs, or engaging in academic activities, are more likely to persist than those who remain on the periphery (Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2010).

Even though different variables are used to measure the model's main concepts of academic and social integration, its core concept is widely accepted – academic success is a process in which the individual takes on the identity of student and becomes integrated into the collegiate environment (Bensimon, 2007). Tinto's theory, despite its origins, leaves room for an examination of students' institutional experiences in a way that does not necessarily need to be dependent on the traditional college-student lifestyle (Deil-Amen, 2011).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of student engagement on the transfer student experience and its perceived influence on student success at a large four-year university in the Rocky Mountain region. This study sought to examine how these students perceived their involvement at a two-year institution influencing

their experience or perception of success at a four-year institution. With the population of students enrolled in community colleges increasing and those students transferring to four-year institutions increasing as well, it is becoming more and more necessary to understand the experiences of these students. This study sought to identify and explain these experiences.

Research Questions

This study sought to address the following research questions:

- How does a student's engagement experience at a two-year institution impact their perceptions of their overall experience of success?

- How does a student's engagement experience at a two-year institution impact their perception of their experience of success at the four-year institution?

- How does a student's transitional experience from the two-year institution to the four-year institution impact the overall perception of their success?

Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study, the following definitions for key terms were identified:

a) *Student engagement:* constructs such as the quality of effort and involvement in productive learning activities (Kuh, 2009).

b) *Student involvement:* the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience (Colaizzi, 1978).

c) *Transfer students:* any student who has completed any post-secondary coursework at a two-year institution prior to enrollment at a four-year institution.

d) *Transfer shock*: the phenomenon usually illustrated by a lower grade point average among transfer students during their first semester at the receiving institution.

Delimitation of the study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of student engagement on the transfer student experience from a community college and its impact on transfer student success at a large four-year university in the Rocky Mountain region.   This study focused on the experiences of ten students who began their higher education journey at public community college in the Rocky Mountain region.

Selected students were identified as a "transfer" student to the university and have completed at least one semester of coursework at the university. Identification occurred through recommendations of students involved in campus programming at the two-year institution. Likewise, participants completed at least two full semesters of on-campus, post-secondary coursework at the community college prior to transfer to the university.

Limitations to study

While transfer student populations are increasing nationally, this study focused solely on the students who transferred from a public two-year institution to a large public four-year university in the Rocky Mountain Region; these experiences may differ dramatically from their counterparts in other areas of the country.   This study focused on ten students who have made this transition. Arguably, there are thousands of students who transfer to the university every semester, so the experiences of this sample may not be representative of the entire transfer population at this university. Finally, this study focused on students who have made the transfer from a two-year institution to this four-year institution. There are thousands of students who transfer from other avenues, such as other four-year institutions, who were not included in this sample; the experiences of the populations selected for this study may not be translatable to all students transferring from a two-year college to a four-year university.

Role of Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument (Creswell, 2009). With that in mind, the researcher served as the sounding board and reporting tool for the participants' experiences as they relate to their student engagement activities at both their two-year institutions and four-year institution. Likewise, the researcher served as a partner with the participant to create a rich, thick picture of the experiences and the subsequent outcomes.

The researcher's experience with transfer students has been limited to work with them in a professional, advising capacity. Since the researcher did not transfer during her own college career, the phenomena that these students face is not one the principal investigator can readily identify with on a personal level.

Fostering student success through the lens of an advisor and mentor has instilled a passion and acted as a motivating factor for the researcher to learn more about the experience and determine how, if at all, the researcher can act as a facilitator in the engagement experience. As the researcher, steps must be taken to ensure that personal experiences with transfer students do not affect interpretations of the participants' experiences.

Significance of Study

It is important to note that 48 percent of students attending two-year institutions are intending to transfer to a four-year school (Kuh et al., 2011). At four- year institutions, transfer students, including those students who had taken a course elsewhere and transferred credit hours toward a degree program, comprised an estimated 40–60% of all student enrollment (Miller & Hillis, 2006).

With community college enrollment and transfer student populations increasing, more scholarly research needs to be conducted to understand the experience of these students to provide an enviornment where they can connect and succeed, and ultimately persist to earning a degree. While there are numerous studies focusing on student engagement of traditional, four-year first-time college students, the literature on community college students who transfer to four-year institutions is less prevalent. Likewise, programs designed to address the needs of transfer students to facilitate a smooth transition to the university appear to be lacking.

This study sought to provide a starting point for the development of more effective programs targeted specifically at transfer students. By developing programs and initiatives that more effectively connect transfer students to the university, institutions will experience an increase in persistence to degree among community college transfer students and improve overall social integration among community college transfer students.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The body of literature on student engagement and involvement is fairly robust and includes works by Kuh (Kuh, 2001, 2003; 2009; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2010; Kuh, Pace, & Vesper, 1997; Kuh, Palmer, & Kish, 2003), Astin (Astin, 1993; Colaizzi, 1978), Pascarella, (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1998; Pascarella, Smart, and Ethington, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998, 2005), Terenzini (Cabrera et al., 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998, 2005; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2007; Terenzini & Reason, 2005), and Tinto (Tinto, 1987, 1988, 1990, 2005, 2006, 2012a, 2012b). The body of literature on transfer students is equally strong, with works by Bauer and Bauer (Bauer & Bauer, 1994), Glass and Harrington (Glass & Harrington, 2002), McClenney (McClenney, 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2007, 2009; McClenney & Marti, 2006), Townsend (Townsend, 1993, 1995; Townsend & Wilson, 2006a, 2006b, 2009), and Umbach (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). The overlap of those two worlds is less extensive; therefore, the following chapter will discuss both worlds as individual entities and highlight the overlap. This chapter will also discuss the importance of academic and social integration that has proven to be necessary for student success among native and transfer students.

Student Engagement and Student Involvement

Student Engagement

Engagement is a state of being that combines high effort, attention, and participation with emotions of interest, enthusiasm, enjoyment, and lack of anxiety or anger (Schuetz, 2008). The more a student studies or practices a subject, the more they tend to learn about it (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006). Student engagement represents two critical features. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The

second component of student engagement is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation (Harper & Quaye, 2009).

Today, engagement is the term usually used to represent constructs such as quality of effort and involvement in productive learning activities (Kuh, 2009), both inside and outside the classroom. All of the activiites and practices – from faculty interaction, experiential learning, and student clubs and organizations – are mechanisms that create engagement opportunities and thereby lead to learning in some capacity (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Students who are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities, both inside and outside the classroom, are more likely than their disengaged counterparts to persevere through graduation (Braxton et al., 2004). Likewise, institutions that are committed to the goal of increasing student success, specifically among low-income and under-represented students, seem to find a way to achieve that success (Tinto, 2005). Institutions can create programming that helps increase student engagement, and thereby increase the chances that students will reach their desired educational goal (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011).

Kuh et al. (2008) conducted a study that sought to determine the relationship between key student behaviors and the institutional practices and conditions that foster student success. The data for this study were from 18 baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities that administered the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) at least once between 2000 and 2003. These institutions were selected because they met two key criteria: an ample number of respondents to ensure enough cases for the analytical methods used to answer the research questions and reasonable racial and ethnic diversity among respondents.

The data collected from this study was analyzed in two stages. In the first stage, ordinary least squares or logistic regression was used to estimate separate models for the time on task and participation in educationally purposeful activities among first year students, as well as persistence to the second year of college. In the second stage of analysis, the researchers estimated models to test for conditional and interaction effects on engagement. Conditional effects were described as the extent to which the influence of study time and engagement on grade point average and persistence differed by a student's background (Kuh et al., 2008). The findings from this study pointed to two main conclusions. First, student engagement in educationally purposeful activities was positively related to academic outcomes, as evidenced by first-year student grades and persistence between the first and second years of college. Second, while exposure to effective educational practices generally benefits all students, the effects were more pronounced for lower ability students and students of color than white students (Kuh et al., 2008).

Student Involvement

Astin defined involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience." He further clarified that involvement refers to the behavior, what the student actually does, rather than the student's feelings or thoughts (Colaizzi, 1978). His Theory of Involvement stated that student learning and development is enhanced by involvement and presented five observations - involvement requires physical & psychological energy, involvement occurs on a continuum, there is both a qualitative and quantitative aspect to involvement, outcomes are proportional to the quality and quantity of involvement, and finally efficacy of a program hinges on its ability to involve students (Barr, Desler, & Associates, 2000). Additionally, by involving students in campus committees, students are not only building trust

between the student and the institution, but also creating meaningful context outside of the classroom for faculty-student interaction and relationship-building (Kuh et al., 2010).

Bryant (2001) found that community college students participated less frequently in campus organizations and rarely attended campus-sponsored events. Student clubs and organizations may promote academic involvement by providing students with the opportunity to informally develop support groups, find study partners, and seek advice from other students. Cooper, Healy, and Simpson (1994), for example, found that students who were members of student organizations scored higher on educational involvement and academic autonomy in the Student Development Task and Life Style Inventory than students who were not involved both when they were freshmen and when they were juniors (Huang & Chang, 2004). Schmid and Abell (2003) found that non-persisters were less likely to be involved in student life than currently enrolled students.

Using a modification of both Astin's Theory of Involvement and Tinto's model of student departure, Milem and Berger (1997) found that social integration had a more influential role in predicting persistence than did academic integration. Berger and Milem (1999) sought to improve their 1997 study on the effect academic and social integration on student involvement. This study improved upon their earlier work by addressing direct and indirect variable effects of student persistence. This study found that initial levels of institutional commitment have a direct negative effect ($\beta = -.09$) on noninvolvement, but do not seem to significantly affect early involvement with peers and faculty. Further, the direct effects of entry characteristics play a diminishing role at later stages in the student's involvement trends. They found that there was only one direct effect on academic or social integration; females are more likely to be socially integrated ($\beta = .13$).

11

Academic and Social Integration

Academic and social integration are key to students making campus connections (Brothers' Schools, 2008), and impact future commitments of students to the institution (Yorke & Longden, 2004). Specifically, the more integrated a student becomes to the institution, the greater the level of persistence to graduation. In addition, the greater the student's level of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the central mission and vision of the college or university. The greater the student's initial levels of commitment and commitment to the goal of college graduation, the greater the likelihood the individual will persist in college (Yorke & Longden, 2004).

Academic integration represents both satisfactory compliance with explicit norms such as earning passing grades and the normative academic values of the institution such as an engineering school that values the physical sciences over the arts. Social integration represents the extent to which a student finds the institution's social environment to be congenial with his or her preferences, which are shaped by the student's background, values, and aspirations (Kuh et al., 2011). The concepts of academic and social integration (Tinto, 2012b) suggest that a student's decision to stay or leave an institution is influenced by the level of connection that student has developed with the institution (Bers & Smith, 1991). Tinto points out that student integration into an institution can occur along two dimensions, the academic and the social. Academic integration occurs when students become attached to the intellectual life of the college, while social integration occurs when students create relationships and connections outside of the classroom. These two concepts, though analytically distinct, interact with and enhance one another. And, while students must be integrated into the institution along both

dimensions to increase their likelihood of persistence, they need not be equally integrated along the two (Karp et al., 2010).

Even among those students that do persist, wide-ranging contact with faculty, especially outside of the classroom, is associated with heightened intellectual and social development. In other words, student contact with faculty, especially outside of the class, is an independent predictor of growth (Tinto, 2012b). Further, Tinto explains that if social integration is going to occur, it must do so in the classroom, because the classroom functions as a gateway for student involvement in the academic and social communities of college (Tinto, 1997). Thus, the college classroom constitutes one possible source of influence on social integration, subsequent institutional commitment, and college departure (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000).

Students are more likely to succeed when they find themselves in settings that are committed to their success, hold high expectations for their success, provide needed academic, social, and financial support, frequent feedback, and actively involve them, especially with other students and faculty (Tinto, 2005). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) explain that the impact of college is largely determined by individual effort and involvement in the academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings on a campus.

Despite much criticism, Tinto's theory of student departure (2012b) has been used most often in student retention discussions. His theory of student departure has been applied in studies about the academic and social integration of students entering as first-year students into large universities (Braxton, Shaw Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). Tinto asserted that the process of becoming integrated into the academic and social systems of a college occurs when students successfully navigate the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation (Milem & Berger, 1997). Separation involves students' ability to disassociate themselves to some degree from the

norms of past communities, including families, high school friends, and other local ties. Transition occurs after the successful negotiation of separation. Incorporation happens when students adapt to and adopt the prevailing norms and behavior patterns of their college or university community (Milem & Berger, 1997).

In 2000, Berger and Malaney (2003) conducted a study of students who transferred from a community college to the University of Massachusetts. This study focused on how students from various community colleges adapted to the academic and social life at the University of Massachusetts. Overall, the researchers found that students who transferred from community colleges to the University of Massachusetts were generally satisfied with their decision and with various aspects of their academic and social life at the university. They found that 88% of the students interviewed were satisfied or very satisfied with their university experience; 89% were satisfied or very satisfied with their social life; 68% were satisfied or very satisfied with the academic support they received, and 83% were satisfied or very satisfied with their academic progress (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) conducted a study that used two national data sets to explore the relationship between faculty practices and student engagement and learning. Combining these databases allowed for a greater understanding of the faculty and institutional characteristics that influenced student learning and student engagement. The first data source for this study was the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The second database came from a parallel study examining the attitudes and behaviors of faculty at institutions participating in NSSE.

This study used a hierarchical linear modeling dual stage analysis. In the first stage, they explored the average faculty behaviors at an institution and student engagement and learning. The aim of this model was to understand the relationship between the student experience and the faculty behavior. The second stage sought to understand the relationships between institutional characteristics and faculty behaviors and attitudes. They found that course-related interactions appeared to be more positively related with student engagement. Not surprisingly, the average number of faculty member reports of course-related interactions with students was significantly positively related to student reports of student-faculty interactions. Additionally, even after including all controls, campuses where faculty reported frequent course-related interactions, both first-year and senior students were more challenged and engaged in active and collaborative learning activities (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

Transfer Students

Initially, community colleges were designed to provide two years of coursework suitable for transfer to four-year institutions (Glass & Harrington, 2002), and to encourage additional education for those who could not afford, or were not able to attend, 4-year colleges and universities (Borglum & Kubala, 2000). Despite the fact that this remains accurate, it does not address the academic and social integration needs of these students (Townsend & Wilson, 2009).

The more students are involved, the more they gain from college and the more likely they are to persist to graduation (Tinto, 2005). Therefore, the more ways we can find to help engage students, the more they will learn. Likewise, involvement tends to create support networks. Students develop friends and associates with those individuals they can turn for questions, guidance, and emotional support (Bliming, Whitt, & Associates, 1999).

Glass and Harrington (2002) conducted a study using a group of community college transfer students from the 58 community colleges in the North Carolina Community College System who transferred to one large (27,000 + students) four-year university in the University of North Carolina System (UNCS), along with a group of native students from the same university. All subjects entered the College of Arts and Sciences at the university. The sample consisted of 100 community college students and 100 native students. This study focused primarily on the relationship between a student's transfer experiences as compared with their native counterparts. The researchers concluded that transfer students had a grade point average equal to or greater than the native students upon completion of the lower division coursework. Further, they found that many of the transfer students suffered from "transfer shock" during their first semester, but those students that persisted were as successful as their native counterparts (Glass & Harrington, 2002).

Integration, Retention and Persistence

Some students start college underprepared for the change required to succeed at a four-year institution; many leave without giving themselves a chance to succeed (Tinto, 1987). The words *persistence* and *retention* are often used interchangeably. Persistence refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from the beginning year through completion of a degree. Retention, on the other hand, refers to the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission through graduation (Berger, Blanco Ramirez, & Lyons, 2005). In other words, institutions retain and students persist.

Tinto's theory of student retention asserts that undergraduate student persistence is influenced not only by their own characteristics, goals, and commitments, but also by their experiences academically and socially within the institution (Tinto, 2012b). Further, Tinto's

16

discussions of academic and social integration seem to be rooted primarily in the degree to which a student believes they are part of the academic and social system of the institution. Much of this integration, he asserts, is based on individual student judgments about the institution's commitment to their welfare (Milem & Berger, 1997). Persistence is also of concern to society at large because college-educated citizens contribute in multiple ways to the social good and are less likely to engage in harmful behaviors (Barnett, 2011). Another term commonly used with retention is attrition. Attrition is defined as the reduction in numbers of students resulting from lower student retention (Berger et al., 2005).

Students who become actively engaged in campus organizations are more likely to persist than those who are not involved (Tinto, 1988). Student organizations create an environment to develop relationships between students with similar interests as well as connections to the institution. Furthermore, these organizations serve as social networks, which enhances their ability to increase the likelihood of integration and student persistence (Harper & Quaye, 2009). What affects transfer students' persistence and time to degree is not well understood, in spite of research over several decades. In contrast, what affects the persistence of first-year students is increasingly understood, particularly as analyzed through the lens of Tinto's theory (2012b) of factors affecting student persistence (Tinto, 1997).

Tinto's first principle of effective retention asserted that the entire college community must assume responsibility for an enduring commitment to the students served by institution. His second principle stated that colleges and universities assure that student learning is not left to chance (Tinto, 2012b). Finally, Tinto's third principle held that effective retention programs focus on the integration of all students into the social and academic communities of a college or university.

Townsend (1995) conducted a case study that focused on the perceptions of a group of community college transfer students about two primary situations, the transfer process itself and the academic environment into which they transferred. To gather this information, the study used 40 full-time students at an urban university, who had transferred from a particular urban community college between Fall 1987 and Spring 1992. These students may have attended other community colleges prior to attending the community college in the study, but none had attended a four-year university. At the time of data collection, seven had graduated from the university, 16 were no longer attending the university, and 21 were still enrolled. This study sought to examine the transfer process, including if and how both the community college and university facilitated the process, and what each institution could have done to make the process easier.

Townsend found that a common assumption about students who leave an institution without graduating is that they do so because of academic difficulties. This may have been a reason why some of the sixteen students left the university. Of the non-respondents, nine had a university GPA of less than 2.0, which is equivalent to a C average. Of these nine, four were dropped for poor scholarship. Of the five respondents to the survey, only one had clearly failed academically and had a 0.0 GPA after one semester. The other four all had passing GPA's, with the average being 2.45. While average GPA was a major difference between respondents and nonrespondents as groups, their characteristics were otherwise similar. The data suggested that the community college transfer student who succeeded at this university was a fairly self-reliant student, able to survive with multiple sources of institutional help (Townsend, 1995).

Although potential transfer students comprise 30-40% of community college enrollment, they often must fend for themselves before and after transferring to a four-year institution. If, before entering an institution, students have certain assumptions about the college environment

18

that eventually prove inconsistent with their impressions after matriculation, they may be candidates for attrition (Bauer & Bauer, 1994).

Motivation and Adjustment

Students must persist through academic, personal, and institutional challenges in the community college setting in order to reach the four-year setting. Social integration is similar to academic integration; however, the focus shifts to interactions between students, faculty, staff, and peers in social contexts, such as peer interactions, involvement in student organizations, and informal contact with faculty. Social integration also affects student persistence in the community college setting (Harper & Quaye, 2009).

Ose (1997) examined transfer students' motivation to engage in extracurricular activities at the four-year level. In her study, she interviewed twelve seniors, ranging in age from 20-24. These interviews were person-to-person, semi structured, one-hour long recorded sessions. A constant comparative method of analysis was used, comparing the data obtained within and between the interviews. This study indicated the biggest differences between involved transfer students and uninvolved transfer students centered on individual motivation.

Participatory students were interested in fitting in, meeting people, and had a significant experience that caused them to commit to the overall campus community. Nonparticipatory students, on the other hand, were more focused on academic achievement, work responsibilities, and off campus commitments. Transfer students showed the fewest differences in areas of satisfaction, but both groups found distinct ways to build satisfaction. Participatory students attributed their satisfaction to fitting in, sense of purpose, and an increased interest in their major. The nonparticipatory students associated their satisfaction with forming a small group of friends (Ose, 1997).

Adjustment to college life involves more than performing inside the classroom; there is a wide range of academic and social interactions and outcomes that must be considered in a comprehensive view of the college adjustment process. It is important to consider how well students adjust to and fit in with the academic and social environments of a campus in order to have a more complete understanding of how well transfer students adjust to a four-year university (Berger, 2003). Senior transfer students share many characteristics with older students and commuters but differ in marked ways from their counterparts who persist at the same college where they started. These patterns hold even after controlling for institutional characteristics (sector, size, Carnegie type) and student characteristics (sex, enrollment status, age, race). For example, transfer students from two-year institutions interacted less with faculty, and participated in fewer educationally enriching activities. Transfer students from four-year institutions did more active and collaborative learning, participated in fewer educationally enriching activities, viewed the campus as less supportive, gained less during college, and were less satisfied overall with college (Kuh et al., 2011).

A significant portion of college students, between 36 and 63 percent of students overall, have to work to at least some extent during their time in college in order to pay for their tuition and stay in school (Pascarella et al., 1998). This makes their time spent on campus even more limited and thus in greater demand. Motivation to make steady progress toward graduation and to graduate from college is a necessary personality trait. Therefore, motivation to graduate from college exerts a positive influence on student persistence (Braxton et al., 2004).

Commuter students' time on campus focuses primarily on classes, often at the exclusion of other campus involvement (Braxton et al., 2004). Students who have significant commitment off campus, such as work and family, have other places where they need to spend their time

(Araujo & Murray, 2011). Consequently, the nature of their campus experiences reflects well-worn paths between the parking lot and the classrooms. Without purposeful and meaningful interactions with other students, these students feel isolated and disconnected from the institutional culture, feelings that contribute to a perception of chaos and confusion (Braxton et al., 2004). By providing and encouraging academic and social integration into the educational community, these students will likely persist, unless external commitments or changing intentions and goals work against their persistence in a particular institution of higher education (Townsend & Wilson, 2006a).

Transfer Shock

Community colleges and 2-year institutions have experienced tremendous growth over the past decade. Because they make up over one quarter of all postsecondary institutions, they have been described as the fastest growing area in higher education (Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000). Three sets of factors impact transfer student success in the four-year college setting: individual student characteristics, community college experiences, and college or university experiences (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Most students transferring from community colleges to 4-year institutions experience "transfer shock," manifested in a lower grade point average their first semester at the receiving institution (Cejda, 1997). Usually manifested by a dip in grade point average, this shock may be so severe that individual students drop out (Rhine et al., 2000). Sometimes they go to another school whose environment is more compatible with their academic abilities and psychological needs; sometimes they abandon a four-year degree as a goal (Townsend, 1995).

Some studies maintain that students are handicapped by starting in community colleges because these institutions lack the opportunity for involvement, residential facilities, and the student populations at these institutions are often underprepared, surrounded by both part-time students and faculty members (Colaizzi, 1978). Given the wide variety of educational opportunities provided at a two-year institution, the transfer function plays an integral role in providing access to underrepresented students to a four-year degree (Laanan, 1996).

With so many community college students planning to attend 4-year institutions, it is important to adequately prepare students for transition. Transfer shock has been seen primarily in students majoring in business, math, and science; students majoring in education, fine arts, humanities, and social sciences have generally reported an increase in their grade point average (GPA) following transfer to a 4-year institution (Rhine et al., 2000). This increase is described as "transfer ecstasy" (Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009). This transfer ecstasy phenomenon appears to refute the belief that all students transferring from community colleges are academically less prepared than students at 4-year colleges and universities (Rhine et al., 2000).

Bauer and Bauer (1994) surveyed 130 respondents enrolled in two Maryland community colleges between Fall 1988 and Spring 1990. The participants were asked to compare their senior year of high school and their community college on selected academic variables, and report self-perceived achievements on selected and academic personal skills while enrolled at the community college. These participants were then asked to follow up after transfer to a four-year institution, yielding a 71% response rate, with 92 of the 130 initial respondents completing follow-up survey information about their experiences at the two-year and four-year institutions.

The study found that speaking during class discussion, giving a speech, and meeting new friends were identified as personal concerns after transfer. Making new friends was the major

personal concern at a four-year college. Thus, the social skills and social opportunities respondents felt were adequate while they were enrolled at the community college were not perceived as adequate after enrollment in a four-year school occurred. A comparison of respondents from their initial enrollment in a community college to their enrollment in a four-year institution revealed some improvement in social skills, however. Additionally, concern about making new friends and about sharing oneself with friends increased on a four-year campus. The fact that many community college transfer students continued to live at home and commute to the four-year campus may, in part, account for this finding (Bauer & Bauer, 1994)

Assessment of Engagement

The construct of student engagement underpins the research work of Kuh (2009) and McClenney (2007), authors of survey instruments that measure how students engage, or fail to engage, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) (Kramer & Associates, 2007).

College Student Experiences Questionnaire

Pace introduced the concept of quality of effort in the early 1970s, and launched the College Student Experiences Questionnaire research program (Kuh et al., 2010).   His work on student engagement showed how students spend their time is highly correlated with the level of their ultimate learning and success. One of the strengths of the student engagement focus is the practice of asking students how they spend their time and how they elect, individually, to engage with the campus (Pace, 1980). Such evidence has shown wide variability in student engagement on any given campus, making it unclear to what degree engagement is a product of entering student characteristics, peer influence, and institutional policies (Kramer & Associates, 2007). The College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) assesses involvement by asking

23

students how often they engage in a specific range of activities clustered into different areas (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The CSEQ Research Program formally moved its operations to Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning in 1994, under the direction of George D. Kuh (Gonyea, Kish, Kuh, Muthiah, & Thomas, 2003). Since 1979, more than 400 4-year colleges and universities have used the CSEQ to assess the quality of the undergraduate experience, resulting in about 300,000 student records (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

The CSEQ allows institutions to compare what students expected from college with their subsequent experiences on the same basic set of considerations regarding in-class and out-of-class behaviors (Pace & Swayze, 1992). Institutional researchers can compare these results and discover that students may not report having the sort of learning experiences they expected. Solutions might include a summer jump-start program or requiring new students to live on campus. Before any direction can be chosen, the assessment of the dissonance between expectations and reality is a necessary first step to addressing the problem (Kramer & Associates, 2007).

Pace (1980) developed a measure of satisfaction with college that consisted of two items: "How well do you like college?" and "If you could start all over again, would you go to the same college you are now attending?" Pace used all of the measures from the College Student Experience Questionnaire, which included students' background, status in college, quality-of-effort scales, ratings of gains toward objectives, and ratings of the environment to predict satisfaction (Pace & Swayze, 1992). More general evidence for the influence of the environment came from the prediction of students' sense of gain toward five general categories of outcomes.

Many relationships with environmental measures were significant, second in frequency only to the quality-of-effort scales (Braxton, 2000).

National Survey of Student Engagement

Since the 1970s, instruments have been available for assessing some aspects of student engagement. These include CSEQ and a few other national surveys with similar types of questions, such as the Cooperative Institutional Research Program's Entering Student Survey and its follow-up version, the College Senior Survey. These instruments, designed and used primarily for research purposes rather than accountability and improvement, were fairly long and cumbersome to administer, which in recent years contributed to lower-than-desired response rates from survey-fatigued undergraduate students (Kuh, 2009).

The National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) project was founded on and continues to pursue three core purposes. The first, and most important, was to provide high-quality, actionable data that institutions could use to improve the undergraduate experience. NSSE's second purpose was to discover more about and document effective educational practice in postsecondary settings. Exploration of the second purpose was done through careful, ongoing analyses of the annual NSSE results, and research and related activities undertaken by the NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice. NSSE's third purpose was to advocate for public acceptance and use for empirically derived conceptions of collegiate quality (Kuh, 2009).

Carini (2006) conducted a study utilizing *The College Student Report* administered by RAND researchers. In this study, 1352 students from 14 colleges and universities were selected to participate. These students spanned all four undergraduate class levels. An intentional mix of institutional characteristics – public/private, urban/nonurban locations, geographical location,

admission selectivity, and large/small enrollment totals were represented in the colleges and universities participating.

Analysis of the data was conducted on a myriad of levels. Student learning was assessed by academic performance as measured by the RAND and GRE scores, and college-reported GPA. Relationships between academic performance measures and self-reported gains associated with college were also measured. Finally, the possible link between student engagement and satisfaction with their college experience at their current institution was probed. This study corroborated what other researchers (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003; Au, 2007; Kuh, 2001; Kuh et al., 2010; Zhao & Kuh, 2004) had concluded: student engagement is positively associated with desirable learning outcomes such as critical thinking and strong academic performance (Carini et al., 2006).

The original intent of the NSSE was to provide a means for students, citizens, elected officials, and taxpayers to better assess the quality of higher education institutions. A secondary objective was to create a tool for the oversight bodies of publicly funded institutions to monitor the quality of higher education provision at the institutions for which they are responsible (Ewell, 2004).

The concept of "engagement" that constitutes its core reflects the results of at least two decades of research in the U.S. identifying specific factors of both experiences and environment that are associated with high learning gains. These factors are embodied in the five "benchmarks" scales around which NSSE results are reported:

- Level of academic challenge, consisting of items on the amount of time students spend on academic work and the kind of assignments and exercises expected of them

- Active and collaborative learning, consisting of items on student participation in group work, and active participation in learning activities in and out of class.

- Student-faculty interaction, consisting of items on various kinds of contact between faculty and students in and out of class.

- Enriching educational experiences, consisting of items on particular curricular and experiential features of the educational environment including service learning, study abroad, or senior capstone projects and other independent work

- Supportive campus environment, consisting of items on the availability and use of various academic support services as well as the general atmosphere of support for student achievement generated by faculty, staff, and other students. (Ewell, 2004)

Community College Survey of Student Engagement

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) was established in 2001 as part of the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin. With initial funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Lumina Foundation for Education, the survey has also been cosponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning (McClenney, 2007). The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) asks students about their college experiences – how they spend their time; what they feel they have gained from their classes; how they assess their relationships and interactions with faculty, counselors, and peer; what kinds of work they are challenged to do; and how the college supports their learning and so on (Schuetz, 2008).

The CCSSE survey instrument was designed to obtain, on an annual basis, information about community college student participation in educationally purposeful activities. The results provide an estimate of how students spend their time; in what ways and how often they interact

with faculty members, other professionals, and other students; and what they gain from attending college (McClenney, 2007). Providing the foundation for CCSSE's work is the concept of student engagement – that is, the amount of time and energy that students invest in educationally meaningful activities. CCSSE's survey instrument is designed to capture student engagement as a measure of institutional quality (McClenney, 2006).

Unlike data obtained from the NSSE or CSEQ, the CCSSE considers some of the risk factors that impact retention and undergraduate success. These include academic underpreparedness (such as not having graduated from high school or needing remedial education), status as a single parent, financial independence (i.e., students who do not receive assistance for educational costs), childcare responsibilities, employment in excess of 30 hours per week, status as a first-generation college student, and part-time student status (Kramer & Associates, 2007).

Summary

This chapter discussed the existing literature and research on transfer students and their acclimation to their transfer institutions, as well as literature and studies on student engagement and involvement. The overlap on these areas is limited, but the minimal overlap focuses on academic successes for these students. These successes would tend to fall into Tinto's "academic" integration area, but little exists to address the "social integration" component.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter seeks to outline the methodology and design of the study conducted. Merriam (2002) explains that the key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of student engagement on the transfer student experience and its perceived influence on student success at a large four-year university in the Rocky Mountain region.

Research Design

Gaining insight into a student's individual experience is most effectively captured using a qualitative research approach. There are several key characteristics that are critical to qualitative research. The first is that the researcher is striving to understand the constructed meaning about an individual's world and experiences. In all forms of qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data collection and analysis instrument (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Finally, qualitative research builds themes from the bottom upward, through an inductive process (Creswell, 2009). A phenomenological approach to research helps the researcher understand the meaning of a place, event, or activity to a participant. This helps answer questions such as "how" and "why" (Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2009).

Phenomenological research mixes descriptive and interpretive research methods to examine personal experiences and attempts to set aside a researcher's preconceived notions and prior experiences to objectively question the nature of a particular phenomenon (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Willig, 2001). More specifically, using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach seeks to capture the quality of the individual experience (Willig, 2001) and provides the opportunity for the participants to share their experiences without requiring the

researcher to become part of the experience. IPA focuses on sense-making by both the participant and researcher; this means that this approach possesses some reasoning as a central analytic concern, creating an intriguing partnership with the cognitive model present in contemporary psychology (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

It should be noted that since this approach focuses on participants recounting their experiences, there exists the possibility that these recollections may not be an accurate reflection of the actual events. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) however, argued that researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations. It is these particular situations that contributed to the richness of the inquiry. Smith et al. (2009) explained that the overarching aims set by IPA researchers are to focus upon the experiences and understandings of a particular phenomenon or event, which essentially builds in some bias when recounting these experiences.

The aim of this phenomenological study was to gain a further understanding into the impact of student engagement experience on transfer student success at large university in the Rocky Mountain region. Utilizing an interpretive phenomenological analysis approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of the participants' experiences and took into account the individual students' experiences and the meanings therein.

Hycner (1985) explained that phenomenological research, while not universally generalizable, may be phenomenologically informative about human beings – and in this case students pursuing transfer opportunities – more specifically. This study sought to examine how these students perceived their involvement at a two-year institution influencing their experience or perception of success at a four-year institution. The following research questions were used to examine this phenomenon:

- How does a student's engagement experience at a two-year institution impact their overall experience of success?

- How does a student's engagement experience at a two-year institution impact their experience of success at the four-year institution?

- How does a student's transitional experience from the two-year institution to the four-year institution impact the overall perception of their success?

Participants

This study focused on ten students who have completed at least one full year, or two full consecutive semesters, of post-secondary coursework on campus at a two-year institution in the Rocky Mountain Region, and are currently enrolled at a large four-year university in the Rocky Mountain region, who were also identified as a "transfer" student to the university. This is a convenience sample because the researcher lives and works in the Rocky Mountain Region, and works at a two-year institution with a strong articulation agreement with the local large four-year university.

Ten transfer students were interviewed as part of this study. Each participant was provided with a Recruitment Letter (Appendix A) prior to agreeing to participate in this study. While "transfer" encompasses many populations, this study focused only on students who have transferred from two-year institutions, rather than students who may have transferred from other four-year institutions or other post-secondary institutions. Identification occurred through recommendations of students who exhibited engagement at the four-year institution, as well as at the two-year institution. Each participant signed Consent to Participate (Appendix B), and a copy was provided to the participant for his or her records.

Using a purposive sample ensured a relatively homogenous sample for this study. Smith and Osborn (2003) explained that IPA researchers usually try to find a fairly homogeneous sample, to find a more closely defined group for which the research question(s) will be significant. The sample size was small, because qualitative studies tend to utilize smaller samples.

Data Collection Measures

Creswell (2009) noted that qualitative researchers collect data by examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants. It is with this in mind that data was sought and collected for this study. Participants were identified by referrals from students who had an existing relationship with the researcher. Interested participants were directed to contact the researcher, at which time an interview was scheduled at a time and location mutually agreed upon by both the researcher and participant.

Semi - Structured interviews

A series of questions was developed to act as a guide for the discussion with each interview participant. These questions can be found in Appendix D. Each participant was asked each question, and given the opportunity to discuss their journey through higher education and explain how engagement – or lack of engagement – has impacted their overall educational experience.

Each interview was conducted face-to-face and recorded. The researcher then transcribed these interviews verbatim post-interview. These interviews sought to illustrate the participants' interpretation of their engagement opportunities at both the two-year institution and the university. These questions were intentionally designed to allow the participant to provide as much detail as they chose, while still addressing the central research points – the student's

engagement experience at their two-year institution, and the student's engagement experience at a four-year institution.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2009) explained that using a phenomenological approach to data analysis would use the analysis of significant statements, generation of meaning units and the development of an "essence description." Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis focuses on transcripts of semi-structured interviews. Since this approach required the researcher to enter into the life-world of the participant, the questions posed needed to remain open-ended and non-directive (Willig, 2001). As such, transcripts of each interview have been analyzed in accordance with the principles of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, focusing primarily on the experience, or phenomenology, and later focusing on a wider range of epistemological approaches (narrative, discourse, cognition, and affect) to the accounts (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Analyzing the transcriptions of these interviews led to common themes among transfer students and provided insight into these students' engagement experiences and how it shaped the perception of their experiences.

As recommended by Creswell (2007), each transcript was read several times to obtain an overall feeling for the transcript. From each transcript, significant sentences and phrases that directly relate to the lived experience of the engagement at either the two-year institution or university were identified. From these sentences and phrases, meanings were then formulated and clustered into themes allowing for common themes among all participants to emerge. Once these themes were identified, a review of all themes across each interview was conducted to find emergent themes among all participants. Coding of the data sought to identify and describe

patterns and themes from the perspective of the participants. These codes were developed through the emergent themes and grouped accordingly.

These transcripts were then loaded into HyperRESEARCH Qualitative Analysis Software to facilitate the data collection and theme identification process. The software allowed the researcher to organize, code, and display data in an illustrative fashion, which enhanced the analysis of the data collected, the emergent themes, and discussion of the study.

Trustworthiness

To ensure reliability, the researcher reviewed each interview transcript to ensure there were no obvious errors made during transcription Transcribing the interviews as soon as possible after the interview minimized these errors. Determining validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009).

Member checking was established by providing transcripts of the interviews to the participants for their review and conducting member checking with each interview. Each participant was provided with a copy of the interview transcript, and was given an opportunity to provide any additional information or feedback that may not have been otherwise included. Each participant indicated the transcription was an accurate and complete account of the interview.

Thick descriptions involve detailed, rich descriptions not only of the participants' experiences of the phenomena but also of the contexts in which these experiences occur (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Providing rich and thick descriptions gave the reader a clearer view into the experiences of the participants, as well as facilitated case-to-case reasoning (Firestone, 1993).

Ensuring quality transcriptions, conducting member checks and providing thick, rich descriptions all contributed to the trustworthiness of this research project. Creswell (2007) recommended qualitative researchers employ at least two procedures to ensure trustworthiness.

Summary

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology that was used to conduct the study. Participant selection, data collection and analysis methods were described in detail. The results of the data analysis will be described in depth in chapters 4 and discussed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of student engagement on the transfer student experience and its perceived influence on student success at a large four-year university in the Rocky Mountain region. Ten students at a large four-year university in the Rocky Mountain Region were interviewed for this study. Each student has completed at least one full year – or two consecutive semesters – of post-secondary coursework at a two-year institution prior to transfer. Each student attended the same two-year institution, though that was not used as a criterion for selection. While the population of transfer students at a university may include students who transferred from a myriad of institutions, this study focused only on those students who have transferred from a two-year institution.

General background information on each participant has been provided in the following section. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Each profile provides brief demographic information, as well as insight into the participant's involvement experiences while enrolled at the two-year institution, if applicable.

Participant Profiles

Sandra

Sandra is a 26-year old, Latina female who transferred to the university in the Fall 2012 semester. She is working to be admitted to the School of Business, and ultimately would like to earn a degree in Business. She is a first-generation college student, and the oldest of four children. While enrolled at her two-year institution, she was involved with various clubs and organizations on campus and worked as a student employee for four years.

Heather

Heather is a 21-year old Caucasian female who began her post-secondary career at her two-year institution in an effort to save money before transferring to the University. She is working on a degree in Early Childhood Education and is scheduled to graduate in May 2014. She is also a first-generation college student, though many of her siblings and both of her parents have attended both the two-year institution and have continued their education at the University. While enrolled at the two-year institution, Heather was not as actively involved in campus activities as she was with organizations through her church. However, she did work on campus as a student employee for two semesters.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a 26-year old Caucasian female whose connection to her two-year institution was such a huge part of her life that she acknowledges that moving on from it was similar to mourning the loss of a loved one. She is pursuing a degree in Secondary Education and History and is scheduled to graduate in May 2014. While enrolled at the two-year institution, she worked on campus as a student employee and was heavily involved in campus clubs and organizations, as well as campus-wide committees and initiatives.

Grace

Grace is a 20-year old Latina female, whose ambition when she started college was to attend an Ivy League law school. She has since changed her career aspirations, but continues to strive for excellence. She has just completed her third semester at the University. While enrolled at the two-year institution, she was involved in some campus clubs and organizations, but primarily focused on her academics. She did work on campus for the two years she was

enrolled at the two-year institution, and was then brought back to work as a temporary employee at the two-year institution while a student at the University.

Jean

Jean is a 34-year old Caucasian female who went back to school after surviving a domestically violent relationship that ended in divorce. She is married and a mother to three children between the ages of 3 and 7. While enrolled at the two-year institution, she was heavily involved with the institution's Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and other organizations on campus, and has received numerous awards and accolades for her service, leadership, and academic excellence. She has just completed her second full semester at the University and is currently pursuing a degree in Social Work.

Marie

Marie is a 36-year old Caucasian single mother of four children. While enrolled at the two-year institution, she worked on campus for a semester, but found that her children were suffering from the lack of time with her, so she elected to just focus on school and spend more time with her children. She has just finished her first semester at the University and is pursuing a degree in Business.

Amanda

Amanda is a 21-year old Caucasian female who had initially intended on enrolling at the University immediately following high school, but the cost of living in the residence halls prevented that from occurring. Instead, she enrolled at the two-year institution to work on some general education courses and then transferred in to the University. While enrolled at the two-

year institution, she was involved in numerous clubs and activities, as well as working on campus for the year that she was a student at the two-year institution.

Cait

Cait is a 26-year old Latina single mother of one child. While enrolled at the two-year institution, she was involved in a few campus activities, and worked in a number of different offices at the institution. She has just completed her second semester at the University, and is pursuing a degree in Education. Ideally, she would like to work with teen parents, and help them find a way to realize their educational and life goals.

Jeremy

Jeremy is a 26-year old Caucasian male. While enrolled at the two-year institution, he acknowledges that he was trying to focus on his academics, and thus did not become too involved in extracurricular activities that were not directly related to his field of study. Toward the end of his tenure at the two-year institution, he did become involved with some activities, and carried that involvement with him to the four-year institution upon transfer.

Sean

Sean is a 20-year old Caucasian male studying Civil Engineering at the four-year institution. Prior to starting at the two-year institution, he had spent much of his educational life being home schooled, so he chose to start his higher education journey at the two-year institution, rather than jumping right into a university setting.

Defining Success

Each interview began by asking the participant to define success within their college experience. Individual definitions of success ranged from academic success and earning a degree, to leaving an impact on the institution, to self-development and personal growth. This definition was used later throughout the interview, as a baseline for discussion of perceived "success" and its impact on their overall experience. Jean, Amanda, Marie and Elizabeth equated success to connection and impact, rather than academic success. Jean, for example, mentioned that she left the two-year institution feeling more empowered, and indicated, "education is empowerment, and I left (the two-year institution) feeling more empowered." The concept of empowerment surfaced repeatedly throughout Jean's interview, and much of her overall success seemed to be rooted in finding empowerment and making a difference in her community. Amanda suggested that success was a transitionary process, and that education "is not just about school, but about growing as a person." Marie explained that she would consider herself successful by feeling like she fit in with other students, and just being able to succeed in a given career path.

Elizabeth indicated that she measures success by the impression left, after the person is gone.

> I feel like I was successful at my two-year, I left an impact there. And I feel like at the four-year, my goal is to say that I've been successful there and to have people say, "Oh you know, I had this student . . . " and if my little brother went there and was in the same program, they'd be like, "oh! I know who that is!" I think by accomplishing that and your degree, you're putting yourself in a place where if you need something in your career from those people, you have a good place to go back to. And I think that's considered success.

Heather, Sandra, Cait, Grace, Jeremy and Sean all noted that their vision of success focused on academic excellence, to varying degrees. Heather focused her explanation of success on developing good study habits and learning how to be a more effective student.

> I would say that success for me in college has been learning and developing really good study patterns. I feel like when I was at the two-year institution, it was a bit easier for me because of the smaller classrooms, but the workload was also different. Now that I'm at a four-year institution, I have to figure out how I study and how I learn best. But it's amazing when you figure out how you learn!

Sandra measured success by keeping up with the rigors of the coursework at the four-year institution as she progresses through her program, as well as utilizing campus resources to facilitate learning. Cait described her measure of success by how far one can go with what they learn, "[g] rades matter, but the experience of what you learn and how you interpret it is also a huge part of success." Grace mentioned that her vision of success focused on earning a Bachelor's degree to improve her employment opportunities after graduation.

Jeremy explained that while he did not feel a particular connection to either the two-year or the four-year, he felt he was "getting something out of it" by building the skills and receiving an education that he knew he would need to be successful after graduation.

> I got an education out of it that I was looking forward to, and I definitely learned a lot and there's a lot of resources that I gathered out of there, you know, other students, and information that I've collected over the years. So it was good, I mean definitely.

Sean explained that his measure of success has shifted since he transferred to the university, and has transformed to be more broad-based than just earning good grades.

> I started out thinking "A"s – if you didn't get an A, you weren't trying hard enough. So it worked pretty well for the first part of classes. At a two-year institution it was a little bit easier to get to that. Now, it's more about saying that you've put forth your best efforts and what you get; you should be satisfied, no matter what. I would say success in college is being able to grow in your ability to think for yourself, grow in your critical thinking skills, learn about the world

around you, and gain some probably skills for the rest of your life, whether that be talking skills or just knowledge.

Emergent Themes

Participant motivation for enrolling at the two-year institution was varied, as was their goal post-graduation from the university. Despite these varied motivations, their experiences shed light on five main themes: (1) connection to the institution, at both the two and four-year levels, as well as resources designed to create connections for transfer students; (2) academic integration, including college readiness, academic exploration, passion for classroom activities, and persistence to a degree; (3) involvement, which includes institutional organizations, community-based initiatives, experiential learning opportunities, including student employment, and leadership activities; (4) confidence, including finding acceptance among peers, building a level of confidence and success that had not previously existed, and the effects of diminishing confidence on the student experience; and (5) transfer student transitions, including establishing connections with peers, faculty-student interaction, and the availability of resources needed to ensure academic success.

Connection to the Institution

While each participant expressed some opportunity or avenue by which they either could become, or did become, involved with the institution, they also expressed frustration and disappointment over the lack of connection established at the university. A few participants expressed an inability to connect at the two-year institution, but more frequently this was felt at the four-year institution. Heather indicated that she didn't feel as connected during her two-year experience, primarily because she knew she wouldn't be at the institution long-term, and consequently acknowledged that she didn't make much of an effort to connect. She did, however, indicate that she felt much more connected post-transfer at the four-year institution.

Two-Year Institutional Connection

Some participants expressed a very strong connection with the two-year institution, rooted in various motivations and backgrounds. Amanda indicated that she felt more comfortable at the two-year institution because she grew up in a smaller town and the closer-knit environment made her success easier. She also indicated that starting at the two-year institution fostered her success at the university.

> Coming from an incredibly small town, there weren't very many opportunities to try new things with new people. And without the smooth transition into the two-year institution, I know that I definitely would not have had as much social success at the university as I have had.

Elizabeth's experience was less grounded in the small-town roots and more in the relationships she developed while enrolled at the two-year institution. Unlike Amanda, she felt as if her connection to the two-year institution may have hindered her connection to the university.

> You know, going from somewhere that I had a personal relationship with the Deans, and going to this place where I don't know anybody – literally nobody – and there's 150 other kids in this classroom with me. You know, I think that being such a part of the two-year community made me very hesitant to become a part of the four-year community. Because I'd already had that identity – that I was a part of a school, and it took me about a semester to kind of get that over with, you know, deal with the loss.

Grace indicated that the connections she made at the two-year institution strengthened her overall experience, and expressed her disappointment that she was unable to build connections at the university like she had built at the two-year institution.

> I find that people at the two-year school are a lot more friendly, and that's why its
>
> easier to engage whereas at the university everybody's off doing their own thing
>
> and . . . you know . . . it's not so easy to get involved and make friends over there.

Four-Year Institutional Connection

The overarching concept of "connection" manifested itself in a number of different

forms, but the most common was an expressed lack of connection to the institution.

Elizabeth expressed her disappointment at the lack of opportunity and connection she had

hoped would exist upon transfer.

> It made me a little bit disappointed, you know, going to the four-year. Just because I expected to have the opportunities to get that involved and I felt so out of place there because of how involved I was at the two-year. And those opportunities I had at the two year that were so easy and all you had to do was grab, and you got it, it wasn't like you had to fight for it. Those weren't available after I transferred, I feel like. I feel like there you're just a number, which for me was a really, really hard transition.

Likewise, Grace felt that building a connection at the four-year institution was very

difficult, that individuals were not interested in how she was doing, and less likely to help foster

a connection.

> In that big college setting, people don't really care about you as much especially the teachers. And so it's been a little bit hard with the transition; everybody's off doing their own thing and . . . you know . . . it's not so easy to get involved and make friends over there.

Jean echoed a very similar sentiment, expressing her frustration at the lack of cohesion

among the campus community, and inability to find an opportunity to connect with the

university.

> I spent the first semester going crazy, because I didn't have anything to do. And every place that I tried to go and fit in wasn't what I was looking for. That's the thing that's so frustrating to me is that it's such a big campus and everybody's so focused on their own thing that they don't even really know the right answer and they give you incorrect information all the time.

Jean's vision of success focused on empowerment, and throughout our discussion, she often

alluded to the lack of empowerment opportunities present, which compounded her frustration

and created mild animosity for the institution.

Jeremy touched on the disconnect between the "honeymoon phase" for first year students and transfer students, and how this first impression can set up transfer students to feel less valued than their first-year student counterparts.

> Like all the freshmen that show up get like water bottles and stuff and then they drop out a year later, but the transfer students, they don't really show any love to, ya know? So that's kind of hard too. You don't feel like you're as accepted when you transfer over, than if you had just started there, which was difficult.

Transfer Student Resources

Some participants discussed resources specifically for transfer students, designed to facilitate a smoother transition to the university. These resources, however, did not seem to be particularly effective or welcoming among the participants that sought out these services.

Elizabeth indicated that the Transfer Student Orientation seemed like a "waste of time" to her, because much of the time was spent explaining concepts she was already familiar with from her time working within the two-year institution. She did seem to appreciate efforts made by the university to connect new students to current students, and to provide a student's view of campus life.

> There were some cool things, like they had a girl take us around on a tour and
>
> show us around and show us where everything was. And that was really cool to
>
> hear about the surroundings from an actual student. That was really nice.

Jean sought out membership with the Transfer Student Association, and was disappointed to learn of its intended purpose, rather than the purpose she had perceived.

> There's a Transfer Student Association. And I went to one of their meetings, and found out that they're mostly about playing games, eating pizza, and watching movies, and getting to know the town. They're really designed more for people transferring from other universities than from community colleges schools within the state.

45

Academic Integration

The strongest connections forged by many of the participants were rooted in their academic endeavors, including college readiness, academic exploration, an expressed passion for the participant's field of study, and persistence to an earned degree. Many participants expressed a sense of connection to the institution through academic-related activities.

College Readiness

Many participants expressed that began their higher education journey at a two-year institution, as an intermediary step to the university, because they fear the larger class sizes typically associated with a large university, and worry that they will not be successful in these classes. This fear is particularly present among students who may have started at a smaller institution, such as the participants in this study.

Amanda indicated that she "avoided" the large classes that she had feared, which helped facilitate a smoother transition into the university. She accomplished this by completing most of her general education and core classes at the two-year institution before transferring.

> [I] t was just that tiny step that I needed to ease into college, rather than just going straight to the university with like 300-people classes. And with my classes at the two-year we didn't have that, and by the time I transferred I didn't have them either.

Many participants indicated they began their higher education journey at a two-year institution, because it would afford them the opportunity to learn how to become a student, and utilize campus resources to ensure their successes. These resources include tutoring services, library and research support, and student support services designed to help students connect and achieve academic success.

Sandra discussed her development of stronger study skills and habits, due in part to her experiences at the two-year institution. She felt that these skills, and utilizing academic support resources, would help her be more successful at the university.

> I think I would have gotten assistance when I needed it. Even though I didn't need it much, but definitely I did for math and science because they're dull to me and they don't do anything for me, and I think I should have gotten assistance and I would have had better grades in the outcome. At the university, I'm definitely getting the assistance and it's helping, but at the two-year, I should have done that and I wish I had known it was okay to step up and say "hey I'm having an issue with learning, and I need some extra help" and having that extra bit of confidence. It would have made me be more willing and open to it at the university, because I waited a month to seek it out and that really was a flaw on my part; I should have been getting help from day 1 that I didn't understand the material, but I just thought I could handle it all. It's something you need to learn to accept that you cant do everything, even if you'd like to be Superwoman or Superman, you've gotta learn when to ask for help and I wish that was something I had done at the two year institution.

Grace felt that she became a more effective student through her experience at her two-year institution. She felt that she built skills that benefitted her, and will continue to benefit her, in her academic endeavors.

> I guess though what the two-year institution did help me out with was study skills. I noticed it is a lot harder, and I had to study a lot more, but the two-year institution definitely helped me out as far as that researching goes, especially when it comes to going to do research at the library, with resources to use.

Academic Exploration

Many of the students in this study indicated that they started their college experience without a clear vision of their end goal. Two-year institutions give students an opportunity to explore these options, without incurring extreme costs. For many of them, this exploration created an opportunity to connect with students, faculty, and members of the college community they may not have otherwise considered.

Heather explained that her time at the two-year institution helped her focus her academic goal.

I think being at the two-year gave me some time to explore at like half the cost, also, so instead of going to a four-year and not really knowing what I wanted to do and taking all those classes I wasn't going to use, the two-year was really nice because it was much cheaper and it gave me an opportunity to explore lots of different fields without . . . since I'm paying for college myself . . . it was really nice to have that.

Jean's experience at the two-year institution led her to completely rethink her academic and career goals, and change her course of study from a business focus to a social work focus.

That there's so much more that you can learn from being a part of the campus and a part of the community. It's led me to change my major; I think, education is empowerment, and being acknowledged was a big piece of empowering me and that's actually what led me to change my major from business to social work.

Passion for Classroom Activities

Elizabeth and Heather expressed a connection to their classmates within their academic field, which helped each of them develop a sense of "community" within the university that they were otherwise unable to find.

Elizabeth found her niche through her classroom experiences, drawing upon a shared motivation among her peers. Finding this niche seemed crucial to Elizabeth, which filled a void she had been missing after leaving the two-year institution and having to "re-invent" herself.

In my education program is where I really got in my niche because you get to be involved with people going for the same thing. So my education classes – we have people from all different fields, but there are always at least three of us History majors, studying to be history teachers.

Heather explained that involvement in her academic program fueled her passion for education, and drove her to become more involved.

Okay, so once I got to the university I felt like I was a lot more motivated in my classes because all my classes were more targeted toward my passion. When I was at the two-year institution, all my classes were more core classes so like history, math, and all that stuff. But when I got to the university I'm in the early childhood education program and that's really fun because all of our classes are all about human development, child psychology, and so I'd say that when I got to the university I just started becoming a lot more excited about what I wanted to do in

48

the future, so I started looking for more opportunities to get more practice in teaching.

Jeremy did not participate in extracurricular activities during his time at the two-year institution until his final year as a student there. He indicated that he didn't think his involvement with academically related activities contributed to his overall experience with the institution, but did contribute to his overall knowledge in his field of study.

> I did spend a lot of time, because being in the Horticulture department they have the greenhouse there so you could go in extracurriculary and do kind of that stuff, too. So I did spend some time there doing extra clones and propagating extra plants for them in my free time, but it wasn't a whole lot of . . . it probably didn't impact anything too much beyond that.

Persistence to Degree

Each participant indicated that one marker of a successful academic career was getting to the end and earning their designated degree. Their paths to reach this end goal differed as greatly as did the participants' goals and motivations for pursuing the degree. Elizabeth explained that the experience was just as critical as the degree, but that one could not be effective without the other, "success would be completing a degree, you know, and being active with your department, your major, at your four-year university, at your two-year university. Leaving an impact, you know."

Marie found comfort in the common goal she shared with her classmates. She acknowledged that returning to school as an "older" student was a bit intimidating to her, and having a support network around her in the form of these classmates made the reintegration process more manageable.

> Going back to school as an older student definitely was a little scary and a little just. … fear of the unknown, and just being able to feel like there was other people, not necessarily the exact same age, but some were older, some younger, and it was like there was a common ground; we're all working toward a degree, you know, we were all succeeding.

Jeremy expressed that earning a degree was especially meaningful to him, as he and his sister would be the first in his family to graduate from college. Further, he was very proud of his academic successes thus far, and hoped to maintain the standard of excellence he had set forth for himself.

> I would say success is just graduating in general. Being that my sister and me were the only ones in my family to graduate from college, so that was a success and I graduated with a 3.25 and the Honor Society of Horticulture, joined that too. So it was good, because I didn't really do that well in high school, so that was good. I did pretty well.

Involvement

By nature of their attendance patterns, they attend class on campus but live elsewhere, often work full-time, and have strong familial obligations off-campus, community college students are assumed to lack the time to participate in activities, such as clubs, that would facilitate social integration (Karp et al., 2010). Participants in this study discussed the different ways to become involved, both at their two-year institution and at their four-year institution. These opportunities included institutional organizations, community-based initiatives, experiential learning opportunities, including student employment, and leadership activities. Jean explained that becoming a part of the campus community could be life changing.

> Going from your car to class and back to your car again is a disservice to your
>
> education. That there's so much more that you can learn from being a part of the
>
> campus and a part of the community.

Institutional Organizations

Sandra found her niche by becoming involved in theater projects through collaborations with the two-year institution and community. She was also involved in building a student history organization, which helped her grown and become more confident in her everyday life.

It made me more confident in my abilities to be engaged with the school. I didn't feel shy or that I wouldn't be able to accomplish something. Especially when I was doing music with the school, I was asked to sing at Commencement, and I remember being like "I don't want to do that! I don't want to sing in front of people! I'm going to be all nervous!" I hadn't done that in forever, but going through theater and history club, and doing different things with it, I had the confidence get up there and to be like "whatever." This is something you do on a daily basis; it's not going to kill you.

Marie sought to find her fit while at the two-year institution, and did so by becoming involved with Phi Theta Kappa, the International Honor Society at two-year colleges. Since the organization participated in a variety of activities, this gave Marie options that worked better with her schedule and did not require her to sacrifice time with her children.

There was a lot of stuff that I wanted to be involved in, but it just didn't fit. I'd say about the only one that I did actually get involved with was Phi Theta Kappa, and that was just great because they had a lot of different activities that I could be involved in and sit back and do it at my own pace, instead of feeling like I had to be committed to one day a week, one Saturday, like . . . some time I couldn't always commit to.

Sean was selective with his involvement, choosing to focus primarily on his academic endeavors. He did, however, serve as President of the two-year institution's chapter of Campus Crusade for Christ. He indicated that, while this took time away from his studies, it also helped him stay motivated.

I think it probably gave me a better attitude, just being able to have a spot where I could go back to every once in a while during the week. Because, I mean, you can have fun in Physics and Chemistry and math and whatnot, but being able to meet with people and share your life . . . it was just a time where people could talk about what classes they were going through and share what was going on in their life. So it was kind of a mentorship group

Elizabeth became very active with student clubs, committees, and organizations while at the two-year institution, which made her transition to the four-year very challenging, as she had discussed previously.

During those two years (at the two-year institution), I was active with Student Life; I volunteered for the homecoming float building and parade, the Halloween

51

Carnival. I did . . . .I'm trying to think of what else. Just tons of stuff with Student Life. I was a part of the Enrollment Management Committee; I was the only student member of that committee. There were all deans at the point, and the head of Admissions was there.

Experiential Learning Opportunities

On-campus or work-study employment is more often associated with student success, as working on campus provides a channel of communication to students and helps students use the educational system effectively (Kuh et al., 2011). Additionally, employment on campus can positively influence degree completion (Seidman, 2012). Each participant indicated a connection rooted in experiential learning in some fashion. Many participants worked at the two-year institution during their time there, and each expressed that this involvement connected them to the institution. Others found connection through volunteer opportunities that enhanced their educational experience. Those that did not work, or did not start working immediately upon transfer to the four-year institution, did not express that sense of connection post-transfer.

Elizabeth is not currently working at the four-year institution, but indicated that the strength of her connection and depth of her engagement while at the two-year institution was facilitated by her role as a student employee.

> It was easy to get involved because I had a position there. I think that if I hadn't been working there, I wouldn't have been as involved as much. But it's so easy to get a job when you're awarded work-study, and to become a part of that.

Amanda echoed a similar sentiment about her experience at the two-year institution, and disclosed that she began to feel much more connected to the university once she began working there.

> So through my time at the two-year institution, I started working there right away in my freshman year. And, so I met a lot of people and they told me about a lot of things . . . I think it had everything to do with it (impacting the overall experience at the two-year institution). I feel like if I hadn't worked there, it would have

been harder. Because now that I'm at the university, I didn't work there in the beginning but I feel like it definitely helped me because I was starting new. I had to find a new group of friends; I had to find myself.

Marie indicated that while she enjoyed her time working on campus, her family was suffering from her lack of presence at home. Because of this commitment to her family, she has elected not to work on campus at the university.

> I did work on campus, the first semester. And then I gave that up, I was just noticing that my children were suffering by taking full-time classes and being gone working, so I haven't worked since then.

Much of Grace's reverence for her two-year experience was rooted in the relationships she fostered through her student employment involvement. She indicated that the bonds created through that experience have lasted beyond the confines of the job, and extended into lasting, meaningful friendships.

> Some of the people that I worked with I had classes with so that was really nice. I think that because knowing other people in that setting, you know, gave me a chance to know people and I had them as resources and most of us still talk to this day, even though we've gone our separate ways.

Heather looked at her student employment opportunity as a chance to build rich, deep experiences, as well as learn some valuable time management skills that would become crucial once she enrolled at the university.

> By me being involved in all those different activities I had to manage my time better. I think when you're involved in things, or they even say that when you have a part-time job your freshman year, you do better in school because its like "okay, I'm going to be devoting my time to all these different things so I have to manage my time well. I have to really study when I say I'm studying", you know? Also I think that it just really, I think its so good to reach out to other people. I think that's a really important thing. I think that the more you do things with other people, the better you can work with people, and it's also really good for networking.

She is currently working while enrolled at the university and explained that while this position

isn't something she would consider as a career, she has gained valuable experience from it.

> I've learned how to manage confrontation in a really good way. And I think it's really helped me learn how to work with all sorts of people, like difficult people and not being intimidated by that and that's been a really good experience there. And working with a lot of kids my age has been really great, because I feel like with our job you learn so much more than you would with some other jobs.

Sandra developed a stronger work ethic and confidence in her own abilities because of

her experience working on campus at the two-year institution, and felt this benefitted her studies

once she transferred to the university.

> Working in that area, in that environment, also helped me develop a really good work ethic. I got to know how to work with other people – even if people don't think I did my best – I still learned to work with others, and that's something I'll never forget because I did it for three and a half years? It gave me a great experience, and I'm very thankful for that. I mean, I know I'd still be a hard worker without that experience, but I don't think I'd have the skills I do now. I just feel more confident in the things I'm doing now, and feel more confident in my abilities to do things right.

Community-Based Initiatives

Since she began at the university, Cait has become involved with a community-based

youth empowerment program that involves students from local schools in developing solutions

to issues facing the community.

> They vote on a community problem and this year they ended up choosing child abduction, with all the stuff that was going on. So that's what they ended up choosing and so they were researching that and they're trying to find a . . . solution . . . to the problem, and bring awareness to the community about it.

She explained that involvement in this program has made her overall experience at the university

more fun, and help her develop her skills as a teacher.

> It's made it funner, because it gives me a night away from my daughter (laughs) . . . I'm just kidding. But it does – it gives me a break to still interact with kids, which I like, but its geared towards something which I like helping people, so it's good to help the kids research problems and stuff.

Heather has been very involved in organizations through her church, during her time at the two-year institution as well as the four-year institution. She frequently discussed these opportunities as "really great" and "really fun." Her strong involvement with her church overlapped with her educational goals, and gave her the opportunity to help with early childhood classes, which she felt was a rewarding experience that will help further her professional development.

> I'm in the early childhood education program and that's really fun because all of our classes are all about human development, child psychology, and so I'd say that when I got to the university I just started becoming a lot more excited about what I wanted to do in the future, so I started looking for more opportunities to get more practice in teaching. So I continued to help with my church with the kindergarten program and then I also actually help out with the Early Childhood center on campus, and that's really fun because we have infants through 4-yr olds, so they're really little. But that age group is really good because it's so much about like, it's more freelance so it's not so structured, it's more about letting the kids explore different things. So that's been a really fun engagement experience, just getting to work on campus with the kids and working off campus with the kids.

Elizabeth expressed passion and excitement when she started discussing volunteer opportunities focused on teaching, where she felt like she was making a difference and finally connecting to the institution.

> So they gave us the opportunity to volunteer at the school as well, and other schools around. Get involved with stuff like that, and so I feel like that's where I've finally found my niche. Because it's much easier to get involved when you have that small area that you know people have the same goals as you, than this wide university-wide idea of trying to get involved.

Leadership Activities

Governed by her empowered sense of self, Jean was instrumental in creating and enhancing programs on campus while at the two-year institution, and was recognized as one of the top students in her graduating class. Along with her "core group of confidants," she and other members of Phi Theta Kappa strived for excellence in everything they did. Their efforts

lived on beyond their tenure at the two-year institution, but also created a level of greatness for

these students to expect in various aspects of their lives.

> We went from a two-star to a five-star chapter; five star is the highest you can
>
> achieve. We built a large presence on the campus; (we) won the distinguished
>
> honors and action project award, which is an international award that PTK offers.

Additionally, she expressed the power that she felt higher education could bring to one's quality

of life, and the benefits that one could garner from it.

> I think that, just going to college in itself is empowering, but going to college and
> being involved and not having to worry about the dollars and cents of it . . .I
> mean, it's life changing. It's so empowering, and you learn that you really are of
> worth.

Elizabeth, like Jean, was instrumental in creating programs and organizations during her

time at the two-year institution that sought to involve fellow students and create a sense of

community.

> I actually started a physical activities club. And I was the president of it for the
> first year it was around. When I graduated, it kind of died out because most of the
> people that were in it graduated. So it wasn't very long, but we still had a lot of
> fun. We set up group kickball, dodge ball, softball, got a lot of students engaged
> in that.

Sandra channeled her passion for history into a student organization that sought to share

their excitement for history with their fellow students.

> I was in the History Club, which was a lot of fun because we would put together
> pamphlets to let people know what happened on this day in history, to try and
> make it fun and engaging so students wouldn't look at it and think "oh my god
> they're giving us a history lecture?!?" because a lot of people, if you just say
> "history" they automatically just shut down and get bored and are like "oh god
> she's gonna tell us a story", you know? But we wanted to make it interesting and
> fun.

Sean saw his role as President of the Campus Crusade for Christ as an opportunity to

serve as a mentor for other members, and inspire aiming for greatness in their academic pursuits.

> I would help out others who were lower level chemistry and math, and inspire them to reach for higher standards, and enjoyment for chemistry or math. So I guess a little of that still had an effect on me, because when you're encouraging someone else its kind of hard not to do it yourself, otherwise you're being hypocritical. I'm sure it had a good impact, a positive impact.

Confidence

Many participants touched on the role of finding acceptance and building common

experiences among their peers and the subsequent effects on overall success, or events that

diminished confidence they may have initially developed, as well as aspects of their experience

that either helped build confidence they did not have when they started.

Peer Acceptance and Common Experiences

Marie discussed her apprehension for returning to school as an "older" student and

seeking a common experience among her peers.

> Going back to school as an older student definitely was a little scary and a little just . . . fear of the unknown, and just being able to feel like there was other people – not necessarily the exact same age, but some the at were older, some younger, and it was like there was a common ground; we're all working toward a degree, you know, we were all succeeding.

She also indicated that this support network she had built gave her the confidence she needed to

not give up or "stop out."

> I'd say it just helped me, encouraged me, to keep going and know that there were other people in the same boat and not feeling like I was the lone sailor out there, and so I think that just gave me the encouragement to not give up after one semester, and just say its over whelming – too much, and just quit.

When asked about her transition to the four-year institution, Heather commented, "as a

transfer student there's always a fear that you're not going to fit in with the other students,

because they've been there since their freshman year."

Elizabeth emphasized the importance of peer connection to help with the transfer assimilation process, and to help diminish that fear of acceptance to which Heather referred. She explained that regardless of background, age, or educational history, each student should now be working as part of a greater team, working toward the same goal.

> Get connected to those people, and don't be afraid. Just because they go to the university doesn't make them any different than you, you know? As an older student, I'm 26 years old in a room full of 150 19-year olds, I was like "Oh my gosh! I'm the weird old lady!" And so, but even with me being a little bit older and going into those education courses that did have younger students, our goal connected us, you know what I mean? Wanting to be in this program, and wanting to help kids learn, and you know all the tings that we had to do for that experience really connected us and that's my biggest thing.

Amanda explained that her connection to both her two-year and four-year experiences was rooted in the people she met, and those "familiar faces" that transcended the institutional boundaries.

> I definitely think being engaged at the two-year institution like, there were a lot of people I met who were students at the university, so I would see people I knew that went to both schools, so that helped. I think honestly, I knew how to get around town.

Diminished Confidence

Elizabeth struggled to find a sense of "mattering" after transferring to the university. While she appreciated the Transfer Mentor program that the university offers, which pairs 10-12 new transfer students with a student mentor for their first semester, she found it to be a frustrating effort as well, indicating "it's a difficult transition from such a small place where you seem like you matter and going into such a big place and yeah, you might matter to this one person who emails you three times a semester." She also indicated that the sheer size of the institution inhibited the sense of connection she had grown accustomed to while enrolled at the two-year institution, which consequently rattled her confidence.

58

Going from knowing my teachers, having relationships with my teachers, and going to a school where your teacher doesn't really care what your name is, doesn't care if you show up to class or not. For me, that was a really really hard thing.

Amanda indicated that she wasn't sure how she would connect to the institution for the first few years she was at the university. It wasn't until she began working at the university that she really felt like she belonged.

But I really felt like I didn't know how to get engaged, or get into groups or clubs or anything like that, which is partly my fault because I didn't go to the Transfer Orientation, so that's partly my fault, I will say. But I was just so overwhelmed; I didn't get involved until I started working there. I met some friends through classes, and so just I kind of bonded with them more and helped them with their events and stuff. But otherwise, I know it was my fault for not going to orientation, but I didn't really get engaged I'll say my first two years.

Sandra expressed that, while her involvement at the two-year institution had certainly helped build her confidence, she was still unsure of her abilities in other areas and would be less likely to jump into new situations at this time.

I think had I gotten involved with more . . . I don't want to say "serious" clubs – because we did take our history club seriously – but they were more focused on being an organized activity, more structured, more official, I think that would have helped me. Right now I definitely know I don't have the confidence to get into a position like that, because I still feel like I'm a baby. And I'm not ready for that, so I definitely would have gotten more involved like that.

Building Confidence

Amanda attributed her success during her time at the two-year institution to the confidence she built through that experience. The same comfort she felt at the two-year institution because of her small-town roots also helped her succeed.

Because it was smaller and I felt like the teachers really cared and wanted you to learn, so I feel like going to the two-year institution just gave me that confidence also. It gave me confidence in who I was, because coming out of high school you're scared of college, but it gave me confidence in who I am and that I can do this, I can graduate! So probably that, it just gave me confidence more than anything. I guess the two-year institution gave me that confidence to meet new people and talk to new people, and get confidence in myself so that when I went

59

to the university I just continued that. It's given me a bit more confidence now that I've been engaged. I think for the first two years I was just so terrified of everything!

Sandra attributed some of the confidence she developed while enrolled at the two-year institution to her student employment opportunity, which forced her out of her comfort zone and facilitated development of skills she wouldn't have otherwise used.

> I think having that little bit of confidence was a major boost to just being successful at the two-year institution because I wanted to do better and I wanted to be more engaged with different things, and that was really cool. And also, working in the financial aid department was definitely a booster too because I had to speak with other students and I was able to communicate better with other people without being shy about it, or not really wanting to speak to them. I felt more confident doing so.

Transfer Student Transitions

Each student expressed an adjustment when transitioning from an institution of less than 10,000 students to an institution of more than 30,000 students. These students expressed strong differences in student connection, faculty-student interaction, and resource availability.

Student Connection

Each participant seemed overwhelmed by the sheer size of the four-year institution, both in student numbers and size of campus. This was their initial comment among many participants when asked about the transition from the two-year to the four-year.

Jeremy found it difficult to connect with his peers, primarily due to the sheer size of the university in relation to the student population he had experienced at the two-year institution.

> Just be ready to not be . . . you know . . . once you go from a two-year institution
>
> to the university, you're kind of just another face in the crowd, you know? I mean,
>
> you kind of expect that going from a couple thousand students to 30,000 students

Elizabeth expressed a sense of frustration trying to acclimate to the new environment and maintain a balance between her studies, home life, and work obligations.

> When you go in to that new environment, you're trying to catch up so quickly because instead of 25 people in your classroom, you have 150 and so for me it felt like the first semester was just catch-up and trying to acclimate . . . when you're a transfer student and you're taking full-time classes, and you're working part-time, and you're not the typical student, it's hard to . . .

Sean, whose focus has primarily been on his academic endeavors, found the class sizes at the two-year institution more conducive to learning. The class size and faculty-student relationships created a more welcoming learning environment; he indicated "I do enjoy chemistry and math better at the two-year institution just because the classes are smaller, and I like the teachers more."

Faculty – Student Interaction

Amanda recommended that students looking to transfer from the two-year institution to the university cultivate and establish relationships with individuals already at the university, whether student or instructor, prior to enrolling. She felt this would ease the transition and create a stronger connection for the student.

> I would just say don't be intimidated. I'd say make sure you have one or two
>
> points of contact that you know you can reach out to at CSU before you go,
>
> whether it be friends or teachers or something.

Heather felt that connecting with her instructors at the university was critical to her success, but she also acknowledged that she needed to hold herself more accountable after transferring to the university than she did at the two-year institution.

> I think getting to know the teachers is really important, too, because the classrooms are so big. It's not so easy to get to know the teachers; you can skip classes a lot easier, and nobody will know. It's about taking accountability for

yourself and sitting up front is I think really helpful, because then the teacher gets to know you, and if you miss they'll notice and I think that's really important.

Jean has shared with other students looking to transfer to the university that the level of involvement they became accustomed to at the two-year institution will not exist at the university; it is just not feasible.

> Well, I've been back to the two-year institution and talked with fellow PTK students and I mean, I have said, don't expect engaged instructors, and don't expect the same level of involvement because it really is not possible, everything is so non-diverse.

Like Jean, Grace was a bit dismayed at her interactions with her instructions, feeling as if they are not interested in her participation or success.

> Definitely don't expect a lot of one-on-one contact. I just had a Spanish teacher that supposedly has office hours, but she doesn't want to meet with students. She's like, "You know, I have too much home work to grade" and things like that, so you're definitely not going to get that . . . like . . . I don't know how you call it, like, eagerness to help you out, like teachers at the two-year institution.

Resource Availability

Participants, who had not previously sought academic support resources at the two-year institution, found the need to utilize these once at the university. Additionally, the transfer process caused some students to rethink how the approach their studies, and shift their study habits.

In addition to shifting his vision of success, Sean shifted his study expectations after transferring. He indicated that while straight "A"s may no longer be feasible, he was giving it his best.

> When you transfer, don't spend the same amount of time on your studies as you did at the previous institution. Because at a two-year, you can get by with a little less hours. When you get to the higher institution, you should kind of throw away all of your expectations of your study and build a new study ideal, or something. So I guess re-shape your thoughts, kind of.

Jean found that she benefitted from additional learning resources post-transfer that she had not needed to use at the two-year institution, because of a difference in instructional style and delivery.

> For example, one of the things it took me a while to figure out is that taking exams at the university is very different than taking exams at the two-year institution. I'm a . . .RLDS – Resources for Disabled Students. I am tied in with them now, but I never ever, ever, ever took a test that I didn't like, miss or something, at the two-year institution in a testing center, because I was able to take them in class. So basically, it took me an entire semester to figure out that the instruction is different, the teachers are different, and that some of those resources that you didn't have to use at a community college level because the instructors are so much more in tune with their students, um, you do need to use at the university just because of the sheer size.

Cait's recommendation for any student transferring to the university was simple - don't miss class.

> Don't miss class. I mean at the university it's much different as far as not having busy work. Whereas at the two-year institution you could miss a class or two and still be fine, because there was so much small work that . . . you just definitely have to stay on top of it and no procrastination.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the results of interviews with ten transfer students and sought to examine how these students perceived their involvement at a two-year institution influencing their experience or perception of success at a four-year institution. Five overarching themes emerged from this study: (1) connection to the institution; (2) academic integration; (3) involvement; (4) confidence; and (5) transfer student transitions. Chapter Five will provide interpretations and conclusions drawn from this study as well as recommendations for future research and the limitations of this study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a summary of the study conducted and discusses the findings of this study. Interpretation of the data obtained, conclusions drawn from the information gathered, potential application of the conclusions drawn, implications of this study, and recommendations for future research will be discussed in this chapter.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of student engagement on the transfer student experience and its perceived influence on student success at a large four-year university in the Rocky Mountain region. This study sought to examine how these students perceived their involvement at a two-year institution influencing their experience or perception of success at a four-year institution.

Discussion of Emergent Themes

Throughout the participant interview and data collection process, their experiences shed light on five main themes: (1) connection to the institution; (2) academic integration; (3) involvement; (4) confidence, and (5) transfer student transitions.

Connection to the Institution

Each student expressed a passion for education, and that this passion, in whatever form, was their source of motivation to complete their education at the university. Many participants expressed a connection to the two-year institution, to varying degrees. The smaller class sizes, opportunities for connection with faculty and staff, and bonds between students created a welcoming environment that created an atmosphere for perceived success.

Most participants felt the environment at the university was not as conducive to fostering relationships with their instructors, as they had become accustomed to at the two-year institution. In some instances, resentment for the four-year institution had developed because of the lack of

connection.   In other instances, some participants acknowledged that creating such a connection at an institution significantly larger than the two-year institution would be difficult, at best. A few participants, however, indicated that the transition to the four-year institution was a valuable experience and helped the participant develop skills and abilities that had not previously been cultivated.

Participants that utilized resources specifically designed for transfer students appreciated the sentiment behind the resources, but did not find them to be as useful as intended. The participants that sought out these resources expressed disappointment and frustration at their focus on students transferring from other four-year institutions, rather than students like them, transferring from two-year institutions whose experiences may be vastly different than the experience obtained at a four-year institution. Likewise, they expressed frustration at the lack of attention paid to non-traditional students, including adult learners, veterans, and students with children.

Academic Integration

The students' passion for their education was a driving force for many of them to find a connection to the institution. Some participants indicated that their experience at the two-year institution helped them become more effective students, which facilitated an easier learning process once they began their coursework at the university. Others discussed smaller class sizes as a primary source of academic success while at the two-year institution, adding that the additional attention from instructors facilitated a more comfortable learning environment and provided an opportunity to connect to both the instructors and fellow students to create a "community" within the two-year institution.

Many participants expressed an appreciation for the ability to explore different fields of study while enrolled at the two-year institution. These participants expressed an appreciation for this time to explore, and acknowledged the cost-effectiveness of the two-year institution, and indicated that the time used to explore gave them the opportunity to be certain of their academic path once they transferred to the four-year institution. Others found their niche within their field of study after transferring to the four-year institution, and developed the sense of "community" that they had grown to appreciate from their time at the two-year institution.

The shared commitment among students pursing the same academic goal created a kinship among these students and their peers, and seemed to bridge the "transfer student" gap and facilitate the integration with the "native" students. Some indicated that the activities in the classroom sparked a desire to become more involved in activities outside of the classroom, but still related to their field of study. Others indicated a similar, yet mirror-image relationship; they indicated that their involvement in academically related activities outside of the classroom enhanced the learning experience in the classroom and contributed to the student's overall perception of success.

Despite the myriad of approaches to the desired goal, each participant indicated that their primary objective was to complete their degree and to apply those skills in the world in some capacity. Some expressed a sense of comfort in sharing a common goal with classmates, while others expressed a sense of pride and accomplishment at being the first family member to complete a college degree. Others emphasized the desire to complete a degree to serve as a role model for future generations, and inspire students who have yet to make the transition to the four-year institution through their stories.

Involvement

The most common theme among all participants was involvement, in varying capacities. Many students became involved with campus activities, and expressed that this involvement helped them feel connected to the institution. Consequently, they indicated that this connection helped them achieve success at the two-year institution, and fostered a sense of confidence that they took with them to the four-year institution. Some participants, however, indicated that their connection to the two-year institution may have actually created an environment that could not be replicated at the university, and therefore left the participant feeling a bit jaded. These participants had become so connected to the two-year institution that, upon transfer, they were unable to forge a connection to the four-year institution until they had processed and fully accepted the loss of the identity developed at the two-year institution.

Pascarella and Terrenzini (2005) explain that for a substantial number of students who work during college, employment provides a context in which they acquire efficient organizational skills and work habits. This held true for many of the participants in this study. Many participants chose to become involved by working on campus, and these students indicated that their employment connected them to campus and helped facilitate a smoother transition from the two-year institution to the university. While most of the participants did not indicate a passion for pursing their employment field as a career, they each acknowledged that it facilitated their connection to both the two-year institution and created a safe environment for them to connect to the four-year institution.

Participation in community-based initiatives and leadership activities were also factors in creating a sense of belonging for these students. Participants found a connection between their community-based activities and their campus identity, and indicated that this connection helped

them develop a sense of purpose in their academic pursuits. Heather, for example, used her connection to her church organizations to fuel her passion for becoming a teacher; she capitalized on each opportunity to hone her teaching skills and become the best teacher possible. Many participants exhibited leadership in some aspect of their experience, but a few participants left an indelible impact on their two-year institution, and it seems that this experience left an indelible impact on the student, as well. Jean's experience working with students at the two-year institution brought about a change in her career goal, and ignited a desire to develop a nonprofit organization to help other victims of domestic violence pursue higher education, if they do not have the means to do so on their own.

Confidence

Finding acceptance among peers and connecting to the new environment was a concern for many participants. Several participants indicated apprehension that "native" students – or those who had begun their post-secondary education at the university – would not accept the transfer students; in particular, many of the "older" participants expressed apprehension about fitting in upon transfer, because of such a large gap in age between themselves and the "native" students. Other participants, however, expressed that the shared goal and passion for the student's field of study helped bridge that age gap, and made some participants feel more comfortable in the new environment than they had initially anticipated.

Some participants discussed the diminished confidence they experienced during the transfer process, and the insecurity it ultimately instilled in the student. Elizabeth, for example, struggled with a sense of not "mattering" at the four-year institution, after feeling such a strong connection to the two-year institution and feeling as if she genuinely "mattered" to the institution.

Participants also discussed methods and tactics implemented to help build individual confidence to ensure success. Heather and Amanda explained that part of their decision to start their post-secondary education at the two-year institution was to be able to develop a support network before jumping into the four-year institution. Sandra indicated that her experience at the two-year institution brought her out of her comfort zone and made her "brave" to try new things. She indicated that this was an immense help once she transferred to the four-year institution, because she knew she could work outside of her comfort zone and still be successful.

Transfer Student Transitions

Finally, students discussed the overall transition through the transfer process. Each student indicated the sheer size of the university was unsettling, with some remarking that the student population size was a huge factor in their inability to connect with the university. Jeremy mentioned that he was warned by instructors at the two-year institution that he would end up being "just another face in the crowd." While this did not particularly surprise him, he indicated that he was a bid disheartened that this was the case.

Many students indicated that, because of the size, they would not be able to find the same sort of faculty-student interaction they experienced at the two-year institution, and would not be able to find their "community" of friends beyond those they established within their field of study. Heather mentioned the need to develop a greater sense of personal accountability to connect with her instructors, as the class sizes and overall student volume were not conducive to cultivating these relationships casually. Grace indicated she was dismayed and felt isolated at the four-year institution, due in large part to the lack of interaction with her instructors, who she felt were not interested in her participation or overall success.

Finally, many students indicated they had to "re-learn" how to be a student in this new environment, seeking out resources they did not previously need. Jean, for example, sought out academic support resources at the four-year institution that she did not need to utilize at the two-year institution, to ensure she could maintain her academic progress. Others found themselves shifting their vision of academic success as a result of their experiences at the four-year institution. Sean, for example, had previously considered academic success as earning straight "A"s, but has since realized that as long as he is doing his best, this should be the most important determinant, rather than the grade attached to his "best."

Findings Related to Research Questions

This study focused on a student's engagement experience at both the two-year institution and four-year institution, and how those experiences impacted the student's perception of success at those institutions. Additionally, it sought explain the transitional experience from the two-year institution to the four-year institution, and how that transition impacted the student's perception of success. This study sought to address the following research questions:

- How does a student's engagement experience at a two-year institution impact their perceptions of their overall experience of success?

- How does a student's engagement experience at a two-year institution impact their perception of their experience of success at the four-year institution?

- How does a student's transitional experience from the two-year institution to the four-year institution impact the overall perception of their success?

How does a student's engagement experience at a two-year institution impact their perceptions of their overall experience of success?

Some participants indicated that the small class sizes and close-knit community present at the two-year institution fostered an environment that encouraged success and provided resources to achieve that goal. Additionally, participants touched on the relationships cultivated with their peers, and described these as "life changing" and "huge confidence builders," which helped these students strive for excellence throughout their experience at the two-year institution. Because of this confidence, these students were more inclined to believe they could be successful and, by extension, achieve their perception of success.

Many of the students who worked on campus during their time at the two-year institution indicated that this strengthened their connection to the institution and enhanced their experience of success. Heather indicated that working on campus helped her become both more connected to the institution and more accountable for her time, which helped her approach her academics with more dedicated purpose, which she feels led to her perceived success.

How does a student's engagement experience at a two-year institution impact their perception of their experience of success at the four-year institution?

When asked about the impact of their two-year institutional experience on their perceived success at the four-year institution, responses were mixed. Some participants indicated that the time spent at the two-year institution eased them into the college environment and prepared them for the four-year institutional environment, and thereby made their experience at the four-year institution a more rewarding and successful experience than the student thought they would otherwise have. Many of the students that felt engagement at the two-year institution benefitted their success also indicated that this empowerment followed them to the four-year institution,

and instilled a sense of confidence that facilitated a greater perception of success once enrolled at the four-year institution.

Other students, however, indicated that the time spent at the two-year institution actually served as a disservice when related to their perceived success at the four-year institution. These participants that indicated the experience at the two-year institution fostered such a perceived sense of success that the student was unable to carry this experience forward to the four-year institution. These same students indicated that much of their success, they felt, was a direct result of relationships established at the two-year institution that could not be replicated or replaced at the four-year institution.

How does a student's transitional experience from the two-year institution to the four-year institution impact the overall perception of their success?

Much like with research question #2, responses from students were mixed when asked how the transitional experience from the two-year institution to the four-year institution impacted the student's overall perception of success. Some felt that the experience at the two-year institution prepared them for the expectations and environment of the four-year institution; others felt the transition played no role in the student's perception of success; some felt that the transition experience was a negative experience.   Sean indicated that he felt his transitional experience from the two-year institution to the four-year institution gave him an opportunity to serve as a mentor for other students looking to make a similar transition, and indicated he felt a need to "pay it forward" and provide guidance and mentorship.

Implications

The findings from this study support several aspects present in previous literature, concerning transfer student connection, student engagement and academic and social integration. This study focused on Tinto's model (2012b) of college student departure, specifically on academic and social integration and its impact on student persistence and the student's perceived success.

Colleges and universities are realizing that welcoming transfer and non-traditional students makes financial and academic sense, but many still do not have effective programs in place to help these students succeed (Zubernis, McCoy, & Snyder, 2011). While some participants discussed the programs currently in place to facilitate transfer student success, these same students articulated that the programs were not as effective as they had hoped, and in some cases seemed like a waste of time. This is important to note, because if the students for whom these programs are designed do not find the value or utility in them, they are less likely to invest time and energy into "useless" programs. Universities have incorporated Tinto's research into their retention efforts – unfortunately, most attention has been paid to retaining students entering as freshmen, and much less to transfer student retention (Zubernis et al., 2011).

Miller and Hillis (2006) argued that students who utilize the transfer capability provided by higher education institutions may be less interested in learning and development and more interested in obtaining a degree for personal or professional reasons. Some participants, particularly those who were "older" students, seemed to fall into this assessment. The "younger" students, however, seemed to gravitate more toward the learning and development aspect of the transfer experience.

It is not uncommon for transfer students to feel isolated and disconnected (Zubernis et al., 2011). Transfer students from community colleges often experience much different environments than what they are accustomed to; this is either because they are not acquainted with those who matriculated as freshman (native students) or because there is simply a different institutional culture or feel to which they are expected to assimilate (Ishitani & McKitrick, 2010). Some participants indicated that a resource center specifically designated for transfer students would be helpful, to provide a central point of reference for these students to connect with other transfer students, to find support and potentially foster the social integration they felt they were lacking.

Academic experiences include faculty and staff interactions in the classroom and outside. Social interaction includes formal and university-provided co-curricular activities as well as informal interactions with peers. These experiences all contribute to a student's sense of belongingness – if a student is sufficiently integrated into the university culture, they will tend to persist through graduation (Zubernis et al., 2011). Many of the participants in this study found the most meaningful connection to the four-year institution through their academic efforts, but not necessarily with the normative academic values associated with the field of study. Many students found this connection through their peers pursuing similar academic goals and objectives, which seems to have created a sense of camaraderie among them.

Student engagement is linked to a wide array of desired college outcomes, so it is no surprise that engagement and grades go hand in hand (Kuh et al., 2011). Many of the participants equated "success" with academic success, and these students were also heavily involved in student activities, which supports this correlation between engagement and strong academic performance.

Application of Research

Nationally, nearly 60% of college students attended more than one institution on their way to earning their Bachelor's degree (Peter, K. & Forrest Cataldi, E. 2005). Likewise, support for social integration as a predictor of persistence is more robust than for academic integration, suggesting that increasing social integration leads to greater institutional commitment and thus greater likelihood of persistence to graduation (Kuh et al., 2011). By providing opportunities for students to connect to the institution through social integration efforts, students will feel more connected to the institution, which will also be reflected in persistence and graduation rates.

Some transfer students need more hand holding during their initial weeks, especially when they've been used to a much smaller campus with individual attention and support. It might also be helpful to consider renaming these programs, as many transfer students do not believe they need another orientation to college and thus, they might be more interested in something called Transfer Day, or a series of transfer programs where handouts of information and transfer advice could be distributed (Zubernis et al., 2011). Participants expressed an interest in developing an alternative transfer orientation program designed to meet the needs of students who have already had college experience, and have these programs and workshops facilitated by peer mentors, or an equivalent role. This would give current students an opportunity to connect to the four-year institution and enhance their own experience, while helping mold the experiences of the next wave of transfer students.

Since many of the participants in this study found a stronger connection among their peers within their academic field than through external interaction, it may be beneficial to create opportunities for interaction with these peers outside of the classroom, possibly during the first week of the term. This would give new and continuing students a chance to develop these

relationships and connect to the institution and mitigate the "outsider" feeling that some

participants discussed.

It is also worth noting that it may not be realistic to expect the environment present at a

two-year institution to be re-created at a four-year institution, where the population of students is

markedly larger and the physical space the campus occupies is much larger. As such, it may be

beneficial for two-year institutions to educate the students, before they jump into the "big pond",

about the realistic expectations regarding class sizes, student involvement opportunities, and

faculty-student interaction. This may reduce some of the disappointment felt by these students,

and equip them with a realistic expectation of life at the university.

Future Research

This study examined the experiences of ten transfer students who began their higher

education journey at the same two-year institution. Through this process, three main suggestions

for further or additional research emerged.

First, while this study highlighted experiences of those students who transferred from the

same two-year institutions in Colorado, not all transfer students at the university began their

careers at the same two-year institution. Interviewing students who began their careers at a

different two-year institution may illustrate a different set of experiences and expectations. This

would shed light on whether the particular two-year institution is creating unrealistic

expectations for the university to fulfill, or if the environment at two-year institutions in general

fosters this environment.

Second, the four-year institution highlighted in this study was a fairly large institution,

with a student population in excess of 30,000 students. Interviewing students who transferred

from the two-year institution highlighted in this study to a four-year institution with a smaller

student population may evoke a different experience, as well. Findings from those interviews would equip the two-year institution with data to more effectively prepare their students for expectations of the environment at the four-year institution. It would also highlight the distinction between four-year institutional size on the transfer student adjustment process by providing data from different sized institutions.

Finally, although some students draw from reservoirs of personal resiliency and institutional support to achieve their educational goals in spite of their initial challenges, transferring from one institution to another can have lasting negative consequences for many other students (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012).   While this study did not address experiences of those students who began their higher education journey at a different four-year institution before transferring to the university highlighted in this study, the university highlighted in this study needs to look into increasing resources for all transfer students, regardless of institutional origin. The students in this study who had utilized the resources designated specifically for transfer students did not find them as beneficial as the university may have intended. It would be beneficial for the university to get additional input from other transfer students to see if the lack of effectiveness is isolated just to the students in this study, or if a larger service gap exists.

The cost of post-secondary education continues to rise. For the academic year 2012-13, the average full-time undergraduate student will pay $3131 at a public, two-year institution as a resident of the state in which the school is located. This represents a 5.8% increase from 2011-12. Tuition in that same state, at a public four-year institution is charged at $8655, which represents a 4.8% increase ("Average Published Undergraduate Charges by Sector, 2012-13," 2013). With costs increasing, more students are likely to begin their higher education journey at two-year institutions and later transfer to the four-year institutions.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of student engagement on the transfer student experience and its perceived influence on student success at a large four-year university in the Rocky Mountain region. This study sought to examine how these students perceived their involvement at a two-year institution influencing their experience or perception of success at a four-year institution. The researcher was able to engage in discussion with the ten participants without any preconceived notions of the "typical" experience, as no previous studies have focused on such an experience from a social integration perspective.

The findings of this study provided insight into the experiences of students transferring from a public two-year institution to a large, public four-year institution in the Rocky Mountain Region. Analysis of ten semi-structured interviews was conducted using HyperRESEARCH Qualitative Analysis Software. Through this analysis, five main themes emerged: (1) connection to the institution; (2) academic integration; (3) involvement; (4) confidence, and (5) transfer student transitions.

Chapter 5 presented the findings related to the themes identified and explored in Chapter 4, along with an overarching connection to Tinto's theory of college student departure. Future areas of research based on the findings include transfer student experiences at smaller, private institutions, as well as lateral transfer student experiences and the development of transfer student resources and programming to facilitate a stronger institutional connection among transfer students.

REFERENCES

Abrams, L. M., Pedulla, J. J., & Madaus, G. F. (2003). Views from the classroom: Teachers' opinions of statewide testing programs. *Theory into Practice, 42*(1), 18-29.

Araujo, P., & Murray, J. (2011). Channels For Improved Performance From Living On Campus. *American Journal of Business Education (AJBE), 3*(12).

Astin, A. W. (1993). *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Au, W. (2007). High-stakes testing and curricular control: A qualitative metasynthesis. *Educational Researcher, 36*(5), 258-267.

Aud, S., Hussar, W., Johnson, F., Kena, G., Roth, E., Manning, E., . . . Nachazel, T. (2012). The Condition of Education 2012. *National Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education*.

. Average Published Undergraduate Charges by Sector, 2012-13. (2013). *Trends in Higher Education* Retrieved March 24, 2013, from http://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/average-published-undergraduate-charges-sector-2012-13

Barnett, E. A. (2011). Validation experiences and persistence among community college students. *The Review of Higher Education, 34*(2), 193-230.

Barr, M. J., Desler, M. K., & Associates. (2000). *The Handbook of Student Affairs Administration*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass

Bauer, P. F., & Bauer, K. W. (1994). The Community College as an Academic Bridge: Academic and Personal Concerns of Community College Students Before and After Transferring to a Four-Year Institution. *College and University, 69*(3), 116-122.

Baxter Magolda, M. B. (1992). Cocurricular Influences on College Students. *Journal of College Student Development, 33*(3), 203-213.

Berger, J. B., Blanco Ramirez, G., & Lyons, S. (2005). A Historical Look at Retention. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College Student Retention: Formula for Student Success* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD Rowman & Littlefield Publishers

Berger, J. B., & Malaney, G. D. (2003). Assessing the Transition of Transfer Students from Community Colleges to a University. *NASPA Journal, 40*(4), 1-23.

Berger, J. B., & Milem, J. F. (1999). The role of student involvement and perceptions of integration in a causal model of student persistence. *Research in Higher Education, 40*(6), 641-664.

Bers, T. H., & Smith, K. E. (1991). Persistence of community college students: The influence of student intent and academic and social integration. *Research in Higher Education, 32*(5), 539-556.

Bliming, G. S., Whitt, E. J., & associates. (1999). *Good Practices in Student Affairs: Principles to Foster Student Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education* (5th ed.): Pearson Education.

Borglum, K., & Kubala, T. (2000). Academic and social integration of community college students: A case study. *Community College Journal of Research & Practice, 24*(7), 567-576.

Braxton, J. M. (Ed.). (2000). *Reworking the Student Departure Puzzle*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Braxton, J. M., Hirschy, A. S., & McClendon, S. A. (2004). Understanding and Reducing

College Student Departure. In A. J. Kezar (Ed.), *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report*

(Vol. 30). San Francisco.

Braxton, J. M., Milem, J. F., & Sullivan, A. S. (2000). The influence of active learning on the

college student departure process: Toward a revision of Tinto's theory. *Journal of Higher*

Education, 569-590.

Braxton, J. M., Shaw Sullivan, A. V., & Johnson, R. M. (1997). Appraising Tinto's theory of

college student departure. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory*

and Research (Vol. 12, pp. 107-164). New York: Agathon Press.

Brothers' Schools, C. (2008). *The Search for Success in a Charismatic Environment.* Australian

Catholic University.

Bryant, A. N. (2001). ERIC review: Community college students recent findings and trends.

Community College Review, 29(3), 77-93.

Cabrera, A. F., Crissman, J. L., Bernal, E. M., Nora, A., Terenzini, P., & Pascarella, E. T. (2002).

Collaborative Learning: Its impact on College Students' Development and Diversity.

Journal of College Student Development, 43(1), 20-34.

Carini, R. M., Kuh, G. D., & Klein, S. P. (2006). Student Enagement and Student Learning:

Testing the Linkages. . *Research in Higher Education, 47*(1), 1-32.

Cejda, B. D. (1997). An examination of transfer shock in academic disciplines. *Community*

College Journal of Research and Practice, 21(3), 279-288.

Colaizzi, P. F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. *Existential-*

phenomenological alternatives for psychology, 48-71.

Colleges, A. A. o. C. (2013). American Association of Community Colleges Fast Facts 2012

    Retrieved March 4, 2013, from

    http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Pages/fastfactsfactsheet.aspx

Cooper, D. L., Healy, M. A., & Simpson, J. (1994). Student development through involvement:

    Specific changes over time. *Journal of College Student Development*.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*

    (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods*

    approaches (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Deil-Amen, R. (2011). Socio-academic integrative moments: Rethinking academic and social

    integration among two-year college students in career-related programs. *The Journal of*

    Higher Education, 82(1), 54-91.

Ewell, P. T. (2004). The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) *Public Policy for*

    Academic Quality.

Firestone, W. A. (1993). Alternative arguments for generalizing from data as applied to

    qualitative research. *Educational researcher, 22*(4), 16-23.

Glass, J. C., & Harrington, A. R. (2002). Academic Performance of Community College

    Transfer Students and "Native" Students at a Large State University. *Community College*

    Journal of Research & Practice, 26, 415-430.

Gliner, J. A., Morgan, G. A., & Leech, N. L. (2009). *Research Methods in Applied Settings: An*

    Integrated Approach to Design and Analysis (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge

Gonyea, R. M., Kish, K., Kuh, G. D., Muthiah, R., & Thomas, A. (2003). CSEQ Norms for the Fourth Edition. *Bloomington IN Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning*.

Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (2009). *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations*. New York: Routledge.

Huang, Y. R., & Chang, S. M. (2004). Academic and Cocurricular Involvement: Their Relationship and the Best Combinations for Student Growth. *Journal of College Student Development, 45*(4), 391-406.

Ishitani, T. T. (2008). How do transfers survive after "transfer shock"? A longitudinal study of transfer student departure at a four-year institution. *Research in Higher Education, 49*(5), 403-419.

Ishitani, T. T., & McKitrick, S. A. (2010). After transfer: The engagement of community college students at a four-year collegiate institution. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 34*(7), 576-594.

Junco, R., Heiberger, G., & Loken, E. (2011). The effect of Twitter on college student engagement and grades. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 27*(2), 119-132.

Karp, M. M., Hughes, K. L., & O'Gara, L. (2010). An exploration of Tinto's integration framework for community college students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice, 12*(1), 69-86.

Kezar, A., & Eckel, P. (2002). Examining the institutional transformation process: The importance of sensemaking, interrelated strategies, and balance. *Research in Higher Education, 43*(3), 295-328.

Kramer, G. L., & Associates. (2007). *Fostering student success in the campus community*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Kuh, G. D. (2001). Assessing What Really Matters to Student Learning: Inside the National Survey of Student Engagement. *Change, 33*(3), 10-17.

Kuh, G. D. (2003). What We're Learning About Student Engagement from NSSE: Benchmarks for Effective Educational Practices. *Change 35*(2), 24-32.

Kuh, G. D. (2009). The National Survey of Student Engagment: Conceptual and Empirical Foundations. *New Directions for Institutional Research* (141), 5-20.

Kuh, G. D., Cruce, T. M., Shoup, R., Kinzie, J., & Gonyea, R. M. (2008). Unmasking the Effects of Student Engagement on First-Year College Grades and Persistence *Journal of Higher Education, 79*(5), 540-563. doi: 10.1353/jhe.0.0019

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J. A., Bridges, B. K., & Hayek, J. C. (2011). *Piecing Together the Student Success Puzzle: Research, Propositions, and Recommendations: ASHE Higher Education Report* (Vol. 116): Jossey-Bass.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., & Associates. (2010). *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter*. San Francisco Jossey-Bass.

Kuh, G. D., Pace, C. R., & Vesper, N. (1997). The development of process indicators to estimate student gains associated with good practices in undergraduate education. *Research in Higher Education, 38*(4), 435-454.

Kuh, G. D., Palmer, M., & Kish, K. (2003). The value of educationally purposeful out-of-class experiences. *Involvement in campus activities and the retention of first year college students. The firstyear monograph series*(36), 19-34.

Laanan, F. S. (1996). Making the transition: Understanding the adjustment process of community college transfer students. *Community College Review, 23*(4), 69-84.

Laanan, F. S., Starobin, S. S., & Eggleston, L. E. (2010). Adjustment of community college students at a four-year university: Role and relevance of transfer student capital for student retention. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice, 12*(2), 175-209.

McClenney, K. M. (2004a). Redefining Quality in Community Colleges: Focusing on Good Educational Practice. *Change, 36*(6), 16-21.

McClenney, K. M. (2004b). Redefining quality in community colleges: Focusing on good educational practice. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 36*(6), 16-21.

McClenney, K. M. (2006). Benchmarking Effective Educational Practice. *New Directions for Community Colleges*(143), 47-55. doi: 10.1002/cc.236

McClenney, K. M. (2007). Research Update: The Community College Survey of Student Engagement. *Community College Review, 35*(2), 137-146. doi: 10.1177/0091552107306583

McClenney, K. M. (2009). Helping community-college students succeed: A moral imperative. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 55*(33), A60.

McClenney, K. M., & Marti, C. N. (2006). Exploring relationships between student engagement and student outcomes in community colleges: Report on validation research. *Austin, TX: The University of Texas. Retrieved August, 19*, 2007.

McCormick, A. C., Carroll, C. D., Improvement, U. S. O. o. E. R., & Statistics, N. C. f. E. (1997). Transfer behavior among beginning postsecondary students, 1989-94. In U. D. o. Education (Ed.): Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Merriam, S. B., & Associates. (2002). *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Milem, J. F., & Berger, J. B. (1997). A modified model of college student persistence: Exploring the relationship between Astin's theory of involvement and Tinto's theory of student departure. *Journal of College Student Development*.

Miller, M. T., & Hillis, S. R. (2006). Transfer Students. In L. A. Gohn & G. R. Albin (Eds.), *Understanding College Student Subpopulations: A Guide for Student Affairs Professionals* (pp. 295-311): NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

Mintrop, H., & Sunderman, G. L. (2009). Predictable failure of federal sanctions-driven accountability for school improvement—and why we may retain it anyway. *Educational Researcher, 38*(5), 353-364.

Nakajima, M. A., Dembo, M. H., & Mossler, R. (2012). Student persistence in community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 36*(8), 591-613.

Ose, K. (1997). Transfer Student Involvement: Differences between participators and nonparticipators in extracurricular activities. *College Student Affairs Journal, 16*(2), 40-47.

Pace, C. R. (1980). Measuring the Quality of Student Effort. *Current Issues in Higher Education* (1), 10-16.

Pace, C. R., & Swayze, S. (1992). College Student Experiences Questionnaire: Norms for the Third Edition, 1990. Part One: Tentative Norms for the 1990s. Part Two: Comparable Responses from the 1980s. Part Three: Bibliography [and] Psychometric Supplement to the CSEQ, 1990. In C. f. t. S. o. Evaluation (Ed.): University of California, Los Angeles

Pascarella, E. T., Edison, M. I., Nora, A., Hagedorn, L. S., & Terenzini, P. T. (1998). Does work inhibit cognitive development during college? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 20*(2), 75-93.

Pascarella, E. T., Smart, J.C., and Ethington, C.A. (1986). Long-term Persistence of Two-Year College Students. *Research in Higher Education, 24*(1), 47-71.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1998). Studying College Students in the 21st Century: Meeting New Challenges. *Review of Higher Education, 21*(2), 151-165.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research* (Vol. 2). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Peter, K., & Forrest Cataldi, E. (2005). The road less traveled? Students who enroll in multiple institutions (NCES 2005–157). US Department of Education. *National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office*.

Provasnik, S., & Planty, M. (2008). Community Colleges: Special Supplement to The Condition of Education 2008. Statistical Analysis Report. NCES 2008-033. *National Center for Education Statistics*, 100.

Reason, R. D., Terenzini, P. T., & Domingo, R. J. (2007). Developing social and personal competence in the first year of college. *Review of Higher Education, 30*(3), 271.

Rhine, T. J., Milligan, D. M., & Nelson, L. R. (2000). Alleviating Transfer Shock: Creating an Environment for More Successful Transfer Students. *Community College Journal of Research & Practice, 24*, 443-453. doi: 10.1080/10668920050137228

Ritchie, J., & Lewis, J. (2003). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*: Sage Publications Limited.

Schmid, C., & Abell, P. (2003). Demographic risk factors, study patterns, and campus

    involvement as related to student success among guilford technical community college

    students. *Community College Review, 31*(1), 1-16.

Schuetz, P. (2008). Developing a Theory-Driven Model of Community College Student

    Engagement. *New Directions for Community Colleges*(144), 17-28. doi: 10.1002/cc

Seidman, A. (Ed.). (2012). *College student retention: Formula for student success* (2nd ed.).

    Lanham, MD Greenwood Publishing Group.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis:*

    Theory, method and research. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Doing social*

    psychology research, 229-254.

Snyder, T. D., & Dillow, S. A. (2009). *Digest of education statistics, 2008* (Vol. 45): National

    Center for Education Statistics.

Terenzini, P. T., & Reason, R. D. (2005). *Parsing the first year of college: A conceptual*

    framework for studying college impacts Paper presented at the Association for the Study

    of Higher Education, Philadelphia, PA

Tinto, V. (1987). *The Principles of Effective Retention*. Paper presented at the Maryland College

    Personnel Association, Largo, MD

Tinto, V. (1988). Stages of student departure: Reflections on the longitudinal character of student

    leaving. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 438-455.

Tinto, V. (1990). Principles of Effective Retention. *Journal of the Freshman Year Experience,*

    2(1), 35-48.

Tinto, V. (1997). Classrooms as communities: Exploring the educational character of student persistence. *Journal of Higher Education*, 599-623.

Tinto, V. (2005). *Taking student success seriously: Rethinking the first year of college*.

Tinto, V. (2006). Research and Practice of Student Retention: What's Next? *Research and Practice of Student Retention, 6*(1), 1-19.

Tinto, V. (2012a). *Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (2012b). *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* (3rd ed.). Chicago, Il: University of Chicago Press.

Tobolowsky, B. F., & Cox, B. E. (2012). Rationalizing Neglect: An Institutional Response to Transfer Students. *The Journal of Higher Education, 83*(3), 389-410.

Townsend, B. K. (1993). *University Practices That Hinder the Academic Success of Community College Transfer Students* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education Pittsburgh, PA

Townsend, B. K. (1995). Community College Transfer Students: A Case Study of Survival. *Review of Higher Education, 18*(2), 175-193.

Townsend, B. K., & Wilson, K. B. (2006a). A Hand to Hold for a Little Bit: Factors Facilitating the Success of Community College Transfer Students to a Large Research University *Journal of College Student Development, 47*(4), 439-456. doi: 10/1353/csd.2006.0052

Townsend, B. K., & Wilson, K. B. (2006b). The transfer mission: Tried and true, but troubled? *New Directions for Community Colleges, 2006*(136), 33-41.

Townsend, B. K., & Wilson, K. B. (2009). The Academic and Social Integration of Persisting

        Community College Transfer Students. *Journal of College Student Retention, 10*(4), 405-

        423. doi: 10.2190/CS.10.4.a

Umbach, P. D., & Wawrzynski, M. R. (2005). Faculty do matter: The role of college faculty in

        student learning and engagement. *Research in Higher Education, 46*(2), 153-184.

Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and*

        method: Open University Press Buckingham.

Wirt, J., Choy, S., Provasnik, S., Rooney, P., Sen, A., & Tobin, R. (2003). *The Condition of*

        Education, 2003. Jessup, M.D.: U.S. Department of Education.

Yorke, M., & Longden, B. (2004). *Retention and Student Success in Higher Education*.

        Cornwall, UK Open University Press.

Zhao, C. M., & Kuh, G. D. (2004). Adding value: Learning communities and student

        engagement. *Research in Higher Education, 45*(2), 115-138.

Zubernis, L., McCoy, V. A., & Snyder, M. (2011). *Starting Over Again: Counseling*

        Considerations for Transfer Students in Higher Education. Paper presented at the 2010

        American College Counseling Association Conference, St Louis, MO

        http://counselingoutfitters.com/ vistas/vistas11/Article_11.pdf

CSU letterhead

November 20, 2012

Dear Participant,

My name is Elizabeth Romba and I am a graduate student researcher from Colorado State University in the School of Education. We are conducting a research study on the impact of campus involvement on transfer students' perception of success at a four-year institution. The title of our project is *The Impact of Student Engagement on the Transfer Student Experience: A Phenomenological Analysis.* The Principal Investigator is Linda Kuk, Ph.D., School of Education, and the Co-Principal Investigator is Elizabeth Romba.

We would like to interview undergraduate students who completed at least two consecutive semesters at a two-year institution prior to enrolling at CSU. Please forward this email to students who you think are good candidates for this research, and interested students would then contact Elizabeth Romba via email at elizabeth.romba@gmail.com. Participation will take approximately 60-90 minutes. Participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty.

All interviews will be recorded, with the contents of those interviews remaining confidential. Elizabeth Romba will maintain the audio files of these interviews on a password-protected computer, and access to the data obtained from those interviews will be held confidentially as well. Names will be changed when reporting out to protect your identity. While there are no direct benefits to you, we hope to gain more knowledge on how student engagement impacts a transfer student's overall perception of their student success.

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.
If you would like to participate in this research or have any questions, please contact Linda Kuk at 970-491-7243 or Elizabeth Romba via email at elizabeth.romba@gmail.com. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator, at 970-491-1655.

Sincerely,

Linda Kuk, PhD   Elizabeth Romba
Principal Investigator   Ph.D. Candidate, College and University Leadership

APPENDIX B: Consent to Participate

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: The Impact of Student Engagement on the Transfer Student Experience: A Phenomenological Analysis

Principal Investigator: Linda Kuk, PhD, School of Education, 970-491-7243

CO-Principal Investigator: Elizabeth Romba, School of Education, PhD candidate, elizabeth.romba@gmail.com

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?
You are being invited to participate in this study because you have been identified as a student who transferred from a two-year institution and were involved in campus activities while at that two-year institution.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?
Linda Kuk, Ph.D. and Elizabeth Romba, a graduate student researcher in the College of Education, are conducting this study.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?
The purpose of this study is to determine what impact student involvement has on a student's perceived overall success after transferring from a two-year institution to Colorado State University

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?
You will be interviewed once. This interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Your total approximate time commitment is 60-90 minutes. These interviews will be conducted in a public location of the your choosing (e.g. Lory Student Center, coffee shop, etc.).

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?
You will be asked to meet with the Co-Principal Investigator face-to-face to answer eight questions focusing on student involvement and how that may have impacted a student's overall perception of success. This interview will be audiotaped with your permission.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?
No known risks are associated with this procedure. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
There are no direct benefits to participants

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?
Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?
We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. For this study, we will assign a pseudonym to your data (e.g. "John Smith") so that the only place your actual name will appear in our records is on the consent and in our data spreadsheet, which links you to your pseudonym. Only the research team will have access to the link between you, your pseudonym, and your data. The only exceptions to this are if we are asked to share the research files for audit purposes with the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee, if necessary.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Linda Kuk at 970-491-7243. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on November 26, 2012.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing __2__ pages.

Do you give your permission for the interview to be audiotaped?
___Yes   ___No   I agree to be digitally recorded during the interview.

_____   _____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____   _____
Name of person providing information to participant   Date

_____
Signature of Research Staff

APPENDIX C: IRB Approval

Colorado State University
Knowledge to Go Places

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

DATE:	November 27, 2012
TO:	Kuk, Linda
	Robinson, Dan, Romba, Elizabeth
FROM:	Barker, Janell, Coordinator, CSU IRB 2
PROTOCOL TITLE:	THE IMPACT OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT ON THE TRANSFER STUDENT EXPERIENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
FUNDING SOURCE:	NONE
PROTOCOL NUMBER:	12-3878H
APPROVAL PERIOD:	Approval Date: November 27, 2012 Expiration Date: November 13, 2013

The CSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled: THE IMPACT OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT ON THE TRANSFER STUDENT EXPERIENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol. This protocol must be reviewed for renewal on a yearly basis for as long as the research remains active. Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed.

If approval did not accompany a proposal when it was submitted to a sponsor, it is the PI's responsibility to provide the sponsor with the approval notice.

This approval is issued under Colorado State University's Federal Wide Assurance 00000647 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under CSU's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Please direct any questions about the IRB's actions on this project to:

Janell Barker, Senior IRB Coordinator - (970) 491-1655 Janell.Barker@Colostate.edu
Evelyn Swiss, IRB Coordinator - (970) 491-1381 Evelyn.Swiss@Colostate.edu

Barker, Janell
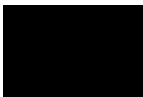
Barker, Janell

Approval is to recruit up to 10 participants with the approved cover letter and consent form. The above-referenced project was approved by the Institutional Review Board with the condition that the approved consent form is signed by the subjects and each subject is given a copy of the form. NO changes may be made to this document without first obtaining the approval of the IRB.

Approval Period:	November 27, 2012 through November 13, 2013
Review Type:	EXPEDITED
IRB Number:	00000202

APPENDIX D: Interview Questions

1. Talk a bit about what you consider "success" in your college experience. How would you define it?

2. Talk a little bit about your engagement experiences at your two-year institution. What sort of activities did you get involved in at your two-year institution?

3. What impact did getting involved have on your overall experience at your two-year institution?

4. What impact did getting involved have on your success at your two-year institution?

5. Talk a little bit about your engagement experiences since you've transferred to the four-year institution. What sort of activities have you been involved with?

6. What impact did becoming involved at the two-year institution have on your transition to the four-year institution?

7. What impact did getting involved at your two year institution have on your overall experience at your four-year institution?

8. From your own experiences, what would you have students making a similar transition consider as they go through the transfer process?