A Multi-Case Study Identifying Potential Factors Related to Two- to Four-Year Transfer Student Retention And Persistence at Private Institutions

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A MULTI-CASE STUDY IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL FACTORS RELATED TO TWO- TO FOUR-YEAR TRANSFER STUDENT RETENTION AND PERSISTENCE AT PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

By

Rachael C. Capua

An Applied Dissertation submitted to Department of Education Policy and Leadership in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Degree Awarded:
May 2019
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my husband, Carlo Capua, for encouraging me to pursue my dreams and to live life inspired, not intimidated. Thank you for always standing beside me and for your unconditional love and unwavering commitment. To my mother Catherine Benavidez, sister Mattie Claire Carranza, and to all the family, friends and colleagues who became my strong web of support, I am overwhelmed by your generosity. To my dissertation committee (Drs. Ashley Tull, Denisa Gándara, Eugene Giovannini and Janet Marling) whom I consider the dream team: thank you for your wisdom, belief, and inspiration. Each of you have contributed to my doctoral journey in meaningful ways and I thank you. To the Education Policy and Leadership Faculty at Southern Methodist University for their provision and guidance throughout the entire program. Thank you for believing in us and for always going the extra mile to ensure our cohort’s success. To the participating four-year institutions in this study for their assistance in data collection, specifically the institutional research and enrollment management teams; your help, diligence, and follow through are much appreciated. To the transfer students whom I interviewed, thank you for your time and authenticity. You are truly inspiring, and your institutions are better places because you are there. To Dr. Tahita Fulkerson for her encouragement and belief in this work, a heartfelt thanks. I am honored to know you. And, above all, to God, for without faith and perseverance, this dissertation would not have been possible. I am humbled and sincerely grateful for the opportunity. Onward and upward.
ABSTRACT

A multi-case study, this research was designed to address a dearth of literature focusing on undergraduate transfer students from two- to four-year private institutions. Through a quantitative and qualitative approach, the researcher completed a descriptive data analysis (n = 2,086) and semi-structured student interviews (n = 10).

The purpose of this study was to better understand the makeup of students who transfer from community colleges to private (highly selective) institutions as well as what potential factors were related to their retention and persistence at the baccalaureate level. Two private universities, both geographically located near a large community college system (also identified as the largest feeder schools) were selected.

Literature supports that if four-year colleges and universities with high graduation rates accept more two-year transfer students, the institutions can reach historically underserved populations. Research also verifies that these students do well, and in some cases, graduate at higher numbers than their peers who transferred from four-year institutions. What is lacking in current literature, however, is a focus on two- to four-year private institutions.

Through this multi-case study, using Schlossberg’s Transition Theory as its framework, the researcher found that although the four-year private institutions had many similarities, their two-year transfer populations looked considerably different quantitatively. By way of descriptive data analysis, the researcher analyzed student demographics, retention and persistence, academic performance, and student financial aid and Pell Grant eligibility. Findings from qualitative interviews also provided several main themes such as differences in college culture and environment matter, students’ psychological resources play a role in persistence, scholarships and financial aid are often a necessity to remain enrolled, and strategies for success include a focus on mindset, grit, and gumption.

With insight and tools geared toward practitioners in higher education, this study is also a resource for administrators, faculty, and transfer admission offices. Recommendations highlight why making the case for two- to four-year transfer students at private institutions is valuable, the importance of concentrating on students’ first-year and mental health resources, as well as ways to create a transfer receptive culture vs. a campus with transfer-friendly attributes.

Keywords: transfer students, retention, persistence, community colleges, four-year private institutions, two- to four-year transfer, baccalaureate degree attainment, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory
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<td>American Association of Community Colleges</td>
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<td>ATI</td>
<td>American Talent Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCRC</td>
<td>Community College Research Center</td>
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<td>IRB</td>
<td>Internal Review Board</td>
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<td>JKCF</td>
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This dissertation is dedicated to my family, the many transfer students whom I have had the opportunity to work with and serve, and Dr. Kay Higgins, the staff member who unequivocally became my lifeline as an undergraduate transfer student and who introduced me to the field of higher education; she is a true mentor and friend.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In a competitive admissions market and due to postsecondary attainment goals, both at the local and national levels, understanding the needs of transfer students illustrates a growing topic of interest for administrators, practitioners, and policy makers in higher education. Yet, the transfer population remains vastly under-resourced and widely undervalued on campuses across the country (Handel, 2013; Herrera & Jain, 2013; Jenkins & Fink, 2015; Marling, 2013; Miller, 2013; Swanson & Jones-Johnson, 2004; Von Kaenel & Havice, 2018). Those specifically transferring from two-year community colleges to four-year most selective or highly competitive institutions are actually more likely to graduate than their peers who entered from high school or transferred from a four-year (Glynn, 2019). Still, little research is done on this population within the transfer umbrella.

“An essential piece of the puzzle for any school looking to become a more welcoming place for transfer students is to look past the acceptance phase of the process and think about what’s provided to students after they enroll” (Sánchez, 2019, p. 3). Through efforts of organizations such as the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS), the Community College Research Center (CCRC), the Aspen Institute, and the American Talent Initiative (ATI), examination of transfer, matriculation, outcomes, and best practices are on the rise. Efforts such as the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) Strategic Plan entitled 60x30TX (www.thecb.state.tx.us) are also encouraging stakeholders to rethink and reengineer existing priorities. This plan, with an overarching goal that 60 percent of young adults ages 25-34 in Texas will have some type of postsecondary credential by the year 2030 (THECB, 2018) should make both two- and four-year institutions pay close attention. In short, the value of
recognizing transfer student trends and barriers is critical, as without this sub-population, enrollment, and attainment goals are likely to miss the mark.

This multi-case study focuses on students who transferred from a community college to a four-year *private* institution, because this vertical pathway is often not present in current literature. Thus, the goal of this research is to help private colleges and universities to better identify who makes up their transfer student populations and what best practices, policies, programs, and support efforts have potentially the highest impact in helping two-year transfer students persist.

**Problem of Practice**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), an estimated 19.9 million students, as of fall 2018, are enrolled in colleges and universities across the nation, with approximately 6.7 million attending two-year institutions (NCES, 2018b). A study tracking 720,000 degree-seeking students who started at a community college in fall 2007 found just 14 percent transferred and earned a bachelor’s degree within six years (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Funded by Public Agenda, CCRC, and the Aspen Institute, this study also found that increasing the transfer rate by 10 percent of all new students at two-year institutions could mean approximately 70,000 more earning a bachelor’s degree *every year* (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Although encouraging and supporting community college students in the actual transfer process is paramount, equally important are the resources and support provided to these students upon arrival at the receiving institution.

Specifically relating to those who transfer from a two- to a four-year private college or university, there is a dearth of literature when identifying potential factors influencing academic success such as persistence and retention at the baccalaureate level. Although community
colleges offer a gateway of opportunities for millions of students, many low-income, first
generation, or students of color, the transfer process fails to work well for most (Wyner, Deane,
Jenkins, & Fink, 2016). Additionally, there are more than 50,000 high-achieving students at
community colleges with a 3.7 GPA or higher who do not transfer to a four-year institution
(LaViolet, Fresquez, Maxson, & Wyner, 2018). If four-year colleges and universities with high
graduation rates do not expand two-year transfer enrollments, they are missing a substantial
opportunity to influence historically underserved students (LaViolet et al., 2018) and to provide
more opportunities for quality higher education. Also important is better equipping, serving, and
supporting the two-year transfer students they already have. It is for these reasons and based
upon the review of literature, this research concentrates on a narrower scope within transfer
pathways – two- to four-year transfer students at private institutions.

**Context for the Study**

Before providing more context about community colleges, the students they serve, and
what we currently know about transferring to selective institutions, it is relevant to first outline
enrollment trends within postsecondary education more holistically. In the most recent Signature
Report by the National Student Clearinghouse, researchers investigated transfer and mobility by
looking at the fall 2011 cohort (2.8 million first-time students) and their movement within two-
and four-year institutions (Shapiro et al., 2018). This research reveals “over one million of them
continued their studies at a different institution, resulting in an overall transfer rate of 38.0
percent” (Shapiro et al., 2018, p. 4). Moreover, this literature also provides a total overall initial
enrollment breakdown by sector as illustrated in Figure 1.1 below. This breakdown tells us that
of all students who first enrolled at a postsecondary institution in fall 2011, the majority at 40.8
percent attended a two-year public institution, 37.6 percent attended a four-year public
institution, and 16.8 percent a private non-profit. With two-year institutions at the highest enrollment threshold, this National Student Clearinghouse data are a strong example of why two-to four-year transfer cannot be ignored.

![Total Overall Initial Enrollments by Sector](image)

Figure 1.1: Total Initial Enrollments by Sector, Fall 2011 Cohort, Source: Adapted from Shapiro et al. (2018)

The Community College Landscape

“Transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions offers a critical avenue for upward mobility for many underserved students” (Jenkins & Fink, 2015, p. 1). To best contextualize and understand why this fact is important for this multi-case study is to better understand current facts about community college enrollment and completion, a prominent theme found in the literature.

As compiled by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (2018), of all students enrolled in two-year institutions in fall 2016, 59 percent or a total of 7.1 million were taking for credit courses, and 41 percent or 5.0 million were enrolled in non-credit. Of those
enrolled for credit, approximately 47 percent were White, 24 percent Hispanic, 13 percent Black, and 6 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, to name the largest groups (AACC, 2018). Additionally, the average age was 28, a total of 36 percent were first-generation college students, 17 percent were single parents, and 4 percent were veterans. During the 2015-2016 academic year, more than 70 percent of community college students also had some type of financial aid, whether federal grants, state aid, federal loans, or institutional aid (NCES, 2018a). This landscape painted a clearer picture of who community colleges serve, a topic further explored in Chapter II.

**Transferring to Selective Institutions**

The literature also confirms a lack of specific research pertaining to students transferring from two- to four-year private institutions, specifically schools with high graduation rates. As noted in Figure 1.2 below, most transfer students enroll in less selective public four-year institutions at 56 percent, with private nonprofit institutions enrolling 20 percent (Jenkins & Fink, 2015). From this same research, authors found that among those who do transfer to a four-year private nonprofit, there is a 60 percent transfer completion rate.

![Most Transfer Students Enroll in Public Institutions](image)

*Figure 1.2: Most Transfer Students Enroll in Public Institutions, Source: Adapted from Jenkins & Fink (2015)*
A project led by ATI (2018) called *The Talent Blind Spot* is making the case for increasing the number of community college transfer students to high graduation rate institutions. ATI is:

“A rapidly expanding alliance of four-year colleges and universities with graduation rates of 70 percent that has committed, by 2025, to attracting, enrolling, and graduating an additional 50,000 low- and moderate-income students” (LaViolet et al., 2018, p. 1).

Of ATI’s nearly 300 institutions, “only 18 percent of new students are transfers, compared to 32 percent at all four-year institutions” (LaViolet et al., 2018, p. 7). Others also argue that transfer can be a dynamic source of diversity (e.g., racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious), especially for selective colleges and universities (Sánchez, 2017). As stated in Princeton’s Strategic Plan, the University had not accepted transfer students since 1990 but that they would reinstate a transfer admissions program (The Trustees of Princeton University, 2016). The Princeton Strategic Framework further explains that “transfer programs can provide a vehicle to attract students with diverse backgrounds… such as qualified military veterans and students from low-income backgrounds, including some who might begin their careers at community colleges” (The Trustees of Princeton University, 2016, p. 15). Just this year, Princeton has now admitted its first transfer students, and other selective universities are wanting more high-achieving community college transfer students now more than ever before (Jaschik, 2018; Smith, 2018b).

Although ATI schools are not the only four-year institutions that can offer quality education, *The Talent Blind Spot* is relevant to this study given its focus on the two- to four-year transfer pipeline.
Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of this multi-case study was built on the growing emphasis of college transfer but the dearth of literature on two- to four-year transfer students at private institutions. As Wang (2016) argues, many current studies addressing transfer student achievement lump both private and public colleges and universities with varying selectivity into one group. Therefore, this multi-case study is significant as it aimed to help private four-year institutions unpack and better understand who their two-year transfer students are, in addition to recommending potential best practices used by those students persisting.

In doing so, this research analyzes transfer students from two mid-sized religiously affiliated private universities located in the southwest region of the United States (U.S.). Both four-year institutions were near a large community college system that also served as their largest feeder schools. Thus, the study analyzes only those students who transferred from those specific community colleges (Two-Year Community College A to Four-Year Private Institution A and Two-Year Community College B to Four-Year Private Institution B). For convenience, the remainder of the document will refer to the four-year institutions in this study as Institution A and Institution B.

The overall purpose of this research is to provide a descriptive data analysis of students who transferred to Institution A and Institution B beginning with fall 2011 and ending with fall 2018. Second to the analysis was to interview a total of 10 transfer students (five from each four-year institution) within these sample populations, and who were within one academic year of graduating with their bachelor’s degree. The latter provided a heartbeat to the researcher’s findings and recommendations, more than a data analysis could potentially offer.
Research Questions

With all considered, this multi-case study, as further described in the following chapters focused on two research questions (referenced as RQ1 and RQ2 throughout the remainder of the document):

RQ1 – What are the characteristics of a four-year private community college transfer student?

RQ2 – What potential factors are related to their retention and persistence at a private institution?

These questions served as the lens through which the researcher analyzed two- to four-year transfer students at the private institutions selected.

Conceptual Framework

In quantitative research, conceptual frameworks are used deductively in an effort to test and make predictions regarding results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In qualitative research, such frameworks are used inductively to provide an overall explanation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). For this multi-case study, the theoretical foundation comes from a social sciences framework known as Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. Not only did Schlossberg’s Transition Theory guide the nature of the questions asked in qualitative interviews, it also provides a structure/format to analyze descriptive data, as well as themes found in Chapters IV and V of this document. Equally important, this selected theory informs both research questions as well as offering a way to integrate both quantitative and qualitative efforts throughout the study.

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory

Schlossberg (1984) gives a scholarly definition of a transition “as any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and/or roles” (p. 43). Now known as
Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, this framework outlines four major sets of factors impacting a student or adult’s ability to cope with a transition. The four major components of the framework include Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies, also known as the 4 Ss (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; L. D. Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). As Appendix D visually illustrates, this multi-case study closely analyzes Schlossberg’s Transition Theory by using the 4 Ss of the transition process to answer both research questions. Some of these areas and key concepts noted are examined quantitatively and some qualitatively as shared more extensively in Chapter III.

Arguably, the most recent and relevant literature connecting Schlossberg’s theory to college students is Barclay’s (2017) work where she applies the principles directly to college student development, student affairs, and offices serving nontraditional students. By way of introduction, and further referenced throughout the following chapters, each of the 4 Ss are defined as follows:

**Situation.** “Experiencing a transition can be disabling for many” (Barclay, 2017, p. 29). Known in this multi-case study as the transition from a two-year community college to a four-year private institution, the Situation or transition is consistent among all students researched. For both four-year institutions selected, all students, both in the quantitative and qualitative evaluation, transferred directly from the two-year institution identified to the four-year institution identified. Shared by Schlossberg (2008) in her book called Overwhelmed, she believed that by taking stock in evaluating each of the 4s, the individual can navigate the transition process more smoothly, a topic relevant for practitioners in higher education (Barclay, 2017). “This can be an emotional time for the student transitioner; therefore, practitioners must be knowledgeable and skilled in working with students from both a student development and a mental health
perspective” (Barclay, 2017, p. 30). The latter, student mental health, is also a notable theme in this study’s literature review and findings. Triggers (whether anticipated or unanticipated transitions), timing, and whether adults have control, are also pivotal considerations (Anderson et al., 2012; Barclay, 2017).

**Self.** In researching potential factors impacting two- to four-year transfer retention and persistence, the *Self* category in Schlossberg’s Transition Theory is an integral component to introduce further. “Each individual is different in terms of life issues and personalities” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 61). Personal and demographic characteristics affect how a student or adult views life including “socioeconomic status, gender, age (emphasizing psychological, social, and functional age over chronological) and stage of life, state of health, and ethnicity” (Evans et al., 1998). Analyzing variables through this lens provides a better understanding of the diverse transfer makeup, an important insight as this study also aims to closely review student level data quantitatively.

Another a prevalent theme noted in the literature was what is known in Schlossberg’s Transition Theory as *psychological resources* (Anderson et al., 2012; Barclay, 2017; Evans et al., 1998; L. D. Patton et al., 2016; Schlossberg, 2008). Acknowledging what students bring to a transition such as outlook (e.g., self-efficacy and optimism), values, spirituality, and resilience (Anderson et al., 2012) are also key indicators of how they transition through their Situation. This concept is a key part in this multi-case study’s research, specifically in its qualitative approach.

**Support.** Within this framework, *Support* “refers to social support, and transition theory identifies four types: intimate relationships, family units, network of friends, and institutions/communities” (L. D. Patton et al., 2016, p. 39). As Lazarowicz (2018) found while
studying community college transfer students and their transition to a four-year university (a large research/land grant institution), support was critical, a conclusion in this multi-case study that is further addressed in Chapter IV. Age is also a factor in identifying an individual’s support systems in that these might look different over time (Barclay, 2017). If an adult in transition is receiving affirmation, affection, or support from varying persons or groups (e.g., organizations, close family and friends, and significant others), *taking stock* in channels of support can be critical in their transition success (Barclay, 2017; Schlossberg, 2008).

**Strategies.** Last, the strategies adults deploy in times of a transition can include four coping mechanisms such as direct action, information seeking, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior (Anderson et al., 2012). The latter refers to mindsets such as wishful thinking, distortion, and denial (Anderson et al., 2012). As literature also confirms, students can choose how they react to challenging situations differently, from managing stress and expectations, to how factors such as *Self* and *Situation* play a role (Anderson et al., 2012; Barclay, 2017; Schlossberg, 2008). In this multi-case study, types of strategies are evaluated within qualitative interviews, specifically within questions pertaining to how students managed to persevere when times were difficult, and what they wish they would have known their first year of transferring to the four-year institution.

**Definitions of Terms**

For purposes of this study, a few terms are operationalized and referred to often. The term *transfer* means “any student who arrives at an institution of higher education with previously accumulated college credits” (Archambault, 2015, p. 215). Also known in recent literature as *mobile students*, not all transfer students take traditional paths (Shapiro et al., 2018), nor does this study claim that two- to four-year transfer is the full picture. Throughout the document,
transfer students may mean the general population or only those within the study’s sample. If the latter, the researcher makes the distinction when clarification is needed.

It is also important to note that not every student who attends a community college intends to transfer to a four-year institution. Although expectations and priorities continue to evolve for community colleges, their mission, dating back to the early twentieth century, has a strong emphasis on workforce development (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). More broadly, the definition of a community college or referred to as a two-year institution, is “any not-for-profit institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree” (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 5). “Community college” and “two-year institution” are used interchangeably throughout this document.

The term selective is also used throughout the document to describe the four-year private institutions in this study. According to Barron's Profiles of American Colleges, a total of 21 categories under eight main headings are captured for each institution (College Division of Barron’s Educational Series, 2018). These include student life, faculty/classrooms, and programs of study, activities, services, requirements, admissions, and financial aid. Although the methodology for Barron’s exclusive competitive scale is unclear, the researcher refers to the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation (JKCF) Persistence study which describes selective institutions as those identified by Barron’s index as “Most Competitive” or “Highly Competitive” (Glynn, 2019). As noted in Chapter III, both four-year institutions in this study fall under this umbrella.

Furthermore, the term Cohort means a “specific group of students established for tracking purposes” (NCES, 2018c, p. 6). “Retention refers to an institution’s goals for students to continue their enrollment to the following term or successfully complete their program” (Hirschy, 2017, pp. 253–254). With regard to this study, retention or a retention rate is
understood as the number of degree-seeking students enrolled in the preceding fall who are enrolled again in the present fall (NCES, 2018c). Persistence is student level, meaning it “indicates a student’s continued enrollment in the postsecondary system” (Hirschy, 2017, p. 254). Additionally, as defined by the Glynn (2019) report on two- to four-year transfer to selective institutions, persistence refers to a student’s determination and drive. Specific to this study, a requirement for students interviewed is they needed to be within one academic year of graduating with their baccalaureate degree. In like manner, they had persisted through at least their first year at the four-year private institution and had an intended graduation date. The term completion, as confirmed by IPEDS, are students who received a conferred degree or award (NCES, 2018c).

Finally, the term nontraditional or a nontraditional student can mean a variety characteristics such as someone who works full-time, has dependents, is a single parent, attends school part-time, is financially independent, among others (Nadworny & Depenbrock, 2018; Passmore, 2015). This concept was another prominent theme in literature; however, for purposes of this study and specifically for the descriptive data analysis, nontraditional means students ages 25 or older. This decision was based on the same age bracketing in other studies, most notably by the National Student Clearinghouse (Shapiro et al., 2018).

**Summary**

As this introduction highlights, transfer is becoming a growing topic of interest, both in research and in discussions on college campuses nationwide. In addition, several organizations and initiatives are furthering the conversation and elevating the recognition of transfer students, including the value they bring to postsecondary education. As this multi-case study focuses on two- to four-year transfer students at two private institutions located in the Southwest, this
research hopes to contribute to the current body of literature, an area lacking concentration on the two-to four-year private school pipeline. By using Schlossberg’s Transition Theory as a guiding framework, the researcher answers two primary research questions including the characteristics of a four-year private community college transfer student and factors related to their retention and persistence at a private institution.

Through both personal and professional experiences, the researcher was particularly interested in two- to four-year transfer students at private institutions as her own academic journey followed this same path. She has also worked directly with transfer students at a four-year private institution and now serves at a community college working directly with administrators, faculty, and staff. It is through these prior and current positions that led the researcher to transfer-related research.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study’s why began with wanting to address and explore the literature on potential reasons why only 14 percent of community college students who initially plan on completing a baccalaureate degree do (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). For those students who do transfer from a two-to four-year institution, specifically a private college or university, who are they and what is helping those who do persist be successful? According to Jacobs (2004), “a more cohesive transition process might emerge if institutions could realize that a systematic and proactive retention and graduation plan is beneficial for both two- and four-year colleges” (p. 12). The first of many challenges prohibiting transfer success attributes to the number of transfer pathways, a concept established well over 100 years ago (Handel, 2013). As Executive Director of NISTS, Dr. Janet Marling (2013) says,

“The prevalence of multiple transfer pathways is challenging how institutions view recruitment, retention, and completion; the methods by which we track students; and the means by which institutions are given credit for their role in the education process” (p. 77).

Navigating a new normal as Marling (2013) states requires higher education professionals to intentionally focus on every entry and exit point of helping students successfully transition. Although the focus of this research is on two- to four-year transfer students at private institutions, this literature review is comprehensive in scope and includes transfer pathways of different kinds to provide greater understanding. In addition, creating a transfer receptive culture can make a considerable difference for student belonging and dispelling transfer misconceptions (Jain, Bernal, Lucero, Herrera, & Solorzano, 2016), a topic found and addressed throughout this chapter.
Correspondingly, the following subsections offer a sense of what we currently know about transfer, transfer student success, and its many implications. Some of the permeating themes, for example, include college choice and levels of selectivity, a deeper dive into the community college transfer pipeline, literature on serving diverse student populations, a review of support systems and resources such as financial aid and advising, as well as the importance of students’ sense of belonging and counseling and mental health. By and large, and noted throughout, each of these themes connects to one or more of Schlossberg’s 4s – Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies. Thus, the following sections are organized by domain.

**Situation Domain**

Literature related to the *Situation* domain include three specific topic areas: 1) college choice and levels of selectivity; 2) transfer mobility and pathways; and 3) a deeper dive into the community college pipeline.

**College Choice and Levels of Selectivity**

Since the groundbreaking research from Community College Research Center (CCRC), the Aspen Institute, and the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center authored by Jenkins and Fink (2016) was released, studies about transfer outcomes, metrics, and benchmarking have continued to emerge. Specific to transfer college choice, a tie to Schlossberg’s *Situation* domain (as defined by this multi-case study), literature confirms that transfer to four-year institutions with varying selectivity is a less understood topic (Cheslock, 2005; Crisp, 2017; Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008; LaViolet et al., 2018; Moon Asa, Carignan, Marchesani, Moser, & Woods, 2018; Wang, 2016).

Drawing on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, Moon Asa et al. (2018) studied four public two-year colleges in the Midwest. The study’s two research questions
included these: 1) “Which factors most influence community college students to choose a particular university as their transfer destination?” and 2) “How do students perceive four-year institutions when making the decision to transfer?” (p. 90). Data collection consisted of 21 student interviews and a 30-question survey given to students within arts and sciences at four study sites (Moon Asa et al., 2018). With a survey response rate average of 9.7 percent or a total of 1,029 completed surveys, approximately 44 percent indicated they had intentions of completing a bachelor’s degree with 27.9 percent stating they wanted to pursue a master’s degree at some point.

Through the quantitative method, survey participants shared reasons for attending both their current community college and the four-year institution chosen for transfer. The three top reasons for choosing their two-year institution were cost/tuition (80.4 percent), financial aid/scholarships (71.5 percent), and programs offered (68.9 percent) (Moon Asa et al., 2018). Of those students who planned to transfer to a four-year, approximately 91 percent of the researchers’ sample, only 8.3 percent had selected a private institution in-state, 38.4 percent a public institution in-state, 24.5 percent out-of-state, and 28.8 percent undecided/had other plans (e.g., a for-profit) (Moon Asa et al., 2018).

Furthermore, qualitative analyses found that “despite their stated desire to transfer…most students are not actively engaging in behaviors to help them effectively navigate this transition” (Moon Asa et al., 2018, p. 95). Other themes included a reliance on key confidants such as family, classmates and friends – an example of Schlossberg’s Support domain – and the desire for a personalized transfer process such as advising and step-by-step transition resources. This valuable study unveiled recent literature about college choice and support systems, specifically from two- to- four-year institutions.
Another study, this one supported by the Greater Texas Foundation, a team of researchers led by Dr. Huriya Jabber with the University of Texas at Austin, also recently explored choice sets (e.g., list of institutions under consideration) and decision-making of community college transfer students to four-year institutions (Jabber, Epstein, Edwards, & Sanchez, 2017). The study looked at factors such as institutional context, financial support, social networks, and choice sets made available to two-year transfer students, many of whom are first generation, students of color, or low income (Jabber et al., 2017). With over 100 interviews from students at two-year institutions in Central Texas, researchers found that, on average, students were applying or considering four- to five schools total. In addition, minority students and those with dependents were considering more private schools, what the researchers believe may be due to locality and geographic preferences (Jabber et al., 2017).

Moreover, the analysis of what the authors called Big U or Big Bucks: Public vs. Private Universities concluded that many students interviewed said they had thought or considered private institutions “but could not afford it” (Jabber et al., 2017, p. 31). It was also mentioned that some “students shied away from private religious institutions because of curricular requirements or because of the environment,” while some were incentivized by the religious affiliation (Jabber et al., 2017, p. 31). This study was insightful for purposes of this multi-case study as it addressed four-year public vs. private and religiously associated institutions.

Additional literature also shines light on the topic of college choice and transfer students choosing four-year institutions with varying selectivity. Wang (2016) believes “transfer from community colleges to selective four-year institutions is an issue that assumes great importance for the democratization of postsecondary education” (p. 1). His research, a multilevel analysis of two-year transfer students to four-year institutions, not only supports this growing topic in
literature, but also illustrates a similar purpose and why – what experiences, support/interventions, and resources are helping community college transfer students complete their baccalaureate degree, specifically at selective institutions?

Wang (2016) argues that by lumping private and public four-year institutions receiving community college students into one group, this method “neglects heterogeneity in institutional selectivity and fails to study forces underlying the varied pathways” of transfer pipelines (p. 1). The study, a design including national data sources as well as a representative sample of first-time students beginning postsecondary education at a two-year institution in 2003-2004, included just over 5,000 students from 385 community colleges. Results differed from these of Jabber et al. (2017); proximity to selective institutions did not appear to be as influential to college choice (Wang, 2016). Other interesting takeaways included demographics of the sample – 58 percent were female, 42 percent male, 34 percent from underrepresented minority groups, and 47 percent were first generation (Wang, 2016). As for college choice, just under 2 percent transferred to a highly selective institution, 14.6 percent to a moderately-selective institution, 7.7 percent to less selective, and 75.9 percent who did not transfer (Wang, 2016). Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of issues pertaining to access and mobility for community college students for transfer to selective institutions.

Furthermore, Wang (2016) believes that both research and education policy must continue to broaden access and opportunity for students at two-year institutions, an effort that Jack Kent Cooke Foundation (JKCF), the Lumina Foundation of Education, and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation aimed to do a decade before in a 2006 study entitled Transfer Access to Elite Colleges and Universities in the United States: Threading the Needle of the American Dream. Although focused on elite institutions, this research funded by the noted foundations is
another example of what we currently know about transfer and those who attend four-year selective institutions. In this study’s executive summary, researchers share that together

“Highly selective institutions and community colleges have the potential to dramatically increase the number of low-SES transfer students by encouraging talented community college students to apply, raising awareness of financial aid, and working to diminish cultural barriers” (Dowd et al., 2006, p. 3).

Bridging differences of culture, environments, finances, and curriculum are some of the most difficult for many students, especially those least affluent (Dowd et al., 2006). Meanwhile, organizations such as JKCF are moving the needle on social mobility by helping low-income transfer students who want to pursue postsecondary education with both financial assistance and support services (JKCF, 2019), as further explored later in this literature review.

Melguizo and Dowd (2006) report that nearly 26,000 students who began at a two-year institution in 1992 were in the top fifth percentile of their class. This fact reinforces and continues to debunk the notion that community college students may not be capable of or qualified for the academic rigor involved at a selective four-year institution. Nevertheless, a decline in transfer enrollment at private institutions from 1984-2002 decreased from 10.5 percent to 5.7 percent where at public selective institutions during this same time, went from 22.2 percent to 18.8 percent (Dowd et al., 2006). Hence, continued questions of why, how, and when transfer students select four-year institutions remain pertinent.

Research conducted by Tobolowsky and Bers (2018) identified stops, starts, and detours of the transfer college choice process. Through interviews, focus groups, and surveys at four different institutions, researchers found that transfer search and selection parameters were in
large part due to familiarity, situations (planned and unplanned), and transferability of credits (Tobolowsky & Bers, 2018).

Building upon such data, researchers seem to have mainly assumed that transfer to four-year institutions constitute a monolithic group, one that is homogeneous in scope. Although overall increases in transfer and graduation rates at four-year accessible institutions may warrant or yield larger impact in mere numbers (Crisp, 2017), studying college choice by varying levels of selectivity is noteworthy. Expanding opportunities for community college students and continuing to uncover strategies or coping mechanisms for those who are successful remain consistent themes throughout literature. More broadly and to better understand transfer success, it is also critical to address the topic of transfer mobility and the community college pipeline in greater depth.

**Transfer Mobility and Pathways**

For some public institutions like the University of Central Florida, the number of incoming transfer students is significantly larger than the number of first-year students due to a consortium of five two-year feeder institutions (Smith, 2018a). However, research also tells that emerging and more complex patterns in transfer mobility, outside of two- to four-year, also exist (Poisel & Joseph, 2018). As confirmed by the literature, today’s transfer students follow both vertical and horizontal pathways: some are considered reverse transfer students meaning they transfer from four- to two-year institutions, some swirl back-and-forth between multiple colleges and universities, and some stop out (Archambault, 2015; Jenkins & Fink, 2015, 2016; Laanan, 2001; Lauren, 2004; Pope, 2004; Shapiro, 2018; Steinmann, Pope, & Miller, 2004; Taylor & Jain, 2017).
Meanwhile, a noted misconception is that four-year colleges and universities are where students transfer, when “in fact, two-year institutions are as much a destination point of student mobility as they are an origination” (Shapiro, 2018, p. 5). For this reason, it is critical to reiterate that transfer from two- to four-year institutions is not the only way students move through the postsecondary pipeline. “In order to help students plan an optimum path and advise them along the way, however, educators need to know the likely outcomes of different pathway options” (Shapiro, 2018, p. 7). This study particularly analyzes the two- to four-year pathway, which is one piece of a larger and more complex phenomena.

**The Community College Pipeline**

With the American community college dating back to the early twentieth century, initial reasons for expansion were to help train workers for growing industries, to support social equality, and to increase access to higher education (Cohen et al., 2014). Until the 1940s, two-year institutions were primarily known as *junior colleges*, and it was not until the 70s that the term *community college* was used interchangeably for varying two-year institution types (Cohen et al., 2014). Said another way, “community college” is a hybrid idea that combines the concept of both the transfer-oriented junior college and the vocational or technical institute” (Steinmann et al., 2004, p. 17). Although today two-year institutions are still receiving continued pressure to offer more certifications and non-degree credentials, the other face of the community college coin is transfer (Smith, 2018a).

Clearly, the community college landscape is vast. In 2016-17, 8.7 million students were enrolled in two-year public institutions, totaling 38 percent of all undergraduate students in postsecondary education (NCES, 2018b). Perhaps one of the most telling statistics is that of all students who completed a four-year degree in 2015-16, 49 percent had also attended a two-year
institution within the previous decade (CCRC, 2018). Of the latter, approximately six percent of these were dual credit students, 22 percent were enrolled in a community college for one semester, and 63 percent were enrolled for three or more semesters (CCRC, 2018).

Uniquely, the most recent report by JKCF studying the success of students who transfer from a community college to selective four-year institutions is the first of its kind to disaggregate the community college transfer population in this way. The study found that of two-year students, only 7 percent attend selective colleges and universities (Glynn, 2019). In addition, those transferring from community colleges were more likely to graduate at the selective institution at 75 percent, than their peers who entered from high school or transferred from a four-year institution at 73 percent and 61 percent, respectively (Glynn, 2019).

From the research, two prevalent themes have arisen: 1) serving and supporting a diverse student population; and 2) the impact of an associate degree prior to transfer.

**Self Domain**

Different than in decades past, dimensions to student diversity and needs in-and-outside-the-classroom are part of national dialogue. To this point, although representation from various groups is important, campus diversity is much more than numbers (Griffin, 2017). El-Khawas (2003) notes factors such as full- or part-time study, working while enrolled, commuter or residential, international student status, financial dependence from parents, and family obligations. All symbolize some of the many contributing factors of whether a student reaches graduation. And the diversity of educational experiences may contribute to how colleges and universities develop and execute student support programs.

Specific to the *Self* domain and for purposes of this research, serving and supporting a diverse student population is two-fold – first, all transfer students are arguably diverse in that
they bring and offer several different experiences and perspectives; second, literature tells us that community college students are particularly diverse. To understand what characteristics makeup two- to four-year community college transfer students and what factors potentially relate to their retention and persistence at private institutions, the following elements address both sides of the diversity coin and unpacks two specific categories: 1) marginalized students and upward mobility; and 2) nontraditional students.

**Marginalized Students and Upward Mobility**

Upward mobility and the role of postsecondary education is an important topic as it relates to access, students served, and persistence. Chetty et al. (2017) studied more than 30 million college students between 1999-2013 and found that parent income strongly impacts college choice. In fact, “children whose parents are in the top 1% of the income distribution are 77 times more likely to attend an Ivy League college than those whose parents are in the bottom income quintile” (Chetty et al., 2017, p. 1). According to Opportunity Insights (2018), a research team at Harvard, approximately 90 percent of children who were born in 1940 later earned more than their parents. In contrast, only about half of children born now meet the same threshold. This research is startling and perhaps an argument for why open access institutions with diverse student populations are increasingly critical to support the American dream.

As for community colleges, two-year institutions serve many low-income, minority, and first-generation students (Chetty et al., 2017; Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Espinosa, Turk, & Taylor, 2017; Glynn, 2019; LaViolet et al., 2018; Ma & Baum, 2016; Shapiro et al., 2017; Shapiro, Dundar, Wakhungu, Yuan, & Harrell, 2015). Data published by The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2011), show that 44 percent of low-income students with household incomes of less than $25,000 per year choose to attend a two-
year institution post high school. In fall 2017, approximately 44 percent of Hispanic undergraduates, 35 percent of Black students, and 31 percent of White students were enrolled at a community college (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2018). According to Shapiro et al. (2015), low income students are also three times more likely to begin at a community college at 44 percent than students at a high income level (15 percent).

Furthermore, the American Talent Initiative (ATI), first mentioned in Chapter I, has five main reasons for expanding community college transfer at ATI institutions. One is the “significant opportunity to reach historically underserved students” (LaViolet et al., 2018, p. 6). For highly selective institutions, in particular, “a committed effort [to expand community college transfer rates] would not only create opportunity and reward student talent, it would also improve diversity at elite schools” (Dowd et al., 2006, p. 3). The downfall, however, is for those who do transfer; marginalized students such as minorities, low-income, and first generation often meet barriers.

More specific to the probability of transferring Dougherty and Kienzl (2006), explored inequalities by social background as they related to transfer from two-year to four-year colleges. In analysis of two national datasets, one primary finding was that students with high-SES had a significantly higher transfer rate. Regarding race as an element in transfer Jain et al. (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study of 87 participants from a Summer Transfer Enrichment Program (STEP), 90 percent of whom identified as persons of color. With 56 who completed the survey and 22 who participated in focus groups, researchers found that a transfer receptive culture was established through five main ways: 1) the institution’s making transfer a priority; 2) providing tailored resources and outreach efforts; 3) offering academic and financial support; 4)
access to family and community support; and 5) research and assessment for transfer receptive programs (Jain et al., 2016).

As each of these connect directly or indirectly to Schlossberg’s 4s (Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies) as well as support findings within this multi-case study, the Jain et. al. (2016) empirical research was a relevant and vital source.

Nontraditional Students

It may be time to reconsider the term nontraditional as the typical college student looks different today than most may think (Mellow, 2017; Nadworny & Depenbrock, 2018; Passmore, 2015). Organizations such as Excelencia in Education, with a mission to improve college access, retention and completion, have advocated for the term “post-traditional” for some time (Excelencia in Education, 2019).

Surprisingly, approximately 74 percent of all undergraduates in 2011-12 (NCES, 2015) had at least one of the following nontraditional characteristics – a topic also aligned with Schlossberg’s Self domain. These included 1) a student who is a designated independent for financial aid; 2) someone who is a single caregiver; 3) someone attending school part-time; 4) a student with delayed enrollment at the postsecondary level; 5) someone with full-time employment; and 6) an individual who completed a GED (p. 1). In this National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2015) report on characteristics of nontraditional undergraduates, age was not used. In fact, the definition of nontraditional is conveyed by the noted characteristics. Understanding these characteristics is imperative as students under this umbrella can be “vulnerable to challenges that can affect their well-being, levels of stress and satisfaction” (NCES, 2015, p. 1).
As for private colleges and universities such as Institution A and Institution B in this study, both are highly residential, and therefore, many transfer students are also commuters. As another nontraditional student variable or component, Martin and Kilgo (2015) found that in exploring commuter students and their psychological well-being, those at two-year institutions who did not live on campus had lower levels compared to students who did. Overall, according to the American Association of Community Colleges (2018), statistics show that 63 percent of community college students enroll part-time.

**Student Veterans.** One specific subpopulation under the nontraditional umbrella is student veterans. Although qualitative interviews for this multi-case study did not include veterans, they were part of its descriptive data analysis. For both Institution A and Institution B, all veterans are also considered transfer students; therefore, as another diverse population, it rose to importance for purposes of this literature review.

From a culture known well to a culture less known, student veterans face a number of challenges when entering civilian life as a college student (Bauman, Davidson, & Roesch, 2015; Cass, 2014; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Morales, 2016; Poisel, 2016). Just over a decade ago, DiRamio et al. (2008) published the first empirical work regarding student veterans and their transitional experiences by using Schlossberg as its guiding framework. That study followed 25 veterans as they began their journey from the military to higher education. Results found these students often portrayed an accelerated level of maturity, were interested in establishing relationships with one another, and often downplayed past experiences while enlisted (DiRamio et al., 2008). Relating to student persistence and retention, this insight is important for practitioners looking to improve the student veteran experience.

More recently, the Student Veterans of America (SVA) Research Department (2018)
published the initial National Veteran Education Success Tracker (NVEST) report. NVEST, made possible by the support of Google Global Impact Awards, the Kresge Foundation, and the Lumina Foundation, serves as an instrumental tool for administrators and practitioners alike.

Through this resource (SVA, 2017) and with demographic data from the 2016 SVA Census, we now know the following about contemporary student veterans: 1) they are more likely to be 25+ years in age, married and pursuing an undergraduate degree in an area different than their occupation while in the military; 2) approximately 51 percent report having a VA disability rating and 80 percent of this population share their disability caused stress within their educational setting; 3) nearly half at 46 percent have children; and 4) a total of 46 percent work full or part-time while also enrolled in classes. From a macro and micro level, knowing who educators are serving – a direct correlation to Schlossberg’s Self domain – is key. However, it is important for institutions not to generalize this subpopulation, as some student veterans may prefer to be invisible (Poisel, 2016). Overall, this knowledge helps campuses make better informed support and policy decisions while also allowing for greater sharing of student needs across institutional lines.

Another compelling study, also using Schlossberg as its conceptual framework, is a dissertation by Morales (2016). The study used a mixed-methods approach and explored transitional processes for student veterans at a four-year institution in the Pacific region of the US. Findings concluded that the subpopulation would benefit from transition courses, a cohort model, and peer-to-peer mentoring (Morales, 2016). Additionally, the fear in the inability to connect with traditional students, disinterest in participating in social support programs, and the impact of a close web of support all surfaced as notable themes (Morales, 2016).

Last, with more than one million now taking advantage of educational benefits across the
country (Prins, Spangler, & Walser, 2014), using the Post-9/11 GI Bill does not mean every student veteran is guaranteed full tuition (Poisel, 2016). For student veterans still seeing a gap in what the Post-9/11 GI Bill covers and what tuition costs, mainly at private institutions, 1,770+ colleges and universities have agreed to partner with the federal government to ensure their institutions are more accessible (Bauman et al., 2015). This initiative, called the Yellow Ribbon program, projects Post-9/11 GI Bill funding at approximately 100,000 degrees each year. Thus how institutions rank in regards to veteran inclusiveness will continue to rise (CCRC, 2018). Most recently, U.S. News and World Report (2019) published its “Best Colleges for Veterans” recognizing institutions that “participate in federal initiatives helping veterans and active-duty service members pay for their degrees” (p. 1). Among the top three and all private universities were Stanford, Dartmouth, and Cornell.

The Impact of an Associate Degree or Prior Credential

The final main theme under the Self domain found in current literature was whether an incoming transfer had an associate degree or other credential prior to transferring to the four-year institution. This topic is relevant as some literature suggests a higher four-year degree attainment rate for students who obtain a two-year degree prior. With not every four-year college or university tracking prior credentials, this makes it difficult to use this distinguishing factor as an indicator for potential success. However, the impact of an associate degree or prior credential is noteworthy as it relates to recommendations for further research.

Excluding dual enrollment students, 37.5 percent of all new fall 2011 first-time college students earned a two- or four-year credential within six years (Shapiro et al., 2017). Of the less than 15 percent of two-year students who transferred and earned a four-year degree within six years, 52 percent of this population did not obtain a two-year degree first (Shapiro et al., 2017).
However, in looking at whether community college students should earn an associate degree before transfer, Kopko and Crosta (2016) found a 10 percent difference in baccalaureate degree attainment when comparing the two differing populations, with the higher outcome correlated to having an associate degree prior. Though this literature specifically discounts whether transfer outcomes vary depending on institution type (public or private), this characteristic or qualification may inform admission counselors and practitioners about possible factors related to persistence and retention.

**Support Domain**

The following subsections addresses support systems and resources to include scholarships and financial aid, academic advising, and transfer-year experience programs. Each of these is directly tied to Schlossberg’s *Support* domain, as described in this multi-case study. Each also became widespread themes both in the literature review and in the study’s findings. Overall, “the academic transition for transfers is affected by gaps in academic skills, access to resources, shift to upper-division coursework, and adjustment to new academic culture and expectations” (Van Der Karr, 2018, p. 76).

**Scholarships and Financial Aid**

According to Ehrenberg (2002), one reason why selective private colleges and universities cost so much is the desire to “maximize the value of their institutions” (p. 11). Perhaps due to fear of long-term debt, literature affirms many community college transfer students feel private education is out-of-reach. However, through scholarships and financial aid, access to private institutions becomes more attainable (Archambault, 2015; JKCF, 2019; LaViolet et al., 2018; Pope, 2004; Sánchez, 2017; Zielinski & Sanchez, 2016).
As this multi-case study evaluates transfer student success, literature affirms that with access to institutional scholarships and financial aid, students have equal opportunities than native first-year students to persist and complete. Because “the most underserved populations are among the least able to afford steeply rising tuition, least likely to enroll in college, and least likely to complete,” affordability and transfer are instrumental in increasing baccalaureate degree attainment (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011, p. 1). Therefore, “by providing financial support for transfer students, four-year institutions will not only increase transfer rates from community colleges but … will likely diversify their student bodies” (Pope, 2004, p. 153).

As one strategy proposed by Santiago, Perez and Ortiz (2017) to improve transfer pathways to college completion, authors believe access to institutional financial aid is critical. Tactics to assist in accomplishing this goal include consistent communication regarding deadlines and disbursement, the importance of standardizing forms across two- and four-year institutions, proactive advising and discussion about aid opportunities, and the development and execution of scholarships specifically designed for transfer students (Santiago et al., 2017). Furthermore, organizations like JKCF are built on serving and supporting students with financial need (JKCF, 2019). Whether through one-to-one student coaching, financial education and/or advisement on scholarship opportunities, financial support for community college students warrants attention.

**Academic Advising**

Another pertinent theme in identifying factors impacting transfer student retention and persistence is advising support and processes (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Laanan (2001) found “that many who transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions have trouble adjusting to
the rigorous academic standards and are often faced with numerous other challenges upon enrolling” (p. 5). Lack of advising and academic resources for student mobility serve as two of the most prominent reasons why transfer students feel unsupported (Van Der Karr, 2018). To contextualize challenges related to advising in three areas, Van Der Karr (2018) believes credits, planning and curriculum, transfer shock and academic preparedness, and navigating a new culture are noteworthy.

Consequently, Wyner et al. (2016) offers essential practices and strategies for two- and four-year institutions, one of which includes customized transfer student advising as a key element. In the community college setting, for example, advisors introduce students to the concept of transfer and often help in goal setting throughout the enrollment process (Barrett & Hardy, 2015). Other literature confirms that “the academic advisor is the most important resource to help new students clarify their goals and select courses that lead toward those goals” (Bailey, Smith Jaggers, & Jenkins, 2015, p. 58).

At four-year institutions, differing advising structures can cause immense difficulties especially in a decentralized model when staff and faculty, not skilled or equipped to answer unique transfer questions, remain the only option (Swanson & Jones-Johnson, 2004). Put most directly:

“Advisors who focus on transfer can increase the quality of service to students and improve college-wide support by educating the campus on transfer experiences and transition, advocating for the transfer perspective in policy making and curriculum development, and presenting evidence that resource allocation for transfer support leads to greater student outcomes” (Van Der Karr, 2018, p. 84).
Transfer students need guidance to ensure correct pathways are followed, to help better navigate resources, to overcome obstacles along the way, and perhaps most importantly, to reassure them that they are capable (Wyner et al., 2016). With stronger advising support, students can feel more confident about degree requirements and expectations, confident that they have comprehensive and accurate information (Barrett & Hardy, 2015; Swanson & Jones-Johnson, 2004).

Programs like the Jack Kent Cooke Scholars (Cooke Scholars) and the Kaplan Leadership Program (KLP) Scholars are designed to support community college students and transfer. A key component, among others, is one-on-one academic advising where students receive continuity in academic support and accountability (Zielinski & Sanchez, 2016). For Cooke Scholars, the majority first-generation college goers, completion rates have topped 97 percent at the baccalaureate level in three years or less, and nearly half of these students are transferring to private institutions (Zielinski & Sanchez, 2016). Both Cooke Scholars and KLP verify that when community college transfer students have strong financial and academic support, these vital tools enable them to succeed.

Transfer Orientation Programs

Swanson and Jones-Johnson (2004) believes that not only can new student orientation help transfer students in identifying goals and expectations, but also assist in familiarizing them with campus resources and support systems. Although in agreement that such programs are instructive, Foote (2018), recognizes that varying factors are important to consider in the design of transfer orientations. Some of these include the complexity of transfer pathways, varying levels of transfer student capital (e.g., skills and knowledge unique to transfer students), and fluctuating levels of experience (Foote, 2018). Transfer orientations can also assist students in
learning new technology (Barrett & Hardy, 2015) and overall, provide a foundational experience for acclimating them into their new campus environment.

**Strategies Domain**

The final subsections below address sense of belonging and engagement, as well as the importance of counseling and mental health on college campuses. Each directly tie to Schlossberg’s *Strategies* domain, as described in this multi-case study.

**Sense of Belonging and Engagement**

As noted in prior literature related to the *Self* domain, student personal demographics can impact the ability for a student to acclimate after transitioning to a new institution. In agreement, Martin and Kilgo (2015) believe that:

“Given the student populations at 2-year institutions compared to residential 4-year institutions, community building and engagement are critical for students to feel a sense of belonging at the institution” (p. 40).

As early as the 1980s and 90s, the concept of *transfer shock*, meaning the drop in GPA once a student transfers, and other transitional concerns for students were prevalent in the literature (Steinmann et al., 2004). Although acclaimed theorists such as Alexander Astin (1984) suggest the importance of student involvement and how well students adapt, research reveals staggering differences when comparing transfer student needs to traditional first-year student needs. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), for example, reports both first generation and transfer students are somewhat less likely to participate in high-impact practices such as internships, learning communities, research with faculty, and study abroad (NSSE, 2018).

Integrating the transfer population, as the literature argues, provides necessary connections and a level of engagement for students to feel part of the campus community.
According to Astin (1984) isolation and fragmentation may cause an astounding threat to student retention and persistence. To strengthen support programs requires intentional planning, but more important, progress will require a body of educators committed to the importance of serving all students, not just some (Hirschy, 2017).

With this in mind, not many studies focus on the correlation between sense of community and transfer student success as it is often difficult to measure. However, despite the difficulty in determining possible correlations, Townley et al. (2013) does an effective job of addressing its importance in the undergraduate transfer student experience. This cross-sectional study looked at 53 transfer students majoring in STEM subjects. Participation in academic activities, GPA, and sense of community, captured by usage/involvement in academic related opportunities, were analyzed using a moderated regression analysis (Townley et al., 2013). Findings suggested that students who reported “high participation with STEM activities and strong sense of community performed better academically than students who reported high participation and low sense of community” (Townley et al., 2013, p. 277). A critical takeaway from this study is its correlation between campus engagement and academic outcomes. It provides valuable insight to the lack of research surrounding these two topic areas. Although the sample size is small, the study delivers a good example of quantitative research relating to a more qualitative question (e.g., belonging, engagement).

Furthermore, inspired by Tinto’s (1993) theory and best practices for combating student attrition, the work of Townsend and Wilson (2006), focused on community college transfer students to a large research university. Qualitative in its method for data gathering, researchers interviewed transfer students at a selective research institution in a suburban setting. Researchers found that “active institutional efforts… are required to help community college transfer students
develop a sense of belonging to the university community, both within and outside the classroom” (Townsend & Wilson, 2006, p. 454). With sense of belonging and engagement at the forefront, institutional leaders wanting to improve retention of transfer students, should develop strategies not only for the first few weeks, but from the community college to baccalaureate attainment (Lester, Brown Leonard, & Mathias, 2013; Townley et al., 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Without a strong sense of belonging, the potential of students feeling marginalized is likely (Barclay, 2017).

**Counseling and Mental Health**

Referring to *campus culture shock*, Archambault (2015) discusses how the shock of moving from one institution to another encompasses a variety of emotional and psychological setbacks. For those going from two- to four-year selective institutions “these challenges are even greater … as they may find to be polar opposites” (Archambault, 2015, p. 220).

The topic of counseling and mental health become a pervasive theme when exploring the acclimation of students once they arrive to their four-year institution and their development over time. More generally, when students adjust to new environments, challenges may arise such as academic, social (e.g., with peers, faculty, other interpersonal relationships), institutional, and personal-emotional (Schwitzer & Van Brunt, 2015). Anxiety and depression, for example, are among the most common mental health challenges in the country, especially among 18-29-year-olds (Schwitzer & Van Brunt, 2015). For practitioners and counselors in higher education to support increasingly diverse populations, it is critical to comprehend the myriad stages of student development throughout the baccalaureate journey (Hermann, Benoit, Zavadil, & Kooymen, 2014).
To explain, “the junior year of college is one that really highlights the emotional and cognitive development of college students” (Magruder & Degges-White, 2014, p. 25). Most first-year students, have successfully navigated on-campus relationships, are choosing their major, and are moving out of on-campus housing (Magruder & Degges-White, 2014). Difficult for transfer students starting at the four-year institution as a junior, however, they may not have a defined group of friends, and academically, they may feel the pressure of securing internships and starting the job search (if they even know these should be priorities). Equally, balancing work and school can exacerbate challenges (Killam, 2014), especially when making the transition from underclassman to upperclassman, or for transfer students, during their first-year.

“The ability to establish connections with others and a sense of belonging at the university are necessary for success” (Killam, 2014, p. 33); therefore, when transfer students have difficulty in making the adjustment, added pressures and anxiety might occur (Archambault, 2015). Fitting in for students who feel different, experiencing the impact of spiritual and religious identities, and having a lower SES background may also cause further angst (Zavadil & Kooymen, 2014). Most importantly, “increased campus involvement meets numerous student needs that are uncovered during the counseling process” (N. R. Booth, Travis, Borzumato-Gainey, & Degges-White, 2014, p. 69). In helping students find their place, Schlossberg’s Support domain continues to remain important for student well-being.

Summary

When asked about how to build a transfer receptive culture, Bonita Jacobs, founder of NISTS, told the Chronicle of Higher Education that we often place transfer students in a package, and they often do not fit within this package (Hoover, 2010). “At some four-year institutions, students who start at community colleges have long been afterthoughts, small pieces
in the enrollment-management puzzle” (Hoover, 2010, p. 1). To change this misconception and move from a transfer friendly college to a transfer receptive one, it takes understanding each of the four domains and corresponding literature addressed. To promote transfer student success means to know why these students choose to transfer, different types of mobility and pathways, who transfer students are in regard to demographic characteristics, and what support and strategies students need to persist.

Although not for two- to four-year transfer students specifically, Li (2010) offers some helpful insight which provides greater awareness and support for the transfer population as it relates to retention and persistence. Interestingly, the study’s conceptual framework categorizes three reasons students leave four-year institutions after transferring: 1) academic performance; 2) financial factors; and 3) institutional attributes such as size, culture, and climate. These same reasons are consistent with the literature and factors associated with transfer student success.

Research also shows a staggering number of students who begin their journey at a new institution, but leave before attaining a degree (Marling, 2013). As seen in the noted literature, and according to (Handel, 2013), the transition, particularly from a two- to four-year institution, is a difficult one to navigate. However, there is a gap in the literature pertaining to two- to four-year retention and persistence at private colleges and universities specifically. This is the area where this study hopes to contribute to the current body of knowledge.

With a diverse blend of characteristics, experiences, and academic portfolios, the transfer student population remains dynamic and nontraditional in scope (Hirschy, 2017). Whether understanding the impact of serving a diverse student population and transfer mobility or considering effects of advising and student engagement, each of these areas is further emphasized in the conceptual framework as outlined throughout this document.
CHAPTER III: METHODS

Introduction

A multi-case study, this research was designed to address a dearth of literature focusing on undergraduate transfer students from two- to four-year private institutions. Through a quantitative and qualitative approach, the researcher completed a descriptive data analysis (n = 2,086) and semi-structured student interviews (n = 10). According to (Yin, 2003), executing a multi-case study should not be taken lightly, as it requires significant time, resources, and potential challenges. However, “most multi-case designs are likely to be stronger than single-case designs” (Yin, 2003, p. 19). This approach was specifically relevant and appropriate as it sought to maximize external validity by looking at more than one sample. The units of analysis in this study were students as the researcher collected results, provided an analysis, and drew conclusions related to secondary data, student experiences, and institutional programs and resources at the selected four-year institutions.

"Increasing the effectiveness of two- to four-year college transfer is critical for meeting national goals for college attainment and promoting upward social mobility" (Jenkins & Fink, 2016, p. 1). Therefore, this study sought to help private four-year institutions identify best practices and touchpoints for what policies, programs, and/or support efforts have potentially the highest impact for transfer students from community colleges. There was also benefit for the four-year institutions in this study as outcomes and recommendations will be shared with them directly.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to identify what kinds of students are transferring from two-year community colleges to four-year private institutions, and for those currently persisting
(specifically within one year of graduating with their bachelor’s degree), what contributed to their ability to be successful. To accomplish this objective, the study addresses two main research questions:

\[ \text{RQ1} – \text{What are the characteristics of a four-year private community college transfer student?} \]

\[ \text{RQ2} – \text{What potential factors are related to their retention and persistence at a private institution?} \]

These questions serve as the lens through which the researcher studied and analyzed secondary data provided by both participating institutions and results from semi-structured student interviews.

**Institution Profiles**

The sampling design used in this study was non-probability in the selection of institutions, as both the two- and four-year targeted populations were decided by the researcher. Purposeful sampling and rationale for the selection of the four-year private institutions is grounded in what Patton (1990) believes as *information-rich cases* for purposes of in-depth study. The strategy behind the selection of four-year institutions also takes a *criterion sampling approach* (Patton, 1990) meaning predetermined criteria such as location, classification as a private school, and the enrollment of transfer students from a primary community college system, were each important. Furthermore, the sampling rule was that students must have transferred from a specific community college system to a specific four-year private institution in proximity (Two-Year Community College A to Four-Year Private Institution A and Two-Year Community College B to Four-Year Private Institution B). This rule was appropriate for the
research questions as it assisted in capturing comparable datasets where information was accessible.

Meanwhile, both two-year institutions were the largest feeder schools to the noted four-year institutions (including four-years), meaning the highest number of transfer students, as reported by the universities, came from the community colleges used in this study. It is also important to note that the two-year college associated with Institution A is a system with *individually accredited colleges*. The two-year college associated to Institution B has several campuses but is *one accredited institution*. For purposes of this study, and in both its quantitative and qualitative methods, the researcher did not separate or isolate a student by a community college campus or location, but rather considered them part of the greater system.

Four-year Institution A and Institution B are described in more detail below. Information by Carnegie Classifications, “a leading framework for recognizing and describing institutional diversity in the U.S. higher education for the past four and half decades” is also noted (Carnegie Classifications, 2017, p. 1). In addition, both institutions have high six-year graduation rates of more than 80 percent for first-year students. Although not every descriptor below is shared for both, variety in institutional profiles is provided to give a better understanding of the four-year universities in this study.

**Institution A**

According to Barron’s Profiles of American Colleges, Institution A is considered *most competitive*. It is a mid-sized religiously affiliated private not-for-profit university located in the Southwest region of the U.S. With a total student population of 10,000-12,000 – including undergraduate and graduate students – it has high research activity and is considered a full-time, *more selective* institution, according to Carnegie Classifications
The university is also highly residential (over 50 percent live on campus), the average age of an undergraduate student is 20, and the percentage of minority students is nearly 30 percent. International student enrollment is at just over 15 percent of all students, and the total full-time transfer population is under 10 percent of the student body. Approximately 30 percent of all students are involved in Greek life.

At Institution A, a transferrable GPA of 2.70 or higher is considered competitive for admission. The university also has merit scholarships specifically designed for transfer students who have 30 or more credit hours and who graduated from high school at least one calendar year before applying. For more competitive scholarships (e.g., half tuition for up to five terms), transfer students must have a minimum of a 3.70 GPA and 50 transferrable hours. A total of 10 full-tuition scholarships (up to five terms) are available for community college transfer students transferring from specific two-year institutions.

Although new student orientation is required, sessions include a mix of incoming first-year and transfer students, as do extended orientation programs offered. The institution does not have full-time dedicated staff for transfer programs or a transfer center model. The total cost of attendance, including room and board, it is more than $60,000 per year.

**Institution B**

According to Barron’s Profiles of American Colleges, Institution B is considered *highly competitive*. It is like Institution A in that it is a mid-sized religiously affiliated private not-for-profit university located in the Southwest region of the U.S. Its total student population is also 10,000-12,000, with a significantly lesser number of graduate students than Institution A. According to Carnegie Classifications, it too has high research activity and is considered a full-time, more selective institution, but with a higher transfer-in rate. The university is highly
residential (approximately 50 percent live on campus), the average age of an undergraduate student is 20, and the percentage of minority students is nearly 25 percent. Of its fall 2018 entering class, approximately 18 percent were transfer students with minority students at nearly 40 percent as compared to just over 20 percent of incoming first-years. The total full-time transfer population is more than 15 percent of the student body and approximately 40 percent of all students are involved in Greek life.

At Institution B, a transferrable GPA of 2.70 or higher is also considered competitive for admission. The university has merit scholarships specifically designed for transfer students who have at least a 3.25 GPA and 27 or more credit hours. For more competitive scholarships (e.g., $15,000 per year for three years), transfer students must have a minimum of a 3.65 GPA and 45 or more credit hours. A total of five full-tuition scholarships (up to three years) are available for transfer students with a minimum of a 3.85 GPA and 60 credit hours.

Although there are dedicated transfer orientation options, in-person orientation is not required, and extended orientation opportunities offer transfer small groups at select times in the summer and spring. Similar but different than Institution A, Institution B does not have full-time dedicated staff for transfer students but does have a transfer center model with staff members who support programming. Around the time secondary data was collected, the university also shared a full-time transfer coordinator had been approved and the search process would start later in the year. The total cost of attendance, including room and board, is more than $60,000 per year.

**Descriptive Data Analysis Design**

To answer RQ1, the researcher conducted a secondary data analysis of students who transferred to Institution A and Institution B from the selected community colleges between fall
2011 to fall 2018. The time period was determined based on what both four-year institutions could provide; therefore, fall 2011 was the farthest back the researcher could collect. To ensure confidentiality, all information was de-identified by using a unique identifier for each student, a number assigned by the four-year institution before data were sent to the researcher. Overall, the descriptive data analysis design was conducted to accomplish two main objectives: 1) to gather and review personal and demographic characteristics of those who transferred from the designated two-year system to the designated four-year institution within the noted time period; 2) to analyze a series of variables and their relationships to one another such as academic program status (e.g., whether the student was active, completed or withdrew), race/ethnicity, and veteran status, to name a few. Exhibit E, as further described below, includes each variable, operational definitions, and recode descriptions.

Equally important, building consistent datasets was critical as one institution may code or run specific data points differently. The researcher mitigated this concern by keeping data requests as streamlined as possible. To best determine factors related to two- to four-year persistence and retention, it was important to compare “apples to apples.” Therefore, strong partnerships with Institutional Research and Enrollment Management teams were instrumental as this phase largely depended on efficiency and accessibility of data to move forward. Although it was impossible to ensure 100 percent accuracy among the data, working closely with these groups helped alleviate potential consequences such as gaps and/or incongruences.

Furthermore, comparing true parallels for both two- to four-year samples was also important for internal and external validity. For the latter, the dataset allows this study to be easily replicated by giving institutions specific variables to request, adapt, and work from. In addition, internal validity was accomplished by specifically targeting what the study was
intended to measure – potential factors pertaining to persistence and retention for two- to four-year transfer students at private institutions.

To dive deeper, the secondary data variables, listed in Appendix E, were used to operationalize key concepts of interest: last school attended, admit term (semester and year), gender, race/ethnicity, person of color, first-generation status, veteran status, age as of first term at four-year, nontraditional student (those ages 25 and older), total transfer hours, total hours from associated two-year institution, transfer GPA, first GPA at four-year, cumulative GPA at four-year, max enrollment term (that is, the last term the student was enrolled at four-year), academic program status (active, completed, discontinued), primary major (recoded by the researcher as STEM and non-STEM related fields), aid year (semester and year) the student received financial aid, if any, Pell Grant eligibility, and last, unmet financial need (total dollar amount of unmet need, if any). Each of these variables directly or indirectly relates to Schlossberg’s Self or Support domains, and the secondary data were aggregate in format.

Both this descriptive data analysis and the qualitative design, as addressed in the next section, aimed to investigate a multi-level approach to learn how an institution supports its two-to four-year transfer students and what kind of support and strategies potentially have the highest impact. Through this inductive and deductive lens, the research is both exploratory and explanatory. Marling (2013) believes that a “national push to standardize data collected for transfer students will require institutions not previously engaged in broad-based data collection to revise their procedures, and potentially strain existing resources” (p. 7). This study can help and provide private colleges and universities a framework for addressing potential two- to four-year transfer outcomes.
Qualitative Study Design

From a qualitative perspective, and to answer aspects of both RQ1 and RQ2, the researcher selected five transfer students from Institution A and five transfer students from Institution B (a total of 10) who intended to graduate with their bachelor’s degree within one academic year. Each student completed a 60-90-minute semi-structured interview and had to be someone who directly transferred from the specified two-year institution in this study. Essentially, this component of data collection gave a heartbeat to the narrative as it provided a holistic view of transfer students’ experiences. This approach was appropriate as it helped determine, better than a mere quantitative analysis of institutional data sets, what specific programs, policies, and/or support efforts have made a positive impact for those successfully navigating the baccalaureate pathway. According to Booth, Colomb and Williams (2008), a key driver in supporting a researcher’s claim is to provide both reasons and evidence for their argument. In this multi-case study, the researcher’s goal was to achieve both, through a combined descriptive data analysis and qualitative design.

A qualitative design was the strongest way to peel back layers related to programs, policies and/or support efforts positively impacting transfer success. Additionally, by conducting semi-structured interviews with five students at each private institution studied, data collection was rich in evidence and validity. Appendix C provides the student-focused interview protocol developed for this multi-case study. By recording and synthesizing key themes based on Schlossberg’s 4 Ss, as depicted in the conceptual framework in Appendix D, this approach was a practical technique to gather more introspective results. Observations of student groups or programs would have been an alternative. However, semi-structured in-person interviews were best suited to capture open-ended questions and more in-depth, personalized experiences.
Participants

To explain further, the researcher wanted to interview students intending to graduate within one academic year as interest and accessibility were more easily attainable than conducting interviews with students who had already completed. In addition, these students were persisting and experiencing transitions first-hand. This approach – adapted from Schlossberg’s Transition Theory – shed light on both research questions, and provided a better insight than numbers, percentages, or trends could solely convey on paper. Students who participated also received a $25 VISA gift card in appreciation for their time. All in-person interviews were recorded and transcribed for research purposes only.

In recruiting interviewees, faculty, staff, and administrator contacts within the researcher’s professional network were utilized for recommendations of potential participants. The researcher gave colleagues a list of criteria and asked for students involved on-campus as well as recommendations for students who were not. All those who participated received a recruitment email, shown in Appendix B, which provided the project title, purpose, involvement specifics, risks, benefits, and contact information for the Principal Investigator (PI) should there be additional questions. Those selected were also asked to provide consent, and each student received an informed consent document (Appendix A following IRB approval documentation) via email well in advance of the interview time. The participation explanation and consent form was required by each participant before the start of the interview and included a more in-depth introduction, study purpose, involvement specifics, risk and benefits, costs description, a confidentiality statement, and participant rights. The last page included a request for signature and a separate confirmation section regarding audio recordings.
Instrumentation

The data collection instrument for the qualitative methods design included a comprehensive list of questions that were asked in participant interviews. Appendix C provides the full protocol. In the first few minutes of the semi-structured interview, students were asked to share about themselves including where they grew up, about their family, educational background, work experience, etc. As a precursor to questions related to the Self domain the students were also asked to describe themselves in 3-5 words and/or phrases.

The next part of the interview included questions in relation to the Situation domain, which specifically focused on the students’ experiences when transitioning to the four-year private institution. Questions included prompts such as factors they considered when deciding to attend a private institution, what challenges, if any, they faced, and a description of their overall transition, including whether they were involved at their community college.

When starting questions pertaining to the Self domain, the researcher referred to the personal and/or demographic characteristics shared at the beginning of the interview – a tie to RQ1 – to see if students believed any of these characteristics and/or qualities directly impacted their persistence at their current institution.

The Support domain was primarily made up of questions associated with programs, resources, and/or opportunities provided by the four-year private institution. Topics such as first-year or transfer-year experience programs, academic advising, on-campus involvement, utilization of academic resources, and persons and/or programs with high positive impact to the student were each addressed.

For the Strategies domain, students were asked whether they had ever thought about leaving their current institution, and what specific strategies they had developed and/or executed
throughout their transfer experience. This intentional question specifically aimed to identify RQ2 – what potential factors were related to student persistence and the ability for the university to retain them. Students were also asked to reflect on their first semester and if they would change anything. This question as well any advice they would give other two-year transfer students to their current institution were instrumental in better identifying, more than descriptive data, what had influenced these students in positive and/or negative ways.

**Risks, Benefits, and Confidentiality**

Minimal risk existed to participants and all identifying participant information remained strictly confidential. Benefits included a contribution to literature as there is limited research on two- to four-year transfer students at private institutions. Although there were no tangible benefits for actual participants, beyond the VISA gift card, this invitation did allow for personal reflection and the opportunity potentially to help future transfer students at the private institutions.

For the purposes of confidentiality, no identifying information was recorded on research documents. For interviews, a code sheet was created to protect identities using a naming system. For the secondary data request, institutions gave each student a unique identifier before sending the researcher data for analysis, and no names or ID numbers were received. For interviews, identification was based on this same coding system. Students were given pseudonyms as described in Chapter IV of this document.

**Methods of Data Analysis**

According to Booth et al. (2008), finding a solution to the research problem, and justifying both through reasons and evidence, are critical to making a good argument. By including a descriptive data analysis with a supplemental qualitative approach, the researcher
designed a study with high generalizability that provides hard numbers and relatable anecdotes. To help support transfer conversations nationally, a combined descriptive data analysis and qualitative design provide a strong argument for why intentional support of transfer students, especially at four-year private institutions, is important.

Additionally, the key concepts measured in this study were centered on student success, specifically retention and persistence for two- to four-year transfer students. Touchpoints such as scholarships and financial aid, orientation programs, transfer resources, faculty/staff support, friends/family support, and sense of community services were also addressed. To best operationalize these specific concepts, it was imperative to strictly define what could be measured, quantitatively and empirically, within the study.

Appendix F is a detailed breakdown of the research questions, methods of data analysis, and indicators to help better explain the study. In short, the Research Question column lists both RQ1 and RQ2 as addressed in this study. For RQ1 the primary method of data analysis was quantitative in scope; the secondary was qualitative. For RQ2, the primary method of data analysis was reversed with qualitative as the primary and quantitative as the secondary.

The Used Indicators column specifically addresses how the research question was addressed (e.g., descriptive variables drawn from the secondary data analysis and/or specific research questions from the qualitative interviews). Last, the Type of Analysis column provides examples of how the dimension/measurement was explored in more detail. For example, for RQ1, quantitative indicators pertaining to characteristics such as gender, age range, first-generation status, veteran status, and race/ethnicity were analyzed through outputs in SPSS, specifically using frequency tables, crosstabs, pie charts, and line graphs. For RQ2, in identifying potential factors related to retention and persistence, specific research questions are listed, and
coding and themes by domain/category (specifically for Support, Strategies, and Other) are noted as the type of analysis conducted.

**Summary**

To emphasize further, the units of analysis in this study were students as the researcher specifically looked at indicators relating to programming, policies, and resources that impact two-year community college transfer students at private institutions. This analysis was appropriate for RQ1 and RQ2 as it directly addresses potential factors related to student persistence and retention. According to Marling (2013) data provides justification for transfer student resources. If student affairs practitioners, academic departments, and/or admission and recruitment teams at private institutions have a reliable and generalizable study to follow or implement, these groups can better replicate and identify common themes. Through a combined descriptive data analysis and qualitative approach, this study has the potential to shift transfer conversations among personnel at private institutions. It paints a profile for which institutional efforts are potentially making a difference in whether two-year transfer students are staying or dropping out.

Last, although the researcher is unable to define fully concrete indicators related to transfer student success, it is possible to provide four-year private institutions recommendations for how best to support community college transfer students. As someone who personally transferred from a two- to four-year private institution, the researcher remained as objective as possible. Analyzing datasets given by the institutions directly mitigated such biases. For qualitative interviews, the specific interview protocol was followed.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Descriptive Data Analysis

The following analysis of descriptive data tells what personal and demographic characteristics make up community college transfer students at four-year private institutions (RQ1). All outputs in this section were found by using the SPSS software, and as noted in Chapter III, Exhibit E lists all variables, operational definitions, and recode descriptions. Data for both institutions are also described side-by-side, not to necessarily compare one to the other, but to interpret more accurately the multi-case study. Although the four-year institutions have some similarities, as noted in Chapter III, findings show variances in transfer populations, and in some ways, specific data looking at persistence and retention.

As visually depicted in Figure 4.1, the original dataset consisted of 2122 cases (Institution A = 771; Institution B = 1351). Of this dataset, only those students who transferred to the selected four-year private institutions from the specified two-year institutions between fall 2011 and fall 2018 were included, a combination of full- and part-time. In addition, dual credit students were not identifiable when receiving the data. More difficult than with first-year students from high school, institutions can only see whether students had transfer credit prior to matriculation. For many transfer students, institutions do not know when they graduated high school and could not say for certain if transfer credit was dual or not.

Of the 2122 cases, there were a total of 34 students with missing data, all of whom had zero transfer hours. In addition, two cases had outlier transfer GPAs – one that had “41” and the other text rather than a number. For this reason, a total of 36 cases were removed from the dataset completely which gave a new n = 2086 (Institution A = 759; Institution B = 1327).
The removal of these cases was important, for without any transfer hours from the two-year institutions in this study, there would be no way to ensure these students were in fact part of the sample. There was also a total of 261 students of the 2086 who did not have a first-term GPA at their four-year institution. These students were either in their first semester and had not received a GPA when the secondary data was requested or had discontinued. The researcher had to create a binary variable for transfer GPA (0 = no transfer GPA, 1 = students who had a transfer GPA) in SPSS to accurately recode and produce outputs. When excluding these 261 students from results relating to academic performance, the new total is n = 1825. Last, specific findings related to retention and persistence have a subsection of only those students who enrolled between fall 2011 and fall 2016 (n = 1512). Analyzing just this window of time allowed for a more complete picture of those students who might have transferred with junior-level status and could complete their baccalaureate degree program in two years. The researcher also accounted for skewed percentages, as transfer students within this sample were the most likely to complete given the respective timeframe.

Figure 4.1: Web Visual of Descriptive Dataset Counts
To provide the four-year private institutions in this study a more comprehensive picture of their two-year transfer students from their largest feeder schools, the researcher aimed to provide more than mere demographics. Figure 4.2 below shows the number of incoming transfer students from the selected two-year institutions over time and by semester (fall, spring, summer). Both Institution A and Institution B are represented in the line graph, which is divided into three sections to show data by semester.

In fall 2013, it is apparent that both four-year institutions admitted close to the same number of transfer students from the community colleges (88 and 85, respectively); however, before and after this time, the numbers for fall semester enrollment drastically change with Institution A admitting fewer two-year transfer students than Institution B. The middle section of Figure 4.2, representing spring semesters, shows that Institution B has increased spring transfer enrollment, especially over the last three-to-four years. For both universities, summer transfer admits have remained somewhat stagnant.

Overall, considering the total amount of incoming transfer students from these large feeder schools, admission of transfer students from the two-year institutions is at or around the same percentage by semester (Fall: 72-73 percent, Spring: 23-24 percent, Summer: 3-4 percent).
Moreover, when analyzing the total number of transfer hours, students transferring to Institution A had an average of 59 (m = 59.3022). Students at Institution B had an average slightly less at 55 (m = 54.8576). Although minimums were consistent at 6 hours for Institution A and 3 hours for Institution B, the most striking difference was in maximum counts ranging from 151 to 186. Analysis of how many of these total transfer hours came from the two-year institution explicitly in this study revealed Institution A was an average of 51 (m = 51.46) with a maximum of 124 hours and Institution B was an average of 41 (m = 41.17) with a maximum of 113 hours. If students, on average, are taking 15 credit hours a semester, which can vary as many community college students attend part-time, results show a large proportion of two- to four-year transfer students within this study are spending at least one year at their prior institution before making the transition.
Before addressing student demographics, retention and persistence, academic performance, and student financial aid, the study’s sample as it relates to academic majors is insightful. In data collection, students’ primary majors were received. To best operationalize for purposes of this study and its research questions, the researcher recoded this information to include fields related or within Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and non-STEM related fields. For the latter, and true for both four-year private institutions, approximately 60 percent of transfer students are in non-STEM related academic programs (e.g., education, social work, communication studies) and approximately 40 percent are in STEM related fields (e.g., computer science, nursing, accounting). For purposes of scope, such insight is for descriptive purposes only and is subjective as definitions of STEM may vary. As addressed in Chapter V under recommendations for further research, a closer examination of academic programs is suggested.

**Student Demographics**

In determining what characteristics make up a four-year private community college transfer student, as RQ1 asks, analyzing personal demographics was especially important – a direct tie to the *Self* domain. Although the purpose of this study was not to compare Institution A and Institution B, the following outputs and analysis unpack these populations more closely. Tables throughout show both institutions side-by-side to provide a holistic perspective of the data and to determine if any trends or themes arise. Gender, age ranges, traditional vs. nontraditional, first-generation status, veteran status, and race/ethnicity are each identified.

For gender, Institution A had 53.4 percent females and Institution B had 57.2 percent, both relatively consistent with overall male to female ratios for the student body. As shown in Table 4.1, age ranges were informative, showing how old students were when entering their first
term at the four-year institution. As noted in Appendix E, a series of dummy variables by age range was created (Under 18, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64). Institution A had 72.1 percent of transfer students, within the sample, between the ages of 18-24 where Institution B had 63.4 percent.

This finding is notable because age became a prevalent finding in qualitative results explained further in this chapter. Students under the age of 18 and over the age of 55, made up a very little percentage of the population. In further analysis, the researcher found that the oldest student at both institutions was 59. For transfer students coming from community colleges, most of whom have rich diversity in age and experiences, understanding the makeup and climate of their new institutions is critical. This information helps practitioners, educators and administrators become better informed about their students and their potential needs.

Table 4.1

Breakdown of Age Ranges by Four-Year Institution (n = 2086)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Institution A</th>
<th>Institution B</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>1 (0.1%)</td>
<td>2 (0.2%)</td>
<td>3 (0.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>547 (72.1%)</td>
<td>841 (63.4%)</td>
<td>1388 (66.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>165 (21.7%)</td>
<td>339 (25.5%)</td>
<td>504 (24.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>38 (5.0%)</td>
<td>113 (8.5%)</td>
<td>151 (7.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>6 (0.8%)</td>
<td>29 (2.2%)</td>
<td>35 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>2 (0.3%)</td>
<td>3 (0.2%)</td>
<td>5 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>759 (100.0%)</td>
<td>1327 (100.0%)</td>
<td>2086 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correspondingly, when breaking the noted ranges into traditionally aged (24 and younger) and nontraditional in age (25 and older), Institution A had 68.1 percent under the traditionally aged category; Institution B had 59.2 percent. With nearly a 10 percent difference in those considered nontraditional (31.9 percent versus 40.8 percent), as Figure 4.3 depicts, this illustration is significant. Although both four-year private institutions are similar in many ways,
from general size, cost of attendance, religious affiliation, and highly selective, transfer populations, specific to this study, considerably differ in age.

Figure 4.3: Traditional and Nontraditional Breakdown by Four-Year Institution (n = 2086); Note: Traditional age is defined as ages 24 and younger

To further interpret the makeup of transfer students from two- to four-year private institutions (RQ1), the researcher also reviewed first-generation status. From this information, results can further inform four-year institutions about their transfer population and potentially compare outcomes with other first-generation students on campus. As Table 4.2 shows, Institution A had complete data with 5.4 percent of transfer students from the two-year institution as first-generation college goers. Although Institution B was unable to fully provide first-generation status for all students as this variable is not tracked in Transfer Admission or Institutional Research, the university contact did share that he hoped it would be in the future. At the time secondary data was received, Institution B had nearly 70 percent of unidentifiable/missing data with 15.6 percent of students falling under the first-generation umbrella.
Table 4.2

*First-Generation Status by Four-Year Institution (n = 2086)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Institution A</th>
<th>Institution B</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not First-Generation</td>
<td>718 (94.6%)</td>
<td>198 (14.9%)</td>
<td>916 (43.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>41 (5.4%)</td>
<td>207 (15.6%)</td>
<td>248 (11.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Data</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>922 (69.5%)</td>
<td>922 (44.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>759 (100.0%)</td>
<td>1327 (100.0%)</td>
<td>2086 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next demographic variable addressed was veteran status. Data showed that Institution A had a total of 13.6 percent where Institution B had 6.5 percent less. When the researcher analyzed overall age ranges for this subpopulation, the majority fell between the ages of 25-34; Institution A with 35.1 percent under this category and Institution B 24.8 percent, respectively. The second age range by percentage was 35-44 with a breakdown of 10.5 percent for Institution A and 21.2 percent for Institution B. As illustrated, with Institution B having approximately 10 percent more nontraditional students defined in this study as ages 25 and older, student veterans made up a considerable part of this demographic.

For the final demographic variable, there were slight variations in the way institutions named types of race/ethnicity when sending the initial data to the researcher (e.g., “Hispanic of Any Race” and “Hispanic/Latino”, “Multi-Ethnic” and “Two or More Races”). The researcher compared these side-by-side to ensure consistent and accurate groups. Dummy codes included the following, and all were defined the same by Institution A and Institution B: American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, Multi-Ethnic, Non-Resident Alien (Any Race), and White, Race and Ethnicity Unknown.

As depicted in Figure 3.1, the side-by-side illustration of categories representing two percent or more of the transfer population studied is striking. From these results, the most
considerable differences relate to race/ethnicity are White, Non-Resident Alien (considered international students), and Asian. Most notably perhaps, Institution A has less White students at 37 percent in comparison to Institution B at 54 percent. For international students, the difference was 12 percent between universities with Institution A at 15 percent.

![Pie charts showing race/ethnicity breakdown for Institutions A and B](image)

Figure 3.1: Race/Ethnicity Breakdown by Four-Year Institution, Representation of Categories Representing 2 Percent or More (n = 2086)

To demonstrate and unpack race/ethnicity in a different way, the researcher also created a new Person of Color variable and analyzed such data by four-year institution. This process allowed for a specific representation potentially helpful for practitioners and educators wanting to better understand or communicate about two-year transfer populations. For example, as shown in Table 4.3, this crosstab is a different viewpoint to race/ethnicity from the above pie charts. To most accurately deconstruct the given data, Non-Resident Alien (a total of 7.4 percent of the total transfer population studied) and Race/Ethnicity Unknown (a total of 1.5 percent of the total transfer population studied) were excluded. All other categories such as American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino and
Multi-Ethnic were grouped under Person of Color. For Institution A, this totaled 47.2 percent and for Institution B, 42.7 percent.

Table 4.3

Table 4.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Institution A</th>
<th>Institution B</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>281 (37.0%)</td>
<td>693 (52.2%)</td>
<td>974 (46.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person of Color</td>
<td>358 (47.2%)</td>
<td>567 (42.7%)</td>
<td>925 (44.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Resident Alien (Any Race)</td>
<td>115 (15.2%)</td>
<td>40 (3.0%)</td>
<td>155 (7.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity Unknown</td>
<td>5 (0.7%)</td>
<td>27 (2.0%)</td>
<td>32 (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>759 (100.0%)</td>
<td>1327 (100.0%)</td>
<td>2086 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the demographic characteristics discussed (gender, age as of first term at four-year, first-generation status, veteran status, and race/ethnicity) specifically answer RQ1 (the characteristics of a four-year private community college transfer student). In addition, it serves as specific indicators (noted in Appendix F) for the descriptive data analysis portion of this study. Importantly, such indicators also directly tie to the Self domain, specifically demographic characteristics and potentially a foreshowing to topics such as age, as age may impact students’ experiences in-and-outside the classroom.

Retention and Persistence

To evaluate and analyze retention and persistence, the researcher looked at academic program status (e.g., active, completed, discontinued) through varying perspectives. In generating these outputs in SPSS, the researcher used a series of crosstabs to compare academic program status with veteran status, race/ethnicity, and person of color. This decision was not
meant to address or argue causation, but rather, as shown in Appendix F, to provide a descriptive
data analysis using noted indicators. More specifically, retention is assessed by incoming cohort;
that is, for each incoming class beginning with fall 2011, 2-year, 4-year and 6-year graduation
rates are provided as applicable.

This section also addresses RQ2 as it focuses on students’ persistence and retention at
private institutions. As Table 4.4 shows, when first receiving data from participating four-year
universities, academic program status was categorized into one of the following: active in
program, cancelled, completed program, deceased, discontinued (meaning students who had
withdrawn), dismissed, and leave of absence. Suspension due to academic misconduct or other
campus life related circumstances may be reasons for dismissal. For those who discontinued,
institutions were unable to provide reasons why or where these students went. Accordingly, for
all transfer students in the study (n = 2086), Table 4.4 displays initial findings relating to how
many students are still active – for Institution A, 27.1 percent and Institution B, 41.6 percent,
congruent with Figure 4.2, when evaluating the number of incoming transfer students from
selected two-year institutions over time and by semester.

Table 4.4

Academic program Status Breakdown by Four-Year Institution (n = 2086)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Institution A</th>
<th>Institution B</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active in Program</td>
<td>206 (27.1%)</td>
<td>552 (41.6%)</td>
<td>758 (36.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancelled</td>
<td>19 (2.5%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>19 (0.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Program</td>
<td>392 (51.6%)</td>
<td>513 (38.7%)</td>
<td>905 (43.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deceased</td>
<td>1 (0.1%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>1 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discontinued</td>
<td>134 (17.7%)</td>
<td>262 (19.7%)</td>
<td>396 (19.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissed</td>
<td>3 (0.4%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>3 (0.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave of Absence</td>
<td>4 (0.5%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>4 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>759 (100.0%)</td>
<td>1327 (100.0%)</td>
<td>2086 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although it was insightful to see the above breakdown by percentage, the researcher was particularly focused on those who were admitted between fall 2011 and fall 2016 (n = 1512). This subpopulation of the sample better addresses retention and persistence as these students would have had the time and opportunity to graduate if they had entered the four-year institution with junior-level status. The researcher also recoded the categories in Table 4.4 into three narrower groups: active (all those active in program), completed (all those who completed the program) and discontinued (those who cancelled, were deceased or dismissed or had a leave of absence).

As Table 4.5 below explains, approximately 25 percent of transfer students, at both institutions, entering between fall 2011 and fall 2016 have discontinued. For Institution A, 64.9 percent have completed; at Institution B, only 56.5 percent of students completed. This table also verifies that nearly 20 percent of transfer students in the sample attending Institution B are still enrolled/active. At Institution A, the number is approximately 10 percent.

Table 4.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>Discontinued</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution A</td>
<td>62 (10.3%)</td>
<td>392 (64.9%)</td>
<td>150 (24.8%)</td>
<td>604 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution B</td>
<td>173 (19.1%)</td>
<td>513 (56.5%)*</td>
<td>222 (24.4%)</td>
<td>908 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>235 (15.5%)</td>
<td>905 (59.9%)</td>
<td>372 (24.6%)</td>
<td>1512 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Completed percentage at Institution B may be lower due to the number of students still active.

In exploring the rich dataset further, the researcher also compared academic program status with three additional variables: 1) veteran status; 2) person of color; and 3) race/ethnicity. First, as already noted, veterans at both private four-year institutions are automatically enveloped under the transfer student population. Although this sub-group was not part of the study’s qualitative methods or results, it is an important highlight in the literature and in quantitative
analysis. As Table 4.6 reflects, a total of 126 student veterans were admitted to either Institution A or Institution B between fall 2011 and fall 2016. Of those at Institution A, 9.8 percent are still active, 61 percent have completed, and 29.3 percent have discontinued. Of those at Institution B, 34.1 percent are still active, 56.5 percent have completed, and 9.4 percent have discontinued.

As four-year institutions look to find ways to support student veterans, especially those transferring from two-year community colleges, these results are telling. Not only do they provide insight on whether student veterans are persisting, particularly for Institution B, but also many of this sample are still enrolled. Therefore, institutional support and dedicated resources could help increase retention and completion.

Table 4.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active/Completed/Discontinued Breakdown by Four-Year Institution and Veteran Status, Transfer Students Entering Between Fall 2011 and Fall 2016 (n = 126)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institution A</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institution B</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, to compare academic program status with person of color, the researcher used the same person of color recode from the student demographics section above. For Institution A, the researcher found that of students admitted between fall 2011 and fall 2016 (n = 1512), 11 percent coded as a person of color were still active, 62.7 percent had completed, and 26.4 percent had discontinued. For Institution B, 19.8 percent were active, 53.3 percent completed, and about the same number as Institution A had withdrawn, 26.9 percent respectively.

Third, and as shown in Appendix G, a full breakdown of academic program status by race/ethnicity is provided. When taking the race/ethnicity categories representing more than 2 percent of the population (n = 1512), Figure 4.4 illustrates this study’s findings.
More specifically, Figure 4.4 above gives compelling evidence for why not seeing the transfer population as a homogeneous group is important. From these results, findings show that non-resident aliens (i.e. international students) have the highest completion rate of 73.2 percent with 13.4 percent of this subpopulation as discontinued and the same percentage (13.4 percent) still active. Black/African American students had the lowest completion rate at 50.9 percent, with 34.2 percent discontinued and 14.9 percent active. White, Hispanic/Latino and Asian students were the most comparable as 59.5 percent, 58.9 percent and 59 percent completed. For these same sub-groups discontinued percentages fell between 24.6 and 29.5 percent respectively.

The final retention and persistence piece addressed for this study’s descriptive data analysis was 2-year, 4-year and 6-year graduation rates by four-year institution (as fully provided in Appendix I and Appendix J). Within the same timeframe of fall 2011 and fall 2016, Institution A had a total of 604 students admitted, where Institution B had a total of 908 students.
admitted. The researcher was able to compare student admit terms and their maximum semester enrolled (e.g., when they completed or discontinued); however, was unable to produce SPSS outputs for graduation rates accurately and used Excel to determine percentages.

From these results, Institution A graduates 4x more students at the 2-year mark than Institution B. However, overall 6-year graduate rates are similar (between 73-76 percent). Another interesting comparison is the difference between those students who transfer in during the fall semester versus spring semester. For the latter, 6-year graduation rates fall and range between 48-66 percent.

**Academic Performance**

When analyzing students’ academic performance, the researcher compared means of three GPAs: 1) transfer GPA; 2) first term GPA at the four-year institution; and 3) cumulative GPA at the four-year institution. For all three GPA groups, the researcher created binary variables (e.g., transfer GPA = 1, no transfer GPA = 0; first term GPA = 1, no first term GPA = 0; and cumulative GPA = 1, no cumulative GPA = 0) to ensure that only students who had such variables were included in the SPSS outputs. The researcher also removed all students admitted in fall 2018 (n = 261) as they did not have a first term GPA when the data was collected and therefore would skew averages. This deduction made the new total student count 1825. When comparing first term GPA and cumulative GPA, student counts changed to 1833 and 1849. After attempts to find the reason for this modification and possible anomalies, the researcher was unable to verify. Even so, the percentage of error of overall students in the sample (n = 2086) is less than one percent.

As depicted in Table 4.9, students transferring to Institution A had an average GPA of 3.46 (m = 3.4599) while those transferring to Institution B had an average transfer GPA of 3.30
(m = 3.2975). Similar for students at both four-year universities, average first term GPAs decline (Institution A: 2.95 or 2.9470; Institution B: 2.71 or 2.7906), a theme also found in qualitative results as well as literature related to transfer shock. When examining average cumulative GPAs, these fall just under 3.0 (Institution A: 2.93 or 2.9523; Institution B: 2.88 or 2.8784).

Table 4.7

Means of Transfer GPA (n = 1825), First Term at Four-Year Institution GPA (n = 1833) and Cumulative GPA (n = 1849) Excluding Students Admitted Fall 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Transfer GPA</th>
<th>First Term GPA</th>
<th>Cumulative GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution A</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution B</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For programs and efforts such as transfer orientation, transfer centers, and advising, academic performance as addressed in this subsection provides a clearer picture for how two- to four-year transfer students are performing in the classroom. This information is also relevant as it relates to potential student programming and academic support resources. In relation to this study’s conceptual framework, GPA is potentially representative of two domains – Situation (academic policies/GPA requirements set by four-year institutions) and Self (the effect of transfer shock and/or overall academic rigor felt by transfer students).

**Student Financial Aid and Pell Grant Eligibility**

For the fullest possible picture, the researcher requested financial aid data from both four-year institutions in the study. A total of 5054 duplicated financial aid cases were received, a compilation of both universities. Further review showed that each student in the dataset had financial aid from any source (e.g., merit aid, grants, scholarships) for one or more years. When using a software platform called Paradox to determine the total number of unduplicated cases, or in other words, the number of total students with some financial aid (for one or more aid years),
the researcher found that 1704 students (81.1 percent of total transfer sample) fell under this umbrella. To find these results, restructuring the data in SPSS was also necessary.

Additionally, the researcher also evaluated Pell Grant eligibility among the transfer population studied. Of the 1704 students with financial aid for one more aid year, as shown in Figure 4.5 below, Institution A had approximately 53 percent (n = 408) meet Pell eligibility where Institution B had approximately 65 percent (n = 603). This finding reiterates that although both four-year private institutions are relatively similar in size and cost of attendance, particularly, their transfer makeup is different.

![Pie Chart](image)

**Figure 4.5: Pell Eligibility Breakdown by Four-Year Institution (n = 1704); Note: Only students reported to have financial aid for at least one term year included**

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Everyone has a story. While statistics or mere demographics are beneficial, this study wanted also to focus on resources, relationships, and above all, students – the very students who had transferred to the four-year private institutions from the selected two-year community colleges, the very students who were in fact persisting with an intent to graduate with their bachelor’s degree within one academic year.
Specific to RQ2, insight from qualitative data collection answers what potential factors impact two- to four-year transfer student retention and persistence at private institutions. In the 60-90 minute semi-structured interviews with each of the 10 transfer students within the sample (five from each university), one thing was certain: each of them portrayed a level of commitment, determination, and perseverance that resonated. Their sense of urgency and resolve were apparent. Nearly half of the students interviewed were moved to tears, because to reflect on their process brought them great pride and, at times, a reminder of how difficult a specific challenge, situation, or experience during their transition had been. All shared about their journey through the education pipeline, and all shared that attending a selective private institution had seemed in some way insurmountable, and for some, even impossible. Although reference to Institution A or Institution B equated to a place many of them never thought they would belong, it was apparent these students wanted to beat the odds – for themselves and/or for others.

Furthermore, all but two interviewees had completed their associate degree at their two-year institution, and those who had not were close to completion. One was just shy of hours, the other transferred in more than 70 credit hours but had not followed the necessary curriculum to obtain the credential.

The researcher used an interview protocol, as provided in Appendix C, with questions organized by domain – Situation, Self, Support and Strategies. After the completion of all interviews and transcripts from a professional transcription company were received, the researcher used the Atlas.ti software for coding. A total of 932 quotations and 95 codes were determined. After a second and third round of theming, the researcher continued analyzing data by grouping such codes by domain, a full summary found in Appendix L.
The following qualitative results are organized by the four domains with three key themes from each. These themes were not necessarily based on the number of times a topic was discussed, but rather, key insights the researcher believed most relevant to the study’s research questions. Three topics that did not fall under one category but were notable are included at the end of this chapter. First, however, is a comprehensive overview of students including profile information and a description of the most prevalent domains by interviewee.

**Student Profiles and Prevalent Domains**

Each student interviewed was assigned a pseudonym to ensure that identities were protected. Therefore, these pseudonyms, in no order and by institution, are first introduced through the following descriptions. Appendix K provides a complete list of participant profiles and prevalent domains.

Originally from Central America, _Madeline_ moved to the U.S. at the age of 16. She attends Institution A, is not involved on-campus, and devotes most of her time to academics. “I don't really care what happens socially. I care more about what happens academic wise,” she shared. Madeline also commutes, works off-campus, is traditional in age, and is majoring in a STEM related field. Her most prevalent domain was _Self_. When she reflected on her first year at the private institution, her most tangible takeaway was personal and psychological growth. When attending her community college, she worked 35 hours per week; and although she has had to scale back due to academic rigor and commitments at Institution A, she is still responsible for paying for school.

A former first responder who entered the workforce right after high school, _Ryan_ earned his associate degree in less than two years and attends Institution A on a full-tuition scholarship. He is active in a religious-affiliated organization on campus, is traditional in age, and is majoring
in a non-STEM related field. His most prevalent domain was Support. Consistent reference to a staff member continued throughout the entire interview. “She was a rock and she was so gracious and so kind to me when I was treading water,” he said about the university employee. Ryan was also the most vocal as it related to mental health challenges during his transition process. He was genuine, and one of his primary goals was to help other transfer students on campus.

A former dual credit student who later enrolled full-time at the same community college, Vivian attends Institution A on a full-tuition scholarship awarded by her department and participates in research with a faculty member. She commutes to campus, volunteers in the community, is majoring in a non-STEM related field, and is nontraditional in age (25 or older). Her most prevalent domain was Support. Faculty interactions and mentorships had proved the most valuable part of her transfer experience thus far. Vivian also referenced age a few times throughout the interview. “I would say that I don’t feel like there's a whole lot of diversity, as far as backgrounds. I feel separated, almost. For myself, almost more than anything because of my age,” she explained.

An international student, Trinity attends Institution A, works on-campus, and is actively involved in transfer programs. She was president of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society at her community college, commutes to campus, and is in a non-STEM related major. Her most prevalent domain was Support. The resources and opportunities provided by her on-campus involvement – both at her two- and four-year institutions – were most poignant throughout the interview. The college/campus culture at Institution A was also a prominent theme in Trinity’s responses and reflections. Her insight about faculty and staff was positive, but when asked more about her on-campus experience, she shared “the mainstream culture takes over or it makes other people disappear, seeming like they don't exist.”
The last student for Institution A is also an international student. Michael, a Jack Kent Cooke Scholar, lives in walking distance of campus although he wishes he would have lived in a residence hall to build a better sense of community. He took a few years off before attending college to live abroad, identifies as Muslim, and is majoring in a STEM related field. His most prevalent domain was Support. The Cooke Scholars Program and a faculty mentor at his two-year institution remain a vibrant part of his experience at his current university. He referenced the noted faculty member numerous times and credited her for his success thus far. “She realized my potential ahead of a lot of people,” he felt.

Marie is a Texas native who attended a four-year institution immediately following high school but withdrew after a year and took time off before completing an associate degree. She attends Institution B, is nontraditional in age, a single mother of one young child, and commutes to campus. She identifies as Hispanic and Christian and is in a non-STEM related field. Her most prevalent domain was Self. Her role as a parent was a common thread throughout her interview. “Often times I would put her [interviewee’s daughter] to sleep in the transfer [space], and we would study and do group projects [there]… I would just give her a blanket and headphones and she would sleep until we were done,” Marie explained when describing her first-year at Institution B.

A first-generation Mexican American and first in her family to graduate from both high school and college, Joy completed her associate degree, attends Institution B, is married, works off-campus, and commutes. She identifies as Hispanic and Christian and is in a non-STEM related field. Her most prevalent domain was Support. The impact of scholarships and financial aid allowed her to attend a private school. At one time, she was having trouble making tuition payments and decided to enroll in a nearby four-year public institution. When a last-minute
scholarship was awarded, she decided to stay at Institution B. Committed to paying it forward, she gives back to both her two- and four-year institutions by volunteering with transfer admission and serving as a former student leader in the transfer center.

Born in Texas but lived in Puerto Rico for 18 years, Christopher attends Institution B and is highly dedicated to an on-campus sports-related organization. He commutes more than 30 miles, works on-campus, and has a close tie to his community college. His most prevalent domain was Support. On-campus involvement at Institution B has helped him find community and build leadership and networking skills. Beginning at his two-year institution, “student activities was a great way of getting me exposed to students being involved and the benefit of being involved in college… it just forced me to see some of the best and brightest doing something other than just their classes,” he shared. His family was also an instrumental piece mentioned in stories, and people like his father and brothers served as “influencers.”

A stay-at-home mom for 25 years, Kate was called to the ministry at the age of 50 with hopes of attending seminary post-graduation. After receiving her associate degree, she transferred to Institution B and is majoring in a non-STEM related field. Kate is married, commutes to campus, and identifies as Christian. Her most prevalent domain was Self. Her age, a demographic characteristic she referred to often, impacted her in-and-outside the classroom experiences. From sharing about her attempts to retrieve her high school transcript to dynamics within group work in her classes, Kate makes every effort to use her age and experience as a benefit. She also attended Institution B’s extended orientation program, has participated in study abroad, and has built strong relationships with both faculty and staff members on campus.

Born in Mexico, Gabriella is the final interviewee introduced in this series of student profiles. She moved to the U.S. at a young age, took 10 years off after high school, and
completed an associate degree at her local community college. Enrolled at Institution B, she has two young children, is married, commutes to campus, and is majoring in a non-STEM related field. Her most prevalent domain was Support. Her husband and mother provide continuous encouragement, help with childcare, and financial stability. “My husband and my mom are the only reasons that I can be here at [Institution B]. My mom watches my children and my husband is the head of the household making the only income we have for me to be able to continue school,” she said.

**Situation Domain Findings**

Interview codes selected for the *Situation* domain were directly associated with college choice or selectivity, students’ transition to the four-year private institution, and/or what transfer students experienced during their first year. Nearly all interviewees said they chose Institution A or Institution B for an academic program/major, scholarships and financial aid, and/or the reputation/prestige of the private institution. For Gabriella with two young children, location was also an important factor in selecting her four-year destination. Even more so, she made sure to follow Institution B’s curriculum at her community college as she knew transferring to the specific institution was her goal.

Overall, the three main themes for the *Situation* domain include: 1) differences in college culture and environment matter; 2) the impact of students’ community college experiences are palpable; and 3) navigating the transition to a four-year private institution proves challenging.

**Differences in College Culture and Environment Matter.** As a potential factor related to transfer student persistence and retention at a private institution (RQ2), college culture and environment materialized as a main theme from qualitative interviews. “I knew that the classes were going to be harder based on what everyone had told me, but the part I didn't expect was the
difference in feel,” Ryan shared. He continued by explaining that at his community college “everyone was very chummy… then [when] transferring to Institution A… I went straight into the business school, everybody is very, very professional and the attitude is very strict. That was a culture shock,” he said. The same sentiment resonated with many of the transfer students interviewed. Whether due to competitiveness within a specific academic college or the overall culture of the institution, students’ transition from the two- to four-year private school environment, was for many, an unexpected adjustment.

One specific example substantiating this argument was housing and residence life. When Michael shared about his transfer experience thus far, he believed [Institution A] had “a living commons culture where everybody's connected in that way.” For transfer students who choose to commute and/or who never had the opportunity to live on-campus, attending a highly residential institution was a challenge. Students at Institution B such as Christopher felt a similar way. When describing his first year, he touched on culture:

Initially, there was a feeling like since the culture is so strong, I would never truly be in it, or “one of them” and I still have an inkling of that. As a transfer, being here only three years… I didn't have the freshman experience, the dorm experience. I'm never fully going to be one of those go-getting fraternity kids.

Vivian added, “I don't feel like I'm really fully integrated into Institution A's culture. I feel like the circles I find myself in are not really that representative of the university.” Although these experiences paint an undesirable description of differences in culture and environments, students also described how attending a private institution with strong reputations and prestige brought them pride and motivation to remain enrolled.
When Joy spoke about what made Institution B’s culture unique, she felt that the university was focused on helping students not just make a difference on campus, in the community, or in the city, but on a global level. Different from her two-year institution, or what she believed, she would get a public four-year institution, Joy thought this was an advantage of a private school education.

Marie, a single mother and nontraditional in age, said that although she might not necessarily fit into the culture, she does not think about this anymore. It was as if what once she saw as a setback changed when she approached her transfer experience with a different perspective:

If I look for it, I can see the disconnects and the differences, but if I look for the similarities, I see those more. I think maybe … I just fell in love with my classmates and wanted to be able to help them. Maybe I did take more of a mothering perspective with them, but I've loved it the last year here.

Although some students interviewed felt discouraged by such differences in campus culture, they were choosing to persist, for some, choosing a different outlook.

**Impact of Students’ Community College Experiences are Palpable.** The second main theme under the *Situation* domain was how often students spoke about their community college experience. The impact made by transfer students’ two-year institutions was also connected to other domains such as *Support*. However, students’ transition to the four-year institution and/or what they experienced during their first year often referenced back to either people or programs at their prior college. Trinity, an international student who was actively involved in Phi Theta Kappa, said the friends made at her community college were more like siblings as they continue to encourage her to keep going, to graduate. In addition, Michael spoke about how he learned the
importance of asking questions, getting involved, and participating in on-campus activities at his two-year institution. “Once I got accepted into honors, I actually became an officer for the organization,” he said. This leadership role at his prior institution guided him in the transfer process. From choosing what academic major to pursue and knowing what universities offered (from on-campus resources to financial aid), Michael felt informed, more knowledgeable, and “more prepared” for the transition.

A few of the transfer students interviewed also referenced the importance of knowing “where they came from.” Perhaps most palpable was the notion of not wanting to forget what led them to where they are – that is, the experiences, people, and/or programs that helped students go from a community college to a four-year highly selective institution. Ryan explained this well by sharing “I still know my roots and my roots are [my community college] … that was a huge part of my life… we had this strong community transfer feel.” Wanting to hold on to this sense of connection and identity was salient for many interviewees.

Kate, who returned to college after serving as a stay-at-home mom for more than two decades, believed her community college experience propelled her self-confidence and made her “ready” for a private school setting. At her two-year institution, she participated in more than one honor society, “relearned” how to study, and made a 4.0 GPA. When the opportunity to attend Institution B became reality, Kate wanted to leverage what she had built at her prior college to help with her overall transition and transfer experience.

In contrast, the impact of students’ community college experience also identified potential setbacks for some transfer students during their first year at their new institution. Madeline, not involved on campus and fully dedicated to academics at Institution A, explained it this way:
When I was at [my] community college, I felt that I knew things. I felt I was prepared for everything. I would always ask, and I just felt like I was that one girl that's always asking questions or always knows what's going on in class.

When Madeline transferred, she felt intimidated by in-classroom discussions and began excluding herself from participating. The stark difference between feeling comfortable speaking in class or with faculty to feeling isolated made a significant impact on Madeline’s first-year. This was true for many other transfer students interviewed; another described the transition as not feeling “capable.”

A consistent theme also detected was an overall sense that students’ community colleges (still after transferring to their four-year institution) were places they felt “at home.” Most of the students shared how they volunteered, worked part-time, and stayed connected to faculty, staff, and friends at their prior institutions. Their community college experiences left a meaningful mark on their educational journey.

**Students’ First Year at a Private Institution Proves Challenging.** The only unanimous theme across all 10 qualitative interviews was that navigating the transition to a four-year private institution was difficult. More specifically, there was agreement that transfer students’ *first year* at their new institution was the most trying. As identified in Appendix L (summary of compiled interview codes), some reasons for this challenge were academic rigor, not finding like-minded individuals, imposter syndrome (the feeling they were not smart enough or deserving enough), and commuting to campus.

More, navigating a new institution with vast differences in culture and environment, as explained in prior findings within the *Situation* domain, continued as a prominent theme. “It's not impossible but it's hard to fit in. It takes a good year to fit in, to finally find your crew,” Trinity
shared. “It's just like you're already so overwhelmed by being a transfer student so that doesn't help,” she added. It was not uncommon to hear that many of the students interviewed had found no more than 3-5 people at their new institution with whom they really connected. Therefore, at times, it was learning a new school while also feeling alone or doubting themselves in the process as Michael said:

I think after the second semester I just got used to it, I just numbed myself to the situation… and stopped myself from being, feeling like an impostor. At the third semester… I started becoming part of organizations and I started a professional engineering fraternity as well as meeting friends… [then], I felt okay, at least I feel like I belong.

As later addressed under the Strategies domain, on-campus involvement was one of the many coping mechanisms, as Schlossberg defines, for helping students persist. However, understanding the magnitude in which students’ first year impacted their overall transfer experience is important. To further illustrate, Marie explained that Institution B “broke” her. When the researcher asked what this meant, she continued by describing her first year, emphasizing that the academic discipline required to be “successful at an institution with this caliber” stretched her far past levels she thought possible.

Christopher, also doubted his academic abilities and found it difficult to adjust with a 30+ minute commute, sharing that he would sometimes sleep in his car at night versus driving home. He talked about a time when he asked himself "Why continue? What's the end goal?", believing he would “not [be] as effective… or as impactful” if he did not persist and ultimately graduate.

Although many students discussed having a constant stress of “performing well” in the classroom, it was apparent that when they found like-minded peers (transfer students and non-
transfer students), their acclimation (both socially and academically) was more positive. Ryan, for example, validated the power of building connections and community. “Especially in your first-year,” he explained, the bond you have with other transfer students as they have “the same troubles as you,” is a sense of kinship. For practitioners and faculty members, among others, these findings stress the importance of helping students build both academic and social stability, not just during orientation, but throughout their entire first year.

**Self Domain Findings**

Interview codes selected for the *Self* domain were directly associated with personal and demographic characteristics (e.g., age, socio-economic status), psychological resources or qualities (e.g., self-efficacy, optimism, commitment, empathy, motivation), identity, and non-school responsibilities. Therefore, this part of qualitative interviews had a specific focus on RQ1. The three main themes include: 1) students’ psychological resources play an instrumental role in persistence; 2) the impact of mental health and/or personal insecurities influence student transition; and 3) for some, non-school commitments such as work or parental duties take priority over social acclimation.

**Students’ Psychological Resources Play a Role in Persistence.** One of the first interview questions, as noted in Appendix C, asked students to describe themselves in 3-5 words or phrases. Examples of their answers were comprised of highly relationship oriented: friendly, patient, introspective, devoted, committed, empathetic, compassionate, self-motivated, and determined. Later the researcher asked how/if those personal or demographic characteristics impacted their experience at their current institution. These answers provided compelling evidence that what made many of these students prevail or overcome difficult times in their transition was *tenacity*. For many, their age, maturity, and/or past experiences also equipped them
for challenging situations; others did not want to let themselves down or felt a responsibility to lead by example for a sibling or loved one.

Gabriella especially showed the impact of tenacity and not wanting to “fail.” She had a 2.98 GPA when finishing her pre-business classes, but a minimum GPA for acceptance into the business school was a 3.0. It “completely destroyed me when I got that email saying I didn't get approved… and I was like there's something I have to be able to do,” she said. Rather than considering an alternative degree plan or dropping out (which she contemplated), she decided to write a letter to the dean. She also solicited support from faculty and staff members to submit letters on her behalf. “I didn't want another door closed in my face,” she added. These efforts and perseverance enabled her to gain admission into the business school crediting her resilience and not taking no for an answer.

Another example of a psychological resource (that is, what students brought to their transition/transfer experience) was work ethic. Ryan mentioned “one of the things that really helped was a real work ethic and the work ethic specifically… developed post high school.” As a former first responder, Ryan spoke about his experiences in the workforce prior to attending his community college. While enrolled at his two-year institution he also worked part-time. “That work ethic helped me push through a lot of these [transition] issues,” he reflected.

These examples offer a similar sense of grit (a sense of resolve), as identified and further explained in the Strategies domain later in this chapter. Chiefly, the very characteristics and qualities used when students described themselves at the beginning of interviews (e.g., devoted, committed, determined) were the same characteristics and qualities exercised during their transition. Whether the idea of wanting to help other transfer students (like them) be successful
or a burning desire to stay motivated and “beat the odds,” these qualities were evident throughout the researcher’s qualitative analysis.

**Mental Health and/or Personal Insecurities Influence Student Transition.** Another interesting theme pertaining to the Self domain was the impact of mental health and/or students’ personal insecurities. Ryan, although the most expressive about his health concerns, was not the only student who was vulnerable and transparent when sharing about this obstacle. Many students said feelings such as stress, depression and anxiety became strongholds after transferring. “I was getting so stressed and a lot of other issues were welling up... it was one of those make or break moments, and I was concerned I was going to break,” Ryan confessed. Ryan also started questioning why he was attending his new institution. “Was I here for my parents? Was I here because the opportunity was there? Was I here for myself?” he reflected. When Ryan was concerned for his well-being, he turned to on-campus resources and a religiously affiliated student organization for help.

Although difficult to measure or substantiate, another student believed many transfer students “were depressed” but “did not share it.” For some participants in this multi-case study, their mental health was tested for two specific reasons: 1) academic pressures and 2) feeling “different than” or “secluded from” the campus community, ultimately believing something was wrong with them (referenced as “problem with self” in Appendix L). For Marie, stress and anxiety equated with feeling overextended; Vivian, a former dual credit student who later enrolled full-time at her community college, said that once she arrived at Institution A, she had started going to counseling due to several life changes (not just because of her transfer experience).
Undoubtedly, many students interviewed said one of the biggest stressors was starting a new GPA at their four-year institution. Academic rigor had escalated, and those with financial aid (referenced by eight students) were fighting to keep within the GPA threshold (at least a 3.0 or 3.25 depending on program) – all of this while also trying to acclimate socially.

The concept of personal insecurities or “problem with self” rose to a level of importance as the researcher began coding interview transcripts. Joy, the first to graduate from high school and college in her family, spoke often about not feeling she belonged at Institution B or feeling it was her responsibility for not getting as connected to the campus community as she hoped. “I think it's my fault that I have not made an initiative to introduce myself [to others on campus], or be around as much,” she explained. She continued by saying:

I don't think it's because I'm Hispanic, or I don't think it's my ethnic background. I just think it's my personality that has kept me from letting others in, I guess, letting others know who I am.

Several students referenced feeling like a “failure” at one point in their transition process. Others communicated a sense of fear or regret, not with/at the institution but with themselves. Madeline, who works off-campus, referenced “feeling out of place,” especially in her first semester (connection to findings in the Situation domain). “I know there's transfer students that are really involved on campus, but maybe there's something that I need to do that they're doing?” she said. Personal insecurities as well as a dip in the GPA (received below a 3.0 her first semester) were contributing factors to Madeline’s hardships – and to other students as well.

Despite academic pressures and/or feeling “different than others” on campus, transfer students interviewed remained focused on the end goal – getting to graduation. Findings pointing to mental health challenges and personal insecurities as negative influences on students’

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transition validate literature recommending the importance of counseling and mental health services on college campuses. For practitioners serving transfer students, perhaps these results heighten the importance of early intervention programs and dedicated support.

**Non-School Commitments Usually Take Priority Over Social Acclimation.** For transfer students with competing non-school commitments such as work and/or parental responsibilities, these non-academic obligations typically took priority over acclimating socially on campus. A final theme under the *Self* domain, personal and demographic characteristics such as being a parent, having a spouse or partner, and/or working part- or full-time, became relevant in qualitative findings.

Students such as Ryan, Trinity, Christopher and Marie did not attend Institution A or Institution B’s extended orientation program (both three-day, two-night commitments) because of work obligations. For those like Madeline who have strictly chosen to focus on academics, for example, time spent outside-of-the-classroom is purely dedicated to working off-campus with limited flexibility to attend evening events or activities. For others like Marie and Gabriella, both with younger children, the balance of personal and academic responsibilities is also trying. “I wanted to be as active as I could be… as long as it didn't interfere with time [spent with my daughter], and then too much [from] work. I was okay missing some work, but not with my daughter,” Marie explained.

Although webs of personal and financial support varied from student-to-student, those who did not have to work but had a spouse or partner such as Kate still chose family over immersing socially on-campus. “I've been to half of one football game in my three years here,” Kate shared. “It's like as a transfer student that's an older student, I can't buy one ticket to go with my husband where we can sit together.” She further explained that using her student ID for
entrance into an athletics event meant she would have to sit in the student section at games. If she bought a general admission ticket for her husband, they would be unable to sit together, and not surprisingly, she opted to not attend.

Overall, both literature and quantitative findings support that the transfer student population is dynamic, diverse, and different from traditionally aged first-year college students. If institutions encourage and adopt a transfer receptive culture, as Herrera and Jain (2013) describe, understanding the importance of non-school commitments for students who work or have families (just two examples) is paramount.

**Support Domain Findings**

Interview codes selected for the *Support* domain were directly associated with campus support/support systems, institutional resources, mentorship, community, and/or on-campus involvement. The three main themes include: 1) the necessity of scholarships and financial aid; 2) successes and challenges of academic advising; and 3) benefits of faculty and staff support systems.

**Necessity of Scholarships and Financial Aid.** As quantitative results show, more than 80 percent of the two- to four-year transfer students studied at Institution A and Institution B had some source of financial aid. Detected from qualitative interviews, the necessity of scholarships and financial aid support was instrumental in helping transfer students persist; for most, it was the only way they were able to attend a private institution with high tuition.

As Vivian shared, “the only reason that I'm able to go to Institution A is because I have a full tuition scholarship. I wouldn't be here otherwise.” Many other transfer students interviewed echoed this same perspective. For Christopher, his financial circumstances were potentially representative of two domains – *Situation* (his transition to the four-year institution) and *Support*
(institutional resources such as financial aid). “The buck stops with me as far as financially. My family can't in any way afford this,” he said. He emphasized that the fear of losing scholarship funds due to not meeting the GPA requirement caused him so much angst that he changed his major and is graduating one semester later than expected.

Tied to the Situation domain, when students were choosing where to transfer, scholarships and financial aid proved pivotal in their decision-making process. “When I was accepted to [Institution A], and I received a full-tuition scholarship, I was like, ‘Okay, well, I guess I'm going to [Institution A].’” Ryan said with a shrug. For students weighing options between 1-2 other universities, even if the other institution(s) offered more financial support, two students chose Institution A or Institution B due to the university’s reputation/prestige. “I actually had a full ride to [another four-year institution], but I turned it down when I found out I got accepted to [Institution B] and received a large scholarship… had I not got that scholarship, I would not be here today,” another student said.

Although financial aid was also important to Gabriela, she had been right on the edge of the GPA requirement and vacillated with whether to remain enrolled:

I knew that if I lost my scholarship I would still try to be here [at Institution B] ... I was still gonna continue even if I had to get in debt. I just felt like I had already invested time and I didn't feel like a 3.0 was bad... those two Cs that I got in stats and finance; I was proud of those because I knew how much hard work it took.

Although any source of financial aid was deemed helpful, another topic noted by the researcher was transfer students’ investment in their education. Like Gabriela, Christopher shared that he had already invested a lot in his education. Despite financial drain and sacrifices made, some
students felt incurring debt was worth the risk, while others were so dependent on financial support, it was their scholarships that allowed them to remain enrolled.

**Successes and Challenges of Academic Advising.** Specific to the *Support* domain, students were asked what made the academic advising process easy and/or difficult to navigate at their four-year institution. Thus, many students (but not all) at both universities believed advising was challenging and referenced miscommunication, lack of dedicated transfer support, and unclear expectations of curriculum requirements as some of the reasons why. Different from transfer students’ two-year institutions where they typically had one advising office (where they could meet with the next available advisor), many students alluded that having decentralized advising and/or faculty members in advisor roles at their new institutions exacerbated frustration and, in some circumstances, prolonged their expected graduation.

“Advising has just always been difficult,” Joy explained. Trinity shared, “I feel like advisors are not trying to advise students from diverse backgrounds… in the sense of transfer students from community colleges or even transfer students from four-year institutions.” She added that “many components [within students’ transition process] are not communicating well” and advising, she thought, was a hurdle for transfer student success. Whether feeling misguided or uninformed, students consistently named challenges with advising as a consistent theme throughout interviews.

For Michael, however, his academic advising experience was positive, in large part due to having an advisor who was a former transfer student herself:

I was really lucky to find my advisor… I happened to be assigned to someone who was a transfer student… so she completely understood where I was coming from. She believed
in a lot of things that I did and she was very patient in terms of explaining [things] to me such as the university curriculum and courses.

Christopher (with a major where there is a centralized advising office) also had an optimistic experience; he said his advisor “was just really positive and a very good influence. He just laid it out as far as what classes I should take.” This direction provided to Christopher enabled him to feel knowledgeable and informed about his timeline to graduation. For Kate, she credited her advising success to her participation in the university’s honors college and the support of her major advisor (a faculty member in her department) who had an open-door policy and welcomed ongoing check-ins and feedback.

With a mixed review of both successes and challenges pertaining to the academic advising experience, the researcher found that transfer students interviewed appreciated hands-on advising that incorporated and understood their unique situations, the importance of prior transfer credit, and a personalized approach that supported ongoing dialogue and guidance.

**Benefits of Faculty and Staff Support Systems.** The last main theme under the *Support* domain was the benefit of faculty and staff support systems – another direct correlation to answering RQ2. When students were asked if there had been a person and/or program that had positively impacted their transfer experience, almost every transfer student responded with a faculty and/or staff member’s name. For many, it took just *one person* to make the student feel worthy, appreciated, supported and/or welcome.

As noted in findings under the *Situation* domain, the same was true at student’s two-year institutions. Michael, for example, had one faculty member at his prior college who helped guide him and remains a mentor. Ultimately, when students felt someone believed in them, they started believing in themselves, too. As Vivian said:
I had a class with [professor’s name] my first semester here, and she made it very clear that she cared about the wellbeing of all her students. So, when I was having some adjustment issues that first semester, I went to her. She was very compassionate and willing to work with me about things I was struggling with.

Echoed by others, “faculty have been huge,” another student said. “Sometimes it's really just about emotional support.” The researcher also found that when staff members were referenced, these individuals were primarily in one of three specific areas: 1) transfer admission; 2) the registrar’s office; and/or 3) within transfer programs.

Trinity said the staff member had “saved her life” by providing constant encouragement, advice, and support during her transfer experience. When Ryan spoke about who had made a meaningful mark on his journey, he referred to this staff member as a “safeguard” – someone who took the time to sit and help him when needed.

Overall, the researcher would be remiss if the impact of on-campus community and support through student organizations was not recognized. Although a topic not fully addressed under this domain, students like Ryan (as first mentioned under the Self findings) turned to peers when times were difficult. When asked what or who encouraged him to find this network of support, the same staff member he referred to as a “safeguard” was referenced. All in all, transfer students interviewed seemed to need (and want) ongoing support from faculty and staff members at every level of their transition. For many, it was because of these individuals they had overcome hurdles, and more importantly, found a sense of value and belief in themselves.

**Strategies Domain Findings**

Interview codes selected for the Strategies domain were directly associated with how students coped, strategized and/or worked through challenging situations as a transfer student.
The three main themes include: 1) the importance of mindset, grit, and gumption; 2) the utilization of on-campus resources helps students thrive; and 3) building community increases students’ sense of belonging.

**A Focus on Mindset, Grit, and Gumption.** Through analysis of qualitative interviews, the researcher found that when students were undergoing difficult transitions (especially in their first year), many referenced having a change in outlook or perspective – what this multi-case study will call a “mindset shift.” It was through changing one’s mindset, a focus on grit, defined by Merriam-Webster (2019a) as unyielding courage, strength and fortitude, and gumption, defined as resourcefulness and initiative (Merriam-Webster, 2019b) that helped transfer students overcome challenges. When facing hardships, these factors impacted to their retention and persistence at their four-year private institution (RQ2). Some examples specifically tie back to findings under the *Self* domain, as Gabriella, for example, used her psychological resources of resilience and perseverance to endure a potential setback. Strategies utilized by two- to four-year transfer students such as Trinity, Christopher and Madeline deserve mention.

For Trinity, receiving a good GPA her first semester helped her cope with not feeling connected to the college community. She spoke in detail about how this mindset shift changed her outlook:

> I came here to learn. I came here to get a fabulous degree that's going to open doors for me. I really don't care if I don't make friends or if I'm not part of the community… I just dropped those expectations… I just need to do good and graduate. 

Trinity later talked about how adjusting her expectations changed her overall perception. Once a mindset shift took place, she was able to recognize that she *was* able to succeed (personally and
academically). Now, as an active student leader in transfer programs on campus, her mission is to help others feel this same sense of belief.

Christopher spoke about a semester where “everything was falling apart.” He was struggling academically and felt he had “zero motivation.” When he talked about “sticking to it and weathering the storm,” he described feeling a moment where things “switched.” That switch or change was his decision to become a more active student leader in an on-campus organization. “Then, all of a sudden, I had motivation to keep going.” He felt he had purpose, felt part of a larger community, and believed others were counting on him. Becoming more involved at Institution B was his strategy for taking a tough situation (in this case, a semester) and pushing through.

Madeline was doing “very poorly” academically her first semester. When she told herself “you have to do better… you can’t lose this scholarship,” she used this incidence to change her direction, focus, and mindset. She chose to change her major, “start new,” and recalibrate. When describing how she felt during this time, she reflected on her transfer experience thus far:

What can I do this year?” Since I'm starting new, I'm changing my major, I'm doing everything again from the beginning sort of, so what can I do? What did I do wrong? I think that was [when] I changed perspectives.

Every student interviewed described how they exercised qualities such as grit and gumption to persist. With a focus on mindset, each of the interviewees incorporated mental and emotional strength to overcome trying moments or situations in their transition process. For some, the challenge was academics, for others it was the desire to feel part of the college community, and for a few, it was a combination of both.
Utilization of On-Campus Resources Helps Students Thrive. When the researcher inquired about whether students had utilized any transfer student resources and/or academic resources on-campus, almost all of them said yes. For students at Institution A, most commonly referenced were the career center and an office that provided workshops, tutoring, and other related resources for students. For the latter, “I've tried to capitalize on [the resources] and their information sessions,” Ryan said. Especially during her first semester, Trinity also utilized this same office for their workshops and appreciated the transfer-specific sessions offered.

Although students at Institution B mentioned offices such as the writing and career centers, the most commonly shared resources were campus life and the transfer center. These benefits helped students thrive not only in-and-outside the classroom, but in times of crisis. Gabriella talked about visiting campus life her first semester when her husband was having health issues. She had an internship, was working 15-20 hours a week, and with two young children, was still adjusting and acclimating to her new institution. “I felt a lot better [when leaving] … I could breathe better,” she said. She said the staff member had told her that feeling overextended was “normal” and that their team was there to assist her throughout her entire experience at the institution.

Christopher also turned to campus life when he needed help with a personal dilemma requiring him to take some time with family. Overall, it was the strategy in which these students approached difficult situations by utilizing on-campus resources that helped them overcome setbacks and potential barriers – rather than attempting on their own.

Discussed by students at both institutions, a transfer and/or commuter space was also mentioned. At one, the student described the space as dark, not easily accessible, and not warm or inviting. For the other, the student mentioned “I don't like studying anywhere else on campus
except here,” she said. The transfer space was in walking distance from the library, had a mini-fridge, microwave, free printing, study rooms, and good lighting. When comparing these two spaces mentioned, it was apparent that utilization of the latter helped transfer students not only with resources but also as a place to meet others in similar transitional phases. The researcher also found that programs like transfer orientation and extended orientation were ideal ways to share about on-campus resources; however, students believed that ongoing education and reminders past the first couple of weeks were especially important.

**Building Community Increases Students’ Sense of Belonging.** When students were asked what specific strategies they had developed and/or executed throughout their transfer experience that they believed directly tied to persisting at their current institution (RQ2), several answered with coping mechanisms for success. In addition to findings recognized throughout each of the domains such as the importance of psychological resources and connecting with faculty and staff support systems, students’ responses were typically tied with community. Supported by the literature (Hirschy, 2017; Miller, 2013; Townley et al., 2013), sense of belonging and engagement are critical components for student retention and persistence. Thus, this final theme for the Strategies domain supports prior research. If students’ answers were more specific to advice they would give other two- to four-year transfer students (another question asked in interviews per Appendix C), the researcher included these, as described under “Other Notable Findings,” in Appendix M.

For Trinity, building community has helped her feel a sense of belonging. She said she found three good friends her first few weeks who have continued to be her “group” at Institution A – a group that has helped during difficult times in her transition. She also “went out of her way” to take a transitions-type class where she could connect with other transfer students and
resources. Participating helped her make connections and build reading strategies to maximize studying.

Ryan was battling mental health challenges (as shared under the Self and Support domains), he turned to an on-campus organization for help. He further explained how this strategy aided him:

Talking with your communities… that's what helped me work through some of that stuff. The communities that were there when I was stressed out and just willing to listen… and a community that was there when I was struggling with depression and was like, "I need someone to talk to," and I don't even know what I need to talk about … it's a huge part.

Joy offered a similar sentiment. She described her fellow student leaders in the transfer center at Institution B saying this community of people and peers “felt like family.” As someone who began her transfer experience not involved and not connected to the campus community, Joy used her own testimony when emphasizing the importance of finding “your people” with incoming transfer students.

As interviewees shared about why and how community helped them feel a sense of belonging at their institutions, the researcher did not find a “one size fits all” approach. For some transfer students, the sense of community was found in their academic college (e.g., peers in their classes, faculty members, academic-related student organizations). For others, community was found in broader student groups or offices/departments on-campus such as an honor society, religious and spiritual life, and/or transfer programs. One thing was certain, however, and that was these students craved connectedness. As Joy also explained, being around “positive people” also helped her build self-confidence. Students wanted to feel “part of” rather than “excluded from” an institution they now called (or wanted) to call home.
Other Notable Findings

Although the following results did not directly fit in one of the four domains, each served as important findings in qualitative data analysis. The three main themes include: 1) the idea of transferring out or dropping out; 2) students’ reflection in what they wish they would have known when transferring; and 3) advice for two- to four-year transfer students by the transfer students in this multi-case study.

Transferring Out or Dropping Out? As a response to the interview question of whether the student had ever thought about leaving their current institution, half (a total of five students) said they had considered dropping out of school rather than transferring somewhere else. Only two students shared they had contemplated transferring to another four-year institution. And three students said they were either happy with their academic experience, did not want to “back out” of a commitment, or “one transfer was enough.”

One who considered dropping out of school completely, Ryan shared his thoughts and his reasoning:

I never thought about transferring out because of the current scholarship I have and the business school being so prestigious. I’ve thought about dropping. I’ve thought about dropping out of college before, but the thought never occurred to transfer somewhere else.

For Joy and Trinity, both who considered transferring to another institution, one was due to financial restrictions and the other was for lack of belonging. “First semester, I would cry every day… because I just felt so out of place,” Trinity said. She would ask herself “why she came here.” As explained in the Situation domain findings, the first year proved challenging for many. When Joy shared about her reason for needing/wanting to transfer, she told herself at one point
that "for the sake of money, I have to do this. For my parents, for everyone else's peace of mind.”

As findings under the Support domain verify, scholarships and financial aid were a necessity for most of the transfer students interviewed. Joy had even enrolled at another nearby university until she later found out about an unexpected scholarship. It was because of these additional funds she was able to remain at Institution B.

“What I Wish I Would Have Known.” Directly or indirectly connected to each of the four domains, students interviewed were also asked what they wish they would have known when transferring to their current four-year institution. The researcher included this question in the interview protocol to learn – for transfer students who were persisting – what potential factors or information could have impacted their experience in a positive way (tied to RQ2). The following, shared to provide further insight for faculty and staff at four-year private institutions, is not all-inclusive. Highlights shared from interviews are included; however, not all responses are noted.

Specific to the first year at her new institution, Madeline wished she would have realized that it was a “different environment” sooner, and it would be “tougher than I already was in” at a community college. She also wishes she would have told herself that because “this is a different environment; this is going to be more challenging. This is what you should be doing every day to get good grades,” she continued. Ryan regretted thinking that because he was a junior, he did not need to attend or participate in transition-related programs provided by the university.

“Ultimately, I wish I had a done a lot of those things,” he commented.

In relation to what transfer students interviewed would tell themselves if they could go back in time, many of the sentiments related to giving themselves grace. “I think I would tell myself to basically keep calm. Just take it one day at a time,” Joy said. “You're here, you
definitely belong here, find something, find your niche, find something that you're proud to be a part of.” Gabriela agreed. She said she would not have been as hard on herself. In a new, sometimes competitive environment, these words of affirmation could speak to many transfer students in similar situations. Most interviewed spoke about remembering the bigger picture and that they often caused themselves undue stress.

The last two examples are specific to strategies students wish they would have incorporated academically. For Michael, it was approaching studying in a different way while realizing sooner that classes were going to be harder. For Ryan, he wished he would have incorporated better time management (both in-and-outside the classroom). “If I had done those stress reducers early on, it could have reduced so many issues I had later in the semester,” he said. Despite everything they shared, many of the students credited how they built qualities related to resilience, grit, and gumption through experiencing the noted challenges. As for any transfer student, these pearls of wisdom may help alleviate trepidation, especially in the initial transition from a two- to four-year institution.

**Advice for Two- to Four-Year Transfer Students.** As a resource for practitioners working directly with two- to four-year transfer students, the researcher has provided a list (Appendix M) of advice by transfer students in this multi-case study. All insight is connected to topics discussed throughout this document and ranges from choosing a four-year institution and tips for students during their first year to finding support systems and utilizing academic resources.

Advice is presented in first person to maintain and preserve students’ voice through their reflections. To remain authentic, the researcher did limited editing and used interview transcripts to most accurately convey messaging. Organized by Schlossberg’s four domains (*Situation, Self,
Support and Strategies), Appendix M is also outlined in this same way. Although some advice may relate to more than one domain, the researcher grouped all by primary topic areas.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Results

As Wang (2016) found, many current studies addressing transfer student success lump both private and public institutions with varying levels of selectivity into one group. This multi-case study fills this gap in the literature as it focuses on two- to four-year transfer students at private (highly selective) institutions. Coupling quantitative and qualitative findings paints a telling picture of what characteristics make up the two- to four-year transfer student population (RQ1) and what potential factors are related to students’ retention and persistence at a private institution (RQ2).

From a quantitative lens, the researcher began by first understanding the number of incoming transfer students from the selected two-year institutions over time (between fall 2011 and fall 2018) and by semester. Although about the same number of transfer students were admitted to both four-year institutions in fall 2013, results showed that Institution A decreased enrollment steadily over time where Institution B drastically increased. From descriptive analysis alone, the reason for this difference is unknown. Overall, admission of transfer students from the two-year institutions is at or around the same percentage by semester (Fall: 72-73%, Spring: 23-24%, Summer: 3-4%). When evaluating student demographics such as age ranges at time of first term, the researcher found that Institution A had nearly 10 percent less nontraditional students (25 or older) than Institution B. When comparing race/ethnicity, 37 percent of two-year transfer students at Institution A were White where at Institution B, more than 50 percent fell under this category. About the same difference was international students (Institution A: 15 percent; Institution B: 3 percent).
Specific to retention and persistence, the researcher found that approximately 25 percent of two-year transfer students (at each private institution) in the study had discontinued. Black/African American students had the lowest completion rate at 50.9 percent, with 34.2 percent discontinued and 14.9 percent active. At both institutions, the 6-year graduation rate was between 73-76 percent; however, when evaluating transfer students entering in the spring semester, 6-year completion drops to 48-66 percent, respectively. For academic performance, average transfer GPAs, first-term GPAs and cumulative GPAs were also calculated using SPSS. In this order, two-year transfer students at Institution A had average GPAs of 3.46 (transfer), 2.95 (first term) and 2.93 (cumulative). Students at Institution B had average GPAs of 3.30 (transfer), 2.71 (first term) and 2.88 (cumulative).

From a qualitative lens, the researcher had a total of 932 quotations and 95 codes before additional rounds of theming. By using Schlossberg’s 4s of a transition process (Situation, Self, Support and Strategies), results from semi-structured interviews are organized by these four domains. For the Situation domain, main themes include differences in college culture and environment stand important, the impact of students’ community college experiences are palpable, and navigating the transition to a four-year private institution proves challenging. For the Self domain, main themes include students’ psychological resources play an instrumental role in persistence, the impact of mental health and/or personal insecurities influence student transition, and for some, non-school commitments such as work or parental duties take priority over social acclimation. For the Support domain, main themes include the necessity of scholarships and financial aid, successes and challenges of academic advising, and benefits of faculty and staff support systems. Last, for the Strategies domain, the main themes include the
importance of mindset, grit, and gumption, the utilization of on-campus resources helps students thrive, and building community increases students’ sense of belonging.

The following subsections, drawn from the descriptive data analysis (n = 2086) and semi-structured interviews (n = 10) in this multi-case study, provide additional insight such as study limitations, discussion, and recommendations for practice and further research.

**Study Limitations**

A combined descriptive data analysis and qualitative study align to accomplish the overall purpose of addressing what factors related to two- to four-year retention and persistence stand out, specifically for administrators, educators, and practitioners to learn from at private institutions. As one limitation was simply time and resources, the cases were selected with geographic accessibility in mind. Although this decision may result in a limited perspective as it limits scope (both private, in the same geographic region and similar institutional size), methods for data collection as well as overall design can be replicated at other institutions if desired. Travel costs were efficiently managed, and external validity was enhanced as more than one four-year private institution was selected.

Furthermore, specific biases included the students selected for semi-structured interviews as they were identified by the researcher’s professional network as potential participants. Most students were involved on campus and it was difficult to have a representative sample due to the small number of students interviewed. In addition, not all community college transfer students are the same. By only studying four-year institutions and not how well community college students are prepared, these limitations in addition to potential challenges within the two- to four-year pipeline, are warranted.
Another limitation was all secondary data was provided directly by the four-year institutions. Although the chance of biasing was unlikely, the researcher did not have control over how the initial data was compiled to ensure accuracy. One of the institutions, for example, had to pull the requested variables from multiple offices and departments (e.g., Institutional Research, Registrar, Financial Aid) and consolidate them. Overall, the researcher ensured variables across institutions were defined consistently to make certain the study was as accurate as possible. Although unmet financial need was provided for both schools, the researcher was unable to accurately merge datasets and therefore chose to exclude for purposes of this study.

All considered, it was the researcher’s goal to add value by contributing to the body of knowledge limited in two- to four-year transfer students at private institutions, and to verify why this research is necessary. Even so, acknowledging the noted limitations is important.

**Recommendations for Practice**

In analyzing retention and persistence, the researcher found that approximately 25 percent of two-year transfer students (at each private institution) in the study had discontinued. Therefore, the following recommendations for practice may positively impact baccalaureate degree attainment in substantial ways. In answering this multi-case study’s research questions, learning more about two- to four-year transfer student characteristics and potential factors impacting their persistence and retention, institutional leaders and practitioners at private institutions can draw from these conclusions. Whether that is making the case for community college transfer students, focusing on the first year and mental health resources, or supporting (and adopting) a transfer receptive culture, recognizing the unique experiences two-year transfer students bring to private universities is supported by this research. Empowering community
college transfer students also helps a typically underserved population have opportunities to not only attend an institution they might have once thought impossible, but to attend and persist.

**Make the Case for Two-Year Transfer Students (and know your data)**

Although research related to transfer student success coupled with college choice and selectivity is minimal, making the case for why community college transfer students add value to campus environments is critical. Supported by this multi-case study, this specific student population has levels of psychological resources (e.g., grit, gumption, work ethic, and perseverance) that remain part of their core. Instead of students feeling they had nothing to lose, they felt they had *everything to lose*. When asked in qualitative interviews about whether students contemplated ever transferring somewhere else, half of participants said they would drop out of school completely explaining they were already attending the “top institution” or academic program. Transferring to another school was not an option they had considered. Therefore, it is the obligation (and more importantly, the duty) of institutions to do a better job as it relates to supporting transfer students. As admission offices look to adequately support transfer admission teams, as student affairs identifies whether dedicated full-time staff for transfer students is a possibility, and as centers for teaching and learning, for example, help equip faculty members in the classroom, understanding the transfer student population (and knowing the data) is highly recommended.

For Institution A and Institution B, with many similarities in mission, size, geographic location and cost, one might conclude that their transfer student populations look similar. However, even students from the largest two-year institution (both community college systems) were considerably different as it related to age, veteran status, some race-ethnicity categories, and those with Pell Grant eligibility. Knowing this information as well as academic performance
and retention data may help better direct college-wide and department-specific decision-making. It is also imperative to consider institutional fit as attending a highly selective private institution is arguably not for all two-year transfer students. Although making the case for this student population is recommended by the researcher, it is equally important to ensure these students are adequately supported once they get to their receiving institution, both in- and outside-the-classroom.

**Focus on Students’ First Year and Mental Health Resources**

It was apparent from qualitative findings that transfer students interviewed had the most difficult time (academically, socially and emotionally) during their first year at their private institution. When identifying what transfer programs, support services, and intervention strategies are best appropriate for a college campus, activity for activity-sake is not progress. With strong data as identified in recommendation one, programs, services and priorities set by the institution should be well informed by student characteristics such as personal demographics, first-generation status, and retention and persistence (overall and by race/ethnicity). By using such insight, efforts and initiatives have intentional purpose. Rather than spending valuable resources (in time and/or money) on programs that may impact transfer student experiences, how can educators and practitioners do better? A “one size fits all” approach considering transfer students are not a homogenous population is instrumental and highly important for their success. Therefore, planning for all levels of the student transition (factors pertaining to the *Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies*), not only focuses on the first year of enrollment but uses a framework to identify student needs and potential points for positive intervention.

Private institutions should also consider high-touch programs that meet students where they are – past orientation (that may or may not be required) and the first part of students first
semester. Academic support and classroom preparation during students’ first year is particularly significant as the transition from a two- to four-year private institution proves rigorous. As it relates to focusing on mental health resources, this is a main theme and recommendation from results gleaned in this study. There must be intentional dialogue between offices such as campus life, student development/student life, and counseling and mental health to ensure proactive measures for transfer student success are in place. Evaluating intake processes within counseling and mental health centers is a potential place to start. Allowing students to self-identify as a transfer student may help better inform conversations and resources given during consultations. At the minimum, knowing what percentage of transfer students are utilizing campus counseling and mental health services could also inform funding and programming decisions in-and-outside student affairs.

As for those transferring from a two- to four-year private institution, where college culture and environment, as well as academic and social pressures escalate, one-to-one mental health services in addition to ongoing communication and programming, may help alleviate potential student setbacks. Incorporating these recommendations, practitioners might also help students more quickly reach a “mindset shift”, ultimately allowing them to more fully immerse themselves in the college campus and community.

**Support and Adopt a Transfer Receptive Culture**

To support and most importantly, adopt, a transfer receptive culture, it takes institutions moving from having transfer-friendly attributes and marketing campaigns to recognizing, incorporating, and executing recommendations one and two above. For purposes of this multi-case study, a transfer receptive culture focuses on making transfer students an institutional priority.
One recommendation for accomplishing this goal is tackling both academic and social challenges. For example, as supported by this research, a main student stressor is academic performance due to increased rigor. Private institutions should evaluate its transfer financial aid packages to ensure GPA thresholds students have to maintain for eligibility take into consideration a transfer-specific phenomenon like transfer shock. In addition, private colleges and universities should consider incorporating transfer students’ family members. Ideas include offering parent and family programming that educates participants about the importance of transfer students having strong support systems or simply evaluating current programs and events and infusing a family-inclusive component. Institutions can also evaluate athletic games by allowing nontraditional students to have the opportunity to bring a spouse, partner or dependents. These institutional commitments would help exemplify that transfer students are recognized and valued.

Overall, it is important for an office or department to lead the charge in generating transfer student support and identifying “transfer champions” across institutional lines. In reading the advice for two- to four-year transfer students by the students in this study (Appendix M), this population needs representation in institution-wide discussions. They also need opportunities to participate and apply for honors colleges, leadership programs, and cohort experiences to ensure their success – otherwise, as confirmed by qualitative results, students feel led to the “gate” by way of admission, but not fully supported once they arrive to campus. Through an organized approach of bringing varying stakeholders to the table to discuss transfer needs, data, and outcomes, private institutions can invest in all students, not just some.
Recommendations for Further Research

For a more holistic prospective and to provide added value for those interested, the researcher recommends a few suggestions for further research. As identified in the study’s limitations, the following recommendations would also increase generalizability.

Expand Scope and Replicate Study

The first recommendation for further research is to expand scope and replicate the study. When the researcher first began this work, a focus on private institutions was the primary emphasis. However, the size and selectivity of the four-year institution may play an equal or more important role in how well two-year transfer students acclimate. Therefore, expanding the overall study to look at both private and public institutions with varying levels of selectivity and number of undergraduates warrants further research.

Specific to the quantitative approach and with similar methods and overall design, implementing a related study to include all two-year transfer students to the four-year institution could identify whether descriptive data was consistent or different than this study’s results. This would also consider those transferring from different geographic locations. Additionally, a closer look at students who transferred in the fall versus spring could better inform reasons for why retention and persistence for spring transfer students, as found in this multi-case study, decreases by as much as 25 percent in comparison to those starting in the fall. Other potential indicators such as excess transfer hours, academic program areas, prior credentials, and/or the exclusion of dual credit students (if identifiable by institutions), could provide varying perspectives. Furthermore, if a study, for example, were to analyze student demographics, retention and persistence, academic performance, and student financial aid and Pell Grant eligibility between
two- to four-year and four- to four-year transfer students at private institutions, would these characteristics and findings vary?

For the qualitative piece and with similar methods and overall design, semi-structured interviews with university employees would afford different perspectives. Are there disconnects or decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) between what the institution says it values and prioritizes as it relates to serving the transfer population versus student experiences and outcomes? By visiting with faculty, staff, and administrators in areas such as enrollment management, admissions and/or student affairs, results may depict possible strategies for programming implementation and institutional policies.

Determine Potential Effects of Scholarships and Financial Aid

For purposes of this multi-case study, the topic of scholarships and financial aid was briefly discussed in the descriptive data analysis but became a prevalent finding in qualitative semi-structured interviews. Thus, to expand on RQ2 as it relates to potential factors impacting transfer student retention and persistence, the second recommendation for further research is to study the potential effects of scholarships and financial aid.

First, for two-year transfer students who have discontinued from private universities, how many of these decisions were based on financial restrictions and/or students losing their scholarships due to GPA eligibility? Second, although not used for this study, Institution A and Institution B were able to provide the researcher the total dollar amount of unmet financial need, if any. This data would show what students owed after all financial aid from any source (e.g., merit aid, grants, and scholarships) were incorporated. From a better understanding of student debt to engaging with programming related to financial health and wellness, determining potential effects of scholarships and financial aid (from a quantitative and qualitative lens) could
lend insightful implications for colleges and universities. In addition, found from this study’s descriptive data analysis, 53 percent of transfer students at Institution A and 65 percent at Institution B are Pell eligible. If practitioners at private institutions are more knowledgeable about the makeup of their transfer population, specifically as it relates to potential financial stressors, they can make more informed decisions relating to programs and resources offered.

Whether related to financial constraints or not, knowing why transfer students withdraw from their four-year institutions also warrants closer attention. Without this knowledge, by way of an exit survey or interview, it is difficult to address the root cause of systemic issues and concerns.

Take a Closer Look at Institutional Culture

As qualitative results found, institutional culture and environment matter. Students in this study transferred from an open-access, highly diverse college to a highly selective private institution that is less diverse (in many ways) and different in undergraduate makeup. However, to fully understand to what capacity and in what specific ways, a closer look at organizational culture could provide better insight.

To further illustrate, organizational culture, as defined by Tierney (1988), is the “study of particular webs of significance within an organizational setting… that is, we look at an organization as a traditional anthropologist would study a particular village or clan” (p. 4). In short, a culture reflects, describes, and illustrates what an organization “has done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it” (Tierney, 1988, p. 3). As a specific recommendation for further research, better understanding how the culture of a private institution positively and/or negatively affects a community college transfer student could offer discerning evidence for how one acclimates to his/her new campus environment.
Potentially most fitting for a related study, and in order to better unpack potential factors contributing to two- to four-year retention and persistence, is Tierney’s model for organizational culture. This model operationalizes institutional culture for higher education into six distinct categories: environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy, and leadership. This organizational lens could also work in tandem with Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. In short, to more comprehensively understand student experiences, understanding institutional culture is paramount.

Conclusions

At private institutions, where resources for transfer students may be sparse and/or undervalued, it is important to create a case for dedicated, full-time staff to support this population. Both having and understanding institutional data and dialogue (with students and varying stakeholders) are also critical as “student transfer is becoming more common, with students using increasing complex enrollment patterns to navigate toward and successfully complete a college degree” (Crisp, 2017, p. 103). Although famous transfer students include Warren Buffet, Barack Obama, Margaret Mead, and Jimmy Carter, to name a few (Tyler & Henninger, 2017), the transfer option or pathway, for some, may seem nontraditional or less desired. Current research such as the Persistence study by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation and efforts such as the American Talent Initiative are helping change this perception. In fact, “selective schools are beginning to recognize that transfer students, especially those that persevered and excelled at community colleges, have much to offer their campuses” (Sánchez, 2017, p. 1).

Although several factors impact behaviors within higher education institutions, the researcher is also aware that no one theory or concept will encompass all understandings. It is the
hope, however, that this multi-case study will contribute to the overall body of literature, and ultimately, help more transfer students thrive and graduate at the baccalaureate level. By using Schlossberg’s Transition Theory as this study’s framework, the 4 Ss of a transition (Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies), referred to as the four domains in this document, serve as major factors in how students cope with their transition process and overall transfer experience.

Using a secondary data analysis and semi-structured student interviews, this study is also unique in that it contributes to the national conversation of transfer research specific related to two- to four-year private institutions. The design is appropriate as it provides both quantitative insight and real-life experiences of transfer students. When resources are tight and dedicated transfer staff are few, this study sought to discover what is working – what factors are potentially impacting transfer student degree attainment at the baccalaureate level, and what private institutions can do to help.

Transfer students are more than numbers to make enrollment goals or diversity benchmarks; they each bring unique experiences and skillsets to college campuses, especially private institutions. They have lived within diverse environments, they are resilient, and often overcome difficult situations, setbacks, and barriers. Transfer need not define who transfer students are or their potential, but rather, provide a common denominator for baccalaureate degree attainment.
From: IRB Committee  
To: Rachael Carranza Capua  
Date: September 12, 2018  
Re: New Expedited submission approval; Protocol # H18-097-CAPR - A Study Identifying Potential Factors Related to Two- to Four-Year Transfer Student Retention and Persistence at Private Institutions  

Dear Professor Capua,  

The IRB Committee completed review of your application and granted approval of your protocol on 09/11/2018. This approval is valid until 09/11/2019. If work will continue beyond this date, it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to submit an annual review of progress (CFR 21 §56.109(f)). Failure to gain approval of this annual review prior to the expiration date could result in suspension of the work covered under this protocol. This suspension of work would include halting all subject enrollment, collecting data, and/or analyzing previously collected, identified data.  

Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted to the IRB as an amendment prior to initiation (CFR 21 §56.108 (a)(3); §56.108 (a)(4)). Please be advised that as the principal investigator, you are required to report unanticipated adverse events to the Office of Research Administration within 24 hours of the occurrence or upon acknowledgement of the occurrence (CFR 21 § 56.108 (b)(1)).  

All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must have documented IRB CITI or NIH Training on file with this office. The certification will expire in 3 years, so please plan your renewal accordingly. For NIH training only, please include a copy of your certificate with your submission.  

Southern Methodist University’s Office of Research and Graduate Studies appreciates your continued commitment to the protection of human subjects in research. Should you have questions, or need to report completion of study procedures, please contact the Office of Research compliance at 214-768-2033 or at researchcompliance@smu.edu.  

Thank You,
Austin Baldwin IRB Chair

Office of Research and Graduate Studies
Southern Methodist University PO Box 750302 Dallas TX 75275-0240
Office: 214-768-2033 Fax: 214-768-1079
SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY
PARTICIPATION EXPLANATION AND CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: A Study Identifying Potential Factors Related to Two- to Four-Year Transfer Student Retention and Persistence at Private Institutions

INVESTIGATORS/CONTACT INFORMATION:

   PI: Rachael C. Capua, Graduate Student
   Co-Investigator: Ashley Tull, Ed.D., Program Director

Introduction:
Before you say you will participate in this research study, reading this form in its entirety is important. It is key for you to understand all the information in this form because it will tell you what the study is about and how it will be executed. It will also provide you potential risks and benefits for participation. When you read a paper like this to learn about a research study, it is called “informed consent.” When you give your consent for something, it is the same thing as giving your permission. If you do not understand something, please talk with one of the staff to answer your questions. Do not sign this consent form unless all your questions have been answered and you feel comfortable with the information you have read. You will be given a copy of the form to keep.

You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a transfer student from a two-year community college to a four-year private institution and are currently active/enrolled as a student. You are also on track to graduate with your baccalaureate degree within one academic year. No other identifiers other than these were considered when selecting study participants.

Why Is This Study Being Done?
The purpose of this study is to identify potential factors impacting retention and persistence for students who transfer from a two-year community college to a four-year private institution. The goal is to learn more about these students' experiences and the support and strategies used as they navigate the undergraduate pathway to graduation.

How Many People Will Take Part In The Study?
A maximum of 10 two- to four-year transfer students will take part of this study.

What Is Involved In The Study?
If you agree to participate, you will complete a one-on-one interview with the PI for no longer than 60-90 minutes. Questions will cover specifics such as your transition to your current institution, how being a transfer student has played a role in your experience, campus/community involvement, academic acclimation, and strategies that have helped you be successful. Participants will remain anonymous and at any time can withdraw from the study.

How Long Will I Be In The Study?
Participants will commit to one interview session no longer than 60-90 minutes.
What are the Risks and Benefits of Participation?
Minimal risk exists to the participant and all identifying participant information will remain confidential. The PI will use code sheets to ensure confidentiality during all phases of the research process. Benefits include a contribution to literature as there is limited research on two- to four-year transfer students at private institutions. This opportunity also allows for personal reflection and the opportunity to potentially help future transfer students at your university.

What are the Costs and Will I be Paid for Taking Part in the Study?
There is no cost to you for taking part in this study. A $25 VISA gift card will be given to all participants who complete the interview process.

What about Confidentiality?
You have a full right to privacy. This means that only the researchers who are part of this study will see the information about you from this study. The results of this study may be published in a scientific book/or journal or presented to other people. If this is done, your name will not be used so no one will know who you are. All information about you from this research project will be kept in the locked office of the PI. Information that is kept on computers will be kept safe from access by people who should not see it, through password-protection.

What are My Rights as a Participant?
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study and it is okay to refuse to sign this form. If a question makes you feel uncomfortable, you may skip it. If you agree to take part and then change your mind, you can withdraw for any reason. Deciding not to be in the study, or leaving the study early, will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise received.

If you change your mind and later want to withdraw your permission, you may do so. You may notify the PI through phone or in person. If you decide to do this, all of your information will be destroyed.

Whom Do I Call If I have Questions or Problems?
If you have concerns or questions about the study or have a research-related injury, contact any of the following:

PI: Rachael C. Capua, (469) 964-1432, recapua@smu.edu
Co-PI: Ashley Tull, Ed.D., Program Director, (214) 768-4493, atull@smu.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact:

Austin Baldwin, Ph.D., IRB Chair
researchcompliancem@smu.edu
214-768-2033
Statement of Person Obtaining Consent:

I have explained to _______________________________ the purpose of the research project, the procedures required and the possible risks and benefits to the best of my ability. They have been encouraged to ask questions related to taking part.

____________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

_______________________
Date and Time

Confirmation of Consent by Research Participant:

You are making a decision about being in this research study. When you sign this form, you are giving your permission to be in the study. By signing this form, you have not given up any of your legal rights or released anyone from liability for negligence, and you are at least 18 years of age.

The PI has explained to me the purpose of the research project, the study procedures that I will have, and the possible risks and discomforts that may happen. I have read (or have had read to me) this consent form. I have been given a chance to ask questions about the research study and the procedures involved. I believe that I have enough information to make my decision. I have also been told my other options. I agree to give my consent to take part as a participant in this research project.

____________________________________
Signature of Participant

________________________
Date and Time

☐ I give my permission to be audio recorded.

☐ I do NOT give my permission to be audio recorded.

____________________________________
Signature of Participant

________________________
Date and Time
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter/Email

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Transfer Student Retention & Persistence Research

Dear ____________,

You have been identified as someone who would be a strong candidate for the below study. Participants who complete the 60-90 minute interview will receive a $25 VISA gift card in appreciation for their time.

Any and all identifying information will be kept confidential and your participation is very important to help better understand transfer student experiences and to inform future research and best practices.

**Project Title:** A Study Identifying Potential Factors Related to Two- to Four-Year Transfer Student Retention and Persistence at Private Institutions

**Why Is This Study Being Done?**
The purpose of this study is to identify potential factors related to retention and persistence for students who transfer from a two-year community college to a four-year private institution. The goal is to learn more about these students' experiences and the support and strategies used as they navigate the undergraduate pathway to graduation.

**What Is Involved In The Study?**
If you agree to participate, you will complete a one-on-one interview with the Principal Investigator (PI) for no longer than 60-90 minutes. Questions will cover specifics about your transition to your current institution, how being a transfer student has played a role in your experience, campus/community involvement, academic acclimation, and strategies that have helped you be successful. Participants will remain anonymous and at any time can withdraw from the study.

**What are the Risks and Benefits of Participation?**
Minimal risk exists to the participant and all identifying subject information will remain confidential. The PI will use code sheets to ensure confidentiality during all phases of the research process. Benefits include a contribution to literature as there is limited research on two-to four-year transfer students at private institutions. This invitation also allows for personal reflection and the opportunity to potentially help future transfer students at your university.

Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to connect if you have questions about the project. If interested, I will send you a few interview dates and times to choose from and more information for next steps.

Rachael C. Capua
Doctoral Student | Principal Investigator
Southern Methodist University
Simmons School of Education & Human Development
Appendix C: Data Collection Instrument: Semi-Structured Student Interview Protocol

Interview Date:
Time & Location:

Interviewer: Rachael C. Capua
Interviewee:

Brief Project Description: A Study Identifying Potential Factors Impacting Two- to Four-Year Transfer Student Retention and Persistence at Private Institutions.

Research Questions: 1) What are the characteristics of a four-year private community college transfer student? 2) What potential factors are related to their retention and persistence at a private institution?

General (no more than 5-7 minutes)
1. Do you have any questions before we begin?
2. Please share with me a little about yourself, including where you grew up, about your family, educational background, work experience, etc.
   a. Ask about field of study and expected graduation date if student does not initially share.
3. If you could describe yourself in 3-5 words and/or phrases, what would you say? (icebreaker question, but connected to the Self Category in Theoretical Framework – probe interviewee to share why those words/phrases as comfortable)

Situation Domain
4. Walk me through your transfer experience from your most recent institution.
   a. What campus(s) did you attend at your community college?
   b. Why did you choose to attend a two-year institution and how long did you go there?
5. Were you involved on campus and/or did you feel connected to the campus community?
6. What factors did you consider when deciding to attend the four-year institution?
7. What were some challenges you faced when transferring, if any?

Self Domain
8. When asked what words/phrases described you, you said ______.
   a. Do any of these personal or demographic characteristics impact your experience at your current institution?
9. How has being a transfer student played a role in your experience at your current institution? (Probe for both academic and social examples)

Support Domain

10. Did you participate in any First-Year Experience/incoming transfer programs at your current institution? (e.g., Orientation, Extended Orientation Programs, etc.)
   a. Why or why not?
   b. If you participated, how has this helped you be successful as a student?
   c. If you did not participate, and based on your knowledge of these programs, how might these have helped you be successful student now?

11. Please share about your academic advising process.
    a. What made the process easy and/or difficult to navigate?

12. What type of on-campus involvement and/or leadership opportunities have you joined, if any?

13. Have you utilized your university’s transfer student resources and/or academic resources within your college/department? (e.g., Transfer Center, Tau Sigma NHS or other honors program, mentoring, tutoring, etc.)
    a. Why or why not?
    b. If you have, what specific opportunities have you participated in?
       i. What drew you to participate?

14. Please describe your academic experience at your current institution in more detail. (e.g., academic preparedness, interactions/relationships with faculty members, study habits, time management, etc.)

15. Has there been a person and/or program that has positively impacted your student experience at your current institution?
    a. What about this person and/or program stands out?
    b. What if this person and/or program did not exist?

Strategies Domain

16. Have you ever thought about leaving your current institution after you transferred?
    a. If so, what factors influenced your decision to stay?

17. Do you know of any students who have not been successful at your current institution (e.g., they have transferred out)?
    a. If yes, why do you think they did not persist?

18. What specific strategies have you developed and/or executed throughout your transfer experience that you believe directly tie to persisting at your current institution? (e.g., time or stress management, resilience, networking, perseverance, etc.)
a. Why do you think these strategies or qualities are important?

19. If you could go back to your first semester at your four-year institution, is there anything you would change?

20. Thinking about your experiences thus far, what advice would you give to incoming transfer students who are transferring to your four-year private university from a community college?

Thank the individual for participating. Assure him or her of confidentiality and share future follow up/research opportunities, if any.
Appendix D: Conceptual Framework

Adapted from Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012)

**SITUATION**
Transition to Four-Year Private Institution; College Choice/Selectivity; First-Year at Four-Year Institution

**SELF**
- Demographic Characteristics (e.g., gender, age range, first-generation status, veteran status, race/ethnicity)
- Personal Commitments (e.g., work, parental responsibilities)

**SUPPORT**
- Scholarships & Financial Aid
- Academic Advising
- First-Year Experience Transfer Tracks/Programs
- Transfer Centers
- Faculty/Staff Support
- Friends/Family Support
- Sense of Community

**STRATEGIES**
- Ability to Navigate Transfer Process
- Coping Mechanisms (e.g., stress and time Management)
- Campus Involvement
- Utilization of On-Campus Resources

How Are These Potential Factors Related to Two- to Four-Year Transfer Retention and Persistence at Private Institutions?
Appendix E: Secondary Data Variables, Operational Definitions, and Recode Descriptions

Table E.1

Secondary Data Variables, Operational Definitions, and Recode Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Operational Definition and Recode Description (as applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique Identifier</td>
<td>Assigned numbers by participating institutions prior to sending to researcher to ensure student data remained confidential; the unique identifier also allowed for combining student level data with financial aid data as these were provided as two separate spreadsheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last School Attended</td>
<td>The two-year institution the student transferred from Note: Two-Year Institution A had last school attended by college; Two-Year Institution B had last school attended by campus. The researcher grouped these by system to make as consistent as possible (Two-Year Institution A = 1, Two-Year Institution B = 0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admit Term</td>
<td>Semester and year the student was admitted to the four-year private institution Note: Dummy codes (Fall, Spring, Summer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Student identified as male or female (Male = 1, Female = 0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>The race/ethnicity identified by the student Note: There were slight variations in the way institutions coded this variable (i.e. “Hispanic of Any Race” and “Hispanic/Latino”, “Multi-Ethnic” and “Two or More Races”). The researcher compared these side-by-side to ensure consistent and accurate groups. Dummy codes included the following and all were defined the same by Institution A and Institution B:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, Multi-Ethnic, Non-Resident Alien (Any Race), White, Race &amp; Ethnicity Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person of Color</td>
<td>New variable created (Person of Color = 1, White = 0) Note: There were a total of 33 cases that had ethnicity as “Unknown.” The researcher excluded these from this particular recode so they did not show in SPSS outputs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable Name</td>
<td>Operational Definition and Recode Description (as applicable)</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation Status</td>
<td>The student is first in his/her family to pursue post-secondary education (Yes = 1, No = 0) <strong>Note:</strong> Institution B does not track this information for all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran Status</td>
<td>Student is a veteran (Yes = 1, No = 0) <strong>Note:</strong> There were slight variations in the way institutions coded this variable; if data was missing, the researcher recoded after confirming that either a blank meant in fact the student was not a veteran or the data was unavailable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age as of First Term at Four-Year</td>
<td>Age of student as of first term at four-year private institution <strong>Note:</strong> A series of dummies by age range were created (Under 18, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontraditional Student</td>
<td>Nontraditional cases included all age ranges 25 and older; traditionally aged include 24 and younger (Nontraditional Student = 1, Traditionally Aged = 0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Transfer Hours</td>
<td>Total transfer hours from one or more two-year institutions to the four-year private institution <strong>Note:</strong> Cases with zero transfer hours were excluded from all SPSS outputs/data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Hours at Two-Year</td>
<td>Total transfer hours from designated two-year institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer GPA</td>
<td>Transfer GPA to four-year private institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Term GPA at Four-Year</td>
<td>First-term GPA at four-year private institutions <strong>Note:</strong> All transfer students at Institution A and Institution B start a new GPA after transferring; their first term GPA is their new GPA going forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable Name</td>
<td>Operational Definition and Recode Description (as applicable)</td>
</tr>
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<td>----------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Cumulative GPA at Four-Year            | Four-year cumulative GPA at time of receiving secondary data from four-year institutions  
*Note:* All new Fall 2018 transfer students at both four-year institutions showed as zero GPAs since it was their first semester; the researcher excluded these when running SPSS outputs and analyzing. |
| Max Enrollment Term                    | Last term the student was enrolled at four-year private institution                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Academic Program Status                | Students categorized as one of the following: active in program, cancelled, completed program, deceased, discontinued, dismissed, leave of absence  
*Note:* The researcher recoded the above into three categories: 1) active; 2) completed; 3) discontinued.                                                                                   |
| Primary Academic Major                | The student’s primary academic major  
*Note:* The researcher recoded into two categories: 1) STEM related fields (e.g., computer science, nursing, accounting) and 2) non-STEM related fields (e.g., education, social work, communication studies).                                                           |
| Aid Year                               | Semester and year of when student received financial aid  
*Note:* This information was collected for only students who received financial aid for one or more semesters while at Institution A or Institution B.                                                                 |
| Pell Eligibility                       | Whether the student was Pell Grant eligible or not (Yes = 1, No = 0)                                                                                                                                                                                   |
Appendix F: Research Questions, Methods of Data Analysis, and Indicators

Table E.2

Research Questions, Methods of Data Analysis, and Used Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Method of Data Analysis</th>
<th>Used Indicators (Secondary Data and Interview Questions)</th>
<th>Type of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1 – What are the characteristics of a four-year private community college transfer?</td>
<td><em>Primary</em>: Quantitative (Self Domain)</td>
<td>Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Person of Color, First-generation Status, Veteran Status, Age as of First Term at Four-Year, Nontraditional Student, Pell Eligibility</td>
<td>Descriptive Data Analysis (e.g., frequency tables, crosstabs, pie charts, line graphs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Secondary</em>: Qualitative (Self Domain)</td>
<td>If you could describe yourself in 3-5 words and/or phrases, what would you say? Do any of these personal or demographic characteristics impact your experience at your current institution?</td>
<td>Coding and Themes by Domain / Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2 – What potential factors are related to their retention and persistence at a private institution?</td>
<td><em>Primary</em>: Qualitative (Situation, Support and Strategies Domains)</td>
<td>What factors did you consider when deciding to attend the four-year institution? Were you involved at your two-year institution and/or did you feel connected to the campus community?</td>
<td>Coding and Themes by Domain / Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>Method of Data Analysis</td>
<td>Used Indicators (Secondary Data and Interview Questions)</td>
<td>Type of Analysis</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were some challenges you faced when transferring, if any?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did you participate in any First-Year Experience/incoming transfer programs at your current institution? (e.g., Orientation, Extended Orientation Programs, etc.)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What made the advising process easy and/or difficult to navigate?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of on-campus involvement and/or leadership opportunities have you joined, if any?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you utilized your university’s transfer student resources and/or academic resources within your college/department?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has there been a person and/or program that has positively impacted your student experience at your current institution?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What specific strategies have you developed and/or executed throughout your transfer experience that you believe directly tie to persisting at your current institution?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>Method of Data Analysis</td>
<td>Used Indicators (Secondary Data and Interview Questions)</td>
<td>Type of Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Secondary:</em> Quantitative (Situation &amp; Self Domains)</td>
<td>Other Variables Used in Descriptive Data Analysis: Total Transfer Hours, Total Transfer Hours at Two-Year, Transfer GPA, First-Term GPA at Four-Year, Cumulative GPA at Four-Year, Race/Ethnicity, Veteran Status, STEM and Non-STEM Related Fields</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix G: Race/Ethnicity Breakdown by Four-Year Institution (n = 2086)

Table E.3

*Race/Ethnicity Breakdown by Four-Year Institution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Institution A</th>
<th>Institution B</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>3 (0.4%)</td>
<td>16 (1.2%)</td>
<td>19 (0.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>51 (6.7%)</td>
<td>41 (3.1%)</td>
<td>92 (4.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>59 (7.8%)</td>
<td>103 (7.8%)</td>
<td>162 (7.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1 (0.1%)</td>
<td>4 (0.3%)</td>
<td>5 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>230 (30.3%)</td>
<td>372 (28.0%)</td>
<td>602 (28.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Ethnic</td>
<td>14 (1.8%)</td>
<td>31 (2.3%)</td>
<td>45 (2.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Resident Alien (Any Race)</td>
<td>115 (15.2%)</td>
<td>40 (3.0%)</td>
<td>155 (7.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and Ethnicity Unknown</td>
<td>5 (0.7%)</td>
<td>27 (2.0%)</td>
<td>32 (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>281 (37.0%)</td>
<td>693 (52.2%)</td>
<td>974 (46.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>759 (100.0%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>1327 (100.0%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>2086 (100.0%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Academic Status and Race/Ethnicity, Transfer Students Entering Between Fall 2011 and Fall 2016 (n = 1512)

Table E.4

*Academic Program Status by Race/Ethnicity, Transfer Students Entering Between Fall 2011 and Fall 2016*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>Discontinued</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>2 (66.7%)</td>
<td>1 (33.3%)</td>
<td>3 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6 (13.6%)</td>
<td>25 (56.8%)</td>
<td>13 (29.5%)</td>
<td>44 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>6 (12.5%)</td>
<td>25 (52.1%)</td>
<td>17 (35.4%)</td>
<td>48 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>1 (100.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>1 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>17 (9.2%)</td>
<td>123 (66.8%)</td>
<td>44 (23.9%)</td>
<td>184 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Ethnic</td>
<td>3 (25.0%)</td>
<td>7 (58.3%)</td>
<td>2 (16.7%)</td>
<td>12 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Resident Alien (Any Race)</td>
<td>11 (12.8%)</td>
<td>65 (75.6%)</td>
<td>10 (11.6%)</td>
<td>86 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race &amp; Ethnicity Unknown</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>4 (80.0%)</td>
<td>1 (20.0%)</td>
<td>5 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>19 (8.6%)</td>
<td>140 (63.3%)</td>
<td>62 (28.1%)</td>
<td>221 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>62 (10.3%)</td>
<td>392 (64.9%)</td>
<td>150 (24.8%)</td>
<td>604 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Discontinued</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institution B</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>2 (16.7%)</td>
<td>4 (33.3%)</td>
<td>6 (50.6%)</td>
<td>12 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3 (8.8%)</td>
<td>21 (61.8%)</td>
<td>10 (29.4%)</td>
<td>34 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>11 (16.7%)</td>
<td>33 (50.0%)</td>
<td>22 (33.3%)</td>
<td>66 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>2 (100.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>2 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>52 (22.4%)</td>
<td>122 (52.6%)</td>
<td>58 (25.0%)</td>
<td>232 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Ethnic</td>
<td>5 (22.7%)</td>
<td>14 (63.6%)</td>
<td>3 (13.6%)</td>
<td>22 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Resident Alien (Any Race)</td>
<td>4 (15.4%)</td>
<td>17 (65.4%)</td>
<td>5 (19.2%)</td>
<td>26 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race &amp; Ethnicity Unknown</td>
<td>2 (9.5%)</td>
<td>15 (71.4%)</td>
<td>4 (19.0%)</td>
<td>21 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>94 (19.1%)</td>
<td>285 (57.8%)</td>
<td>114 (23.1%)</td>
<td>493 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Count</strong></td>
<td>173 (19.1%)</td>
<td>513 (56.5%)</td>
<td>222 (24.4%)</td>
<td>908 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>2 (13.3%)</td>
<td>6 (40.0%)</td>
<td>7 (46.7%)</td>
<td>15 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>9 (11.5%)</td>
<td>46 (59.0%)</td>
<td>23 (29.5%)</td>
<td>78 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>17 (14.9%)</td>
<td>58 (50.9%)</td>
<td>39 (34.2%)</td>
<td>114 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Discontinued</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>3 (100.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>3 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>69 (16.6%)</td>
<td>245 (58.9%)</td>
<td>102 (24.5%)</td>
<td>416 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Ethnic</td>
<td>8 (23.5%)</td>
<td>21 (61.8%)</td>
<td>5 (14.7%)</td>
<td>34 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Resident Alien (Any Race)</td>
<td>15 (13.4%)</td>
<td>82 (73.2%)</td>
<td>15 (13.4%)</td>
<td>112 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race &amp; Ethnicity Unknown</td>
<td>2 (7.7%)</td>
<td>19 (73.1%)</td>
<td>5 (19.2%)</td>
<td>26 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>113 (7.9%)</td>
<td>425 (59.5%)</td>
<td>176 (24.6%)</td>
<td>714 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>235 (15.5%)</td>
<td>905 (59.9%)</td>
<td>372 (24.6%)</td>
<td>1512 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I: 2-Year, 4-Year and 6-Year Gradation Rates by Incoming Cohort for Transfer Students Entering Institution A Between Fall 2011 and Fall 2016 (n = 604)

Table E.5

*Institution A: 2-year, 4-year and 6-year Graduation Rates by Incoming Cohort for Transfer Students Entering Between Fall 2011 and Fall 2016*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admit Term</th>
<th>2-Year</th>
<th>4-Year</th>
<th>6-Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2016</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2014</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2016</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix J: 2-Year, 4-Year and 6-Year Graduation Rates by Incoming Cohort for Transfer Students Entering Institution B Between Fall 2011 and Fall 2016 (n = 908)**

Table E.6

_Institution B: 2-year, 4-year and 6-year Graduation Rates by Incoming Cohort for Transfer Students Entering Between Fall 2011 and Fall 2016_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admit Term</th>
<th>2-Year</th>
<th>4-Year</th>
<th>6-Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2016</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2014</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2016</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix K: Qualitative Participant Profiles and Prevalent Domains

Table E.7

**Qualitative Participant Profiles and Prevalent Domains by Student**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Profile and Prevalent Domains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madeline</td>
<td>Originally from Central America, Madeline moved to the U.S. at the age of 16. She attends Institution A, is not involved on-campus, and devotes most of her time to academics. Madeline also commutes, works off-campus, is traditional in age, and is majoring in a STEM related field. <strong>Most Prevalent Domain: SELF (Personal/Psychological Growth)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>A former first responder who entered the workforce right after high school, Ryan earned his associate degree in less than two years and attends Institution A on a full-tuition scholarship. He is active in a religious affiliated organization on campus, is traditional in age, and is majoring in a non-STEM related field. <strong>Most Prevalent Domain: SUPPORT (Staff Member Support)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivian</td>
<td>A former dual credit student who later enrolled full-time at the same community college, Vivian attends Institution A on a full-tuition scholarship and participates in research with a faculty member. She commutes to campus, volunteers in the community, is majoring in a non-STEM related field, and is nontraditional in age (25 or older). <strong>Most Prevalent Domain: SUPPORT (Faculty Interactions)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>An international student, Trinity attends Institution A, works on-campus, and is actively involved in transfer programs. She was president of Phi Theta Kappa at her community college, commutes to campus, and is in a non-STEM related major. <strong>Most Prevalent Domain: SUPPORT (Student Involvement)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>An international student, Michael is a Jack Kent Cooke Scholar, attends Institution A, and lives in walking distance of campus. Michael took a few years off before attending college to live abroad, identifies as Muslim, and is majoring in a STEM related field. <strong>Most Prevalent Domain: SUPPORT (Cooke Scholars Program, Faculty Mentorship at Two-Year)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>Marie is a Texas native who attended a four-year institution immediately following high school but withdrew after a year and took time off before completing an associate degree. She attends Institution B, is nontraditional in age, a single mother of one young child, and commutes to campus. She identifies as Hispanic and Christian and is in a non-STEM related field. <strong>Most Prevalent Domain: SELF (Role as a Parent)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Profile and Prevalent Domains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>A first-generation Mexican American and first in her family to graduate from both high school and college, Joy completed her associate degree, attends Institution B, is married, works off-campus, and commutes. She identifies as Hispanic and Christian and is in a non-STEM related field. <strong>Most Prevalent Domain: SUPPORT</strong> (Impact of Scholarships/Financial Aid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Born in Texas but lived in Puerto Rico for 18 years, Christopher attends Institution B and is highly dedicated to an on-campus sports-related organization. He commutes more than 30 miles, works on-campus, and has a close tie to his community college. <strong>Most Prevalent Domain: SUPPORT</strong> (Commitment to On-Campus Involvement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>A stay-at-home mom for 25 years, Kate was called to the ministry at the age of 50 with hopes of attending seminary post-graduation. After receiving her associate degree, she transferred to Institution B and is majoring in a non-STEM related field. Kate is married, commutes to campus, and identifies as Christian. <strong>Most Prevalent Domain: SELF</strong> (Impact of Age In-and-Outside the Classroom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriella</td>
<td>Born in Mexico, Gabriella moved to the U.S. at a young age, took 10 years off after high school, and completed an associate degree at her local community college. Enrolled at Institution B, she has two young children, is married, commutes to campus, and is majoring in a non-STEM related field. <strong>Most Prevalent Domain: SUPPORT</strong> (Family/Support System)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix L: Full Interview Codes, Summary Compiled by Domain

Table E.8

*Situation Domain: Full Interview Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Ranking</th>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Number of Times Referenced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Culture at Four-Year</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Community College Experience</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>First-Year Challenges at Four-Year</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Why Student Chose Four-Year Private</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Academic Rigor</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Why Student Chose Two-Year</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Unsure of Major / Degree Path</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Difficulty Finding Like-Minded Individuals</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Transfer Shock</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Institutional Structure / Lack of Support / &quot;Not Feeling Represented&quot;</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Commute to Campus Impact</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Value of Education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Difficulty Making Friends / Stepping Outside Comfort Zone</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code Ranking</td>
<td>Code Name</td>
<td>Number of Times Referenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Imposter Syndrome</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Interview codes selected for the *Situation* domain were directly associated with college choice or selectivity, students’ transition to the four-year private institution, and/or what transfer students experienced during their first-year.
Table E.9

_Self Domain: Full Interview Codes_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Ranking</th>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Number of Times Referenced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Descriptive Student Characteristics / Qualities (e.g., empathy, commitment, motivation, determination, insecurities)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Non-School Commitments (e.g., work on- or off-campus, parental commitments)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mental Health, Stress and/or Anxiety</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reference to &quot;Problem with Self&quot;</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Wanting to be a Role Model</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Work Experience / Importance of Having Flexibility with Work Schedule</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Building of Self-Confidence</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>International Student / Difference of Perspective</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Nontraditional Student</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Associate Degree Impact</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Faith / Religion</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ethnicity / Minority Reference</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code Ranking</td>
<td>Code Name</td>
<td>Number of Times Referenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>First Generation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Not Wanting to Let Family Down</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Transfer Identity</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Marital Status / Divorced</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Interview codes selected for the *Self* domain were directly associated with personal and demographic characteristics, psychological resources or qualities, identity, and non-school responsibilities.
Table E.10

*Support Domain: Full Interview Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Ranking</th>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Number of Times Referenced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Advising Experience</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Scholarships and Financial Aid / Financial Support</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Admissions and/or Registrar Team Impact</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Faculty / Support System</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Extended Orientation Programs</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Staff / Support System</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Family Influences</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sense of Community</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Friends / Support System</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Orientation Programs</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Phi Theta Kappa / Honor's Societies</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Family / Support System</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Financial Restrictions</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code Ranking</td>
<td>Code Name</td>
<td>Number of Times Referenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Transfer Connection Spaces / Commuter Lounges</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Transfer Center / Resources</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Wanting to Connect with Other Transfer Students</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Interview codes selected for the *Support* domain were directly associated with campus support/support systems, institutional resources, mentorship, community, and/or on-campus involvement.
Table E.11

*Strategies Domain: Full Interview Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Ranking</th>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Number of Times Referenced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Coping Mechanisms / Strategies for Success (e.g., time management, balance, relying on others, making genuine connections)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Utilization of Academic Resources / On-Campus Resources (e.g., tutoring, career services, transfer center)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Involvement / Organizations at Four-Year</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Involvement / Organizations at Two-Year</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reference to Wanting to Help Other Students</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reference to a Mindset Shift</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Persistence / Perseverance / Grit / Resilience</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Impact of Student Leadership Positions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Study Habits</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Community Service</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Interview codes selected for the *Strategies* domain were directly associated with how students coped, strategized and/or worked through challenging situations as a transfer student.
Table E.12

*Miscellaneous / Other Category: Full Interview Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Ranking</th>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Number of Times Referenced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Academic Major / College / Classes</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Advice to Two-Year Transfer students</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“What I Wish I Would Have Known”</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Overall Transfer Experience / Recommendations for Four-Year Institutions</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Thought about Transferring out of Four-Year (Y/N) or Dropping Out-of-School</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Greek Life Reference</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>On-Campus Housing</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Codes selected for this category did not fit one of the four domains directly; however, served as important themes found in qualitative data analysis.
Appendix M: Advice for Two- to Four-Year Transfer Students by Transfer Students in Multi-Case Study

Table E.13

Situation-Related Advice for Two- to Four-Year Transfer Students by Transfer Students in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation-Related Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't discount a private institution because you think it's too cost prohibitive… they're far more generous. If you're willing to work, these institutions will make it possible. It is a place where you can belong and feel connected if you so choose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximize your classes at your community college to ensure as many credits transfer as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really think about what you're going to major in (as soon as you can).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take advantage of the fact that you're at this prestigious university. Take advantage of the people that are around you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rely more on people for the first few weeks of the semester. I really was trying to test the waters and show that I could stand on my own, and it ended up being a waste of time. I really should have just tried to use as many resources, as many people, as many friends as possible and just gotten as much advice, as much help as I could.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask a ton of questions to your advisers and your friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do what makes you happy. When choosing what you want to get involved in your first-year, people would say &quot;you need to be in a fraternity, or you need to be trying out for sports and stuff like that.&quot; Ultimately, it was based on what they had done or what they had thought would be good for me. In reality, it wasn't necessarily based on me (or my interests).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't feel intimidated. It's a big school and that in itself can be intimidating, but I feel like once you get into your major it becomes like a small community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transferring to a private institution is going to be different but don't be afraid and don't give up because it gets better.

We weren't born to be perfect… this might sound silly, but our brains are not wired to be, they're wired for survival (something I read and learned from).

Just be mindful, be realistic, and stick to the facts. The fact is you're here. The fact is you need a degree. The fact is you're smart because yeah, I mean, you got here… give yourself some grace.

(For Parents) It's definitely challenging but if you could get through school and having children and working, just think about how you'll feel when you've completed, knowing that you went through all of that… you’ll feel like you can do anything.

You need to get good grades because that's the reason you are here, but also keep in mind that being “mind healthy” and “body healthy” is important, too… it's really important for you to be successful.

Remember the reward that's at the end of the work… I don't mean like earning a degree, I mean feeling like you have accomplished something pretty incredible… it’s worth it.
Table E.15

*Support-Related Advice for Two- to Four-Year Transfer Students by Transfer Students in Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support-Related Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend really getting into a community as quick as possible. That is going to involve getting out of your comfort zone and meeting people. It's not going to feel great, but the sooner you do that, the better it goes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find a good group of people that you'll see on a frequent basis... I think that's really all it takes to feel like you belong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(For Parents) You're making a big difference. Your kids are seeing you work hard and I know ... it's hard right now. I know what you're feeling. I know maybe you feel like you can't handle it all but you can... just take a deep breath and sleep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get social and find support. Even though I thought, “I can't. I have to do good in my classes,” there was time for everything. So just keep telling yourself that. There is time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you can't meet people or you're uncomfortable, then you're missing so much of your existence, of everything that's around you. So many stories, billions of stories that are as unique as your own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(For Parents) Definitely find the resources that can help you. Try to meet other parents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E.16

Strategies-Related Advice for Two- to Four-Year Transfer Students by Transfer Students in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies-Related Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy it. Enjoy it. Enjoy the fact that you're in a university with so many resources. Take advantage of the resources of a private university. Go to the library, study in those areas. Visit the different restaurants in the community. Go to events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print out your syllabi and read the emails that professors send you during the first week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be active – I did better in my busier semesters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do things. If people invite you to something, just say yes. Just go. Don’t say no out of fear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriend other transfer students and ask them how they study/prepare for classes… I had to change my study habits drastically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study – don’t put it off.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you want to thrive, you need to do all the readings, all the assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn how to manage your stress, because when trying to accomplish anything… you need to have in mind what you're doing to your body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remember, if certain things don't work out, it's not the end of the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I asked a ton of questions and I didn't ask enough. Just keep those questions going.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your dream is to graduate with a degree from _____. You just have to frame things better in your mind and just be realistic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you have negative thoughts, even if you're depressed, it's okay. You're not weird. People are depressed. Because I feel like transfers see what’s around them, everyone seems to be doing just great, and everyone seems to fit in so well, and everyone seems to ... no, they have problems, too.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Socialize, study ahead of time, listen to your professors, learn and connect with genuine people.

Get involved. Go in. You may not necessarily feel like you're welcome sometimes. It may not necessarily feel like people are going to come in and drag you in… but, you got to just get out there and do it. Be a part of it.

Be involved, go to events, find a club… try to take a leadership position.

Network – network not just with people within the campus community, but with people who are associated with the community… companies and organizations. If you don’t, you still get that great degree from a private university. But if you didn’t make other connections… then, you're missing out on a huge, huge part of what you invested in versus other universities. You don't want to lose. You don't want to lose an opportunity to network.

I hope it never happens to you, but a lot of people will find the classes a lot harder and very challenging… you might see a dip in your grades. Look up “transfer shock”… it's a scientifically-studied thing, you should look it up and talk with other people.

Don't be afraid to ask questions if you need some help. I know everybody says that and nobody ever does it. Just ask.

Go on retreats with student organizations or departments because they're refreshing.

For sure go to your professors’ office hours, for sure, and try to talk with your faculty and tell them about yourself.

Don’t be afraid to reach out to people in your network. That's another big thing that really worked out for me, was I went to my professor when I wasn't going to be able to complete a project on time. She was very willing to work with me and reach a compromise… she wanted me to succeed.
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