

UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY TRANSFER PATHWAYS:
A MULTIPLE CASE ANALYSIS OF
TWO TO FOUR-YEAR TRANSFER IN A SINGLE STATE

A Capstone Presented To
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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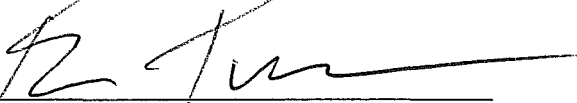
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UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY TRANSFER PATHWAYS

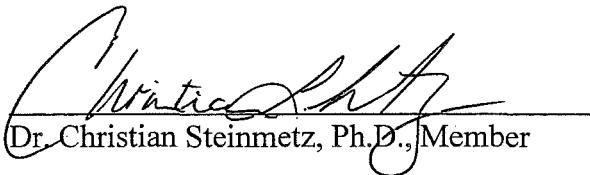
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APPROVAL OF CAPSTONE PROJECT

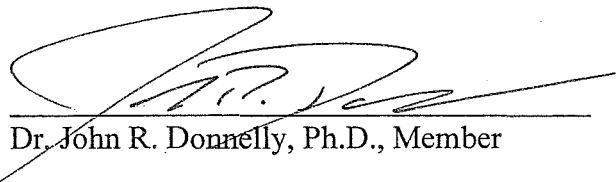
This capstone project, Understanding Contemporary Transfer Pathways: A Multiple Case Analysis of Two to Four-Year Transfer in a Single State, has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.



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ABSTRACT

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Three quarters of community college students enter higher education with the goal of transferring to a four-year institution to pursue a bachelor's degree and as few as 11% succeed. Scholars cite four main reasons for why this gap in baccalaureate completion matters: (1) community colleges today are educating approximately one-half of all undergraduates in the American higher education system; (2) low-income students are much more likely to enter higher education through a community college rather than through a four-year institution; (3) non-traditional students such as adult, part-time, or first generation students, are more likely to start their post-secondary education at a community college; and (4) community colleges educate the highest proportion of minority students within the higher education system. One state-level approach to easing students' transitions between two and four-year institutions has been implementing articulation policies. In the state in which this study was conducted, no formal statewide articulation policy exists; the transfer process, including articulation, is largely governed at an institutional level. This study, focusing on institutional approaches to transfer, explored how administrators conceptualized and implemented their institution's approach to transfer, common elements that existed across institutions, and what practices within institutions were most effective in assisting transfer students.

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DEDICATION

For Ben.

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I owe thanks to many individuals who made this accomplishment possible. Dr. Brian Pusser has been a steady advocate for me throughout my time in the program. As my advisor and then as the chair of my capstone committee, he made me a better writer and communicator. I also owe thanks to the members of my capstone committee, Dr. Christian Steinmetz and Dr. John Donnelly. This capstone came to fruition thanks to their support and guidance. Additionally, I owe thanks to Christina Morell who served as a valuable editor for me.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Community college students who intend to transfer to a four-year institution and obtain a bachelor's degree are much less likely to persist to completion as compared to their peers who begin at four-year institutions (Alfonso, 2006; Long & Kurlaender, 2009). Using nationally representative, longitudinal data, Alfonso (2006) found that students who started at a community college as compared to a four-year institution decreased their chances of attaining a bachelor's degree by a range of 21-33%. Long and Kurlaender's (2009) longitudinal study of students in Ohio's public postsecondary system found that only 26% of the community college students who sought to attain a bachelor's degree succeeded within nine years of starting. In contrast, 50% of students who started their education at non-selective or open-admissions four-year institutions, and 73% who started at selective four-year institutions completed their degrees. The gap in baccalaureate attainment for community college students remained constant when student demographic traits were controlled in various studies (Alfonso, 2006; Dougherty, 1992).

Researchers have long debated whether the gap in baccalaureate attainment for community college transfers is a problem. Clark's (1960) "cooling out" theory stated that the gap in baccalaureate attainment was not a problem as it was simply a sign that the community colleges were working as designed. More specifically, Clark's (1960) theory stated that the post-secondary system was responsible for working with students who entered the higher education system but were not capable of participating and ultimately

destined to fail. He argued that the community colleges were the place for these students who were unlikely to succeed within the postsecondary system. Townsend (2007) argued that researchers should not interpret this gap as an indication of institutional or individual failure, suggesting that students might enter a community college to figure out whether post-secondary education was right for them. Townsend also stated that students in community colleges might find it an ideal environment given the emphasis on small classes and teaching, and decide that a four-year degree was not something they wanted to pursue. However, most researchers suggested that the gap in baccalaureate attainment for community college students was concerning and needed to be studied further (Doughery & Townsend, 2006; Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Shaw & London, 2001; Townsend, 2007).

Scholars cite four main reasons for why it is important to understand this gap in baccalaureate completion. First, community colleges today are educating approximately one-half of all undergraduates in the American higher education system (Long & Kurlaender, 2009). The number of students entering community colleges in pursuit of a bachelor's degree is likely to increase in the coming years as the high school diploma continues to decrease in value (Doughery & Townsend, 2006). Second, low-income students are much more likely to enter higher education through a community college rather than through a four-year institution as the cost of attendance is much lower (Shaw & London, 2001; Townsend, 2007). Community colleges in most areas are within 50 miles of the majority of individuals (Townsend, 2007); the close proximity of these institutions makes it easier for low-income students to attend classes while also balancing their cost of living, family, and job responsibilities (Townsend, 2007). Third, non-

traditional students such as adult, part-time, or first generation students, are more likely to start their post-secondary education at a community college (Hagedorn, Cypers, & Lester, 2008). Townsend (2007) cited that non-traditional students often use these institutions as a way to determine if higher education is right for them, testing this fit while benefiting from the close proximity of these institutions and the flexible class schedules they provide. Fourth, community colleges educate the highest proportion of minority students within the higher education system (Grubb, 1991; Lee & Frank, 1990; Shaw & London, 2001). Researchers have argued that the sign for a functioning education system is that individuals from all backgrounds can be found at all levels of the educational system (Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008). To ensure equality of access and success within the post-secondary education system, it is imperative that this gap in baccalaureate attainment be improved.

Three quarters of entering community college students have the goal of transferring to a four-year institution to pursue a bachelor's degree; however as few as 11% ultimately make this transition (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Grubb, 1991; Lee & Frank, 1990; NCES, 2004). These students have three main transitions to navigate—successfully completing their time at the community college, navigating the process of transfer between the community college and four-year institution, and completing their baccalaureate degree at the four-year institution. This study focuses on the first two of the three transitions.

One approach that 21 states have taken to assist community college students in navigating this transition is to implement articulation policies (Roksa, 2009).

Articulation is defined as “the entire range of processes and relationships involved in

systematic movement of students interinstitutionally and intersegmentally throughout postsecondary education” (Kintzer & Wattenbarger, 1985, p. iii). Articulation is an important state-managed policy supporting transfer, which ensures the successful transition of community college students into four-year institutions. Cohen and Brawer (2008) stated two main reasons why articulation policies are an important state policy. First, community colleges enroll large numbers of students—many of whom are racial/ethnic minorities as well as low-income students—who do not qualify for admission to state colleges or universities, and keeping the transfer pathway open and accessible is necessary. Second, community colleges cost less and provide an affordable pathway to a baccalaureate degree.

Articulation policies are typically initiated by states with the main goals of: (1) increasing the number of students transferring and; (2) better facilitating the transfer process between community colleges and four-year institutions in the same state (Roksa & Keith, 2008). Scholars have found inconsistent evidence regarding the effectiveness of statewide articulation policies. While some scholars suggest that these policies have led to an increase in the number of students transferring (Banks, 1994; Higgins & Katsinas, 1999), recent studies have brought this claim into question (Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006; Roksa, 2006). These scholars (Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006; Banks, 1994; Higgins & Katsinas, 1999; Roksa, 2006) identified a gap in the literature in regards to statewide articulation policies—why are some policies effective in increasing transfer while others are not? What happens in the implementation of these policies, that makes them particularly effective?

This study is focused within a single state that will be called the “State of Four Seasons” for the purposes of preserving confidentiality. The State of Four Seasons is a medium sized state with between 20-40 community colleges. Two-year, public tuition in the State of Four Seasons is in the lower half for the fifty states and four-year, public tuition is in the top third. In this state, no formal statewide articulation policy exists; the transfer process, including articulation, is largely governed at an institutional level. The purpose of this study was to understand institutional approaches to transfer in Four Seasons, common elements that existed across institutions, and what practices within institutions were most effective in assisting transfer students. In addition, the study sought to discover whether there were differences in institutional approaches based on how students chose to move between the two and four-year institutions (i.e. students who use an articulation agreement verses those who do not). This researcher aimed to accomplish two main objectives with this study: to expand the literature on transfer and articulation, and to improve practice by exploring how these institutional approaches are implemented and the ways in which these approaches could be applicable to other institutions or states.

Background

The State of Four Seasons has a coordinating body for the higher education institutions throughout the state, which is charged with promoting collaboration and coordination among policymakers, college administrators, and other leaders within the state. This coordinating body also makes policy recommendations based on data collected from the higher education institutions across the state. In addition to this coordinating body, the community colleges are governed through a single system at the

state level. Within the State of Four Seasons, three out of five students in the public higher education institutions were community college students. The average tuition and fees paid by students in the community college system was roughly one-third the amount of mandatory tuition and fees at four-year institutions.

This state's goals and initiatives for two to four-year transfer can be found in two documents. One document states the main areas of focus for two to four-year transfer within the state. This document does not have specific requirements for institutions—it is merely a compilation of the main areas of focus for transfer. Following the issuance of this document, a piece of legislation was passed at the state level, which led to the creation of statewide articulation agreements, hereafter called “statewide agreements.” These statewide agreements are contracts that guarantee admission for students from the community college system into a four-year institution as long as they meet all of the requirements in the agreement. All but two of the public, four-year institutions in the state have signed these contracts with the community college system. Each of the agreements includes unique requirements for guaranteed admission to be granted. The two, four-year public institutions in the state that have chosen not to sign a statewide agreement instead have institution-to-institution agreements, hereafter referred to as institutional agreements, with several (not all) community colleges throughout the state. The institutional agreements guarantee admission into a specific four-year institution to community college students from a particular two-year institution if they meet all of the requirements in the agreement.

In addition to the statewide and institutional agreements, there are also two other types of articulation agreements that exist across the state: programmatic agreements and

programmatic articulation guides. A programmatic agreement is a contract that guarantees admission to a community college student from a particular institution into a program at a specific four-year institution. A programmatic articulation guide is a document meant to guide students from the community college into a specific program at the four-year institution, but it does not guarantee admission.

All four types of articulation agreements are in place throughout the six institutions included in this study. When referring to these various types of agreements generally, they will simply be called “articulation agreements.”

Problem Statement and Research Questions

This study is designed to add to existing research on how public two and four-year higher education institutions approach the transfer process. This research is focused on understanding institutional approaches to transfer in one state, common elements that existed across institutions, and what practices within institutions were most effective in assisting transfer students. In addition, the study sought to discover whether there were differences in institutional approaches based on the two main populations of transfer students: students who transferred using an articulation agreement and students who transferred without one. Given the increased national attention to community college transfer and the commonalities in the transfer processes used in many states, this study sought to add to the understanding of the transfer process more generally, by seeking answers to the following two research questions:

- 1) How do administrators at two and four-year institutions in the State of Four Seasons describe their institution's approach towards transfer students?
- 2) How well do the two and four-year institutional approaches to transfer align with Ignash and Townsend's (2001) framework for effective articulation?

The researcher used the data collected through this study to create a report including a summary of what the data revealed along with recommendations for interventions and policies designed to benefit community college transfer students. This report will be shared with key policymakers with the hope of improving future practice.

Conceptual Framework

To analyze the data that emerged from this study, Ignash and Townsend's (2001) guiding principles for strong statewide articulation policies were used. Out of the seven principles, six were used. The principle not included referred to the importance of establishing articulation agreements with private institutions within a state. This principle was not included because no private institutions were part of this study. As Four Seasons does not have a formal statewide articulation policy, the institutional approaches to transfer were explored using these principles as a framework.

Ignash and Townsend (2001) established these guiding principles after conducting an in depth review of literature on statewide articulation policies as well as conducting a detailed analysis of several state policies. In 1999, the researchers sent an eleven-question survey out to representatives within all 50 states. Forty-three out of 50 states responded (86% response rate) and 34 of the states (76%) had statewide articulation policies. From this data collected in addition to a review of the literature, the researchers presented the guiding principles required for strong statewide articulation to occur.

The first principle states that two and four-year institutions need to participate as equal partners to ensure that strong articulation policies are developed. Equal partnership allows both parties to place these policies as a priority for their respective institutions. In theory, once defined as an institutional priority, faculty and staff at each institution will be invested in making the policies as effective as possible for the students using them. Additionally, Ignash and Townsend (2001) emphasized that both types of institutions need to be prepared to assist not only vertical transfers, or students moving into the four-year institution from the two-year institution, but also reverse transfers, or students moving from the four-year into the two-year institution, and swirling transfers, or students moving between multiple institution types.

Second, transfer students and native students, or entering freshmen students straight from high school, should be treated equally at the receiving institution. Once transfer students arrive on their new campus, they should have all of the same resources and opportunities available to them as native students. The researchers specifically speak to the challenges faced by many transfer students in various states where they are blocked from certain majors and their credits are accepted or rejected without the input of community college faculty.

Third, faculty at the two and four-year institutions should hold the responsibility of creating and updating the articulation agreements. Faculty members are the experts as to what courses should be included versus not. More than policymakers, legislators, and administrators, faculty know their content areas and can most effectively define the details of how these agreements should be structured.

Fourth, articulation policies should accommodate students who do not transfer with an earned associate's degree. Many students today transfer before earning the associate's degree at the community college level. In a study conducted by Palmer, Ludwig, and Stapleton (1994) involving 13 states, only 37% of community college students transferred with an associate's degree. In order for these policies to meet the needs of students, they need to accommodate both students who transfer with an associate's degree as well as those who transfer without it.

Fifth, articulation agreements should be created for specific program areas and majors. When students plan to enter four-year institutions as juniors, they oftentimes need to enter having completed coursework for their major. This principle assures that students have access to the particular majors for which they are interested.

Sixth, there should be data collection and analysis conducted by both the two and four-year institutions with the goal of understanding how well the articulation policies are working. Assessment of the articulation agreements is important, the researchers point out, because there is a significant amount of time and resources that go into making these policies effective.

Ignash and Townsend's (2001) guiding principles demonstrated key areas of focus for states that currently have statewide articulation policies. These principles provided an effective framework for analyzing the data collected through this study. Additionally, these principles aided the researcher in developing further clarity around what key elements should exist within a transfer approach.

The following pages include several sections: (1) a review of the relevant literature; (2) a review of the methodology for the study; (3) a description of the main

findings of the study organized by institution; (4) a discussion of the findings and answers to the two research questions; and finally (5) the recommendations and conclusions resulting from the findings that aim to further enhance the two to four-year transfer pathway in the State of Four Seasons.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Providing further understanding about institutional approaches to transfer in the State of Four Seasons will enable administrators and policymakers to consider ways to enhance the transfer pathway for community college students. In order to effectively study this topic, four main factors were explored concerning the success of transfer students in navigating the transition between institutions. These four factors included: the unique demographics of students who enter higher education through community colleges; the importance of focusing on the retention of community college students; the impact of comprehensive community college missions; and the role of articulation policies in the transfer process.

Demographics of Community College Students

Researchers who have explored the reasons for the gap in baccalaureate attainment for community college students have consistently found evidence to suggest that one key factor affecting this gap is the demographics of students who enter higher education through community colleges (Grubb, 1991; Wang, 2009). Compared to four-year institutions, community colleges have more students from low-income families, adult students, part-time students, and minority students (Grubb, 1991; Joshi, Beck, & Nsiah, 2009; Long & Kurlaender, 2009). In addition, community college students also are more likely to enroll in institutions with uncertain educational plans, weaker high school transcripts, and lower confidence levels (Dougherty, 1992; Joshi, Beck, & Nsiah,

2009). Previous research indicates that statistically speaking, most community college students enter higher education with their chances of success stacked against them.

There have been many studies conducted on the characteristics of students who are most likely to succeed in transferring. Researchers have found that white students (Grubb, 1991; Gutierrez & Dantes, 2009; Lee & Frank, 1990), traditionally aged students (Hagedorn, Cypers, & Lester, 2008), students from a high socioeconomic background (Grubb, 1991; Lee & Frank, 1990; Roksa, 2006), students attending college full-time (Roksa, 2006), students who are continuously enrolled (Hagedorn, Cypers, & Lester, 2008; Roksa, 2006), students who expect to transfer (Hagedorn, Cypers, & Lester, 2008; Roksa, 2006), and students who are high academic achievers in secondary school (Adelman, 2006; Grubb, 1991; Lee & Frank, 1990) are more likely to succeed in transferring to a four-year institution. There was less agreement among researchers about the impact of gender on the likelihood of transfer (Roksa, 2006; Wang, 2009).

Joshi, Beck, and Nsiah (2009) conducted a study to evaluate how the characteristics of students influenced their choice of postsecondary institution—either a two or four-year college. They used the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97), which included 2,295 observations in the sample. Their findings showed that students with weaker academic records were more likely to attend a two-year institution as compared to a four-year institution. They also found that students who worked more hours were more likely to attend a two-year institution. Non-white students who came from families of a low socioeconomic status were also more likely to attend two-year institutions according to this study.

Lee and Frank (1990) conducted a study specifically seeking to address the characteristics of successful transfer students. They used the High School and Beyond Study of 1980, which included 30,000 randomly selected high school students in over 1,000 randomly selected high schools. The part of the study concerning transfer success rates involved a sample of 2,500 students who attended community college between 1980 and 1982 and then began attending a four-year institution between 1982-1984. Their findings showed that students who transferred were more likely to come from a family with a higher socioeconomic status, less likely to be of minority status, and more likely to be male. Additionally, in terms of students' twelfth grade achievement in high school, Lee and Frank found that those students who were more focused on their academics as compared to their social or work life were more likely to transfer. Finally, the researchers found that students who did not transfer were much more likely to be working than their transferring counterparts.

Confirming the findings in the Lee and Frank (1990) study, Grubb (1991) also found in his study using the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 and the High School and Beyond Study of the Class of 1980 data that:

Transfer rates are higher for males, for white students compared to blacks and Hispanics, for students of high socioeconomic status, for those of higher ability measured in high school, and for those that were in the academic track rather than the general or vocational tracks during high school. (p. 206)

Overall, Grubb found that the unique characteristics of community college students explained approximately one third to one fourth of the decline in effectiveness of the transfer function.

Roksa (2006) conducted a study on community college outcomes to uncover whether student success in reaching their goals (e.g. earning an associate's degree or

transferring to a four-year institution) in a community college setting was linked to the organizational environment. The researcher used a combination of national data sets to conduct her inquiry. She used data from the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study (PETS), which was part of the National Education Longitudinal Study (1988-2000). She also was able to cross these data with Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data. The sample included 2,536 students who entered 550 different community colleges in 46 states by September of 1994. Roksa had several notable findings. First, she found that students who did not have a disruption in their postsecondary enrollment were two times more likely to transfer and six times more likely to complete an associate's degree. Second, she found that students who were enrolled full-time were more likely to transfer and to attain an associate's degree. Third, her data showed that students from a high socioeconomic status (SES) background were two and half times more likely to transfer than low SES students. Fourth, she found that female students were just as likely to transfer as male students, though women were two times as likely to complete the associate's degree. This finding was different from that of Lee and Frank (1990) and Grubb (1991). Fifth, she found that students who expected to earn a bachelor's degree were three times more likely to transfer.

Hagedorn, Cypers, and Lester's (2008) study of patterns of transfer for urban community college students drew comparable results to some of the earlier studies. They used a sample of 5,000 students from the nine Los Angeles Community College District campuses. Students who took the questionnaire in 2001 and were listed as attending a four-year institution in 2003 or in 2005 were coded as transfer students. There were several notable findings. First, reflecting Roksa's (2006) findings, the results showed

that even though there were a larger proportion of female students in the community colleges, female students were not any more likely to transfer than their male counterparts. Second, older students found it much more difficult to transfer as compared to traditionally aged students (18-24 years of age). Third, the longer students stayed in the community college, the less likely they were to transfer. Along these same lines, those students who were continuously enrolled were more likely to transfer. Fourth and finally, students who were prepared to transfer (e.g. completed the general education courses required through the articulation agreement in California) were more likely to actually do so.

Gutierrez and Dantes (2009) found similar results in their exploration of the City Colleges of Chicago's (CCC) six-year student outcomes model. Gutierrez and Dantes used data collected through this outcomes model in addition to institutional data and data within the National Student Clearinghouse. A sample of 7,410 new credit students, or entering community college students, was tracked over the course of six years. In terms of gender, the findings showed that females were more likely to persist and attain an associate's degree or other credential as compared to males. Additionally, Black and Hispanic students were less successful at transferring than their White or Asian counterparts. Finally, this study reinforced the consistent finding that students from low-income backgrounds were less likely to succeed at transferring as compared to their middle to high-income peers.

Several studies also focused on the relationship between students' demographic characteristics and the likelihood of baccalaureate degree attainment. These studies offered a more critical look at which student characteristics had the strongest impact on

baccalaureate degree attainment. Adelman's (2006) study for the Department of Education led to some interesting findings in relation to the characteristics of successful community college transfer students. This study relied on the NELS (1988-2000) data and compared the members of the High School Class of 1992 with the High School Class of 1982. The study sought to uncover the elements of academic momentum to understand how students progressed through the educational pipeline from the K through 12 system into the postsecondary education system. First, the results from this study reinforced Adelman's earlier study in 1999 showing that the intensity of the high school curriculum was the strongest predictor for momentum towards a baccalaureate degree. Second, students enrolled on a part-time basis who accumulated less than 20 credits in the first calendar year of postsecondary enrollment were much less likely to persist on the path to baccalaureate attainment. Third, Adelman found that the longer the student waited to enter college after high school, the less likely the student was to complete a degree. Along these same lines, a student who was continuously enrolled was 43% more likely to complete a degree. In fact, it was better for a student to attend part-time than for the student to go full-time and have extended breaks in college enrollment. And finally, only high socioeconomic status showed a significant positive relationship with degree completion. There were no significant relationships between gender or race and baccalaureate degree completion.

A more recent study by Wang (2009) on baccalaureate attainment and college persistence also used the PETS data, which was part of the NELS (1988-2000) longitudinal data set. The 786 students in the sample included community college students who eventually transferred into a four-year institution. Wang found that women

were approximately two and half times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than men. Also, high SES students were approximately one and a half times more likely to attain a bachelor's degree.

Throughout these studies, there were several consistent findings in relation to students' demographic characteristics as they related to transfer. Minority students and students from a low-socioeconomic background were less likely to transfer successfully. The research supporting the influence of socioeconomic status on transfer success was particularly strong (Adelman, 2006; Wang, 2009). This was significant for community colleges because the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported data from the Community College Taxonomy (2003) showing that 28.3% of community college students were classified as low-income, with 22.1% of these students at or below the poverty level. In comparison, the influence of race or ethnicity was found to be less important when looking at the impact on baccalaureate degree attainment (Adelman, 2006). Traditionally aged students, or students who came straight from high school to college, were more likely to transfer. Similarly, students who stayed continuously enrolled in college were much more likely to succeed in transferring. Full-time college attendance also was a strong predictor of transfer as compared to part-time attendance. Interestingly, Adelman (2006) found that students who attended part time had a better chance at achieving a baccalaureate degree than students who attended full time but experienced disruptions in enrollment. Strong academic performance in high school is also linked to higher rates of transfer. Lastly, students who expected to transfer and earn a bachelor's degree were much more likely to actually achieve this goal.

Pascarella (1984) argued that students' input characteristics were the most significant predictor of their educational outputs. From one perspective, the beauty of community colleges is that they can absorb so many different types of students. The challenge for community colleges is that the diversity within the student body makes it difficult for these institutions to ensure each student has the resources and support they require to succeed. More specifically, low-income, minority, or first-generation students need more information and support, as they are the students least likely to transfer successfully. These students also appear to be least likely to seek out the support or resources available to them in the community college. Overall, the literature was consistent on the fact that the demographic characteristics of students had a strong impact on their chances of success in the community college setting.

Retention of Community College Students

Researchers have acknowledged that the retention of community college students is another key factor to consider when exploring the gap in baccalaureate attainment (Derby and Smith, 2004; Fike & Fike, 2008). The concept of retention deals with how well individual students with unique characteristics connect to the institutional environment. As the concepts of retention and persistence are similar by definition, they will be used interchangeably throughout this discussion of the literature. Derby and Smith (2004) stated, "retention exists, generally, when students remain at the institution for the duration of their studies (that is, until they graduate)" (p. 764). The challenge with defining retention in the community college setting as compared to the four-year college setting is that community college students have varying goals. Students may be attending to earn a degree (e.g. an associate's degree), to transfer to a four-year

institution, to take work-force development courses, or to take courses for personal enrichment. While there will always be some students who simply want to take a class or two for personal enrichment, a significant proportion of the population of community college students do want to earn a degree and potentially transfer to a four-year institution (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). In fact, approximately three quarters of community college students enter with the goal of pursuing a bachelor's degree (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Grubb, 1991; Lee & Frank, 1990; NCES, 2004).

Fike and Fike (2008) stated two main reasons why retention is important for community colleges to consider. The first is that retention enables institutions to maintain financial stability. Recently, states have implemented performance-based funding models for community colleges (Sorey & Duggan, 2008). This emphasis on performance highlights the need for community colleges to consider the retention of their students. Second, community colleges were founded to promote educational access for all. Cohen and Brawer (2008), however, pointed to the core challenge facing community colleges in stating, "it is difficult for an institution built on the theme of easy access to limit easy exit" (p. 71).

A dominant theory in the retention literature is Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure. Tinto (1993) argued that higher education institutions needed to focus on ways to promote the academic and social integration of their students. He stated that these two elements had a direct impact on the chance that students would persist to degree attainment. Due to the diversity of the student body, community colleges have a difficult time integrating students into the academic and social environments within the institution (Dougherty, 1992). Prospero and Vohra-Gupta (2007) explored the

importance of social and academic integration with a specific population of first-generation community college students (N=277). In regards to academic integration, they found that students who became more academically integrated, or assimilated “into the academic life of the college” (p. 966), had higher GPAs. Dougherty (1992) suggested two potential reasons for the lack of academic integration. One of these reasons could be the low selectivity of the institutions. This low selectivity could lead students to be less motivated as the return on their educational investment is lower when compared to peers who attend a four-year institution. Low levels of academic integration also could be caused by a culture where peers have low levels of motivation and unclear academic goals.

Another study by Sorey and Duggan (2008) was conducted to compare the persistence factors of adult students who were 25 years of age or older, to traditionally aged students who were 18 to 24 years of age. Interestingly, social integration had the greatest impact on persistence for adult students while academic integration had the greatest impact on persistence for traditionally aged students. This study highlights the necessity of understanding the different factors impacting integration into an institution across both adult and traditionally aged students. The social environment of community colleges is limited as compared to four-year institutions. Community colleges have fewer opportunities for extra-curricular involvement and they often do not provide the option of living in a residential setting. Research has shown that living in school housing significantly contributes to the retention and integration of students in the institutional community (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Similarly, a study conducted by Miller, Pope, and Steinmann (2005) of 272 community college students at six different institutions revealed three main challenges faced by community college students: academic success; balancing academic and personal life; and paying for college. Policymakers and higher education administrations have attempted to address these challenges through the implementation of one or more intervention strategies. For the purpose of this study, the literature reviewed focused on intervention strategies for community college students aiming to transfer. From an institutional perspective, community colleges, as open-access institutions, cannot control who enters their institutions. However, they can control the programs, structures, and policies in place to increase the success of students who enroll with the goal of transferring to a four-year institution (Dougherty, 1992). The main intervention strategies mentioned throughout the literature include: transitional bridge programs; orientation programs; mentoring programs; and combined approaches (Townsend & Twombly, 2001).

Transitional Bridge Programs. One way to promote increased academic integration and persistence is through the implementation of transition or summer bridge programs. Townsend and Twombly (2001) described the characteristics of students who typically participate in these programs as “high-risk students [who] enter college lacking basic study skills or adequate academic preparation or are undecided on a career or life goal” (p. 265). These programs aim to: (1) help students adjust to college; (2) provide an overview of the tools and resources available at the college; (3) support the development of academic skills and social networks; and (4) contribute to the narrowing of educational and career goals.

A study done by Santa Rita and Bacote (1997) with community college students in New York showed that transitional programs did lead to higher persistence rates for students. This study was conducted over the course of two semesters in 1993 with a cohort of students participating in the six-week long transitional program at Bronx Community College (BCC) at the City University of New York. BCC's transitional program involved a curricular element (e.g. math, reading, and writing instruction) and a counseling element (e.g. orientation information, career counseling, and study skills). Both academic and attitudinal data were collected through the Registrar's Office and from a locally-developed questionnaire. The data showed that students who participated in the transitional course had a 93% retention rate in the first year as compared to the college's overall retention rate of 83%. Considering that the first year is typically when institutions see the highest attrition, this higher rate of persistence in the study was notable.

An ethnographic study done by Keim, McDermott, and Gerrard (2010) assessed the effectiveness of a bridge program for Hispanic students with education majors in successfully navigating the transition between the two and four-year institution. The stated goals for this bridge program were to: (1) promote increased retention and numbers of Hispanic students in completing an education degree through a mentoring program; (2) increase student's self-esteem and self-efficacy in their academic work as well as in their social life; and (3) develop students' core academic skills with a focus on writing skills. The bridge program was conducted in the spring and summer. The components of the program delivered in the spring consisted of setting up learning communities for students as well as featuring a variety of workshops on mentoring and motivational topics. The

summer bridge program not only involved the mentors who were trained in the spring workshops, but also faculty. Based on the attendance and participation rates in the various components of the program, in addition to the feedback on the evaluation forms, the bridge program was successful in meeting its three goals. Additionally, all participants in the bridge program persisted through two full semesters at the community college.

Orientation Programs. Another type of intervention strategy is an orientation course for students who intend to transfer. Derby (2007) studied the effects of an orientation course in a public, rural, mid-sized community college in the Midwest. His results showed that students who participated in the orientation course were much more likely to complete their two-year degree and be eligible for transfer. An interesting finding in the study was the significant variation in the impact of the orientation course by ethnicity of student. White students were much more likely to complete the two-year degree successfully due to the orientation course than Hispanic or African-American students. The author did note, however, that this variation could be due to the over-representation of white students in the sample.

Another study by Derby and Smith (2004) on the impact of an orientation course on two-year degree attainment produced similar results. The course increased the retention of students planning to complete a two-year degree. The authors also stressed the importance of having these orientation courses available for prepared and under-prepared students, as the success of both groups was important.

Mentoring. A third type of intervention strategy is mentoring. An experimental study done by Hoffmann and Wallach (2005) reinforced the positive impact mentoring

had on community college transfer success. The study was conducted at Compton Community College in California and involved pairing community college students with four-year students. Together, these students participated in a gardening program and collaborative group work. Half of the study participants were assigned to the experimental group and half to a control group. The results showed that 60% of the students who participated in the program had an increase in their performance in test taking situations, 71% had improved self-confidence in completing future academic projects, and 68% showed an increase in grade point average.

Intrusive advising is one specific example of a mentoring program. In this type of advising “advisors use an intrusive approach to initiate early contact; help the student to identify strengths and weaknesses; and develop plans for academic, social, and organizational improvement” (Smith, 2007, p. 814). Smith’s (2007) study on the effectiveness of the intrusive advising approach revealed positive results. Overall, students were aware of the challenges facing them when they entered the community college and the method of intrusive advising was beneficial in helping them succeed. An interesting finding emerging from the study showed that students who were most open to the intrusive advising approach were less likely to achieve academically. The author pointed out that this finding was inconsistent with previous literature and could be explained by the low response rate to this particular measure.

Combined Approaches. A final intervention strategy involves a combined, comprehensive approach including elements such as one-on-one advising, visits to four-year campuses, and orientation programs. Adams (2008) studied the effectiveness of a comprehensive program in California called the Transfer Opportunity Program (TOP).

This program included the components of a mentor relationship, campus visits, and a one-week summer session. The most notable finding from the study showed students' perception of their ability to transfer successfully to a four-year institution increased by approximately 138% after participating in the program.

Additionally, Hollins (2009) conducted a study within the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) on whether the implementation of a comprehensive program would increase retention and academic achievement for community college students aiming to transfer. The program included a new student orientation program, an advising and registration session, ongoing group advising sessions, and a one-credit course during the first semester. Though the sample size of students who participated in all of the above program elements was small, the results showed a positive correlation between participation in this program and increased retention.

Another comprehensive program that exists in fifty-six community colleges in California is the Puente Project. Although the Puente Project (2005) is open to all students, it largely serves Hispanic students. This comprehensive program has four central elements: (1) an accelerated English writing course with a focus on Mexican and Latin American literature to address more diverse social and cultural contexts; (2) regular meetings with an academic counselor to talk about college applications, the transfer process, and financial aid; (3) an assigned mentor who is a successful community leader and serves as a positive role model as well as additional advisor; and (4) several visits to four-year college campuses. The students who completed this program had a 47% transfer rate to four-year institutions compared to a 27% transfer rate among community college students not in the program (Puente Project, 2005). Additionally, 90% of the

students who went through the program persisted through their first year at the community college.

Each of the strategies mentioned above successfully raised overall awareness within community colleges about transfer as well as provided access to relevant information needed to navigate the transfer process. While the literature demonstrates the positive impact of intervention strategies in enabling the persistence of community college transfer students, many of the studies had relatively small sample sizes. More research is needed to understand whether these types of programs consistently improve the retention of students as well as promote their success in achieving their goal of transfer.

Community College Comprehensive Missions

A third factor to consider when exploring the gap in baccalaureate attainment for community college students is the impact of the institutional missions. Community college missions have evolved over time since their beginning in the 1920's. Community colleges, or junior colleges, were founded primarily to provide an alternative path for high school graduates to achieve a bachelor's degree (Brint & Karabel, 1991). However, starting in the 1930's, the educational leaders within the junior college system began advocating for increasing vocational programs within the junior colleges. They argued, "Not everyone could be a member of the elite; vocational programs would reduce the high dropout rate; and occupational training would guarantee that students would leave the educational system with marketable skills" (Brint & Karabel, 1991, p. 11). It was not until the 1960's that the missions of community colleges began to shift toward a more comprehensive focus. This comprehensive focus included promoting the transfer

function, providing vocational or occupational training, and providing remedial education (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Grubb, 1991). Missions of community colleges are important to consider when evaluating the transfer function as they guide the planning of community college leaders (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). As community college presidents are forced to adapt to changes and allocate limited resources, the mission of the college becomes a central principle for decision-making. Additionally, it is difficult to identify the most important pieces of their institutional mission as these missions become more comprehensive in nature.

Dougherty and Townsend (2006) pointed out the inherent conflict with multiple missions. They stated, "A general conflict between multiple missions lies in the simple fact that community colleges—like all organizations—have limited amounts of money, time, and energy; serving one mission may thus entail cutting into the resources available for others" (p. 9). Overall, scholars have concluded that these comprehensive missions lead community colleges to reduce the emphasis on the transfer function (Grubb, 1991; Shaw & London, 2001). More specifically, empirical research conducted by Grubb (1991) on the decline in transfer rates from community colleges found that the effect of the inclusion of vocational programs accounts for approximately 15% of the decline in the transfer rates. In addition, Dougherty (1992) stated, "community colleges often inadvertently dampen student interest in transfer by drawing them into their occupational programs" (p. 197). This was an unintentional by-product of community colleges efforts to expand vocational program offerings.

A logical response to these challenges would be to suggest a narrowing of community college missions; however, that is very unlikely to happen due to the demand

for each of the various components within a community college (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). Researchers, therefore, need to explore other potential solutions to resolve the challenges presented by these comprehensive missions. Shaw and London (2001) took an innovative approach to exploring the impact of comprehensive missions on the transfer function. They found that some institutions with comprehensive missions were successful in upholding the importance of the transfer function. This study highlighted the policies and procedures within these institutions that may have led to the effectiveness of their transfer function.

Overall, researchers agreed that comprehensive missions of community colleges did have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the transfer function. The leaders of these institutions had the difficult task of maintaining a certain level of quality across the various programs and tracks. It was inherent within this balancing act that resources dedicated specifically to improving the transfer function would be difficult to obtain. However, it is imperative that community college leaders, administrators, faculty, and students continue to advocate for additional resources to support the transfer function.

Role of Articulation Policies in Transfer

From the intra-institutional perspective, articulation policies linking individual institutions within a state are thought by many policymakers to be useful in enabling transfer success and promoting baccalaureate degree attainment. Kintzer (1973) identified three different types of statewide articulation policies: formal and legally based policies; state system policies, and voluntary agreements between individual institutions or systems. Formal and legally based policies focus on the general education offerings by two and four-year institutions, the regularity in which required courses are offered,

and policies regarding the movement of students between institutions. State system policies are more focused on controlling the details of transfer through policy creation and implementation. Voluntary agreements are typically formed by mutual agreements, between institutions or systems within a state, as opposed to being demanded by state law.

Most articulation agreements were voluntary agreements between individual institutions up until the 1980's (Roksa, 2009). In the 1980's, more state system policies began to emerge. Notable exceptions include Florida and Rhode Island. Created in 1965, Florida established the first statewide, formal or legal articulation agreement. Another formal articulation agreement was implemented in 1980 in Rhode Island. This agreement provided the most all-encompassing guide to articulation and transfer to date (Kintzer & Wattenbarger, 1985). Bender (1990) traced the increase in state involvement to three main causes. First, based on reports such as *A Nation at Risk*, states became concerned with general education requirements and the need for improved communication between institutions to enable the success of transfer students. Second, as demographics in many states changed and minority groups disproportionately enrolled in two-year institutions, states looked to improve access to the transfer pathway. Third, there became an increasing demand from graduates of applied associate's degree programs for improved pathways to baccalaureate programs.

State involvement has evolved in several ways. States have instituted statewide articulation policies, statewide bodies devoted to the topic of articulation and transfer, transfer services, and/or data collection requirements for transfer and articulation (Bender, 1990; Roska, 2009). With the variation in the way states have gotten involved

in articulation, scholars have not come to agreement on how many states have statewide articulation policies (Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006; Ignash & Townsend, 2001; Keith & Roksa, 2008). However, Roksa (2009) analyzed several of these studies and found most scholars agreed that 21 states have implemented statewide articulation policies.

Since the 1980's, many scholars have written about and studied statewide articulation policies (Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006; Banks, 1994; Keith & Roksa, 2008; Roksa, 2009). The growth of articulation policies as well as the increase in scholarly interest has been due largely to the perception that these statewide policies were an effective power mediator between two and four-year institutions (Bender, 1990; Roksa, 2009). However, Roksa (2009) also pointed out, "There are few efforts to understand whether state efforts are effective at facilitating student transfer, leaving open the question of whether all the activity surrounding transfer is enhancing students' progress through higher education" (p. 2450).

There are several studies that attempted to address this question by evaluating whether transfer rates increased in states with statewide articulation policies. Banks (1994) used data from the Transfer Assembly Project, including 78 institutions and 15 states, which showed that statewide articulation policies did promote transfer by increasing the rate at which students were moving from the two to four-year institutions. However, one finding from the study was concerning. When the researcher compared California, which had a statewide articulation policy, and Texas, which did not have a policy, there were no differences. This was notable as 42% of the institutions in the sample were from Texas and California. A study by Higgins and Katsinas (1999) using the same set of data found similar results indicating that states with statewide articulation

had higher rates of transfer. In contrast, using data from Beginning Postsecondary Students (1989-1994), Anderson, Sun, and Alfonso (2006) found that the probability of transfer did not increase in the 12 states with statewide articulation policies. Similarly, Roksa (2006) used data from National Education Longitudinal Study (1988-2000) and found there was no relationship between the probability of transfer and the existence of statewide articulation policies.

Researchers have studied the overall impact of articulation on transfer rates; however, they have not focused on understanding why some of these policies are effective in increasing transfer while others are not. Additionally, there is a dearth of research surrounding what happens in the implementation of these policies that makes them particularly effective. Addressing this gap in the literature could add to the overall knowledge of whether these statewide articulation policies facilitate the transitions of community college students to the extent intended.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are four main factors present throughout the literature which impact the gap in baccalaureate attainment for community college students: the unique demographics of students who enter higher education through community colleges; the importance of focusing on the retention of community college students; the impact of comprehensive community college missions; and the role of articulation policies in transfer. Community college administrators, four-year institution administrators, and state policymakers have the opportunity to improve the overall success of transfer students by learning how each of these four factors impacts the transfer pathway within their state.

In the next section, the methodology used to approach the research questions of the study is explained.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Research on community college transfer students clearly reveals a gap between those students who enter the two-year institution with the goal of transferring to a four-year institution and those who actually achieve this goal (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Grubb, 1991; Lee & Frank, 1990; NCES, 2004). One approach to addressing this gap has occurred at a state level. Many states have implemented statewide articulation policies with the goal of streamlining the process of transfer and increasing the rate of transfer between two and four-year institutions. In the State of Four Seasons, statewide articulation policy is less formal than in many other states. The transfer process, including articulation, is largely governed at an institutional level. Therefore, the unit of analysis for this study focused on the institutional approaches to transfer in Four Seasons. This study sought to understand institutional approaches to transfer, common elements that existed across institutions, and what practices within institutions were most effective in assisting transfer students.

In order to explore how this gap in the literature could best be filled, a pilot study was conducted to understand the experiences of current community college students who were in the process of transferring to a four-year institution in Four Seasons. This pilot study revealed that the process of transfer between two and four-year institutions was laden with challenges and intricacies. These challenges appeared to be distinct depending on the four-year institution to which a student was seeking admission. As

such, this study used a qualitative approach to uncover how institutions approached the transfer process. The perspective of administrators was the focus so as to collect an institutional, rather than an individual, view of how transfer approaches were working in practice.

This study explored how institutional approaches to transfer have been implemented within community colleges and four-year institutions in a single state. More specifically, the institutional approaches of three community colleges and three four-year, public institutions in the State of Four Seasons were examined. Ignash and Townsend's (2001) principles for strong statewide articulation policies guided the data collection and analysis. The research questions answered through the methods outlined below included:

- 1) How do administrators at two and four-year institutions in the State of Four Seasons describe their institution's approach towards transfer students?
- 2) How well do the two and four-year institutional approaches to transfer align with Ignash and Townsend's (2001) framework for effective articulation?

The research questions were explored using a multiple case design (Yin, 2009). A comparative-case study methodology was appropriate as the goal of the study was to understand how institutional approaches to transfer were being implemented by administrators within a selected set of two and four-year institutions within a single state. The selection of these cases, or sets of institutions, was driven by the conceptual framework that guided this study. Methods such as interviews and document analysis were used to uncover rich descriptions of how administrators in the two and four-year institutions were implementing their institutions' approaches to transfer. To ensure that

the data collected were of a high quality, triangulation was used. Document analysis was conducted to provide a tangible picture of the planning documents that went into managing the transfer pathway within these higher education institutions.

Sample

The study was focused in an unnamed state called the “State of Four Seasons.” The State of Four Seasons is a medium sized state with between 20-40 community colleges. Two-year, public tuition in the State of Four Seasons is in the lower half for the fifty states and four-year, public tuition is in the top third. In this state, no formal statewide articulation policy exists; the transfer process, including articulation, is largely governed at an institutional level. The sample for this study was drawn from administrators at three community colleges and three public, four-year institutions in the State of Four Seasons. Each of the three four-year institutions was selected because they were perceived to have a different approach to transfer. Additionally, the four-year institutions in the study varied in selectivity. The four-year institutions included in the study have not been identified by name, but were given pseudonyms of Summer University, Fall University, and Winter University. The three community colleges were chosen based on close geographic proximity to one of the four-year institutions. These institutions were also not identified by name, but were referenced by their pseudonyms of Early Summer Community College, Early Fall Community College, and Early Winter Community College.

Administrators within each of these six institutions were approached for interviews. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, exact titles of each administrator were not provided. At each four-year institution and community college, at

least one senior administrator and one transfer specialist was interviewed. The senior administrators were individuals involved in overseeing the two to four-year transfer process. The transfer specialists were individuals involved with advising, counseling, and recruiting two to four-year transfer students. Within the four-year institutions, the senior administrators and transfer specialists were part of the admission offices and advising centers. In the community colleges, the senior administrators were individuals involved in overseeing the two to four-year transfer process and the transfer specialists were members of the counseling and advising staff. Fifteen administrators in total were interviewed for the study. Most interviews were one hour in length and done in person. Two interviews were done over the phone.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Selected participants were invited to participate in the study via an email from the researcher (Appendix A). This email included the basic information about the study. Once the participants agreed to participate in the interview, they agreed to a time and date to speak with the researcher either in person or over the phone. Before the interview commenced, the researcher reminded the participant about the goals of the study and asked them to sign the consent form. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour. Four interview protocols were used based on the two main research questions of the study—one for the community college senior administrators (Appendix B), one for the community college transfer specialists (Appendix C), one for the four-year institution senior administrators (Appendix D), and one for the four-year institution transfer specialists (Appendix E).

To complement the interviews, the researcher reviewed and analyzed documents related to the two research questions. The documents analyzed included: the materials for transfer students used by each institution in the study; the statewide articulation agreements in place between the community college system and each of the four-year institutions in the study; the articulation agreements between individual institutions included in this study; the document outlining transfer goals within the state; the legislation that led to the creation of the statewide agreements; and the reports on transfer produced by the coordinating body for higher education in the state. These documents were analyzed to understand the institutional approaches to transfer, the stated or implicit goals of the approaches, the stated or implicit target audience of the approaches, and the extent to which assessment data has been collected on how the approaches were working in practice.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was primarily guided by the approach of Erikson (1986). An Eriksonian approach was appropriate as it was an action-oriented approach with the goal of improvement. The researcher was looking to “discover the specific ways in which local and nonlocal forms of social organization and culture” (p. 129) impact the ways in which administrators chose to implement their institution’s approach to transfer. Additionally, Erikson focused on seeing the action, which he defined as the behavior plus the meaning of the behavior, through the eyes of the participants rather than through the eyes of the researcher. The focus of this research was to understand how administrators were conceptualizing and implementing their institution’s approach to transfer.

Building upon Erikson's (1986) approach, the researcher created a list of start codes (Appendix F) using the study's conceptual model as a starting point for the analysis process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once all the interviews were completed, the researcher read through all of the transcript data and all of the institutional and state documents to process the information in a holistic way. In this initial read of the data, the researcher was looking for overall themes as well as confirming and disconfirming evidence. After an initial reading of the data, the researcher revised the start codes (Appendix G) and then began the coding process using NVivo computer software. Applying the revised codes, the researcher began to break down the data into themes and patterns. As the main themes and patterns emerged from this coding process, the researcher began to craft the conclusions from the data focusing on the confirming and disconfirming evidence. To ensure reliability of the analysis, the researcher used member checking in addition to creating a detailed audit trail of all the data collected and materials reviewed in the coding process.

Researcher as Instrument

A researcher as instrument statement is appropriate as this study involved collecting data through one-on-one interviews with the researcher as the instrument (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). As the researcher immersed herself in the literature regarding the challenges facing community college transfer students, she became increasingly interested in the experiences of this unique population. She also believed that community colleges would continue to provide a pathway to a four-year degree for many students. Therefore, ensuring the success of these students within community colleges was essential. The researcher never attended a community college, but rather

went directly from high school into a four-year institution to earn a bachelor's degree. The researcher entered the one-on-one interviews with her own values and experiences, but worked to recognize and separate her own undergraduate experience from the data collected.

Limitations

There are two primary limitations in using this qualitative approach. First, the compiled results provide a rich, descriptive picture of how administrators within the six participating institutions in this study are conceptualizing and implementing approaches to transfer; these results are not generalizable to all two and four-year institutions. Second, as this report will be shared with state policymakers, some of the participants may have been reluctant to be fully candid about their institution's approach to transfer. The researcher aimed to minimize the impact of this limitation by not naming the state, the institutions, or the individuals included in the study.

The following chapter discusses the results of the study organized by institution.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The following chapter provides a detailed description of each institution's approach to transfer. Chapter 5 will build upon these detailed institutional descriptions and seek to answer the two research questions of the study stated below:

- 1) How do administrators at two and four-year institutions in the State of Four Seasons describe their institution's approach towards transfer students?
- 2) How well do the two and four-year institutional approaches to transfer align with Ignash and Townsend's (2001) framework for effective articulation?

For the purposes of data collection and analysis, the researcher used Ignash and Townsend's (2001) model for strong statewide articulation policies as a framework for evaluating each institution's approach to transfer. Out of their seven principles, six were used. The principle not included referred to the importance of establishing articulation agreements with private institutions within a state. This principle was not included as no private institutions were part of this study. The six guiding principles applied were: (1) equal partnership between the two and four-year institutions; (2) equal treatment of native and transfer students at the receiving institution; (3) established processes for updating articulation agreements handled by the faculty; (4) accommodation of non-associate degree earners through articulation agreements; (5) established program specific agreements; and (6) data collection and analysis to gauge effectiveness of the articulation agreements.

In addition to these six guiding principles, the researcher outlined each institution's method of outreach to community college transfer students. These methods of outreach revealed the overall foundation of how institutions chose to interact with community college transfer students and how they prioritized them among the other populations of students within their institutions.

Transfer Pathways

When studying the transfer pathways in Four Seasons, there were two main ways community college students could enter a four-year institution: applying as a competitive applicant or applying for guaranteed admission under an articulation agreement. If a community college student chose to apply to a four-year institution before earning an associate's degree, he or she would follow the typical application procedures comparable to those for high school applicants. Depending on the four-year institution's admissions criteria for community college transfers, the number of credits the student had earned while attending the community college factored into the admission decision. In this study, this constitutes a competitive applicant. When applying through an articulation agreement, community college students needed to have earned an associate's degree in a transfer degree program and a minimum GPA at the community college. Additionally, some four-year institutions required students to submit a "letter of intent" in order to be considered under an articulation agreement. This letter of intent is a standardized agreement created by the four-year institution to be signed by the prospective transfer student and the community college advisor.

There are four main types of articulation agreements and policies found in the institutions included in this study. When referring to these various types of agreements generally, they will be called “articulation agreements.”

Statewide Agreement. The first type of articulation agreement is the statewide articulation agreement referred to hereafter as a “statewide agreement.” The statewide agreements are contracts created between the community college system and four-year institutions within Four Seasons, which guarantee community college students from the system admission into a four-year institution so long as they meet all of the requirements in the agreement. A significant majority of the public, four-year institutions in the state have signed these contracts with the community college system.

Institutional Agreement. Second, an institution-to-institution articulation agreement, referred to hereafter as an “institutional agreement,” is a contract made between a specific community college and a specific four-year institution. These agreements guarantee admission to community college students from a specific two-year institution into a specific four-year institution if they meet all of the requirements in the agreement. This type of agreement exists in the case when a four-year institution did not sign a statewide agreement with the community college system.

Programmatic Agreement. A third type of articulation agreement is a program specific articulation agreement, referred to hereafter as a “programmatic agreement,” which is a contract that guarantees admission to community college students from a specific two-year institution into a specific program at a four-year institution.

Programmatic Articulation Guide. The fourth type of articulation agreement, referred to hereafter as a “programmatic articulation guide,” is a guide for community

college students aiming to enter a specific program at the four-year institution. This type of articulation agreement does not guarantee admission.

What follows are detailed descriptions of the findings for all six institutions included in the study based on data collected through semi-structured interviews with administrators and document analysis.

Summer University

Summer University is the most selective university included in the study. One of the senior administrators stated that approximately half of the transfer students admitted each year came from the community college system. This institution has a signed statewide agreement with the community college system. Three administrators were interviewed at this institution—two senior administrators and one transfer specialist.

As the most selective of the three institutions in the study, Summer University demonstrated an approach to community college transfer that was reflective of its overall admissions process. The administrators at this institution treated community college transfer students with the same care that they extended to prospective high school students. However, they spent less time and expended fewer resources on recruiting community college students. The transfer specialist interviewed for the study was the point person at Summer University for prospective transfer applicants and dedicated a portion of her/his time to this population. The allocation of resources to recruiting community college transfer students was one that all three administrators pondered—how much emphasis should be put on a subpopulation of the students being admitted each year? One senior administrator summarized this point by saying, “Our [transfer] group is of equal importance to the university, but it’s smaller.”

Outreach Efforts. Two of the administrators interviewed for this study traveled to their main feeder community colleges—Early Summer Community College and two others—at least once a year. At these colleges, they met with students one-on-one and in groups to offer guidance on which courses to take while enrolled at the community college and other issues to be aware of as they considered transferring to Summer University. During these visits, these administrators occasionally hosted information sessions for interested transfer students.

Online resources were an important part of all outreach done by the four-year institutions. At the time of this study, Summer University's website for prospective community college transfer students was being revamped to make it more robust and easy to navigate. The website contained information on application requirements, links to the statewide agreement, links to the course requirements for each school, and links to the course equivalencies for community college students applying from the community college system. A transfer guide is posted online specifically for community college students in the state.

Equal Partnership Between Two and Four-Year Institutions. Summer University administrators spoke to productive working relationships with community college administrators throughout the state. These relationships were strongest with their main feeder colleges. Though the administrators felt they had good relationships with the community colleges, there was recognition by two of the administrators that communication could be better. Both referenced specific communication challenges surrounding the statewide agreements. For instance, the administrators spoke to challenges in communicating changes in the interpretation of the statewide agreement to

the community colleges. One senior administrator remarked, “We have tried to go back and make it—we don’t want a 15 page document—we looked at it and said what are the problems with this and how do we make it even more clear for everybody to understand the expectations.”

Additionally, the administrators spoke to an awareness of the challenges faced by the community college advisors: high numbers of students to advise and many other duties beyond advising students on transfer. There was recognition of the great effort made by these community college administrators to meet as much of the need as possible. As one example, a senior administrator said, “at the community college they are overwhelmed. We talk to them and they are just like—they can’t meet their need and the demands on them.”

Summer University administrators defined their role in the transfer process as answering questions from prospective students, doing some outreach (mainly to their feeder community colleges), and admitting applicants. All three administrators interviewed for this study were clear that it was not their role to provide advising and course suggestions for each interested transfer student. They offered some one-on-one advising with community college students from their main feeder community colleges. However, they were clear that it was not their role to do this for every applicant, noting that advisors at the community college should fulfill this role. As explained by one of the senior administrators:

The [community college transfers] we are able to meet with, we try to say this semester you do this and then next semester you do that and then in the summer you do this. But we also don’t have time to meet with everybody. That’s not my job. That is the counselor’s job at the community college.

Additionally, the administrators at Summer University considered their current level of outreach to prospective community college transfer students sufficient. The administrators felt that the best community college students were already gravitating to Summer University. Therefore, because of this, efforts to increase outreach were hard to justify. One of the senior administrators commented, "With community college students, we are usually going to win... We don't spend a lot of time trying to build a relationship with them on the front end so that they will apply."

Equal Treatment of Native and Transfer Students. Through conversations with these three administrators, in addition to a review of the resources available on the web, it appeared that transfer and native students, or incoming high school seniors, were welcomed to the campus with equal care. Transfer students had their own summer orientation session to assist them in registering for classes, to connect them with advisors, and to allow them to get their bearings on the campus. Transfer students were also given opportunities to engage with upper class students through various programs and events.

Established Processes for Updating Articulation Agreements. At the time of the study, Summer University had a signed statewide agreement with the community college system. Prior to the creation of the statewide agreements in the state, Summer University was not interested in adopting this type of contract. One senior administrator explained, "we are more selective, so we resisted any program that would guarantee anybody admission. We have holistic review. We have competitive admission. We didn't feel like having a guaranteed plan that was purely formulaic was in our best interests." By the time of this study, this view had shifted as the administrators at Summer University had seen the value these agreements added for students.

The statewide agreement between Summer University and the community college system had not been updated in recent years. According to one of the administrators, although the statewide agreement clearly stated that both parties should re-evaluate it on an annual basis, this was not happening at the time of the study. However, when an issue arose and a change needed to be made, the revision process involved the administrators at the four-year institution and the administrators within the community college system. Typically, changes were made when several community colleges expressed a common concern about the agreement to the administrators within the community college system. On such occasions, these community college administrators took the concern to the four-year institution to negotiate a change to the original contract.

Accommodation of Non-Associate Degree Earners. Summer University expressed a preference for community college students who applied with associate's degrees. This was stated specifically on the website and reinforced by one of the senior administrators. However, in practice, there was not a strong preference for an associate's degree, but rather a preference for a strong academic record and a transcript showing transferrable courses from the community college. What mattered most in the application process was the student's ability to demonstrate academic potential. For instance, if a community college transfer student performed poorly in high school and then attended a community college it likely would be in this student's best interest to earn an associate's degree or close to it. In comparison, a community college student with a strong high school record who applied to transfer after one year would be an appealing applicant. In the words of one of the senior administrators:

I am happy to take someone after one year at the community college depending on how they have done in high school. The earlier you are into the community college, the more your earlier academic endeavors are going to weigh into the decision—whether that is at another college or your high school work. There are students out there that we take after one year of community college...I think the vast number of people in that system, the associate's degree is probably pretty important, but the ones that are going onto get a bachelor's degree—particularly at a [more selective university] where you are more likely to graduate—they're not hearing that. But I talk to kids all the time and I say that you could apply next semester. And they say really? And I say yeah you would be competitive.

This Summer University senior administrator also pondered how different institutions defined successful community college transfer. As stated clearly in the excerpt above, this institution defined a successful community college transfer student as someone who demonstrated academic potential by earning a high grade point average and taking transferrable courses at the community college.

Students planning to transfer without an associate's degree could use the statewide agreement as a guide for what courses to take and what GPA to earn. These students could also consult the online course equivalency guide to navigate which courses to take at the community college prior to transfer. However, it was not clearly stated on the transfer page of the website where students should look if they planned to transfer with an associate's degree versus if they planned to transfer without it.

If students planned to transfer with an associate's degree using the statewide agreement, the steps to apply were equally unclear. These students still submitted all of the same materials that were required of community college students applying through the competitive process, even though these materials might not be considered if they had met all of the requirements of the statewide agreement. Some of these materials included a high school transcript, recommendations, and college essays. Among the pilot study

participants, one community college transfer student who was applying through the statewide agreement to Summer University spoke to this issue:

I have to send in my high school transcript, and my [community college] transcript. Which makes sense, um the high school transcript doesn't really make sense to me but-that's the thing that I was wondering about since I'm transferring under this agreement...I'll send it in just in case it just felt like something extra that was confusing. Then it made me kind of feel like, 'wait, are they really going to look at that? Are they really going to take care of the guaranteed admission and, you know, accept me because of that? Or are they going to look back into my past?'

This student applying under the statewide agreement felt uneasy about whether she would be considered under the statewide agreement or whether she would be evaluated like a competitive applicant.

In addition, in order to enter under the statewide agreement for this institution, the contract clearly stated that the community college student must have completed an associate's degree at the two-year institution to be admitted for fall admission. With this clause, if a student intended to do a full two-years at the community college and then finish his or her last two years at the four-year institution (i.e. taking four years to earn a bachelor's degree), then the student would not be able to take advantage of the statewide agreement. One senior administrator confirmed this point. Accordingly, when administrators at Summer University evaluated the applications for these students and made a decision, they did not have to guarantee them admission, as they had not earned the associate's degree.

Established Program Specific Agreements. To protect confidentiality of the institution, the researcher chose not to disclose whether Summer University had any programmatic agreements in place.

Data Collection and Analysis. Summer University tracked retention and academic success measures for community college transfers in comparison with native students. The administrators interviewed did not provide specific statistics, however they reported that there had not been statistically significant differences in these success measures for community college transfer students as compared to the native students. Since the implementation of the statewide agreements, Summer University administrators had not been consistently tracking the number of students they admitted through these agreements. However, as a result of a request from the higher education coordinating body in the state in the summer of 2011, the transfer specialist went back and researched how many students they admitted in the 2010-2011 academic year through the statewide agreement. The transfer specialist found that about 20% of the community college transfer students admitted came into Summer University through the statewide agreement.

Overall Reflections on Transfer Approach. Overall, Summer University administrators demonstrated that they were responsive to the needs of community college transfer students, just as they were responsive to the needs of prospective high school students. If a request was made of them, or if a student, parent, or counselor inquired with a question, administrators responded. However, beyond responding to requests, there were limits to Summer University's willingness to reach out to this population of students.

Fall University

Fall University is the second four-year institution included in the study. It is less selective than Summer University and more selective than Winter University. At the

time of the study, Fall University did not have a signed statewide agreement with the community college system, however it had several institutional agreements in place with community colleges across the state. Interested transfer students could apply using one of these agreements or simply as a competitive applicant. Two administrators were interviewed at this institution—one senior administrator and one transfer specialist.

Fall University demonstrated a proactive approach towards attracting community college transfer students. The institution dedicated a full-time staff member to working with prospective and current community college transfers. The online resources provided by this four-year institution were robust. Several of the community college administrators interviewed for this study commented that Fall University had one of the best websites of any of the four-year institutions in Four Seasons.

Outreach Efforts. Fall University administrators focused most of their outreach efforts on the institution's three main feeder community colleges—one being Early Fall Community College. However, instead of a single visit to the campuses of its three feeder institutions, the transfer specialist at Fall University visited them regularly. The transfer specialist visited Early Fall's campus approximately twice a week and the other two feeder community colleges approximately every other week to meet with prospective students. Both administrators at Fall University spoke to the value of spending time with prospective students and sharing information with them about the transfer process. The senior administrator wanted to identify prospective community college transfers earlier in their processes stating:

We could reach out to them sooner and work with them and we would be happy to work with them. And the idea behind it is that they would be more enlightened and educated about what they need to do and they're not thrown curves.

The senior administrator explained further that reaching these transfer students sooner would minimize unanticipated challenges once they arrived on campus. As one example, it was not uncommon for students who satisfied their general education requirements by earning the associate's degree to learn upon arrival at Fall University that they had to fulfill additional general education courses for their major.

In addition to regular visits to feeder campuses, the transfer specialist traveled to many of the other community colleges in the state to meet one-on-one with interested transfer students or to attend a college fair. The transfer specialist also attended the summer orientation program for incoming students at Early Fall Community College to talk with students interested in transferring to Fall University.

The online resources for Fall University were an effective source for prospective community college students and counselors. The online resources were clearly organized, allowing easy navigation through the various pages. The main homepage for the admissions office featured a link for interested transfer applicants from the community college system. From that point, there were options available for those who wanted to transfer using an institutional agreement or those who wanted to transfer through the competitive process.

Once community college students were admitted to Fall University, the transfer specialist made an effort to ensure they were connected with an advisor when they arrived at orientation. Students admitted after the main orientation worked directly with the transfer specialist to create a schedule for their first semester at Fall University.

Equal Partnership Between Two and Four-Year Institutions. Administrators at Fall University believed they were partners with the community colleges throughout

the state. The transfer specialist emphasized the strong partnership in place with Early Fall:

[Early Fall] is fantastic. I got this position—this position was created because people were seeing a need for front end advising before students even got here. And so when I started—as soon as I started—I got a call from [a dean at Early Fall] inviting me to lunch and wanting to talk about a partnership right away. They jumped right on it. They got me an office and now I am in the transfer suite...I don't consider that I am the great representative from the four-year university and you should all be doing what I think you should be doing. I mean they have a tough job and they do a good job. And I think working together as partners is the best thing we can do for the students.

This administrator expressed that the relationship with its main feeder college, Early Fall, was excellent due to great communication and collaboration coming from both institutions.

Equal Treatment of Native and Transfer Students. The transfer specialist spoke highly of the resources in place for entering transfer students. The services and resources available to these students had increased over the past couple of years and were equivalent to the resources for freshmen students. For instance, the transfer specialist collaborated with the orientation office to create a unique and separate orientation program for transfers. The transfer student orientation program included course advising and registration as well as access to upper class students. The program had more optional elements than the freshmen orientation program, allowing transfer students to opt in or out of specific elements of the program depending on what information they needed.

The transfer specialist acknowledged that an orientation program for transfer students did not previously exist, largely because of the perception among administrators that these students had already been in college. The expectation, as expressed by the transfer specialist, had been that, “you know what you are doing and generally where you

need to go and what you need to ask.” Fall University administrators learned that this was not the case after examining the population of students who were required to take a course as a result of being placed on academic suspension. They discovered that a large percentage of those taking this course were transfer students.

Established Processes for Updating Articulation Agreements. Fall University had several institutional and programmatic agreements with community colleges across the state. Though the university did not have institutional agreements with all of the community colleges, the administrators acknowledged that students from colleges without agreements would be treated as highly competitive applicants. The transfer specialist explained, “students who would qualify whether or not we have [an institutional agreement] with their school—if they would qualify under the [institutional agreement for another school] they would be a competitive applicant.”

Both administrators spoke to the positive value of having the institutional agreements. They believed that the agreements were effective marketing tools in attracting students to Fall University. In fact, students from Early Fall who applied using the institutional agreement did not pay an application fee. The agreements also served as a useful guide for students in designing their course schedules at the community college. The senior administrator noted that when students used the agreements, it helped ensure they took transferrable courses at the community college.

The administrators at Fall University reported infrequent updates to the institutional agreements. However, when modifications were needed, the process for updating the institutional agreements was simple. Instead of having to coordinate

updates through the community college system, the administrators at Fall University worked directly with the administrators at the community colleges.

Accommodation of Non-Associate Degree Earners. Fall University

administrators expressed a clear preference for students who applied with an associate's degree. The senior administrator explained that:

We give priority to community college students with associate's degrees, then we do four-year transfers with 60 hours, then we go to 45, then we take a few with 30, but if the 45-60 fills the class then we stop there. One year we only took 30 kids with one year of experience. One year we took about 7 and that's the last one we take. So we give priority to the community colleges.

In several places on the transfer page on the admissions website, it stated the preference for an associate's degree. When asked why the institution preferred students with associate's degrees, the senior administrator explained the need for as many students as possible to enter with their general education requirements fulfilled, so as minimize the enrollment pressure on those courses at Fall University.

Fall University automatically waived the general education requirements for any student who entered with an associate's degree. If a student only needed a couple of courses to complete the associate's, the university would work with that student to reverse transfer the remaining credits from the university back to the community college so the student could officially earn the two-year degree and have his or her general education requirements waived.

Fall University also required that each student applying through an institutional agreement submit a letter of intent before he or she enrolled in the institution; this letter of intent could be submitted when the student submitted their application for admission. Fall University did not require that the associate's degree be completed at the time of

application to be considered for guaranteed admission under an institutional agreement. The institutional agreement stated that to be eligible, a student must be in a degree-seeking program at the community college and have applied for graduation at the time of application.

Both administrators spoke to the misconceptions students held about the nature and implementation of the agreements. The senior administrator explained:

I'll be honest with you that when the agreement was signed there were some conflicts with some universities—we didn't have to deal with it—who put in their caveats. And when the agreements were publicized, the caveats weren't listed... And when this was announced five or six years ago—or whenever—it was marketed incorrectly by the [community college system] in the sense that they didn't explain that each university had one.

The transfer specialist explained further that some students misperceived they could attend Early Fall Community College then automatically be admitted to Fall University. Sometimes these students would not even apply—thinking they would simply be permitted to start courses automatically at Fall University. Another misconception was that tuition would be the same at the four-year institution as it was at the community college. The transfer specialist commented that since starting in the position, these misconceptions had become less prevalent, but they had not disappeared altogether.

For community college students applying without an associate's degree, Fall University clearly delineated the relevant application information for these students. There were also specific resources available online for these students such as course equivalency guides and academic major guides.

Established Program Specific Agreements. Fall University had a handful of programmatic agreements in place with some of their main receiving four-year institutions.

Data Collection and Analysis. This institution tracked retention and academic success measures for community college transfer students relative to native students. Though exact figures were not provided, the senior administrator stated that there was very little difference between the two groups in grade point averages or graduation rates. Fall University also had difficulty tracking the number of students who came in using an institutional agreement. Fall University required a letter of intent, which aided in tracking these students, however many of the students were admitted under the agreements pending completion of their associate's degree. Administrators at Fall University did not go back to verify the completion of the associate's degrees once a student was enrolled.

Overall Reflections on Transfer Approach. This institution was proactive in working with transfer students. Fall University dedicated one full-time administrator to traveling and meeting with potential community college transfers. The administrators interviewed for this study also communicated a commitment to advising potential transfers on what courses to take, when to transfer, and how to navigate the application process. Administrators viewed this pre-enrollment advising as part of their mission to help prospective community college transfers. In addition, the senior administrator at Fall University expressed a desire to reach more community college transfer applicants earlier in the process to: better prepare the students for what to expect in the transfer process; make them aware of relevant deadlines; and provide them contact information for administrators who could assist them in their transfer process.

Winter University

Winter University is the least selective four-year institution included in the study. This institution has a signed statewide agreement with the community college system as well as several programmatic agreements. It also offers a few programmatic articulation guides for specific programs at Winter University. Prospective community college students may apply either through an articulation agreement or as a competitive applicant. This institution has several full-time administrators and graduate assistants in two areas of the university that work with prospective and current transfer students. Three administrators were interviewed at this institution—two senior administrators and one transfer specialist.

Outreach Efforts. A full-time staff member was stationed primarily in one of Winter University's main feeder community colleges. Another full-time staff member, the transfer specialist interviewed for this study, spent approximately two days a week at another of the school's main feeders, Early Winter Community College. The transfer specialist also traveled to all the other community college in the state. This individual was responsible for implementing Winter University's vision for outreach and recruitment of community college transfer students. The transfer specialist created and disseminated specific transfer materials to prospective students and hosted information sessions on Winter University's campus.

The other full-time staff members advised prospective and current transfer students on course selection and evaluated transfer credits. Two of the three administrators interviewed for this study acknowledged that students often "shopped" four-year institutions based on how many credits each four-year institution would take.

The transfer specialist stated, “quite often, they are shopping when they are choosing a transfer institution. They are shopping around looking for the school that will accept the most number of credits.” Winter University evaluated prospective students’ credits before students were admitted. This allowed students to know in advance how many additional credits they would need to take at Winter University before earning a bachelor’s degree.

Equal Partnership Between Two and Four-Year Institutions. All three administrators at Winter University agreed they had good partnerships with their main feeder institutions. However, they were less confident about partnerships with all of the community colleges in the state. One senior administrator explained:

I think it’s gotten better over the last few years. I don’t think it was any conflict as such but we were pretty much going on parallel paths. And there wasn’t any strategic thinking about how the partnership should work. In the past few years there has been more thought put into how a true partnership should operate. And the articulation agreements being one key mechanism to make that happen. I think obviously we have better relationships with some community colleges than others, because we obviously work more closely [with] our feeder schools that are surrounders—[Early Winter] in particular.

The other senior administrator interviewed for the study emphasized the importance of showing the community college administrators that they were all working as a team. The senior administrator explained several efforts to support community college administrators, stating the importance of building and maintaining strong relationships with them:

I mean, just continuing to nurture the relationships with the advisors who meet with these students head on every day. Doing programs for them and showing them we are on their side. Cause like I said there are a lot of trust issues...we just have to get them to trust us more, get them to call us more if they have any questions or issues about anything—you know keep the doors open.

These senior administrators brought the community college administrators from their main feeder institution together to discuss updates and ongoing challenges in facilitating transfer between the two institutions.

The transfer specialist also believed that partnerships existed with some institutions—their main feeder institutions in their region—but not with others. The transfer specialist spoke to the challenges of coordinating visits and programs at the community colleges—sometimes there was a large turnout of interested students and other times very few students showed up. The transfer specialist was not sure of the cause of this variance. However, the lack of effective communication with some community college administrators made this transfer specialist reluctant to classify them as equal partners in promoting the transfer pathway.

Equal Treatment of Native and Transfer Students. Through an analysis of online resources and conversations with administrators, equal treatment of transfer students was evident. Once transfer students were accepted to the institution, they were welcomed to the campus, just as incoming freshmen were, through a new student orientation program in the summer. One exception was the housing available for transfer students. While the institution reserved housing for incoming freshmen students, it did not do so for admitted transfer students. The transfer specialist noted this was a problem for many transfer students accepted to Winter University—particularly for students accepted mid-year to start in the spring semester. To help ease this challenge, there was a university office that assisted transfer students in finding off campus housing.

Established Processes for Updating Articulation Agreements. These administrators felt that the statewide and programmatic agreements were effective tools

for community college students. Winter University administrators also communicated a strong interest in strengthening their existing programmatic agreements as well as creating additional agreements in the future. One of the senior administrators stated:

I put a lot of faith in the articulation agreements. I really think that if we can expand the number of articulation agreements with students, with different community colleges, so that students know exactly what they need to do to achieve a 2+2 program, that it will increase the number of students who complete the associate's degree and also guarantee academic success when they arrive here.

Winter University recently began requesting a letter of intent from students applying through an articulation agreement. This new step in the application process was intended to enable better tracking of students who entered the institution through this pathway. However, the institution did not require students to submit the letter—it was simply encouraged. The senior administrator also acknowledged that they intended to “eventually start offering them services...sending out emails to them, telling them about opportunities, what they need to know to prepare.” Using the letter of intent to identify students in the pipeline, this institution also planned to encourage community college transfer students to come to the university by allowing them to register along with the native, junior level students at the university. This future initiative would be distinct from the other four-year institutions in this study. Typically, incoming community college transfer students registered with the incoming freshmen students.

Two of the three administrators acknowledged the need to and challenges associated with keeping the articulation agreements updated. The senior administrator explained that the process for managing the articulation agreements had changed in recent years from a decentralized to a centralized process—specifically surrounding updates to the programmatic agreements. Instead of the various schools within Winter

University creating and maintaining the agreements independently—as was previously the case—now the senior administrators managed this process. One of the senior administrators explained:

We coordinate the initial contact with the community college making sure the right people are at the table, making sure that the faculty at the schools are following up to keep the deadline that we've got. Moving the agreement up from the school level to the university approvals level. So we are sort of the intermediaries.

When updating the statewide agreement, the senior administrators at Winter University worked directly with administrators at the community college system.

Accommodation of Non-Associate Degree Earners. All three Winter University administrators expressed a strong preference for admitting students with an associate's degree, stating that approximately 20% of their community college transfer students entered with this two-year degree. They encouraged students to stay at the community college and earn their associate's degree before transferring to Winter University. One senior administrator stated:

Our new strategic plan...one of the goals is to increase the number of students coming in with an associate degree. So that's why we're putting a lot of time, effort, and resources into improving services for transfer students, doing more outreach, and establishing more articulation agreements so that we can increase that amount.

Following this statement, each administrator noted that while they preferred students who came in with their associate's, it was not a requirement of admission. To be admitted, the administrators strongly encouraged students to apply with at least 30 credit hours completed at another postsecondary institution. Even this threshold was flexible as some students were admitted with fewer than 30 credit hours so long as their high school

academic record was strong. When asked why they preferred the associate's, one senior administrator explained three main reasons for this institutional preference:

Well one is from a student's perspective, especially if it is tied with an articulation agreement...you are completing the first two years at a cheaper rate at a community college—completing your general education requirements as well as your introductory level courses for the major you want to do...Another reason is that due to data collection we've had and due to anecdotal experiences, students who come in with more credits and especially with an associate's degree tend to be more successful...they are just better prepared both academically and personally. And I will throw in another one which I think we are pretty open about is that it takes the enrollment pressure off of the gen eds so we can offer courses to cover the...freshmen we admit. Not knowing the number of transfer students we are brining in that need general education courses puts a lot of pressure onto our units to handle that.

For community college students who wanted to apply to Winter University before earning their associate's degree, there were resources available to them: a course equivalency guide; program requirement guides; and a transfer guide. However, there were no clear and specific references to these resources online.

In addition, the statewide agreement for this institution clearly stated that the community college student must earn an associate's degree at the two-year institution to be eligible for admission under the articulation agreement. With this clause, if a student intended to do a full two-years at the community college to then finish the last two years at the four-year institution (i.e. taking four years to earn a bachelor's degree), then the student would not be able to take advantage of the statewide agreement as he or she would not have earned their associate's at the time of application.

Program Specific Agreements. Winter University had several programmatic agreements—mainly in place with their biggest feeder community college. The two senior administrators suggested that these were more effective than the statewide

agreements because they were very specific and provided a clear guide for students to follow.

Data Collection and Analysis. The administrators at Winter University noted that students who came in with an associate's degree were more prepared. They reported to the higher education coordinating body in the state how many students entered with an associate's degree, but similar to the other four-year institutions in this study, they had not been tracking how many students came in through a statewide or programmatic agreement. The senior administrators hoped that the recently implemented letter of intent would allow them to track these numbers more closely. As stated previously, approximately 20% of their community college transfer students entered with an associate's degree; a portion of which might have entered under a statewide or programmatic agreement.

Overall Reflections on Transfer Approach. Of the three, four-year institutions in the study, Winter University was the most proactive in recruiting and advising prospective community college transfer students. This focus on community college transfers appeared to have strongly taken hold in 2008, when the institution centralized the advising and credit review for transfer students. Due to the fact that this emphasis on community college transfer had only been in place for three years, the administrators indicated that they were just beginning to see the results of this enhanced effort. However, they also acknowledged that providing information to students and community college counselors was one of their biggest challenges.

The View from the Community Colleges

The findings from the interviews with community college administrators and the subsequent document analysis are presented below. The institutional approaches are organized comparably to those from the four-year institutions with one exception. The Ignash and Townsend (2001) principle of ensuring equal treatment of native and transfer students at the receiving institution was not included as this principle was best explored through the perspectives of the four-year institutions.

Early Summer Community College

Early Summer Community College is the closest two-year institution geographically to Summer University and sends the majority of its transfer students there to earn a four-year degree. Approximately half of the students who declare a major at Early Summer are in one of the transfer degree programs. Approximately 18% of those students who intend to transfer to a four-year institution succeed. Two administrators were interviewed at this institution—one senior administrator and one transfer specialist. The transfer specialist interviewed was one of two full-time staff members at Early Summer focused on the transfer function.

This college prided itself on having a strong transfer function. Though only half of all students who attended this institution indicated an intention to transfer, the senior administrator emphasized that transfer was a central focus for the college. In reference to a question about how Early Summer prioritized transfer, this administrator stated, “From my perspective, I think that is what we do the best... We have the reputation both locally and within the state as being a premier transfer institution.”

Outreach Efforts. There were two full-time staff members at Early Summer Community College whose sole focus was transfer students. These staff members, in addition to the other general advising staff, were located within the area of the college that handled admissions and advising. Students who entered this college interested in transfer had several ways to learn about opportunities available to them. One way that students received this information was through a summer orientation program offered for all students entering the college directly from high school. Another way students received this information was through a student development course that was a course common to all colleges within the community college system. This course was a requirement for all students enrolled in a degree program, and the institution encouraged students to enroll in this course during their first year at the college. While some instructors of this course required students to make an appointment with one of the advisors in the central advising center, academic advising was not a requirement for all students. The transfer specialist interviewed for this study indicated that this course was the main mechanism for communicating transfer information to students. The third mechanism, relatively new to the institution, was a series of programs focused on different aspects of transfer, such as the overall process of transfer, transferring with an articulation agreement, or transferring to a private institution in the state. The transfer specialist acknowledged low attendance at these events, but believed that they were still good ways to reach interested transfer students and encourage them to ask for assistance with their transfer plans.

The transfer specialist emphasized that one-on-one advising was the most important mechanism for supporting transfer students. Through the outreach methods

explained above, the overall goal was to encourage students to come in and meet with a transfer advisor. The transfer specialist explained:

The most beneficial time that a transfer student has is when they actually sit down with an advisor. I am just trying to light a fire [under students through transfer programs or the student development courses] so [they] can come in and actually start talking about the nitty gritty.

In addition to one-on-one advising, the transfer specialist also traveled around the state to meet with admissions representatives at the four-year institutions that accepted the most students from Early Summer Community College. The transfer specialist used these visits to discuss questions that had arisen while advising students with the four-year institution administrators. These meetings often yielded opportunities for personnel from the four-year institutions to visit Early Summer to hold information sessions, one-on-one meetings with students, or some combination of the two.

Equal Partnership Between Two and Four-Year Institutions. Early Summer Community College administrators had mixed reactions to whether they considered themselves partners with four-year institutions in the state. The senior administrator reported that it depended on the institution, but that overall the relationship between the community colleges and the four-year institutions was not equal:

I think it is dependent on the institution. I think, in general, we are not as equal as we could be. At [Early Summer], that is mitigated a bit because we have a good reputation for our students. So we tend to be held in a higher esteem, if you will, by transfer institutions. They like our students, they know our students, they know the quality of our students, thus they know the quality of our faculty and the quality of our programs. So that helps us a little bit. But in general, I would say that we are not an equal partner. The community colleges, in general, are sort of not equal to the four-years. The four-years tend to be in the driver seat. Now that's not to say they are not aggressively pursuing our students depending on the institution—some are not, some are.

The senior administrator acknowledged an inherent imbalance in the relationship between community colleges and four-year institutions because the four-year institutions made the final decision on admitting their students. In addition, this administrator communicated a perception that some four-year institutions in the state—particularly the more selective institutions—were not interested in community college transfer students and therefore were not equal partners in furthering the transfer pathway. In contrast, other institutions, like Fall University, would be considered partners. The partnership with Fall University was due to the institutional agreement in place between the institutions declaring a mutual interest in helping students move smoothly between the two institutions. For an equal partnership to be in place, this administrator implied that both the two and four-year institutions needed to have an equal investment in making the transfer pathway effective for students.

In comparison, the transfer specialist at Early Summer expressed the belief that some four-year institutions tended to be viewed by administrators in two-year institutions as not being transfer-friendly. The transfer specialist attributed this view of four-year institutions to how they shared information about transfer:

There is a big rumor out there that a lot of four-year schools are not transfer friendly and I tend to disagree with that rumor. I think they are more transfer friendly than they get credit for. Here are my issues with why I think people think they are not transfer friendly: I think the information they have is really, really good, but I think it is really, really buried...I would also say that with [statewide] agreements specifically—when I start asking questions I get really thorough responses...I really do feel like anyone I reach out to no matter what level I get really thorough responses...But again it took having to ask those questions to get that information out.

Establishing Processes for Updating Articulation Agreements. Early Summer Community College had three types of articulation agreements: statewide, institutional,

and programmatic agreements. The senior administrator and the transfer specialist agreed that all of the types of articulation agreements were beneficial for students and emphasized that they were most effective when the agreement was valued equally by the two and four-year institutions. The transfer specialist expressed this in saying:

My short answer is yes. I definitely think they are. One thing is I think it gives direction—where the language is not vague and is very descriptive—it can really lay out a good plan for a community college student of how to get accepted to a four-year school or university. So that's number one. Number two is I think it gives second chances to students who thought that school was never...there are students getting accepted to four year schools and universities that they never thought they had a chance.

The senior administrator went further in saying that the institutional agreements were the most effective due to a mutual interest in successfully moving students between the two institutions. The transfer specialist echoed this sentiment. The senior administrator articulated a perception that some schools signed a statewide agreement with the community college system, but were less interested in transfer students. It appeared this way as some institutions—particularly more selective institutions—seemed to put more barriers in the way of community college transfer students such as vague or unclear language in the agreements. Speaking in favor of the institutional agreements, the senior administrator stated:

It's voluntary so they're welcoming and they are trying to make that pathway as smooth as possible. That may not be the case with some schools with the [statewide articulation agreements]. I think that what I might find is that the [statewide agreements], depending on the selectivity of the institution, tend to have more hurdles and barriers in those for our students.

As was the case consistently, the community college system and the four-year institution administrators were primarily responsible for updating the statewide agreements. There was minimal involvement—if any—on the part of the individual

community colleges. The institutional agreements were created and maintained through a partnership between administrators at the specific four-year and the two-year institutions. For the programmatic agreements, the administrators at the two and four-year institutions coordinated the creation of any new agreements or updates to existing agreements alongside the faculty at each institution.

Accommodation of Non-Associate Degree Earners. The senior administrator at Early Summer emphasized the value and importance of encouraging transfer students to complete the associate's degree. Earning this degree caused several things to happen: students demonstrated their ability to excel in multiple subjects by taking a wide range of courses; students became more confident due to their accomplishment and dedication; and students came out of the community college with an academic credential. In case they did not complete the bachelor's degree program, these students would still hold a degree. This administrator acknowledged the differences in how four-year institutions of varying selectivity viewed the associate's degree, "If you get into [Summer University] you have [a greater chance] of graduating...But from a non or less selective institution, like [Winter University], they are more likely to promote the getting of the degree."

Established Program Specific Agreements. Early Summer Community College had several programmatic agreements—the majority with their main receiving institutions.

Data Collection and Analysis. The senior administrator at Early Summer said tracking their students' progress was something they did well. Much of their data came from the National Student Clearinghouse, but other data points—how students did once they enrolled at the four-year institution, for example—were gathered from the four-year

institutions themselves. However, the senior administrator acknowledged two main areas where the college struggled with collecting data. One area was accurately identifying the students who entered Early Summer Community College with the goal to transfer. Early Summer, like the other community colleges in the study, identified transfer students as those who declared a major in one of the transfer degree programs. However, in addition to these students, there was also a group of students who did not enter a degree program, but who did intend to transfer. The senior administrator explained that there were many students who entered Early Summer, did not declare a major, and then transferred to a four-year institution competitively after taking a small number of credits at the community college. The challenge of identifying all prospective transfer students was not unique to Early Summer. The other two community colleges in the study also had similar issues. Not being able to accurately identify prospective community college students raised several additional challenges: it was difficult to target these students with specific communications; it was hard to track students' records of success; and neither the two-year nor the four-year institutions were confident that students received the key messages they needed early in the process.

The institution also lacked data identifying students who specifically transferred using an articulation agreement. Both administrators acknowledged this gap. They were only aware of students using articulation agreements if the institution(s) to which they were applying required a letter of intent—which not all required.

The community college administrators proposed the idea that better sharing of detailed information between the four-year and two-year colleges would improve their

ability to advise students. For instance, knowing which credits transferred to their main four-year feeder schools would be helpful in accurately advising students.

Overall Reflections on Transfer Approach. As Early Summer Community College was one of the main feeder institutions to Summer University, the administrators at Early Summer had a unique perspective on how the transfer process functioned with a more selective institution. The two administrators at Early Summer spoke of a good relationship with Summer University, but were quick to acknowledge that sometimes pertinent information for their transfer students was not easily accessible—either because the information was not posted on the web, the information was posted but difficult to find, or because the language in the statewide agreement was nuanced or vague. These administrators compared the access to information at Summer University to other, less selective institutions—including both Fall and Winter Universities—where information was easier to find and the language in the statewide or institutional agreements was less nuanced or vague.

Early Fall Community College

Early Fall Community College is the community college closest geographically to Fall University and also serves as its main feeder community college. According to the transfer specialist, less than half the students at Early Fall are in a transfer degree program. Of the students who are in these transfer degree programs, approximately 10% successfully transfer to a four-year institution. Two administrators, one senior administrator and one transfer specialist, were interviewed at this institution.

This institution placed equal priority on the transfer function and vocational offerings. The senior administrator explained that Early Fall had a strong connection to the needs of their community that went beyond just the transfer function:

It is very much two distinct functions. We have a responsibility as a community college to the people that live in this region...we also have a responsibility to the companies in the region...If we aren't producing mechanical technology students and human services students...then we aren't doing our job. If we're not providing opportunities for students who want to transfer onto a four-year institution, we're not doing our job.

The administrator also explained that for each of its programs, both transfer and vocational, there was a committee made up of members of the staff and faculty at Early Fall as well as members of the community. These committees worked together to make sure the degree programs were structured most effectively for the students who participated in them.

Outreach Efforts. Early Fall had one administrator, the transfer specialist, who was solely responsible for the development of the transfer support programs. This individual was an administrative faculty member and attended faculty senate meetings at the college. Half of this individual's time was spent on nurturing the transfer pathway for students and the other half on advising students—both transfers and non-transfers. The transfer specialist articulated that this focus on the transfer pathway began in earnest in the fall of 2011. The transfer specialist focused the most energy on learning the transfer requirements at the four-year institutions to which Early Fall students most often transferred. The transfer specialist explained Early Fall's motto for transfer, "Engage transfer students early and often with the institution they wish to transfer to after completing their work at [Early Fall Community College]."

Early Fall hosted all incoming students during group advising and registration sessions. For the first time in 2011, the transfer specialist at Fall University was invited to attend and work specifically with those students who expressed an interest in attending Fall University. Group advising and orientation was a half-day program where students got to know the campus and registered for classes. Students interested in transfer were introduced to the website at the four-year to which they wanted to transfer as well as to Early Fall's website for transfer students. In addition to this orientation program, students could receive additional advising by scheduling an appointment with the transfer specialist at Early Fall, the transfer specialist at Fall University, or one of the transfer specialists at the other four-year institutions that were housed on the campus. Beyond the four-year institutions housed on Early Fall's campus, several additional four-year institutions visited Early Fall to meet with students or conduct information sessions. For new students who entered the college in the spring semester, a group advising and registration session was not offered, so these students met one-on-one with an advisor to receive pertinent information and register for classes.

Equal Partnership Between Two and Four-Year Institutions. Both administrators acknowledged good relationships with the four-year institutions where they sent the majority of their students. In particular, the administrators noted that the strongest partnerships were with the four-year institutions on their campus and with Fall University. These administrators believed that the other four-year institutions to which they did not transfer as many students were partners, but the partnerships were not as constant. Similar to comments from Early Summer administrators, the senior administrator acknowledged that the four-year institutions ultimately had the upper hand,

“I mean we are a community college and we know that. We know that they have the—they can decide whether they want to do an agreement or not...they have the upper hand.” The administrator went further in saying that the four-year institutions often had many choices when they decided who they wanted to partner with—particularly Fall University or more selective institutions.

Both administrators also spoke to challenges in working on the articulation agreements with some four-year institutions. They acknowledged several experiences where changes in the agreements were not communicated to the community colleges in a timely manner, so that sometimes the advisors heard about changes from their students. This concerned them because they believed students might get to the four-year institution and realize for the first time that they took a handful of the wrong courses or they did not take as many of the required courses as they thought. In those cases, the number of credits needed to graduate continually increased.

Establishing Processes for Updating Articulation Agreements. Early Fall had all four types of articulation agreements: statewide agreements, institutional agreements, programmatic agreements, and programmatic articulation guides. The senior administrator expressed the philosophy behind entering into articulation agreements with four-year institutions:

One of our objectives is that the agreement has to be in the best interest of the student, so we are not going to enter into an agreement with an institution that is not accredited...If we are working on an articulation agreement and the student is not getting a fair shake on the credits they have done here we may not do an agreement...if it is not going to help the students then we are not going to put our name on it.

The two administrators agreed that the statewide agreements were an effective marketing tool. The statewide agreements often were the reason prospective community college

transfer students met with the transfer specialist. However, the transfer specialist noted that often students did not meet all of the detailed requirements. Further, she stated that the agreements only served the most adept students.

The senior administrator also spoke to the benefit of having an institutional agreement with Fall University in place of a statewide agreement. Between 15-20% of students who enrolled at Early Fall came from outside their district. This administrator speculated that many of these students moved to attend Early Fall so that they could ultimately apply to Fall University.

The administrators explained that the statewide agreements were updated at the state level, through the administrators within the community college system, in conjunction with the four-year institutions. Any communication with the community college went through the senior administration. The institutional agreements were updated through a combined effort among the senior administrators at the two and four-year institutions. The programmatic agreements were updated with the help of senior administrators, faculty, and academic deans of those specific areas.

The senior administrator explained one of the biggest challenges in promoting transfer was keeping the articulation agreements updated. The reason was largely related to the lack of open and frequent communication between the two and four-year institutions. The senior administrator explained:

Trying to keep up with the articulation agreements—you always want it to be perfect. When they transfer it is going to be golden. And they might get someplace and they say, oh no we changed that last year. Well, did you tell the community college? You still have this agreement here. And then how hard is the student going to fight? Do they know we have that really well thought out agreement that has two president's signatures on it, which we are going to hold them to?

Accommodation of Non-Associate Degree Earners. Early Fall, consistent with the other community colleges in this study, encouraged students to obtain associate's degrees. Depending on the program, completing the associate's would fulfill general education requirements at many four-year institutions. However, both the senior administrator and the transfer specialist emphasized that their primary focus was helping students achieve their goals. They both pointed out that often it was not in a student's best interest to complete an associate's degree prior to transferring to the four-year institution. The transfer specialist explained:

The bottom line is I can think of five programs over at [Fall University], where a lot of our...students are transferring to, say that it is not in the students' best interest to finish their associate's degree because if they do, because of some gatekeeper class that we don't offer, they have to wait a full year before they get in—so they need to get over there after year one.

Thus, these administrators stated that in more than a few cases, successful transfer was not only defined as earning the two-year degree.

Established Program Specific Agreements. Early Fall Community College had several programmatic agreements and most of these agreements were in place with Fall University.

Data Collection and Analysis. Early Fall identified students who were in the transfer track primarily as those students who were in the transfer degree programs—less than half of the overall student population. However, there were also some students taking classes at Early Fall who had not entered a degree program. Early Fall estimated an additional 15% of the student population had the goal of transferring to a four-year institution.

Early Fall Community College demonstrated a focus on measuring the success of its students, tracking the movement of students across institutions, and allocating resources based on student needs. The transfer specialist shared:

The data I look most closely at is probably more outcomes or outputs. For example...I look at how many visits did each one of these folks have... I will be able to see how many people in October and November so we will be able to see the ebb and flow of demand for our services. It will help us think about what we can do programmatically during the less busy advising times to be doing outreach and support.

Early Fall also had accurate data on the students who went from Early Fall to Fall University. Fall University shared retention and academic success information, such as GPA earned and time to degree, with Early Fall. Additionally, Early Fall administered an assessment to each student before he or she graduated from a degree program—a requirement of graduation. The assessment measured items such as critical reasoning and scientific thinking. From the statewide higher education coordinating body, Early Fall was able to collect information about where its students were transferring. The only metric they acknowledged was not in place at the time of this study was how many students transferred using the statewide agreement.

The transfer specialist also raised the question of how a successful transfer was defined. At present, a successful transfer student was a student who earned an associate's degree. However, as both administrators acknowledged in their comments, it was not always in the best interest of the student to earn this two-year degree prior to transfer.

Overall Reflections on Transfer Approach. Early Fall Community College's efforts towards supporting transfer students have become stronger since October of 2011 when the transfer specialist began working with transfer representatives in earnest and began developing a comprehensive transfer support program. In addition, the frequent

and close collaboration with the transfer specialist at Fall University was unique among the groups of two and four-year institutions in this study. The partnership between Early Fall and Fall University, from the perspective of administrators at both institutions, appeared to be highly effective.

Early Winter Community College

Early Winter Community College is the closest two-year institution geographically to Winter University and is also its main feeder community college. Roughly half of the students who attend this institution are in a transfer degree program. One senior administrator and two transfer specialists were interviewed at this institution.

The senior administrator expressed that the college placed equal emphasis on transfer and vocational offerings, but did communicate the importance of the transfer function:

We are in business and we exist to prepare people to be socially and economically mobile—that to me is the bottom line. We are able to prepare citizens to move forward and be adaptable, flexible people in the workforce but also citizens in a republican democracy. So to me, as an administrator it is very important that we maintain viability and the continuing success of our occupational and technical programs because they are a big part of our ability to prepare people for that social and economic mobility. However, I still think and I will always think that at some level the transfer function is the preeminent function of the two-year college.

The senior administrators' view on the balanced mission of the institution was supported by the way the institution was structured—the staff that advised transfer students also advised vocational students. There was not a specific emphasis on one function over another.

Outreach Efforts. Early Winter had more than one campus and two full-time staff members who worked with transfer students. In addition, the individual who

supervised these two individuals did additional transfer advising though not on a full-time basis. Of these three administrators, none of them was solely focused on transfer advising. They supported and advised both transfer students as well as vocational students. At this college, students were encouraged to come and meet with a transfer advisor once they were into their first semester of courses or in the beginning of their second semester of courses. These advisors saw students by appointment and typically did not meet with students on a walk-in basis. However, if a student's request did not require extensive research on the part of the transfer advisor, walk-in appointments were accommodated. After the student had taken 30 credits at the college, he or she was assigned a faculty advisor who served as an additional advisor throughout the remainder of their time at Early Winter. The senior administrator stressed that this personalized advising was the most important element of working with transfer students:

So there are a variety of means by which we try to advise our students coming in because many of them are first generation college students, they have sometimes erroneous notions about what college is about let alone what transfer to a four-year institution entails. And so I think that first and foremost personalized advising and trying to get information related to transfer and what that means and what it is going to require depending on what degree program you are in and what institution you hope to transfer to is certainly the best thing we can do for our students.

This institution also offered an orientation program for new students. This program was not required, but it was available if students wanted to take advantage of it. The orientation program introduced students to the resources available at the college and included a tour of the campus. The college also provided group-advising sessions to assist students with registering for classes. Early Winter also encouraged new students to enroll in the student development course, a community college system wide course, before completing 15 credits at the college. This course did include some advising. The

senior administrator explained that although it would be ideal if all new students enrolled in this course within the first or second semester that did not always happen. If it did, there would not be enough capacity in the current courses.

All three administrators spoke to the challenges they faced when students chose to serve as their own advisors. One of the transfer specialists commented that while they tried to increasingly spread the word to students to come and see them for academic planning, many chose not to do so.

Equal Partnership Between Two and Four-Year Institutions. As was the case with the administrators at the other two community colleges in the study, these administrators acknowledged that the partnerships with community colleges varied based on the institutions. The three administrators spoke to a closer partnership with their main feeder schools—namely those with advisors on their campuses and Winter University. The senior administrator emphasized that while it was important to have relationships with four-year institutions around the state, it was most important to ensure a strong relationship with the main receiving four-year institution. The senior administrator also acknowledged that working with the more selective four-year institutions was more challenging. The administrator, echoing the comments of the senior administrator at Early Summer Community College, communicated a perception that the more selective four-year institutions took transfer students primarily because of the pressure exerted on them by the state. In addition, the senior administrator acknowledged that four-year institutions often “called the tune” as they decided whether to admit students from Early Winter.

Establishing Processes for Updating Articulation Agreements. The three administrators believed the articulation agreements were useful tools for increasing awareness of transfer pathways and served as effective roadmaps for students who wanted to move into a four-year institution. However, they acknowledged that some were more user-friendly than others. One of the transfer specialists spoke to the difficulty of fully understanding the meaning of each agreement. The senior administrator also acknowledged that the articulation agreements were written in an “arcane” manner that was likely difficult for students to interpret—particularly first-generation college students.

The senior administrator also explained the differences in the agreements based on the selectivity of the institutions:

I think the [statewide] agreements are wonderful and they need to be in place. Some of them are more useful to students because they are a bit more permissive. For example, if I have to hold up [a statewide agreement from one of the highly selective four-year institutions in the state] against [a statewide agreement from a moderately selective four-year institution in the state] there are some significant differences there...Its not an easy process at the selective institutions. It is a bit easier under the [statewide agreements] at...the less selective four-year institutions.

This administrator gave the example of working with a student in the community college who wanted to transfer to one of the more selective institutions in the state. In advising this student, the administrator encountered many hurdles in navigating the transfer process and the articulation agreement for that institution.

At Early Winter Community College, the process of updating the articulation agreements happened much like it did at the other two community colleges in the study. The statewide agreements were updated and maintained by the community college system and the four-year institutions. Occasionally, if there was a recurring issue, the

administrators within the community college system would bring it to the attention of the committee of community college vice presidents. The senior administrator also acknowledged that some of the articulation agreements needed to be reviewed and re-signed by both institutions within specific time periods. For the most part, there was a shared effort made by the administrators and faculty within the community colleges and four-year institutions to handle the updates of the institutional agreements, programmatic agreements, and the programmatic articulation guides.

Accommodation of Non-Associate Degree Earners. The administrators communicated a preference for students earning an associate's degree prior to transfer while also acknowledging this was not best for every student. The senior administrator explained that students who earned the two-year degree were more successful academically and socially than those students who transferred earlier. One of the transfer specialists also stated that transfer students with associate's degrees were viewed differently by four-year institutions—particularly four-year institutions who were less selective like Winter University—as compared to students admitted straight out of high school. The transfer specialist explained, “And the difference about a transfer student as opposed to a student that came right out of high school is that they have already proven themselves that they can do college level work. So they are not as much of a risk.”

The senior administrator at Early Winter also mentioned an ongoing issue with transfer students; many students were eligible to earn an associate's degree but did not apply for graduation so the degree was not awarded to them. Community colleges within the community college system did not automatically award associate's degrees in this case. These two-year institutions did, however, automatically award the general studies

certificate to students who took the roughly 30 credit hours required. The senior administrator was not sure of the reason for why students did not apply to get their associate's degree.

Established Program Specific Agreements. Early Winter Community College had several programmatic agreements. Most of these agreements were in place with Winter University.

Data Collection and Analysis. Early Winter Community College, like the other community colleges in the study, did not have a way of accurately identifying all students who were planning to transfer. The senior administrator explained that transfer students could be found in a number of degree programs—beyond the main transfer degree programs—and they could be undeclared, which meant they were not connected to a single degree program. This administrator, in explaining the importance of tracking students, also spoke to the lack of clarity surrounding how to measure a successful transfer student. Was a successful transfer student someone who successfully moved from the two to the four-year institution or was it a student who moved between the institutions after earning a two-year degree?

Overall Reflections on Transfer Approach. Early Winter Community College was the main feeder community college to Winter University, the least selective institution in the study. In talking with the three administrators at Early Winter, it was evident that while they worked diligently to assist transfer students, there were many students they were not reaching through the various outreach methods. Both transfer specialists mentioned that one of their main challenges was communicating with students

and encouraging them to come in for advising. All three administrators voiced concerns about the number of students who chose to advise themselves.

Overall Conclusions

Each of the six institutions demonstrated unique approaches to working with community college transfer students. These unique approaches were driven largely by the characteristics of the institutions themselves—the types of students within the institutions, the other postsecondary institutions nearby, etc. However, within these unique approaches, there were many common threads and themes that emerged in the analysis. These themes are discussed fully in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The process of transferring between a two and four-year institution in any state is a complicated venture. In the State of Four Seasons, minimal state involvement makes this pathway more challenging due to unclear roles across postsecondary institutions, varying methods of outreach to transfer students across institutions, inadequate resources for prospective community college transfer students, and a lack of assessment data on the mechanisms already in place to facilitate transfer. One reason for this minimal state involvement could be attributed to structural difficulties. The two-year and four-year institutions are not under a common, overarching governing board. As a result, it is difficult for the state to impose a comprehensive system for community college transfer like those in Florida or New York where the two and four-year institutions are part of one overarching system (Ehrenberg & Smith, 2004). While a comprehensive system does not equal effective community college transfer, it does allow for greater ease in implementing a structural pathway between two and four-year institutions. Another reason for this minimal state involvement could be due to a lack of resources. As is the case in most states, Four Seasons has reduced resources for public education over the past several years. However, if the State of Four Seasons values an affordable and smooth pathway to a four-year postsecondary degree for all students, additional resources dedicated to the two to four-year transfer pathway are a necessity.

Across the state's public, post-secondary institutions, the transfer pathways differ. This study explained the transfer approaches of three public, four-year institutions of varying selectivity. The selectivity of these institutions affected the institutional approach towards community college transfer students. In addition to these institutions, three community colleges were included in the study—each was chosen due to the close proximity to one of the four-year institutions. Within each institution, the researcher spoke with at least two administrators, one senior administrator and one transfer specialist, to inquire about the institutional approach to transfers.

Following are detailed descriptions of the themes that arose from the findings. These themes are organized within the context of the two research questions that guided the study:

- 1) How do administrators at two and four-year institutions in the State of Four Seasons describe their institution's approach towards transfer students?
- 2) How well do the two and four-year institutional approaches to transfer align with Ignash and Townsend's (2001) framework for effective articulation?

Research Question #1

How do administrators at two and four-year institutions in the State of Four Seasons describe their institution's approach towards transfer students?

Overall Approach. At Summer University, the most selective four-year institution in the study, the overall approach to transfer students was best characterized as highly responsive but primarily reactive. All three administrators were clear that they worked with this particular group of students—community college transfer students—as they would work with any unique applicant pool. They responded to all questions from

students or community college counselors via email and phone. In addition, one of the senior administrators explained that the newly released transfer guide and the soon-to-be-launched transfer website were in response to requests made from community college counselors.

However, it was clear that while these administrators were highly responsive, their outreach to community college counselors was limited. The transfer specialist stated that changes in requirements for a major or degree program were communicated to the counselors, but the administrators did not speak to any further outreach efforts. Two of the administrators spoke to the idea of hosting a workshop for community college counselors, but this had not come to fruition. One of the senior administrators also acknowledged that they did not have a clear idea of what the community college counselors needed from them.

It was evident in talking with all three administrators that there was a clear limit to the amount of outreach they were willing to provide. One of the senior administrators explained:

Well, we do a lot right now. We visit every community college in the state...so we are getting to every school, we are doing evening programs, we are doing open houses here. We could create some more literature, we could do more with email, but I don't know how much more time we can devote to that group with staffing the way it is. The [admission process for entering high school students] drives most of our strategy, time, and resources.

Further, two of the administrators expressed mild frustration regarding the amount of responding they currently do. These administrators spoke to the high proportion of calls they received from community college transfer students. While these administrators were clear that they consistently responded to these calls and any emails from students, the high volume was frustrating. One senior administrator commented:

Yeah, I think part of it is just that it is a drain on our time. You are taking phone calls from transfer students all day and its such a small number that we actually enroll in proportion to what the expectations for the office are. I think it is very time consuming.

An overarching perspective also impacted this limited outreach—community college students inherently wanted to attend Summer University, as it was one of the more selective institutions in the state. Therefore, the administrators at Summer University perceived little need to do additional outreach. Compounding these factors was the reality that the applicant pool of community college transfer students was not as strong academically as the applicant pool of high school applicants.

The limited outreach to both community college students and to community college counselors yielded a perception that Summer University had little interest in community college transfer students. Several community college administrators interviewed for the study spoke to this perception. For instance, one of these administrators stated:

The more selective institutions are less interested in transfer students. They are more interested in the selectivity of their freshmen class...you know I think truthfully, candidly, I think they do it for political reasons primarily. If they are interested in diversity they are interested in picking that up at the freshmen level. Transfer of students is something they have to do because the [state legislators are] looking at them at some level. And since they are getting less and less money from the state they do it for PR.

The interviews with the three administrators at Summer University did not support the conclusion that the institution was not interested in community college transfer students.

There was disconfirming evidence that Summer University was primarily reactive to the needs to community college transfer students. For instance, this university was about to launch a revamp of its website for transfer students in addition to the creation of a transfer guide. These actions could be considered “proactive,” however an

administrator specifically explained that these changes were made purely in reaction to requests from community college advisors. This senior administrator specifically stated:

We go to the meetings with other schools and if they have some sort of guidance counselor conference we try to go and give our input, but I guess we really don't know what their needs are other than everyone that I talk to says fix your website and get us the guide. We got a guide and we are fixing the website. Hopefully that will help.

In contrast to the highly responsive but reactive approach of Summer University the other two four-year institutions in the study demonstrated a more proactive approach towards working with transfer students. Within the last three to four years, both Fall and Winter Universities had dedicated additional resources to nurturing the two to four-year transfer pathway. Fall University added new staff dedicated to working primarily with community college transfer students. Winter University restructured two of the departments that worked with prospective students resulting in several full-time staff members and additional graduate student support dedicated primarily to working with prospective transfer students. Looking at dedication of resources alone, these two institutions surpassed the resources dedicated to community college transfer students at Summer University, which had only one staff member committed to working with transfer students.

These additional resources allowed Fall and Winter Universities to be highly responsive to prospective community college transfer students as well as to community college counselors. Administrators at both institutions spent time, on a weekly basis, at their main feeder community colleges advising prospective transfer students.

Additionally, the transfer specialist at Fall University attended the summer orientation for new students entering Early Fall Community College to inform them about the transfer

process. These administrators viewed it as their role to advise and work with prospective community college students. This was not the case at Summer University. In fact, at Summer University, administrators did not see it as their role to advise all prospective transfer students on the process of transfer and what courses to take at the community college.

Administrators at both Fall and Winter Universities spoke to ways they wanted to increase their outreach to the community college transfer population. The Fall University transfer specialist explained an effort to create additional materials and resources for this specific population. For instance, the transfer specialist mentioned:

I am planning to do a survey, hopefully next spring, of the transfers that came in this fall to find out the types of things—especially for the community college students cause I have heard anecdotally that there are differences at the community college verses here...one instance is a student from [a community college in the state] told me that at [their community college] when you get financial aid it covers your books so you can just take your financial aid package to the bookstore and its covered which you can't do here.

At Winter University, the administrators mentioned a new strategy aimed at encouraging more students to apply to the institution using the statewide agreements. Winter University also recently created a guide for community college transfer students to use in determining which courses to take at the community college based on their intended major at the four-year institution.

One potential explanation of why Summer University assumed a more reactive stance as compared to the more proactive approach at Fall and Winter Universities could be the different motivations influencing each institution's approach to admitting community college transfer students. One of the Summer University senior

administrators acknowledged that the state requires the institution to take a certain number of community college transfer students each year.

In contrast, Fall and Winter Universities appeared to be admitting community college transfer students for two reasons: these students had a proven academic track record of success, and they raised the selectivity of the institutions. One senior administrator at Winter University commented that, “due to data collection we’ve had and due to anecdotal experiences, students who come in with more credits and especially with an associate’s degree tend to be more successful.” Recent literature on community college students indicated that once students completed 20 credits of college level work, they were much more likely to persist on the path to baccalaureate attainment as compared to students who had completed fewer credits (Adelman, 2006). In addition, those students who completed an associate’s degree were much more likely to complete their bachelor’s degree. Therefore, Winter University was motivated to admit these students from the community college as they were likely be successful, especially if they had taken at least one year’s worth of courses at the community college.

Fall University administrators did not speak directly as to why the institution was motivated to admit community college students. However, the admission rate for transfer students was about 10% lower than the admission rate for incoming freshmen students. This lower admissions rate for transfer students meant it was more competitive to be admitted as a transfer student as compared to being admitted as a freshman. Additionally, the senior administrator explained that the institution did not admit these students to replace students they had lost:

We'll bring in [transfer students each year] so that our junior and senior classes are actually larger than our freshmen and sophomore classes. Where the norm normally is if I have a freshmen class of 4,000 and I am going to lose 1,000 of them, I will replace them with [approximately 1,000 transfer students].

Fall University was therefore able to initially turn away some students, who were not qualified as freshmen applicants. Then these students could apply to transfer after having demonstrated their academic potential at a community college or another postsecondary institution. This allowed Fall University to slowly increase its selectivity. In addition, the senior administrator from Fall University stated that they took very few transfer students with less than one year of academic work at another postsecondary institution.

Role of Institutions. Another common theme across all six institutions was the lack of clarity around the role four-year institutions and community colleges should play in working with community college transfer students. Some of the articulation agreements specifically outlined the role of the community college, the role of the four-year institution, and the role of the student. However, this was largely the only place that the roles were acknowledged. This lack of clarity magnified existing challenges in the two to four-year transfer process.

To begin, the lack of clarity around the role of each institution was evident in evaluating the online information available across the two and four-year institutions for community college transfer students. There were three main places where community college students could collect information about transferring to a four-year institution in the State of Four Seasons—on the website of the four-year institution, on the website of the community college, and on the community college system sponsored website. This site listed all of the statewide articulation agreements as well as all of the other articulation agreements in place across the state. The site provided links to all of the

articulation agreements in addition to a brief summary of each agreement. These summaries could be problematic if a student only read the summary and did not read the actual agreement. For instance, on the summary page for the statewide agreement for Summer University, it did not outline that students were required to satisfy specific course requirements while attending the community college in order to be admitted under the statewide agreement. As this was not acknowledged on the community college system website, students could assume if they met all the requirements outlined on the site they could be admitted under the agreement.

Similarly, on Early Winter Community College's website introducing the statewide agreements and other articulation agreements, it stated, "Through system-wide negotiated agreements, students who graduate from a [Four Seasons] community college with a transferable associate's degree are guaranteed admission to many of the [state's] colleges and universities." There was no additional description beyond this regarding the fact that each individual four-year institution had specific requirements for guaranteed admission to be possible. Therefore, students could assume they would be guaranteed admission into any institution in the state regardless of the GPA they earned or the courses they took.

Without clearly defined roles, the information provided by institutions and the state regarding two to four-year transfer was both duplicative and incomplete. In addition, listing the same information in more than one place meant that more resources were being dedicated to the upkeep and accuracy of that information and there was an increased chance of incorrect or outdated information.

Across the four-year institutions, the administrators' stances on the role of their institution in the transfer process varied based on the selectivity of the institution. Some four-year institution administrators believed it their role to advise students on the courses they should take while at the community college and others assumed this was distinctly the role of the community college administrators. The administrators at Summer University clearly articulated it was not their role to advise prospective students on their community college course schedule and overall curricular plan. They did some of this work at their main feeder community colleges, but stated unequivocally that it was not their role to do this with all prospective students. In comparison, administrators at both Fall and Winter Universities suggested it was their role to advise community college students on what courses to take while at the two-year institutions. Clarifying the institutional and state responsibilities in providing information and support to prospective community college transfer students would use resources more effectively and would enable a smoother transfer pathway for students.

Role of Students. The role of the students in the transfer process was also not consistently clear. Some of the institutions were very clear about what they expected from students—some clearly stated students should be in control and driving their own process. For instance, on the website for Early Summer Community College, there was a link to the role of the student in transfer. On this page, it stated, “[Early Summer] offers many resources to assist you with planning your transfer program; however it's up to you to seek out the information necessary to develop your course of study.” At other institutions, the role of the student was not clearly stated or it was somewhat hidden.

The role of the student varied at each institution through the way transfer specialists advised prospective transfer students. At Early Winter Community College, the transfer specialists primarily met with students by appointment as the transfer specialists often did a fair amount of research before each appointment. One of the transfer specialists at Early Winter explained:

Most of mine are appointments and the reason I do that is well one I ask them to make sure what major are you going into, where are you going, what four-year college are you transferring to, with the degree or without the degree...and once I have gathered that information then I can do that research so that before they come in I have checked the college catalogue, I've checked the transfer guide, and I may have pulled up course equivalencies...so by the time they walk into my office, I have the two year plan setup for them.

This transfer specialist, like the others at Early Winter, largely created the academic plan for the student and handed it to him or her. In this case, what was the role of the student? In contrast, at Early Summer Community College, the transfer specialist took scheduled or walk-in appointments. During the appointment, this transfer specialist did the research on individual four-year institutions with the student. The administrator still did much of the navigating and planning in the meeting, but the student was seeing the navigation process. In this case, what was the role of the student? In either of these examples, the role of the student was different.

Another way to determine the role of the student was by reading some of the statewide and institutional agreements. The role of the student was explained, using a specific subheading, in the statewide and institutional agreements for Fall and Winter Universities, but not for Summer University. For instance, in the statewide agreement for Winter University, it stated clearly that it was the responsibility of the student to: (1) know and understand the requirements for earning their associate's degree and for their

intended major at Winter University; (2) earn the associate's degree with a minimum cumulative GPA of a 2.5 and no grade lower than a "C"; (3) provide transcripts from any institutions attended and documentation for any credit applied to completion of the associate's degree; and (4) follow all application procedures and timelines for Winter University. This language was similar in the institutional agreements in place at Fall University.

Common Challenges. There were several common challenges across all six institutions when it came to working with community college transfer students: getting correct and relevant information to students early enough, keeping the articulation agreements and course equivalency guides updated, measuring the effectiveness of the articulation agreements, and defining successful transfer.

To begin, administrators talked often about the difficulty of making sure prospective transfer students received necessary transfer information early enough in their postsecondary career. This was challenging for institutions—both two and four-year—as often there was not one way to ensure all students at the community colleges were getting the same information. Some students heard about the articulation agreements before they got to the community college or early in their time at the college, but others did not hear about them until well into their time in the two-year institution or once they began to apply to a four-year school. Orientation was not required at any of the community colleges in the study and meeting with an advisor also was not required. This meant that community college students could apply, enter the institution, never meet with an advisor or attend a program, and chart their own course while attending the college. While this could work for some students, it could hurt other students who might have

benefited from more information earlier about how the transfer process works, the different pathways into a four-year institution, and who to contact to learn more about the process.

In addition, administrators at all of the institutions spoke to the challenges associated with correcting misinformation—particularly around articulation agreements. A repeated misconception was that if you attended a community college in Four Seasons, you were guaranteed admission to any four-year college in the state. While this was true in its simplest form, the details within each statewide agreement made this claim much more complex. Misinformation could also result from where students obtained their information about transfer. One of the senior administrators spoke to the information students found when they Google information on transfer:

And there is so much information out there too. I mean you go to—you can Google some things and students can be going off of a transfer bulletin from like '07 and they could be following that without even speaking to us or speaking to their advisor. And then when they finally go speak to their advisor those classes aren't the same anymore.

A second challenge was the difficulty in keeping the articulation agreements and the course equivalency guides up to date. All of the institutions in the study had articulation agreements available for their students. From the perspective of the community college administrators, ensuring they had the most up to date information from the four-year institutions regarding these agreements was challenging. One senior administrator explained this as the biggest challenge with facilitating transfer:

Trying to keep up with articulation agreements—you always want it to be perfect. When they transfer it is going to be golden. And they might get someplace and they say oh no we changed that last year. Well did you tell the community college? You still have this agreement here. And then how hard is the student going to fight? Do they know we have that really well thought out agreement that has two president's signatures on it which we are going to hold them to...Keeping them updated is very difficult.

From the perspective of the four-year institutions, they also struggled to keep all of the agreements current—particularly the programmatic agreements—as they involved frequent and effective communication with members of the faculty at both institutions. One four-year institution senior administrator explained that to keep the programmatic agreements functioning well, open channels of communication with faculty at both institutions was necessary because the same courses (i.e. the same course numbers) across the community college system varied:

And the articulation of courses with course equivalencies is with the system as a whole...you might have one community college teaching Bio 101 one way and another community college teaching it a different way and we have articulated it for us as the same course. For us, students who complete Bio 101 come in as fulfilling the first semester for a biology major. But some community colleges teach it as an introductory biology for all majors—for non-science majors. Other community colleges will teach it as an introduction to the discipline of biology...So that is another example of a challenge we face in working with the system as a whole and different community colleges. And administratively it can be hard as well because the big [community colleges]—sometimes it is hard to know who is the right person to talk to. The smaller colleges tend to be easier because it is a smaller staff and so it is easier to get to the right person and the word will get down.

Overall, in order for the articulation agreements to be effective in facilitating a smooth transfer process for students, they needed to be current. Two and four-year administrators expressed that it took significant time and resources to keep these agreements functional for students.

A third challenge dealt with the lack of data on students who transferred using an articulation agreement. Though some four-year institutions could estimate how many students entered using this pathway, the four-year institutions were not consistently tracking this data. Therefore, measuring the effectiveness of the agreements was difficult. Do students who transfer using an articulation agreement lose fewer credits than their counterparts who transfer competitively? Was there a marked difference in how these two groups of transfer students performed once at the four-year institution? As a result of this lack of data, it was difficult to know whether the articulation agreements were worth the time and resources.

A final challenge that surfaced across the institutions in the study involved how success in the transfer process was measured. Depending on who was asked, the answer was different. Though the community college system did not clearly state their definition of a successful transfer, a definition could be inferred from the messaging and accountability measures in place at the community college level. According to the community college system, a successful transfer student was a student who earned an associate's degree prior to moving successfully to the four-year institution. It was because of this view that community colleges encouraged the majority of students to earn the two-year degree. However, the community college administrators were quick to mention it was not in every student's best interest to earn a two-year degree prior to transfer. Though Fall and Winter Universities preferred that community college students transferred with an associate's degree, a successful transfer student was a student who had demonstrated academic promise. A sign of this academic promise was a student with a certain GPA and a student with an associate's degree. At Summer University, a

successful transfer student was one who showed academic promise and often that did not include earning an associate's degree. Rather, it meant that students showed academic success in high school and/or they could demonstrate one year of strong work at the community college or another postsecondary institution.

In addition, the number of potential transfer students was difficult to define in the community colleges. Could a potential transfer student be anyone who indicated they wanted to transfer regardless of how realistic their goals? At the time of this study, the answer was yes, it could be anyone who expressed the goal to transfer or enrolled in a transfer degree program. Depending on the community college, the accuracy surrounding this number varied. However, even the community colleges with the most accurate numbers were missing students—some who successfully transferred.

Concluding Thoughts to Research Question #1. Overall, there are varying approaches to helping community college students navigate the transfer process into a four-year institution. In Four Seasons, transfer between two and four-year institutions is happening successfully and many students earn a bachelor's degree. There are ways, however, that the overall transfer process in the state could be improved. Community college students are a unique population of students in the postsecondary education system and they have distinct needs. In addition, successfully navigating the process of transfer between two or more institutions is complex. With confounding issues such as students being uncertain as to where they want to transfer, students being unsure about their major, or students transferring credits from multiple institutions, this process becomes highly complex. One community college senior administrator put it well when saying:

I think it is a complex process that students often get frustrated by...and our students oftentimes when they get up against a barrier they don't know to break it down or climb over it or walk around it, they just turn around and walk away from it.

While many in higher education would agree it is the responsibility of students to drive their transfer process, it is important that these students are set up to succeed in doing so.

Research Question #2

How well do the two and four-year institutional approaches to transfer align with Ignash and Townsend's (2001) framework for effective articulation?

For the purposes of data collection and analysis, the researcher used Ignash and Townsend's (2001) guiding principles for strong statewide articulation policies as a framework for evaluating each institution's approach to the transfer pathway. The six principles explored through this study revealed that the various institutions in Four Seasons had progress to make in regards to promoting a smooth transfer pathway. The six guiding principles applied were: (1) equal partnership between the two and four-year institutions; (2) equal treatment of native and transfer students at the receiving institution; (3) established processes for updating articulation agreements handled by the faculty; (4) accommodation of non-associate degree earners through articulation agreements; (5) established program specific agreements; and (6) data collection and analysis to gauge effectiveness of articulation agreements.

Equal Partnership Between Two and Four-Year Institutions. Ignash and Townsend's (2001) first principle stated that strong articulation policies needed to ensure both two and four-year institutions functioned as equal partners. Equal partnership entailed both parties placing these policies as a priority for their respective institutions. Within the context of this study, this first principle was explored more holistically with

the intention of understanding whether the two and four-year institution administrators within the state acted as though they were in an equal partnership in facilitating the overall transfer process.

There were varying reactions to the researcher's inquiries into whether the four-year institutions and the community colleges were equal partners in facilitating community college transfer. The community college administrators had two common reactions to this question. First, there was recognition that the four-year institutions inherently had the "upper hand" as they choose whether or not to admit the community college students. Going beyond this reality, community college administrators explained that the presence of a partnership depended on the institution. Across the three community colleges, the four-year institutions viewed as partners were largely those that took frequent action to make the transfer pathway into their institution as smooth as possible: creating and maintaining a clear and detailed website; being open to suggestions of how to remove hurdles for prospective transfer students; and working diligently to ensure the same messages were being communicated by all individuals advising transfer students. Administrators within two out of the three community colleges spoke highly of the relationships they had formed with Fall University. There were several reasons why these administrators spoke to the benefits of partnering with Fall University: clarity of the institutional agreements; the excellent coordination of transfer resources among staff at Fall University; and easily accessible and detailed information on the transfer website.

From the perspective of the four-year institutional administrators, they spoke to two main challenges in working with community college administrators. First, administrators at all three four-year institutions commented that it was challenging to

know who to contact about transfer related matters at each community college in the state. Second, the administrators acknowledged that many community colleges were understaffed. At all three four-year institutions, administrators commented on the large caseloads of students community college advisors were expected to manage in addition to other duties. These comments made the impression that though these community college administrators worked hard to provide support to prospective transfer students, they often were not able to meet the need in their institutions.

It was evident across all of the institutions in the study that an understood definition of an ideal partnership was lacking. As mentioned previously, clarifying the roles of the institutions in the transfer process would help this lack of clarity. At the time of the study, no clear definitions were in place with regards to the specific roles of the four-year institutions and the community colleges. Better channels of communication between the two and four-year institutions would greatly enhance the exchange of information—an essential element of making the community college transfer pathway smooth.

Equal Treatment of Native and Transfer Students. Ignash and Townsend's (2001) second principle stated that both native and transfer students should be treated equally at the receiving institution. Once transfer students arrived at the four-year institution, they should have all of the same resources and opportunities available to them as native students.

According to the administrators at each four-year institution and the websites of these institutions, incoming community college transfer students and native students at the four-year institutions were treated equally. At each of the four-year institutions,

transfer students were offered an orientation to the institution as was offered to the incoming high school students. Transfer students were connected with an advisor or advisors to assist them in registering for their first semester of classes at the four-year institution. Two of the three institutions offered incoming transfer students access to upperclassmen for advice and guidance.

There was one element, the evaluation of credits, which appeared to cause some trouble for students transferring into one of these four-year institutions. Administrators at all three four-year institutions spoke to the challenges of ensuring students had taken the correct curriculum in the community college so they could transfer in the most credit from their two-year institution. All of the four-year institutional administrators spoke to ways they had attempted to assist in this process. However, administrators at two of the three community colleges stated examples of students encountering challenges with transfer of credit upon arrival at the receiving institution. These surprises were difficult for the students as it often meant they needed to take additional classes to satisfy requirements.

Better channels of communication between the two and four-year institutions would improve this challenge. Four-year administrators would simply need to keep track of common issues and share those issues with the community college administrators so that advising could be adjusted.

Established Processes for Updating Articulation Agreements. Ignash and Townsend's (2001) third principle stated faculty at both the two and four-year institutions should hold the responsibility of creating and updating the articulation agreements. More than policymakers, legislators, and administrators, faculty are familiar with their content

areas and can most effectively define the details of how these agreements should be structured.

The process for updating articulation agreements was consistent across the six institutions in the study. Faculty were not responsible for creating and updating the articulation agreements unless the agreement was for a specific program or school within an institution (i.e. a programmatic agreement or a programmatic articulation guide). Administrators within the two and four-year institutions explained the reasoning for this lack of involvement on the part of the faculty in regards to the statewide and institutional agreements, noting these two types of agreements were much more broad. Most statewide and institutional agreements did not contain specific courses needed to transfer, therefore negating the need for faculty to weigh in on the details of the agreements.

When necessary, the statewide agreements were updated by administrators within the community college system and administrators within the four-year institutions. If a common issue arose across several of the statewide agreements, the administrators within the community college system would consult with the chief academic officers and the chief student affairs officers at each community college. Similarly, the institutional agreements were updated by the administrators at the two and four-year institutions.

Accommodation of Non-Associate Degree Earners. Ignash and Townsend's (2001) fourth principle stated that articulation policies should accommodate students planning to transfer without an earned associate's degree. Many students transfer before earning the associate's degree at a community college. In Four Seasons, the majority of community college students transfer before earning an associate's degree. Within the

context of this study, the researcher sought to understand the value placed on earning the associate's degree prior to transfer to a four-year institution.

The preference for associate's degrees across the four-year institutions was related to the selectivity of the institutions. The most selective institution in the study, Summer University, did not place as much emphasis on the completion of the associate's degree as did Fall and Winter Universities. The associate's degree was valued at Summer University if a student's previous academic record, typically from high school, was weak. However, if the student had a strong high school and the initial college-level work at the community college was strong, then the associate's degree was less important. In comparison, both Fall and Winter Universities consistently valued the associate's degree as it demonstrated academic promise, determination, and commitment. For Fall and Winter Universities, they could choose not to admit the lower portion of their freshmen applicant pool and those students could re-apply for admission at the four-year institution after demonstrating academic potential.

For those community college students planning to transfer prior to earning their associate's degree, there were resources available to them largely through course equivalency guides. These guides showed the courses available at the four-year institution and the corresponding courses at the community college. These guides allowed students to ensure they were taking transferrable courses at the community college. However, though these course equivalencies were available on the web, they were not always clearly identified and easy to find on each of the institution's websites.

Established Program Specific Agreements. Ignash and Townsend's (2001) fifth principle stated that articulation agreements needed to be created for specific

program areas and majors. When students planned to enter four-year institutions as juniors, they oftentimes needed to enter having completed coursework for their major. These program specific agreements ensured students had access to the particular majors for which they were interested.

Within the institutions included in this study, there were two types of these program specific agreements. The first type were programmatic agreements, which guaranteed admission into specific programs at an institution if students met the specific criteria outlined in the agreement. The second type were programmatic articulation guides which served as guides for students to follow should they plan to earn an associate's degree at the community college and then transfer into a particular program at the four-year institution. Programmatic articulation guides did not guarantee admission but were simply a guide for students.

Data Collection and Analysis. Ignash and Townsend's (2001) final principle investigated in this study stated the importance of continually measuring and tracking how the articulation agreements were working. All of the institutions in the study had access to data regarding how many students transferred into or out of their institution each year, where they transferred, and then how they did once they arrived (e.g. GPA and graduation rate). However, while data existed, the consistency and validity of the numbers reported were not strong. For instance, in the community colleges, the number of students attending with the goal of transfer was not well defined. This number largely came from the students currently enrolled in a transfer degree program. Even then, not all of the community colleges had clear tracks for transfer students—some colleges had students who transferred after being enrolled in a transfer degree program and also

transferred after being enrolled in a vocational degree program. To further complicate the data, many students entered community colleges unsure of their academic goals.

Many of the administrators—from both the two and four-year institutions—spoke to this as a significant challenge because it made it difficult to advise and track these students. Community college administrators also acknowledged that students often entered with unrealistic goals. A student might have entered the community college with the goal of attending one of the more selective institutions in the state and then started his or her postsecondary career taking a semester of all remedial courses that would not transfer to any four-year institution. One community college senior administrator explained:

It's a really hard one because you don't start with what your goal is and is it realistic. It is their goal and they put it down. Did you take any science in high school and pass it? No. Okay, but you want to be a scientist. Ok, good enough, come on in.

Advising students like this was challenging—particularly because even with excellent advising a student might not be successful.

Data specifically related to tracking students who transferred into an institution using an articulation agreement was not easily available. Identifying community college transfer students that came into a four-year institution under an articulation agreement was difficult as there was no tracking mechanism at most institutions. Even at the four-year institutions in the study that had a letter of intent, the tracking was challenging. For instance, at Fall University students were required to earn their associate's degree to be admitted under the institutional agreements. This was not a data point that administrators at this institution tracked. If a student was on schedule to complete the degree at the time of application and met all of the other requirements, then the student would be admitted.

At the time of the study, there was not a mechanism in place to verify who actually completed the degree.

Concluding Thoughts on Research Question #2. In this study, the six institutional approaches to transfer exhibited elements of each of the principles provided by the Ignash and Townsend (2001) framework. However, none of these institutions fully met each of the six principles. Summer University, in particular, was the institution in the study that was least aligned with the Ignash and Townsend framework.

The following section outlines proposed recommendations for how to strengthen the two to four-year transfer pathway in the State of Four Seasons.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and Future Recommendations

Three quarters of community college students enter higher education with the goal of transferring to a four-year institution to pursue a bachelor's degree and as few as 11% succeed in making this transition (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Grubb, 1991; Lee & Frank, 1990; NCES, 2004). This study focused on institutional approaches to transfer in the State of Four Seasons in order to evaluate how administrators within the selected institutions conceptualized and implemented their institution's approach to transfer. Through interviews and document analysis, this research sought to understand institutional approaches to transfer, common elements that existed across institutions, and what practices within institutions were most effective in assisting transfer students. In addition, this study attempted to uncover any differences in institutional approaches based on the two main populations of transfer students: those who transferred using an articulation agreement and those who transferred without one.

The results from this research revealed several common challenges facing institutions in facilitating the transfer pathway in the State of Four Seasons. These challenges included: getting correct and relevant information to students early enough; keeping the articulation agreements and course equivalency guides updated; measuring the effectiveness of the articulation agreements; and defining successful transfer. Further, in reviewing the varying approaches to promoting the transfer pathway for community college students, a couple of themes emerged that need to be addressed—

encouraging all institutions to take a more proactive approach to promoting community college transfer and defining the expected roles for students, community colleges, four-year institutions, and the state in the transfer process.

To address these challenges, several recommendations are proposed below. Many of these recommendations involve direct action on the part of the state. In fact, though the transfer pathway has remained a focus for the state, the legislation that led to the creation of the statewide articulation agreements did not have any accompanying financial support and did not include tangible goals for increasing and improving transfer within the state. The language of the legislation referred to improving the transfer pathway in very broad terms. This lack of specificity meant that the four-year institutions were the ultimate decision makers as to who and how many transfer students they admitted in a given year. The legislation did not mandate cooperation between two and four-year institutions. It also did not provide incentives for institutions to admit more transfer students or to be proactive in making the transfer pathway smoother. In order to ensure the two to four-year transfer pathway in Four Seasons is functioning effectively, additional funding and more specific guidelines will be needed from the state.

Based on data collected, the following five recommendations would enhance the transfer pathway between two and four-year institutions in the State of Four Seasons. In addition, these recommendations could be useful for other states aiming to improve and strengthen the two to four-year transfer pathway.

Recommendation #1: Clarifying Roles of Institutions and Students

In order to make the transfer pathway for community college students clear and easy to navigate, the state needs to define the specific roles that each party plays in the

transfer process. Below are proposed definitions for the roles of the state, of institutions, and of students. Many of the statewide and institutional agreements currently outline role definitions similar to those described below.

Role of the State. The state should be responsible for defining and communicating the roles of the institutions and the roles of students in the two to four-year transfer process. The state should also define what constitutes successful community college transfer. These definitions will provide clarity to all parties regarding their respective expectations. In addition, the state should prepare to support and enforce the expected roles of the institutions.

Successful community college transfer cannot be singularly defined as earning an associate's degree at the community college and then transferring to a four-year institution. The main reason for this is shown by the data—the majority of community college students transfer without an earned associate's degree in the State of Four Seasons and these students do not represent unsuccessful transfer students. If a four-year institution accepts a community college student, then that institution has deemed the student capable of earning a bachelor's degree. How these four-year institutions define a community college transfer student who demonstrates the potential to succeed is left to them to decide. Additionally, the student decides how he or she wants to pursue the transfer pathway—either through an articulation agreement or through competitive admission. Therefore, a definition of successful community college transfer should encompass all students who transfer into a four-year institution, including those students who do so with an associate's degree and those who do so without one.

Role of the Community Colleges. The primary role of the community colleges should be to orient and advise all students who enter the community college. The community colleges would take on the role of helping students locate the information provided by four-year institutions on the requirements to gain admission.

In addition, the community colleges should each have one staff member who serves as the “chief transfer officer” for the college. This person would be the main point of contact for the institution on messages related to transfer. Having this single designated point of contact will allow information to flow more easily between the state, the community college system, and the four-year institutions.

Role of the Four-Year Institutions. The four-year institutions should be expected to proactively provide clear and accurate information about the transfer process to both community college administrators and to students. Administrators at four-year institutions bear the responsibility of ensuring that any changes to course equivalencies, articulation agreements, admission requirements, or other transfer-specific information are communicated immediately to the community colleges via the chief transfer officer. The four-year institutions also bear the responsibility for serving as the main source of information on transferring into their institution—this information should not be duplicated by the community colleges or by the state. The four-year institutions need to send staff to each community college in the state to communicate with students about the transfer process. More specifically, each four-year institution should allocate staff to regularly visit its top feeder community colleges to provide outreach to students during each term at the community college.

In addition, the four-year institutions should request feedback from the community college advisors, at least twice a year, regarding the unmet needs of community college transfer students. The four-year institutions should also annually survey incoming community college transfer students to learn what would have made the transition to the institution smoother.

Role of the Students. The role of the students should be to drive their own transfer processes. Students are responsible for defining their immediate and long-term academic goals, seeking assistance from the community college as needed, registering for courses that will benefit them at the community college and at the four-year institution, and navigating the process of applying to the four-year institution(s) the student is interested in attending. It is ultimately the students' responsibility to ensure they have met the requirements necessary to transfer and to meet their goals.

Recommendation #2: College Advocates

One way to improve the accuracy of transfer information provided to students is to establish state-funded, full-time positions for "College Advocates." These College Advocates would interpret and provide information on the postsecondary procedures and policies of the state. The College Advocates would educate current juniors and seniors in high school about the various college options: attending a community college to earn an associate's degree or a vocational degree; attending a community college as a pathway to a four-year institution with or without the use of an articulation agreement; and attending a four-year institution.

These College Advocates would be responsible for traveling to all of the high schools in the state and presenting on all of the college options in the state including the

two to four-year transfer pathway. These individuals would ideally be recent two or four-year college graduates so that they could speak to their own experience in the state's postsecondary system. The work of these College Advocates would complement the current work of the high school college counselors, the community college counselors, and the admissions staff at four-year institutions.

Creating these positions would allow all students to hear about the various options available to them for college. High school students would have accurate information to navigate the college environment so as to make better decisions about the educational pathway best suited to their goals. Providing this information about postsecondary options to students in high school could greatly benefit students who come from a first generation background and do not have access to this knowledge from any other source. In addition, providing this information to high school students would enhance students' abilities to set realistic educational goals for themselves. If these students then enter the postsecondary system, they will be better setup to persist and succeed in achieving their goals.

Housing these positions under the Department of Education is critical to ensure their efforts are closely tied into the goals of the state in terms of education and access. These College Advocates need to report to the state on the current issues and challenges facing students within the state. They need to ensure the pathways to postsecondary education in the state are functioning smoothly and effectively.

The approximate cost of launching the College Advocate Program is detailed in Table 1. Each College Advocate would receive an annual salary of \$30,000 per year, health insurance, and a vehicle. The total cost per College Advocate would be estimated

at \$68,700 and the total overall cost for five College Advocates would be estimated at \$343,500.

Table 1: Estimated Annual Cost of the College Advocate Program

	Annual Stipend	Health Insurance	Vehicle Expense (car, gas, insurance)*	TOTAL
College Advocate 1	\$30,000	\$5,000	\$33,700	\$68,700
College Advocate 2	\$30,000	\$5,000	\$33,700	\$68,700
College Advocate 3	\$30,000	\$5,000	\$33,700	\$68,700
College Advocate 4	\$30,000	\$5,000	\$33,700	\$68,700
College Advocate 5	\$30,000	\$5,000	\$33,700	\$68,700
TOTAL	\$150,000	\$25,000	\$168,500	\$343,500

*Based on a \$30,000 car, \$100 per month for insurance, and \$50 per week for 50 weeks a year for gas.

Recommendation #3: Required Orientation & Academic Advising

Another way to increase the information community college students receive early in their postsecondary career would be to require all new students to participate in an orientation program. A recent report, *A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success*, released by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2012) stated that required orientation for new community college students was one promising practice for improving persistence and success. In addition, a report, *Beyond the Open Door: Increasing Student Success in the California Community Colleges*, by the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy echoed this sentiment (Moore, Shulock, Ceja, & Lang, 2007). Several of the community college administrators cited in that work stated that the lack of required orientation was one of

the main challenges of their work. Without this initial connection with students, there was no guarantee that students obtained the information they needed to be successful. Required orientation would allow students to learn how to access certain resources such as financial aid, course advising, transfer advising, and preliminary testing.

In addition to a required orientation session, each community college should require each student to meet with an academic advisor within his or her first semester of attendance. Academic advisors would discuss the student's goals and assist in aligning coursework with those stated goals. These advisors could also provide feedback and guidance on student's academic plans.

The report by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2012) stated that required academic advising was another promising practice. The Center's report stated, "ninety-one percent of [Community College Survey for Student Engagement student] respondents (376,899 of 414,646) report that academic advising/planning is a somewhat or very important service" (p. 11). The report indicated that only 54% of students in the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) from 2010 had sought out academic advising/planning services between the time the student chose to attend the community college and the end of the first three weeks of his or her first semester. Required academic advising within community colleges in Four Seasons would be a necessary ingredient to ensure students receive the information they need to achieve their academic goals.

Additional resources would be needed in the community colleges to implement a required orientation for all new students and required academic advising. As each individual community college allocates resources differently, additional research and

analysis would need to be conducted to accurately estimate the cost associated with making these proposed recommendations a reality.

Recommendation #4: Clarifying Application Process for Articulation Agreements

Community college transfer students can be admitted into four-year institutions in various ways in different state contexts. As one example, in Four Seasons, there are two ways: through competitive application or through an articulation agreement. However, when a student goes to apply to these institutions, the application process is the same no matter which path he or she chooses. The only variable is whether the four-year institution requires a letter of intent. This leads to confusion and misunderstanding for students trying to navigate this process.

In all states, the pathways to admission should be clearly explained. In the example of Four Seasons, this could be as simple as explaining the two separate processes on the websites of the four-year institutions. Additionally, in some cases, language in state articulation agreements needs to be clarified and/or changed. In the example of the state of Four Seasons, the statewide agreement for Summer University states that students must follow all admission procedures, which include submitting items such as a high school transcript or admission essays. To further clarify what students are expected to submit with their application, the statewide agreements should list what these additional required materials include.

Recommendation #5: Tracking

Based on this research in the State of Four Seasons, the final recommendation is that all states should consider ways to improve postsecondary data collection in three ways: clarifying how a transfer student is identified, requiring that four-year institutions

track how students move into and out of the their institutions, and clarifying the role of the associate's degree in the transfer process. Within the community colleges, there is imprecise data on how many students have the goal of transfer. In the event that new student orientation and academic advising are required by each college, advisors could track students who have the goal to transfer and those who do not without having to rely solely on reporting from the degree programs students enter. Then if students want to receive information from specific four-year institutions, the four-year institutions would be able to contact students, with the permission of the community college, to inform them about application procedures, deadlines, and any updates to course equivalencies, etc.

Based on the four-year institutions examined here, states should check their systems to see if there is a lack of data on how many students are admitted under articulation agreements as compared to the competitive admission process. A lack of data may be caused by the lack of a separate and unique application procedure for those students who transfer under the articulation agreements. Another reason for a lack of data may be that all of the statewide, institutional, and programmatic agreements require that students earn their associate's degree to be guaranteed admission. In that case, admissions officers are admitting students with the assumption that they will complete their associate's degree. None of the four-year institutions in this study went back to verify that the students completed their associate's degree.

To improve the quality and accuracy of transfer data, two specific measures should be tracked. First, four-year institutions should indicate on each student's application whether they were admitted under an articulation agreement or through the competitive process. This would allow for tracking of how many students are entering

four-year institutions under these articulation agreements and would provide a mechanism to track how these students perform as compared to students who enter through the competitive application process. Second, students should be required to submit documentation of obtaining an associate's degree to the four-year institution upon earning it. This should be as simple as resubmitting their transcript to the four-year institution when they arrive in August for the start of classes. Students who have earned their associate's have their general education requirements automatically waived at most four-year institutions in the state of Four Seasons. In states with a similar process, it will be to students' advantage to produce documentation of the degree earned.

Finally, the role of the associate's degree in the transfer process varied across the two and four-year institutions in the State of Four Seasons. This is likely to be the case in similar state contexts. In Four Seasons, there were many competing priorities in regards to earning an associate's degree prior to transfer. The number of associate's degrees awarded is a key performance measure for the two-year institutions. In addition, the national completion agenda emphasizes the importance of students earning degrees—the associate's degree being one type of degree. Two of the four-year institutions in this study encouraged students to earn the two-year degree prior to transfer, however these institutions still accepted the majority of community college transfer students without an associate's. Some students in the transfer process benefited from earning the two-year degree prior to transfer as it meant they had satisfied their general education requirements at the four-year institution and they could start immediately on their coursework for their major. Other students did not benefit from completing the degree because their major required certain courses they could only take at the four-year institution and they needed

to get into the four-year institution before completing the associate's. In conclusion, the role and importance of earning an associate's degree prior to transfer is unclear and needs to be clarified further by the state.

Final Conclusions

The community college transfer pathway to a four-year institution provides a more affordable option for students who want to earn a bachelor's degree but lack the resources to attend a four-year institution for the entirety of time needed to earn it. Students are best able to take advantage of this transfer pathway when they enter directly into credit bearing courses at the community college as compared to non-credit bearing courses (i.e. remedial education courses). The transfer pathway is also an excellent option for non-traditional students whose lifestyles are not accommodated by traditional four-year institutions. Community colleges afford students flexibility to live at home, take care of family members, and hold a part or full-time job. Students also benefit from this pathway if they need a smaller, more intimate college environment prior to attending a larger institution. Students who had a poor academic record in high school, but have the academic ability and drive to earn a bachelor's degree can attend a community college to demonstrate their academic potential and commitment to reaching their goal. The transfer pathway from two to four-year institutions is powerful for students—when it is fully functioning. This study sought to uncover how a sample of two and four-year institutions in a single state support the transfer pathway, what practices work well, and what are some of the consistent challenges that need to be addressed. The findings from this study reveal the transfer pathway in the State of Four Seasons, as in many other states, has the foundations for success. The process could be greatly enhanced with a few

proposed recommendations. These recommendations are best evaluated, embraced, and driven by each state.

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Appendix A
Initial Email to Participants

Dear <<Name>>,

By way of introduction, my name is Ashley Cullop and I am a doctoral student in U.Va.'s Curry School of Education within the Higher Education Department. I am writing to you today to request your participation in a study I am conducting to understand more about the two to four-year transfer process.

The purpose of the study is to explore efforts at the institutional level to increase transfer from 2-year to 4-year institutions in your state. This study aims to evaluate through interviews and document analysis how administrators within two and four-year institutions implement the transfer approach within their college or university.

As the <<Insert title of person here>> at <<insert name of institution here>>, I would like to invite you to participate in a one-hour interview with me at a date, time, and location that is most convenient for you. The purpose of the interview is to explore your experiences in working with community college transfer students. Your responses as well as your institution will be kept confidential. The results of the study will be compiled and shared with policymakers in your state with the aim of enhancing transfer.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Ashley Cullop
Graduate Student
U.Va. Curry School of Education

Appendix B
Interview Protocol: Community College Senior Administrators

1. When a student enters your institution with an interest in transfer, how does your institution assist them in pursuing this goal?
 - a. How do you identify or classify students who have an interest in transfer?
 - b. What is the overall approach to providing information and supporting these students?
 - c. What are your biggest challenges in supporting students who want to transfer?
2. How does your institution prioritize transfer in relation to the other programs or tracks that are offered (e.g. vocational programs, remedial education, etc.)?
3. Does your institution have institution specific articulation agreements with four-year institutions?
 - a. If so, how did these come about?
 - i. Are they more or less effective than the statewide agreements? Why?
 - ii. How often are these agreements updated?
 - iii. Who updates and/or maintains them?
4. Who is involved at your institution in keeping the statewide agreements up to date?
 - a. When were these statewide agreements first created?
 - b. What was the process of first creating them like?
 - c. How often are these agreements updated?
 - d. What is the process, if you are familiar with it, for updating them?
5. Does your institution's approach to assisting transfer students vary based on whether they want to transfer with an associate's degree verses without?
6. Do you perceive there to be an equal partnership between your institution and the four-year institutions in the state in helping students from your institution transfer?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. What about specifically with the four-year, public institution that is geographically closest to your institution?
7. How does your institution assess or measure how the transfer process is working for your students?
 - a. Do you survey students as they exit the institution?
 - b. Do you have anecdotal data?
 - c. What measures, if any, are required either by the community college system or the state?
8. From your perspective, how could the process of transfer be improved to better assist students in moving between institutions?

Appendix C
Interview Protocol: Community College Transfer Specialists

1. When a student enters your institution that has an interest in transfer, how does your institution assist them in pursuing this goal?
 - a. What is the overall approach to providing information and supporting these students?
 - b. What are your biggest challenges in supporting students who want to transfer?
 - c. When meeting with a student who is interested in transfer for the first time, what key messages do you consistently share with them?
 - d. In your experience, what are the main reasons students interested in transfer do not ultimately achieve this goal?
2. How does the application process work for community college students aiming to enter a four-year institution if they are using the statewide agreements?
 - a. Specifically, how does the process work if a student wants to apply to the four-year, public institution geographically closest to your institution?
 - b. How does the application process differ for those community college students not using the statewide agreements?
3. Does your institution have institution specific articulation agreements with four-year institutions?
 - a. If so, how did these come about?
 - i. Are they more or less effective than the statewide agreements? Why?
 - ii. How often are these agreements updated?
 - iii. Who updates and/or maintains them?
4. Does your institution's approach to assisting transfer students vary based on whether they want to transfer with an associate's degree verses without?
5. Do you perceive there to be an equal partnership between your institution and the four-year institutions in the state in helping students from your institution transfer?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. What about specifically with the four-year, public institution that is geographically closest to your institution?
6. What is your perception of the effectiveness of the statewide agreements in improving the transfer process and/or increasing the rate of students transferring out of your institution?
 - a. What are the main benefits?
 - b. What are the main challenges?
 - c. How could these agreements be improved to better serve students?
7. From your perspective, how could the process of transfer be improved to better assist students in moving between institutions?

Appendix D
Interview Protocol: Four-Year Institution Senior Administrators

1. When a student approaches your institution with an interest in transfer, how does your institution assist them in pursuing this goal?
 - a. What is the overall approach to providing information and supporting these students?
 - b. How is the application process different for transfer students as compared to high school seniors?
 - c. Is the application process different for students who use the statewide agreement?
 - d. What are your biggest challenges in supporting students who want to transfer?
2. How does your institution prioritize transfer students as compared to other unique populations applying for admission (e.g. athletes, international students, etc.)?
3. Does your institution have institution specific articulation agreements with community colleges?
 - a. If so, how did these come about?
 - i. Are they more or less effective than the statewide agreement?
 - ii. How often are these agreements updated?
 - iii. Who updates and/or maintains them?
4. Who is involved at your institution in keeping the statewide agreements up to date?
 - a. When were these statewide agreements first created?
 - b. What was the process of first creating them like?
 - c. How often are they updated?
5. Does your institution's approach to assisting transfer students vary based on whether they want to transfer with an associate's degree verses without?
6. Do you perceive there to be an equal partnership between your institution and the community colleges in the state in helping students transfer?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. What about specifically with the community college that is geographically closest to your institution?
7. What differences, if any, are there for entering transfer students as compared to freshmen students in terms of how they are welcomed and oriented to the campus?
 - a. Who is in charge of first welcoming and orienting them to the campus?
 - b. What is involved in this welcome/orientation?
8. How does your institution assess or measure how the transfer process is working for your students?
 - a. Do you survey students once they arrive on the campus?
 - b. Do you have anecdotal data?
 - c. What measures, if any, are required by the community college system or the state?
9. From your perspective, how could the process of transfer be improved to better assist students in moving between institutions?

Appendix E
Interview Protocol: Four-Year Institution Transfer Specialists

1. When meeting with a student who is interested in transfer for the first time, what key messages do you consistently share with them?
 - a. What is the overall approach to providing information and supporting these students?
 - b. What are your biggest challenges in supporting students who want to transfer?
 - c. When meeting with a student who is interested in transfer for the first time, what key messages do you consistently share with them?
 - d. In your experience, what are the main reasons students interested in transfer do not ultimately achieve this goal?
2. How does the application process work for community college students aiming to enter your institution if they are using the statewide agreements?
 - a. Specifically, how does the process work if a student is applying from the community college geographically closest to your institution?
 - b. How does the application process differ for those community college students not using the statewide agreements?
3. Does your institution have institution specific articulation agreements with community colleges in the state?
 - a. If so, how did these come about?
 - i. Are they more or less effective than the statewide agreements?
 - ii. How often are these agreements updated?
 - iii. Who updates and/or maintains them?
4. Does your institution's approach to assisting transfer students vary based on whether they want to transfer with an associate's degree verses without?
5. Do you perceive there to be an equal partnership between your institution and the community colleges in the state in helping students transfer?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. What about specifically with the community college that is geographically closest to your institution?
6. What differences, if any, are there for entering transfer students as compared to freshmen students in terms of how they are welcomed and oriented to the campus?
 - a. Who is in charge of first welcoming and orienting them to the campus?
 - b. What is involved in this welcome/orientation?
7. From your perspective, how could the process of transfer be improved to better assist students in moving between institutions?

Appendix F
List of Start Codes

Code Name	Code	Description
Parity of Institutions- Partners	P-P	Parity exists between CC and 4yr
Parity of Institutions-Unequal Partners	P-UP	Parity is unequal between CC and 4yr
Parity of Institutions-Somewhat equal partners	P-SP	Parity is somewhat equal between the CC and 4yr
Parity of Students	SP	Parity of students is present at the four-year institution
Updating Articulation Agreements	UAA	How various institutions update articulation agreements
Resources for transfer without Associate's	R-WOAA	Resources present for students who aim to transfer without an Associate's degree
Data on Transfer	D-T	Data that exists or doesn't exist on the transfer function
Main Challenges	MC	Main challenges faced in facilitating the two to four-year transfer function
Outreach	O	Outreach to transfer students
State's Goals for Transfer	SG-T	State Goals for Transfer

Appendix G
List of Revised Codes

Code Name	Code	Description
Parity of Institutions- Partners	P-P	Parity exists between CC and 4yr
Parity of Institutions-Unequal Partners	P-UP	Parity is unequal between CC and 4yr
Parity of Institutions-Somewhat equal partners	P-SP	Parity is somewhat equal between the CC and 4yr
Parity of Students	SP	Parity of students is present at the four-year institution
Updating Articulation Agreements	UAA	How various institutions update articulation agreements
Resources for transfer without Associate's	R-WOAA	Resources present for students who aim to transfer without an Associate's degree
Data on Transfer	D-T	Data that exists or doesn't exist on the transfer function
Main Challenges	MC	Main challenges faced in facilitating the two to four-year transfer function
Outreach	O	Outreach to transfer students
State's Goals for Transfer	SG-T	State Goals for Transfer
Attitude towards Transfer-Proactive	A-T	A proactive attitude towards promoting and actively improving the transfer pathway
Attitude towards Transfer-Reactive	A-T	A reactive attitude towards promoting and actively improving the transfer pathway
Barriers to Transfer	B-T	Barriers to the transfer pathway working effectively
Good Quotes	Q	Quotes that effectively illustrate emerging themes
Potential Solutions	S	Potential Solutions to improving the transfer pathway
Priority given to Associate's earners	P-AA	Priority is given to Associate's degree earners
No Priority is given to Associate's earners	NP-AA	No Priority is given to Associate's degree earners

Reactions to the SAAs	SAA	Reactions to the statewide articulation agreements
Role of Institutions	R-I	Role of the institutions in the transfer process
Role of Students	R-S	Role of the students in the transfer process