Transfer Students' Perceptions of Their Academic Preparedness from Urban Community Colleges to Four-Year Institutions

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Transfer Students' Perceptions of their Academic Preparedness from Urban Community Colleges to Four-Year Institutions

BY
Jazmine E. Thompson

THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF College Student Affairs
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the perceptions of transfer students' academic preparedness from urban community colleges to four-year institutions. Within separate one-on-one interviews, four participants were asked a set of open-ended demographic and biographic questions regarding their community college experience. Through coding and analyzing participant responses several themes emerged, including (1) importance of relationships with faculty and staff, (2) departmental support, (3) academic preparation for a four-year university, (4) preparedness for university academic expectation, (5) learned academic strategies, (6) test-taking, (7) understanding environments and (8) utilization of professor and other strategies. Several conclusions of the present study were drawn and recommendations for Student Affairs professionals, as well as future researcher, were established.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family. Thank you for the sacrifices, encouragement and support. Your prayers and words of encouragement motivated me to pursue a career that I love.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I am so blessed to have this experience. He has guided me and placed amazing people around me who make life more meaningful. I thank God for the strength, family, friends and the great professionals I have had the pleasure to learn from. I am amazed by the things God is doing in my life and I know there are more blessings to come.

I would like to thank my family for their endless love and support. A special thank you to the women in my life, my mother, Senovia and grandmother, Irene. Your sacrifices and life lessons have not gone unseen or unheard. I thank you for the pathway you made for me to pursue my dreams. To my sister Jada, I thank you for your faithful friendship and the special relationship we share. I hope to inspire you to take risk and never give up. I thank my stepfather, Johnny for continuously showing support for my endeavors. Lastly, my grandfather, Charles, I thank you for being a father figure role model in my life. You have taught me many lessons on possessing tact and hard work. You once told me “when you do what you love, you will never work a day in your life,” and that is exactly what I plan to do. I thank God for having each of you in my life.

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Dena Kniess for guiding and supporting me throughout my graduate experience. I would like to also thank my committee members, Dr. Mona Davenport and Dr. Tina Stovall for all your guidance, ideas, and feedback. Your presence and dedication to my research is invaluable.

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CHAPTER I
Introduction

Societal changes such as cost of living and education requirements for employment are teaching a new generation of students that education is the key to success. Inside this culture are recession, depression, and unemployment; which motivate young people to work toward a stable future. The cost of higher education has increased making it unobtainable for some individuals. In Illinois, the average community college, also referred to as a junior college, full time student pays $3,379 per year (Illinois Community College Board, 2014). Many college students are cost conscious and some start at their local community college and transfer to a four-year university. A study conducted by the ICCB found that between 2001 and 2015, the total transfer rate for all Illinois community college students is 36.5% with Illinois Central Community College having the highest transfer rate of 48.5% (Illinois Community College Board, 2014).

Many universities have transfer students that experience a failed first or second semester at the senior institution and the question arises; are community colleges meeting their mission? The community college mission is to provide high quality educational programs and services that are affordable, accessible and meet the needs of a diverse student population (Illinois Community College Board, 2006). Community colleges serve the community so keep in mind that “we must never forget that all Americans have the right to pursue the American Dream; we must never forget that the community college represents the only hope millions of Americans have of achieving that Dream” (Hageodorn, 2004, p. 21).
As stated earlier the Illinois average transfer rate is 36.5%. Every student attending a community college does not have the intention of transferring. According to the Illinois Community College Board, the graduation and retention rates for Illinois are 16.6% of degree completers and a decrease of -1.1% of students are retained (Illinois Community College Board, 2013). Many students enter community college wanting to gain a professional certification to make them more employable or boost their knowledge for a promotion. Community college offer students short-term programs such as Automotive Technology and Heating & Air Conditioning that provide students with a specialized skill. According to U.S. News (2015) “certificates and industry certifications also show employers that a candidate is continuously improving their skills (p. 1).”

The cost of education is a limitation that working-class students and their families face in the 21st century. Getting good grades to be eligible for scholarships or playing sports are just a few of the activities that students in the working-class pursue to afford a college education. According to Lightweis (2014), working-class is defined as “students who have parents employed in occupations that require lower-level skills, lower pay and do not need a college degree” (p. 462). Many students that are challenged with this financial limitation often find it hard to communicate with their parents the difficulties of college expectations. Due to financial constraints working-class students are unable to live on campus at the four-year university, therefore they are unable to engage in the student community. The gap in educational opportunities between social classes limits the working-class from choosing elite universities. Working-class students have limited choices when deciding on college. These students attend more affordable, less prestigious institutions where they train for jobs and accumulate debt (Lightweis, 2014). Although
this is a limitation, students who start their academic career at a community college have the opportunity to begin college at a lower cost.

When a student begins college near home, he or she has access to family and friends that are their major support system. Upon leaving their support system behind to begin their educational journey at a four-year university, it can be stressful trying to adjust to their new environment. During this period, some students experience transitional trauma defined by Chin-Newman and Shaw (2013) as, “the level of alienation a student experiences when unfamiliar with some of the norms, values and expectations that predominate in a school community (p. 19).” Transfer shock is also commonly seen among transfer students when they are transitioning from one institution to another. Transfer shock is defined as “a drop in grade point average at the new 4-year institution” (Flaga, 2006, p. 3). Literature on transfer shock references that the shock occurs while the student is adjusting to their school, work, and residential space. These are important to consider when addressing students who have transferred to a four-year university because even the academically prepared student can experience the difficulty of adjustment at their new institution.

According to Chin-Newman and Shaw (2013), the challenges that persist for students who transfer from community college to university happen in two stages. The stages are prior to acceptance and after acceptance to their university. Before acceptance students had the anxiety of being admitted and becoming academically successful. Many students also have anxiety about the application process because of doubting their credits would transfer and count towards graduation. After acceptance, students begin the process of getting to know their campuses and the culture of their new school. During this
transition period, the students are going through trial and error while navigating through
the university as well as taking a full course load of classes.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the proposed study was to investigate students’ perceptions of
their preparedness for academic success at a four-year university after transferring from
an urban community college. The study also asked about the skills students learned to be
prepared for classes and coursework at the four-year university. According to Urban
(2014), being a successful college student is a student that has “created good study habits,
developed test taking strategies, and perfected their time management and computer skills
(p. 1).” To be successful in college a student needs five essential characteristics: drive
and motivation, persistence, positive thinking skills, support, and organization skills”
(Urban, 2014, p. 1). Specifically, this study aimed to determine what skills students learn
to prepare them for rigorous work at the four-year institution. The researcher gathered
information on the students’ prior experience at the community college to learn study,
test-taking, and time-management skills. The study examined the skills learned from the
student’s community college on their utilization of time-management as a reflection of
academic success at the four-year university

Findings of the study will help faculty and administrators at two-year colleges
with identifying solutions for student academic success. Identifying a solution can
potentially reinvent or create programs for students and reach students in need of these
skills. Community colleges house a variety of students with distinct needs that should be
addressed and this study can focus as a method of assessment on student needs that are
not being accommodated. A qualitative approach will be used to answer the researcher’s research questions.

This study will focus on urban community college transfer students to present the resources the colleges supply for students for academic success while they are attending and upon their transfer to a four-year university. Participants in the study were students who are currently enrolled at a four-year institution and have completed twenty-four credit hours or more of their coursework at an urban community college. It is important to bring attention to the urban community college experience to understand the programs that are needed to promote student academic success. According to Castañeda (2002), the majority of students attending urban community colleges are students of color. African-American students have a lower rate of graduation than any other ethnic group and Hispanic students are more likely than White or Black students to have a bachelor’s degree as their educational goal (Castañeda, 2002). Additionally, Castañeda indicated (2002) African-American students have the lowest educational goals. Looking into the student’s college perceptions of their preparedness and finding a solution toward academic success could stimulate effort and dedication on the student to become an active advocate for their education.

Research Questions

The number of transfer students four-year universities receive are increasing and they are entering college with needs that the four-year universities have to accommodate (Laanan, 2001). Throughout the study the researcher gained an understanding of the skills students learned at their two-year college that helped them with academics at their four-year institution. The following research questions guided this study:
1. How do students feel two-year institutions are preparing students for success at four-year universities?

2. What skills did students learn to prepare them academically for the four-year university?

3. How are students utilizing skills they have learned from their two-year institutions?

**Significance of Study**

The significance of the study was to identify the skills urban community college transfer students need for success at a four-year university because African American and Hispanic students are underrepresented in degree attainment in higher education. This study examined the perceptions of transfer students from two-year colleges on academic preparation for the four-year university that includes a rigorous course load. This study also showed the perception of the student’s beginning college experience, resources available to them and how they applied the skills they learned at the four-year institution.

More recently, the transfer rate for fiscal year 2015 for students with no prior college experience who completed 12 or more semester credits from a two-year college and transferred to a four-year university was 36.5 percent (www.iccb.org). According to the ICCB (2015), the number of students that have transferred from two-year colleges to four-year universities has decreased (-0.6 percent) from fiscal year 2011 (37.1 percent).

This study may also bring more awareness to the phenomena of the reverse transfer student which has been a significant occurrence seen at community colleges. Reverse transfer students are “students who prior to attending a two-year college, were last enrolled at a four-year institution. This group consists of two types of students: 1)
Non-completers, who attended a four year institution, but did not complete a degree before enrolling at a two-year college; and 2) Graduates, who earned at least an undergraduate degree prior to enrolling at a two year college” (Kajstura and Keim, 1992, p. 1). The reverse transfer student will be explored further in the literature review.

Limitations of the Study

This research includes various limitations. First, it may exclude other types of community colleges like suburban and rural, which house students with needs that may differ from those students from the urban colleges. The study may include research bias by having a researcher who transferred from an urban community college and did not feel prepared for the four-year university. Since the researcher is only looking at urban community colleges, the majority of the participants will be minority students which are African American, Hispanic, and Indian, while excluding a number of other racial categories. As an urban community college alumnus, a limitation can be leading the participants with the researcher’s experience. The researcher will also provide an explanation of her bias in Chapter III. Other limitations may be the problems that occur during the process of transferring to a four-year university. Students who are transferring many credits can experience difficulty with the process of admissions and adjusting to the new environment because they are concerned all of their credits transferring and counting towards their degree from the four-year university.

Definition of Terms

Community college. “Any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree” (Cohen and Brawer, 2008, p.5).


Non-traditional student. Commuter or transfer students that are over the age of 25, oftentimes returning to school while working, raising children, or serving the military for an extended period of time (Eastern Illinois University, 2012).

Transfer shock. “A drop in grade point average at the new 4-year institution” (Flaga, 2006, p.3).

Transitional trauma. “The level of alienation a student experiences when unfamiliar with some of the norms, values and expectations that predominate in a school community” (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013, p.19).

Working-class. “Students who have parents employed in occupations that require lower-level skills, lower pay, and do not need a college degree” (Lightveis, 2014, p.462).

Summary

Chapter I provided the reader with an introduction of community colleges. Financially, college has become unattainable for some students, therefore two-year institutions aid in providing quality education at an affordable rate. The financial breakthrough with the economy has increased the number of students enrolling in college. Students who would like to continue their education at a four-year university
have to be prepared for their future careers. Chapter I discussed some other factors that affect a student’s grades such as transfer shock and transitional trauma. However, the main focus is determining student’s perceptions of their preparedness that have attended an urban community college. The rest of the research will continue to explore other components that affect transfer students. Chapter II will provide the reader with a literature review.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

The following literature review explains the characteristics of transfer students explaining student needs for academic success. It examines the urban community college and what the institution offers students. The literature review also discusses the reverse transfer student phenomenon that has been seen over the years and is a growing student population at community colleges.

The Community College: A Historical Account

Community college is a great way for students to start their college education because it is more affordable than a university. The concept of the community college around the world began with William Rainey Harper. Harper is considered to be the father of junior colleges in America. He was an advocate for junior colleges and convinced four-year colleges to drop the last two years and become junior colleges (Vaughn, 1982). Stephens College in Missouri took the advice of Harper and became "one of the nation's outstanding junior colleges before it returned to four-year institutions" (Vaughn, 1982, p. 4). Harper had a great influence in education and is responsible for the development and influence on Joliet Junior College in Joliet, Illinois. Joliet Junior College, established in 1901, is believed to be the oldest existing public junior college in the nation. In 1931, Illinois adopted the first junior college legislation that assisted in establishing, managing, and providing for the maintenance of junior colleges (Illinois Community College Board, 1998).

According to Vaughn (1982), the introduction of community college began as a way to admit individuals who were excluded from higher education. A large debate in
higher education was talk of “practical” versus “liberal” views on what types of students should go to college and what programs and courses should be included. Vaughn (1982) explained the most important benefit to higher education is the Morrill Act of 1862 and the Morrill Act of 1890, allowing the creation of land-granting universities toward establishing and funding educational institutions. The first land grant institution in the state of Illinois is the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana (Brichford, 1983).

Community college students include ethnic minorities, low-income, and nontraditional students (Laanan, 1996). Community colleges are catering to the needs of a variety of students and some students begin struggling once they transfer to a four-year institution. According to Laanan (1996), research has indicated students who attend community college before transferring to a four-year institution are at a disadvantage because they do not have the same opportunities as traditional students. Research has indicated there are not opportunities for student involvement, lack of residential facilities, and host large populations of underrepresented students at community college level.

Transfer Students

The number of students that have transferred from community colleges to four-year university campuses is continuously growing larger due to public community colleges serve roughly ten million students per year (Laanan, 2001). Transfer students create diversity as a result of belonging to different demographics and range in age groups. A great number of students use community college as a strategy to pursue and complete a bachelor’s degree (Handel, 2013). Usually transfer students coming into community college are enrolled in traditional or remedial courses to gain skills or boost their grade point average. This information is important to their transition to four-year
universities considering these students have to adjust to more difficult coursework. It is imperative that faculty at both community colleges and four-year institutions are corresponding with each other to assist in student preparation because the end goal of collegiate education is for the student to graduate and be effective in his/her career.

As stated in the introduction, it is important to recognize not all students attending community college have the intent to transfer to a four-year institution. According to Handel (2013), up to 80% of incoming first-time community college students are seeking to earn a bachelor’s degree. This number is good, but needs to increase to meet the nation’s workforce needs by having more associate’s and bachelor’s degree holders (Handel, 2013). Graduation rates of students in underserved populations need to increase such as Latino, American Indian, African American, low-income, and first-generation students. Targeting these groups are a must considering they will increase significantly in the years to come (Handel, 2013).

Community colleges manage access to higher education for students that are ineligible for admittance for four-year universities (Laanan, 2001). By the end of the 2011-2012 academic year, at least 45% of students who completed a bachelor’s degree had been previously enrolled in community college (Handel, 2013). When a student finishes two years at the community college and transfers to a four-year institution the student “faces new psychological, academic, and environmental changes” (Laanan, 2001, p. 5). Many students face difficulties with adjusting to rigorous coursework, the size of campus, location, institutional differences, and competition among other students.

Students who transferred from community college often had to face their own doubts about academically succeeding at the university level (Chin-Newman & Shaw,
A recent study conducted by Chin-Newman and Shaw (2013) uncovered the anxiety transfer students deal with during the transition period. In the study, three focus groups were conducted with 14 former community college students ranging between 20 to 50 years of age. The students were divided into three groups for interviews where four to five participants were included at a time. The results of the study were separated into two stages: prior to acceptance and after acceptance to the four-year university.

Prior to acceptance at the university, many participants had anxiety during the application process and self-doubt about their ability to succeed at the four-year university. Along with the application process, students had a difficult task of deciding on a field of study and doubted if the university would fit their needs. After being admitted, a big challenge was learning the technology such as Blackboard or other classroom material. The focus group came to the consensus that a great deal of anxiety came from the amount of time it took to transfer all of their credits to the university. Some participants also had mixed feelings about transfer orientation because it did not focus on "core things" such as how to choose professors, where the departments were located, and the organization of the faculty (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013, p. 18). Chin-Newman and Shaw concluded that students experience stress and anxiety when information they needed was not available, however they feel welcomed when important information was provided to them. Important information may be included in a new student information packet such as: how to sign up for classes, accessing email, and other online platforms. This can assist in a students' transition so was not left up to them to determine how to find the information (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013).
Urban Community Colleges

According to Smith and Vellani, (1999) "America's urban community colleges offer a chance to learn about other cultures and obtain the knowledge and skills needed to move ahead in careers" (p.5). Students at urban community colleges are gaining the skills and knowledge to help them live and succeed in the workplace of metropolitan areas. Usually urban community colleges house a higher percentage of minority groups than other suburban or rural colleges (Laden, 2004). The students at urban community colleges have many outside barriers that can interfere with their studies, such as working part-time or full-time jobs, parenting, being married, or having responsibilities that help develop a good work ethic. Entering these institutions are students who may have experienced poor collegiate preparation and it is the community colleges responsibility to prepare them for the next level of their education (Smith & Vellani, 1999). Community colleges offer remedial education to provide the student with the skills to be successful with other college course work (Smith & Vellani, 1999).

For most students, having student services and helpful administrators make all the difference in their experience at an institution (Evans et al., 2010). "Many community college alumni relate stories of life change and new possibilities thanks to the open-door admission policies, specific student services, and conveniences of a community college (Hagedorn, 2006, p. 21). The students attending Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) have administrators providing specific student services geared toward academic success. The LACCD has designed various specialized programs to reach Hispanic students, students of color, working adults, and African American students. The
programs help students with writing and oral skills, providing learning communities and help with the cost of books.

Reverse Transfer Student

Sometimes students who attend four-year institutions are not academically prepared for the coursework. As a result many transfer to a two-year institution; a phenomenon referred to as reverse transfer. This has been attributed to many factors such as financial cost, lack of individualized attention, and academic difficulty (Kajstura & Keim, 1992). Findings from research indicated that students in the cycle of reverse transfer have greater satisfaction with the two year college due to student-faculty relationships and helpfulness from campus departments such as registration, admission, and counselors (Kajstura & Keim, 1992). Faculty support for student success is highly important because it provided the student with the level of support needed for good academic performance (Kajstura & Keim, 1992).

Community College Cost

Many community colleges enroll a plethora of African American, Latino, first-generation, low-income, and single parent students (Handel, 2013). This can also be attributed to the affordability of community colleges versus a four-year institution. According to Handel (2013), tuition and fees are 36.2% less than the average four-year college. Education is a major investment and many families are not prepared, nor have planned for the expenses. As stated by Sallie Mae (2014), only 38% of families agree they had a plan to pay for all four-years of college expenses. Additionally, families that planned to pay for college spent 30% more than non-planners. Students and parents today
are confronted with high tuition cost, a lagging economy, and competition for jobs. These are reasons why students are more likely to choose to attend a community college.

**Successful Transition**

The growth of the number of students transferring from community college results from economic conditions, employment, and a new education policy (Grites, 2013). Having this knowledge will aid community colleges in preparing students for the transition from one institution to another. Many of the students will have to begin a new regime that includes breaking old habits, learning the institutions vocabulary, and learning the academic standards held at the new institution.

Community colleges and four-year universities are significantly different and students should be aware of these differences before transferring. To learn these differences students must begin navigating throughout the campus. Many community college students have learned the routine of *class-to-car-car-to-class* behavior and continuing this behavior will be a disadvantage to the student finding a sense of belonging to their new campus. Students need to figure out simple things that will help them such as where to park on campus, know where their resources are located including financial aid, bookstore and any student support service offices. The university can also aid the student by providing the student with a campus tour and an information packet with telephone numbers and maps to find offices.

When the student knows how to communicate at the level of the university they will be able to understand how the university works. According to Grites (2013), every institution has their own vocabulary related to student organizations and course curriculum. On a college campus the use of acronyms are common to describe a course
such as *gen ed*, meaning *general education*. Another acronym that describes a student organization is *SGA* or *Student Government Association*. If the student is serious about being academically successful on their new campus the student will need to know the institution’s language. Providing the student with a glossary of the acronyms will also be helpful in an information packet.

As stated earlier, community colleges and universities are significantly different and this includes academic standards and expectations. The first step that will create a smooth transition of credits from the community college to the four-year institution is preparing to meet with an academic advisor. If a student meets regularly with an academic advisor, the student will have an understanding of how the credit system works at both institutions and knowing what classes at the community college matches those at the four-year. Grites (2013) recommended that faculty at the four-year institution correspond with the community college about “course content and learning outcomes” (p. 64). If a prospective student has this preparation, it will allow them to gain confidence and knowledge about the transfer process and the course load. Sessions with an academic advisor will also address other course content issues such as prerequisites for classes, remaining in good academic standing, and how to calculate their grade point average. These are tools that the student will use throughout their college career and learning them at the community college will help decrease transfer shock and transitional trauma.

The process of transferring to a four-year institution is very detailed with a lot of information that can potentially overload a student. Having to know all of this information can also bring on transfer shock (Flaga, 2006). Although both of these
phenomenon can occur, preparing the student adequately can prevent the student from having these experiences.

**Academic Advising at the Community College Level**

When a student seeks guidance from an academic advisor, it significantly affects their college experience. Many community college students are first-generation students and need further assistance. Petty (2014) defined first-generation students as “someone whose parents have not completed a college degree” (p. 257). The academic advisor is an important pathway toward educational achievement for many students, especially first-generation college students. As stated by Allen et al., (2013) the academic advisor serves the student through five essential functions for the student including integration, referral, information, individuation, and shared responsibilities.

These five functions explain how advisors can best to guide students. Integration is the function advisors use to aid students with connecting their curricular choices to academic, career, and life goals (Allen et al., 2013). When the advisor uses the referral function they assist students with campus resources to address academic problems such as referring the student to a math or science tutor. The academic advisor also assists students by providing the student with accurate information on their degree requirements and explains institutional policies such as financial aid, registration, and grading. During the advising sessions the advisor will get to know the student as an individual which includes considering the student skills, interest, and abilities. Lastly, the academic advisor aids in shared responsibility with a student by aiding in problem-solving, decision making, and developing academic student plans.
Allen et al. (2013) found the most important characteristic students wanted out of their advising sessions was accurate information about degree requirements. Another function that was rated highly was overall connection to their academics, career, and life goals and assistance with choosing a major. The researchers found that advising was more important to women, older students, African American, Asian American, and Hispanic students (Allen et al., 2013).

**Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

It is important to take a look at previous work on college student development to further explain factors that can interfere with student success upon transition to a four-year institution. The theories best describing challenges for transfer students in their transition from a community college to a four-year university are Arthur Chickering and Linda Reisser’s theory of *Identity Development* (1993) along with Nancy Schlossberg’s *Transition Theory* (2010).

Chickering and Reisser (1993) proposed seven vectors intended as stages that explain the development of students in college. Of all the seven vectors, three best describe the transfer student population. As stated earlier by Laanan (2001), transfer students enter a four-year university facing new psychological, academic, and environmental changes. Thus, students are serious about achieving academic success will have to develop intellectual competence, develop purpose, and their identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Transfer students enter with skills they have learned from the community college but are in need of the intellectual competence to achieve their goal of earning a baccalaureate degree. Intellectual competence are skills the student must develop such as studying, time management, and organizational skills. Obtaining the
needed skills will make adjusting to the rigorous coursework manageable and the student can perform high in the classroom.

Students need motivation and a purpose if they would like to achieve academic success. Coming into the university with clear goals will aid the student in making a commitment to creating a meaningful experience and remaining dedicated to their education, but after becoming comfortable with a new environment there challenges will still arise. Students face challenges in the academics, social, and personal areas of their lives. While the student is still attending the urban community college there can be many outside factors that can distract them from their goal. However, committing to the purpose can be used as focus to obtain academic achievement.

Another vector that is essential to describing transfer students is establishing identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Also stated earlier is that community college students belong to different demographics and range in age groups. Community college students also have the habit of class-to-car-car-to-class behavior which has to be changed at the four-year university in order to find a community at the new institution. Many four-year universities have various student organizations to join in order to find the group in which they belong. Students in this stage are developing relationships and building identities that are deemed acceptable by their peers and themselves.

Schlossberg’s transition theory is another framework that best describes the experience of community college students that transfer to a four-year university. The theory explains the transition, the process, and the factors that influence the transition. According to Evans et al., (2010) Schlossberg’s three of the four S’s in her theory best explain the transition process for transfer students which are situation, self, and support.
The important situational factors for transfer students are role change and duration. When the transfer student comes to the four-year university with 60 credits or more they are upperclassmen. Upperclassmen have more responsibility than they previously had before at the community college. The duration is the time spent on their goal to achieve academic success. The time at the four-year institution is temporary, but obtaining the degree is permanent.

The second S is self which correlates to establishing identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010). The demographic characteristic of the student is important to the process of their transition. The students socioeconomic status, age, and gender affects the interpersonal relationships they development. These are factors that are associated with the student finding a sense of belonging. The third S is support which is very critical and that can impact the student experience positive or negative. Chickering and Reisser (1993) confirm faculty/staff support for students can greatly impact their experience and is associated with retaining students. Chickering and Reisser explained the student/faculty relationship is a key influence of the student’s college development. Students also need family and friend support to aid with the challenges that persist with gaining higher education.

Summary

The literature identifies the importance of community college for making higher education accessible to underprepared collegiate students. It also looks at student adjustment and the changes students face after transferring. A great deal of the literature focuses on the anxiety students have when getting acclimated with new surroundings and becoming familiar with the academic courses. A big factor that is recognized in the
literature is the faculty-student relationship, in which there is a great influence on the student experience (Kajstura & Keim, 1992). Another influence on the student experience is the special assistance programs for student support that help to increase student success. A common issue seen in higher education is the reverse transfer student experience. The literature explains the major reasons why this phenomenon may exist. Chapter III provides the methods for the study.
CHAPTER III
Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative approach to answer the research questions. According to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) qualitative research is “research in which the investigator attempts to study naturally occurring phenomena in all their complexity,” (p. G-7). This approach provided more insight into the student experience at the two-year college preparing for their four-year university transition. The qualitative approach capitalizes on the student experience and gave the information needed to answer the research questions. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do students feel two-year institutions are preparing students for success at four-year universities?
2. What skills did students learn to prepare them academically for the four-year university?
3. How are students utilizing skills they have learned from their two-year institutions?

Design of Study

The study utilized a semi-structured interview approach. Full time transfer students who have transferred twenty-four or more credits or an associate’s degree from an urban community college were interviewed. Four individuals were interviewed for this research. The interview protocol consisted of demographic and open-ended questions about their community college experience and the tools they have received that helped them successfully transition to their four-year institution. See Appendix A for the interview protocol.
Participants

Participants for this research study were transfer students at a mid-size, four-year university. The students must be enrolled at the four year college at the time of data collection with the intent to graduate from their institution. Participants were both male and female. Most of the participants are minority students because the researchers desire is to focus on students transferring from urban community colleges. Students were interviewed individually to share their experience at the two-year institution. The researcher gained access to these students by contacting TRIO/Student Support Services.

Four individuals were selected to participate in an in-person interview. Of the participants 50 percent (n=2) were classified as having junior standing and the other 50 percent were classified as having senior standing. Of the participants 75 percent (n=3) were parents. Finally 25 percent (n=1) of the participants had a documented disability. Post data collection, the participants were given a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. Table 1 provides a chart with the participant demographics.

**Table 1. Participant characteristics.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Year in College</th>
<th>Parent (Y/N)</th>
<th>Reverse Transfer (Y/N)</th>
<th>Student with Disability (Y/N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashton</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliot</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Site

The research site was a mid-sized four-year public mid-west university located in rural Illinois. The university serves a total of 8,913 students. The university student demographics are 21 American Indian students, 80 Asian students, 1,500 African American students, 444 Hispanic students, 273 International students, 169 Biracial students, 6 Native Hawaiian students, 190 students not reported, and 6,230 Caucasian students (Eastern Illinois University, 2015). The research site is ranked the No. 4 public regional university in the Midwest by *US News and the World Report*. Graduating students from the research site graduate at 15% higher than the national average.

Data Collection

The interviews were administered individually to each participant and audio recorded with the participants consent. Interviews were then transcribed and all participants were contacted after the interview and the transcriptions were shared with them. The instrument used included demographic and open-ended questions on the participant’s recent experience at a two-year college. The interview questions were created by the researcher to identify the skills students are learn at the community college for the four year institution. The interview was created to give students the chance to explain the essential tools that helped them successfully persist at the senior institution. The interview questions were a mix of demographic and biographic questions (e.g. “which of the following best describes your race?” and “what is your gender”)? The interview also had open-ended questions (e.g. “Did you see a decrease in your grades during the first or second semester at your senior institution?” and “Do you believe your community college was cost accessible”)?
All interviews began during the first six weeks of the fall semester 2015 to new and existing transfer students. Access to transfer students was obtained through TRiO/Student Support Services in which this department offers support to first-generation, low-income, and students with disabilities. Students were contacted by email and asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with myself on their community college experience. I introduced myself to the participants, explained my research, and explained my community college experience. I then started to ask them questions on their experience.

Role of the Researcher

As a member of the transfer student population, I conducted this research to gain a better understanding of the measures community colleges are taking to ensure academic student success. In my experiences as both the reverse transfer student and transfer student, I experienced just about everything in the current literature. I was a reverse transfer student because the cost of education from my first university was too expensive. I transferred to community college but I did not have access to learn studying, test taking, and time management skills. I also experienced transfer shock the first semester at my senior institution and my grade point average fell below a 2.0. The skills I learned that helped me to successfully finish, I learned at my four-year institution. By having a background of the adjustment period and a dip in grades that transfer students experience, I can identify the strengths and weaknesses at my previous community college in preparation skills. I can then make recommendations to administrators and faculty regarding existing or creating new programs for accessible information on academic
student success. Ultimately, the results of the research can assist in many urban community colleges improving retention and more successful alumni.

**Data Analysis**

Participants were interviewed on campus in an office setting or in a comfortable location within the campus. Once interviews were complete, responses were transcribed and coded. The researcher found common themes among all participant experiences to establish a results section. Once the common themes were found the researcher analyzed the themes and compared the data to previous research on the topic. Later, the researcher provided recommendations based upon the findings of the study.

**Treatment of Data**

Data were collected through individual interviews, transcribed, and coded. Before starting the interview participants were required to read and sign an informed consent in order to record and continue. The qualitative approach will allow the researchers to investigate how things occur in the student preparedness process (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012). All participants contact information will be kept on a voice recorder and transcriptions will be kept on a password protected flash drive. Data will be kept for three years after completion of study per IRB policy, in which the recording and flash drive will be destroyed.

**Summary**

The methods identifies the specific procedures that describes how the data will be collected from participants. It also describes the institution, participants, and background on the researcher. The researcher section is an important portion of the methods because it tells why this research is important to the researcher. The researcher has experienced a
lot of the phenomenon's describing the transfer student adjustment and wants to investigate other student experiences, included in the methods is the instrumentation that will be used in collecting data. The interview protocol and data collection procedures were described. Chapter IV will provide the reader with the results of the study.
Chapter IV

Results

This chapter examines the data collected from four participants that participated in one-on-one interviews about their experience and the preparedness from their community colleges. The participants sat down for a 30-60 minute interview and several themes emerged from this data. The proposed research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. How do students feel two-year institutions are preparing students for success at four-year universities?

2. What skills did students learn to prepare them academically for the four-year university?

3. How are students utilizing skills they have learned from their two-year institutions?

The interview explored how students felt their two-year college prepared them for the four-year university coursework and experience. Each theme that resulted from these interview questions will be introduced with the corresponding research question and then themes will be examined.

Research question 1: How do students feel two-year institutions are preparing students for success at four-year universities?

This research question was answered by the following seven open-ended questions asked to participants: (1) How well did your two-year college prepare you for the four-year college experience, (2) Describe some of the help you received from faculty and staff at your community college. What (3) department at the community college did
you receive a lot of support from, (4) How does your GPA at the university compare to your GPA at the community college and (5) what academic resources did your advisor refer to you at the community college? Explain (6) the educational plan your advisor developed for you for your transfer process and (7) how prepared were you for the universities expectation on your academic performance?

Participants were asked to describe how their two-year institutions prepared them for academic success at the four-year university. Specifically, their feelings toward the preparation they received from the two-year institutions were examined. During this question, three of the four participants learned structure, studying tips and the benefits of utilizing resources and tutoring. However, one student, Sophia, explained that her community college experience did not prepare her for the four-year university. The following themes emerged from the interview are Importance of relationships with faculty and staff, Departmental support, Academic preparation for a four-year university and Preparedness for university academic expectation.

**Importance of Relationships with Faculty and Staff.** Three of the four participants received help from faculty and staff members. Some staff at the two-year college were willing to meet students in non-traditional locations off-campus, such as a coffee shop. Overall, students received help from various departments. Elliott came into his community college unsure of a goal but once he entered the institution he met a staff member that helped him get on track with academic and personal life. Elliott shared his thoughts on the relationships he developed from faculty and staff stating,

> Once I gained relationships and I was engaged in my education I was able to perform better academically. I really utilized my professor’s office hours and I
was able to learn better during the one-on-one sessions with my professors. I have a learning disability so the one-on-one sessions really helps me out and I learn better.

Jackson shared similar thoughts when he was asked about the relationships he developed from faculty and staff,

My first job I had at the community college I worked with High School Partnership. We help students that qualify get dual credit from the college. In the office, there were two ladies that were like my second moms and they would make sure I wore my coat, check in with me during midterms, sit down with me to talk about my grades and how I could use studying tips to better myself. Any time I needed them they were there. To this day they still call and check up on me to see how I'm doing at the four-year. I can't explain to you how helpful they are there and I genuinely love these people at my community college because they don't treat me like a student they treat me like one of their family members.

Ashton shared similar thoughts when she was asked about the help she received from faculty and staff,

At my two-year a lot of the faculty and staff were willing to give their cellphone numbers and their personal emails. A lot of them were adjunct teachers so they taught part-time. They were willing to meet at a coffee shop to help tutor also. I asked one of my teachers for Philosophy class to meet at a local café in my area and he came because I was having problems on a big philosophy paper we had due. A lot of them were willing to go outside of class more than most teachers would.
Sophia had a unique situation at her two-year college because of out of all the participants she explained that she did not feel prepared for the four-year university or establish relationships with faculty and staff. Sophia said “as far as help the teachers didn’t give us that information as far as go to this place to help you write a paper.” She explained the lack of help she received from staff and faculty and how non-motivating the experience was for her. She did not feel motivated for the classroom work and explained that faculty and staff did not refer her to other resources at the institution.

**Departmental Support.** By attending a two-year college, students described the help they have received from various departments on-campus. At some point during the two-year experience all students received help from several different departments. Ashton received support from Tutoring, various Academic departments and the Academic Success Center (ASC). Sophia received support from Academic Advising. Jackson received support from TRiO, High School Partnership, Financial Aid, Admissions and Academic Advising. Lastly, Elliot received support from Kingsmen which is a mentor program for African-American males, the Transfer Center, Student Services and Basketball coaches.

Elliot shared his experience with the Transfer Center:

I just noticed with me working with her relationships started developing with other professors and deans. I didn’t see it because I would just run an errand for her and my networking started changing. I recognized more resources and opportunities. I noticed I was separating myself from people I was hanging with. My relationships change because I was hanging around deans and professors and the doors that opened from this lady that gave me a job.
While the students were getting academic support they also received recommendations from their advisors for academics. Two of the four participants experienced getting campus resources from their academic advisor. All of the resource recommendations from advisors were iTransfer, Writing Center, tutoring, TRIO and Math Lab. The other students experience were getting information for graduation or registered for classes.

**Academic Preparation for a Four-Year University.** Two of the four participants responded to having a better GPA at the four-year university than at their respected two-year colleges. Sophia and Elliot explained how once they began taking school seriously they each saw a difference in their grades. During the interview, Elliot explained that since transferring from community college he has been staying on track with consistently getting good grades on assignments. He explained how at the two-year he would add and drop classes but he has not failed a class or dropped any courses since being admitted into the four-year university.

Ashton sees a slight difference in her GPA. Ashton shared similar thoughts when she was asked about improving her GPA,

> In my eyes there a little bit different because I had a 3.72/4.00 at my community college and here I have a 3.45/4.00. I'm ok with that, I feel like that's equivalent to each other. You have a little bit of a higher standard at a community college plus me starting out as a different major and transferring that had some effect on my GPA. I think they are equivalent because the standards are a little higher at a four-year.

At the time of the interview, Jackson had not received a GPA because it was his first semester at the four-year university. However, Jackson believed he would have an
overall GPA of 3.30/4.00 at the four-year and left his two-year college with a 3.20/4.00. Jackson openly discussed his goal of wanting to get into the honor society and he strived to earn the GPA for admission.

Three of the four participants expressed that their community college advisor did not help them develop an educational plan. Jackson however did get this assistance at the community college from his academic advisor. He expressed that his advisor "made sure I only completed two years at the four-year because I have completed the general requirement classes if I kept on the right track that we had planned out for myself."

**Preparedness for University Academic Expectation.** Three of the four participants expressed they were academically prepared for the university expectations of their academic performance at the four-year university. Sophia shared her thoughts on her preparedness for the university academic expectation,

> I wouldn’t say I was prepared because Cook County College is like high school. I didn’t have to do much research and studying so this is way different. I’m actually doing work here. It was an easy thing with them.

Jackson shared his experience when asked about academic preparation,

> I think it prepared me well because the work at my two-year was equal to the four-year with the studying habits that you have to get used to. The late night studying and going to the writing center to get your paper checked. So I felt like it prepared me for fully for the four-year experience.

**Research question 2: What skills did students learn to prepare them academically for the four-year university?**
This research question was answered by the following three open-ended questions asked to participants: (1) What study skills or strategies did you learn at your community college, (2) What did you learn about test-taking? and (3) What did you learn on how to manage your time from an available resource at your community college? Participants were asked about the skills or strategies they learned at their community colleges that prepared them for the four-year university. Participants explained the skills they learned and where they learned these skills. During these questions, three of the four participants discussed having learned study skills or other methods for studying. The following themes emerged from the interview are Learned academic strategies focusing on Test-taking and Time-management.

**Learned Academic Strategies.** Through a success strategies course, Ashton learned her learning style and gained helpful studying tips. Jackson learned an effective way to utilize note cards as a studying method through a course. Elliot learned to utilize the syllabus, take notes, read the material and study to be ahead of the class. Sophia did not learn a study method through a resource at the community college.

**Test-Taking.** Three of the four participants learned test-taking strategies while attending their community college. Ashton expressed learning to not cram information and to process the information over time. She learned to complete assignments; read the material and sleep well the night before a test. Jackson was asked about learned test-taking strategies and shared,

> I used to be nervous to take a test but I learned to chill and not to over study for a test. I really take my time with studying and when I feel like I know it I’ll do a review because I try not to over study. I don’t try to pound it in my brain, if I don’t get after two
or three times it’s probably not meant to be. I really try to pace myself and go in with a calm attitude because I usually do better when I’m more relaxed about the test than nervous about one.

Elliot shared similar thoughts when he was asked about learned test-taking strategies, "don’t study to memorize, study to apply it. Once I studied and remembered everything on the study guide and when I took the test I failed.” Sophia learned test-taking strategies, but she did not learn them from her community college. When asked this question she expressed, “when I realized I needed help I went to a friend. I needed help in Chemistry and my friend has a degree in that. I took it upon myself to get study tips from him but not from the staff.” Although Sophia did not learn test-taking strategies from her community college, throughout her interview she expressed that she expressed a lack of information on resources from faculty and staff.

**Time-Management.** All four participants learned tips on time management while attending the two year college. This skill is something that participants learned inside and outside of their two-year college. Ashton shared her thoughts on learning time-management skills:

They had a lot of workshops on time manage and stuff like it. It helped us see and know what your problem subjects is. Mine was Science and I was taking a Statistics and Astronomy at the same time. So I knew I could finish my Statistics homework in 20 minutes but it would take me 2-3 hours to finish one Astronomy worksheet. So I knew if I got my Statistics homework done first take a break and then come back to my Astronomy homework and take 20-30 minutes increments just to get it done it would help
me go through the process easier so I wouldn't get worn out. I learned how to divide and conqueror.”

Jackson learned how to manage his time off campus but was able to utilize this skill at the four-year university. He shared his thoughts on learning time-management skills:

I wouldn’t say I learned how to manage my time at my college. I learned it while I was working a job while attending my college. I worked for Walmart and it’s not a real hard job but you have to manage your time right in order to get your stuff done. Working there really helped me manage my time right with school work and regular work. That was my first time working outside the college so I had to know how to schedule everything. I learned time management working a part-time job while I was in school.

Research question 3: How are students utilizing skills they have learned from their two-year institutions?

This research question was answered by the following three open-ended questions asked to participants: (1) How have you put these skills to use that you’ve learned from your community college at your current institution, (2) While attending your community college what were some skills you learned to be successful at your senior institution? and (3) How did your community college prepare you for your major and core classes you are currently taking? The following themes emerged from the interview are Understanding environments and Utilization of professor and other strategies. Participants were asked how they are utilizing the skills they have learned from their community college. Participants explained how they use these skills for academic success at the four-year university. When Ashton was asked this question she was able to describe how knowing her learning style has benefitted her in many ways.
Understanding Environments. Jackson discussed how he felt prepared by his community college academically but did not feel prepared to transition into the new environment. Jackson shared his thoughts,

The studying tips I learned from my community college I still use it here but it didn’t prepare me for this environment. I’m not living at home, I’m living by myself and it’s weird because you have your parents asking if you have class and checking on you. It’s more independent here than being at a community college.

The other participants felt prepared for the academic coursework, but Ashton expressed how she struggled with social and personal transitions. Ashton explained, “I knew my academics were fine but it was me being in my first apartment and having my child here by myself without my Mom because she was a big help at home.” Ashton entered the four-year university as a transfer student-parent. As Ashton moved three hours away from home with her toddler, she had to navigate the campus by finding her classes and campus resources along with daycare information. Although she felt well prepared for the coursework and the university expectations for performance, she was unsure of the transition with her toddler in tow.

Ashton shared another method on utilizing her environments,

I know where to pick out a good area for me to read and reading all of my material in certain areas help me focus more. I know I cannot read in my apartment because it is too many distractions for me to sit and read. I have to pick places outside of my apartment for me to read or knowing what assignments I can and can't do at my apartment.
Since Ashton is knowledgeable about her learning style she is able to decipher what places in her home or on-campus best benefits her studying method. She is aware of the things that break her concentration versus the places where she is able to remain focus on her task.

**Utilization of Professor and Other Strategies.** Jackson described how he utilized the skills he has learned and talked about the importance of utilizing professors' office hours:

> I put them to use every day by going to my teachers office hours, going to the writing center, managing my time wisely and stuff. This whole semester I used some skills and I did adopt some skills. If you don’t understand something go to office hours. When I was at my two-year college all my professors encouraged me to come to office hours when I didn’t understand something or things I wanted to know more about something.

Elliot described how he utilized his time to study by saying “I wasn’t going out during my semester and I was nervous about passing my classes. I stayed at home and studied and took advantage of my time.”

Of all the participants Ashton and Sophia both were reverse transfer students. Sophia attended community college then transferred to a four-year university where she majored in Art. Sophia explained that the courses she took for her Art major prepared her for her classes at the previous four-year university. However, when she changed her major she felt differently about the preparation she received. She explained this when she asked about her community college preparing her for her major classes at the four-year university by saying,
I was an art major when I was there but when I came here I completely changed it. I wasn’t passionate about it anymore. It kind of prepared me for the first university I attended when the drawing classes. I learned some skills there and when I went to the first university I attended I was able to apply those skills. Now I don’t have art classes.

When Ashton was asked this question she also explained utilizing the note-taking skills she learned at her four-year university. Ashton shared,

One of my teachers was a graduate from UIC Sociology program and he talked to us a lot about reading the material. I learned how to thoroughly read, taking notes as you read and dissecting the material.

Elliot shared similar thoughts when he was asked about preparation for classes,

I was fully prepared. It was now or never because if I don’t make it here then what am I going to do with an Associate’s degree. I knew what I had to do and I learned a lot of discipline at my community college.

Summary

The results identified the overall examination of data from four participants. It also describes the participant breakdown of their characteristics. Each participant described their experience at the two-year college by classifying the skills they learned and relationships they developed with faculty/staff. All participants attended different urban two-year colleges and received different experiences. Some participants received more aid than others in the classroom and through the transition from the two-year college to the four-year university. After analyzing the data several themes emerged, Chapter V will provide the findings and recommendations for the study.
Chapter V

Findings and Recommendations

Community colleges keep education accessible and affordable for students. For students in the working-class this is very important to their economic mobility. Community colleges equip students with the tools to be academically successful by providing students with trade skills and the requirements to transfer to a four-year university. According to Lightweis (2014), working class students are challenged with the financial limitation to make college less expensive as possible. Many community college students commute and some live at home with their parents. While still in this living arrangement students are influenced by their parents to go to school, do their homework and many are still surrounded by their high school friends. Once the student transfers away from home their parents are not there to make sure they are making it to class on-time. Everything is on the student.

Being in a new environment with this responsibility can trigger transfer shock (Flaga, 2006) or Chin-Newman and Shaw (2013). Students become anxious about their credits transferring, being prepared for the coursework and sometimes finding the right resources for their n children. According to Kajstura and Keim (1992) “financial cost, lack of individualized attention, and academic difficulty as the major reasons for reverse transfer” (p. 1). The rising cost of education continues to be a limitation toward students’ access to their choices of colleges. Education is a major investment and students opt to take a many loans to cover the cost. The conclusion leads to many students having large numbers of debt after they finish. Research has consistently emphasized the importance of community college as an inexpensive route toward the
This chapter aims to determine students’ perception of their academic preparedness for academic success at a four-year university after transferring from community college. Of particular interest were the skills students needed to learn to be prepared for classes and coursework at the four-year university. The researcher examined the perceptions of the skills taught to students at community colleges to prepare them for rigorous work at the four-year institution such as study, test-taking, and time-management skills. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

**Research question 1:** How do students feel two-year institutions are preparing students for success at four-year universities?

**Importance of Relationships with Faculty and Staff**

In response to the first research question the results revealed four categories that expressed how students felt prepared for the four-year university. The categories include importance of relationships with faculty and staff, departmental support, academic preparation for a four-year university and preparedness for university academic expectation. A new theme emerged from the data collection which is importance of faculty/staff relationships. Most literature on faculty-student relationships focus on students attending a four-year university. The participants discussed how developing these relationships resulted in the student becoming more engaged with their education. They explained how faculty/staff would go out of their way to make them feel important.
Nancy Schlossberg's theoretical framework of transition best describes the importance of relationships with faculty and staff. According to Evans et al., (2010) the third S of her framework which is support identifies how the impact of faculty/staff relationships with students can impact them negatively or positively. Three of the four participants discussed having positive relationships with faculty and staff and how that positively influenced their experience at the community college. One participant described how not having this experience created a negative learning environment.

**Departmental Support**

Along with the importance of faculty/staff relationships another important theme is departmental support. Data collection shows that at some point during the two-year all participants received departmental support. Participants were asked about the various resources that were introduced to them by their academic advisor. Allen et al., (2013) suggest that academic advisors should advise students by five functions: integration, referral, information, individuation, and shared responsibilities. These functions are used to guide students toward success with academics and personal goals. To do this successful advisors have to connect with students and learn their skills, interest and abilities (Allen et al., 2013). Two of the four participants indicated receiving academic support from their advisors. The support participants explained receiving was with course placement.

**Academic Preparation for the Four-Year University**

Academic preparation for the four-year university is a theme that emerged from the data. When participants were asked about their academic preparation many responded by explaining the difference in their grade point average from the two-year college to the
four-year college. According to Smith and Vellani (1999) community colleges offer remedial education to better provide the student with the skills to be successful with other college course work. Often times there are many students entering the four-year university with poor collegiate preparation. Two participants discussed seeing a difference in their grades once they began taking their education more seriously. Only one participant indicated not feeling academically prepared after transferring from community college. The student also indicated lack of aid from faculty and staff. The other participants explained not seeing that much of difference because they transferred into the four-year university with a high grade point average.

Many students coming from urban community colleges have outside barriers that interfere with their education such as working part-time or full-time jobs, parenting, being married, or having responsibilities that help develop a good work ethic (Laden, 2004). Three of the four participants were parents along with being a full-time students. Another barrier described by one of the participants but is not focused in the literature is having a documented disability. The participant in the study indicated needing to receive extra help from professors such as one-on-one sessions because it helps with learning the material. There was no other barrier associated with having a learning disability from the participant.

**Reverse Transfer Student**

A participant characteristic that emerged from the data is being a reverse transfer student. Two of the participants identified being a reverse transfer student before entering their current four-year university. Previous research by Kajstura and Keim (1992) stated there are various attributes to the reasoning a student will reverse transfer such as
financial cost, lack of individualized attention, and academic difficulty. One student described having to reverse transfer because of culture shock at the four-year university. Literature suggest that students may have greater satisfaction with the two year college due to student-faculty relationships and helpfulness from campus departments such as registration, admission, and counselors (Kajstura & Keim, 1992). This was not the experience Sophia described from the two-year college she attended. She described a lack of help from faculty and staff along with not being challenged with the coursework.

University Academic Expectation

The last theme that answers the research question is preparedness for university academic expectation. When asked this question three of the four participants explained feeling prepared for the university academic preparation. Participants described being accustomed to the work load, studying late and reading scholarly articles. By having this preparation, three of the four students in this study experienced a successful transition. Grites (2013) recommended that faculty at the four-year institution correspond with the community college about “course content and learning outcomes” (p. 64). Although none of the students in this study experienced their community colleges corresponding on course content and learning outcomes, this method can help students’ transition process tremendously.

Research question 2: What skills did students learn to prepare them academically for the four-year university?

Learned Academic Strategies

In response to the second research question the results revealed three categories that described the skills students learned to prepare them academically for the four-year
university. The categories include learned academic strategies, test-taking and time-management. When asked this question participants shared the strategies they have learned from their two-year college experience. Students described learning their learning style, study tips, utilizing tools such as note cards and the syllabus. These skills are very useful in the academic setting because many students that transfer from community college face doubts about academically succeeding at the university level.

**Test-Taking and Time-Management**

The other learned strategies students learned are test-taking and time management. When participants discussed test-taking they learned they describe tips on what to do the night before and the process of studying. One participant described learning the information to apply it and not to memorize it. Participants also discussed reviewing information not cramming the material but processing the information over time. When participants were asked about time-management they described learning this through workshops held at the college. Two of the four participants described learning a time saving method to get work done. One participant worked a part-time job and the other was a student-parent and both were able to utilize their time well.

**Research question 3: How are students utilizing skills they have learned from their two-year institutions?**

**Understanding Environments**

In response to the third research question the results revealed two categories that described how students are utilizing skills they learned from their two-year colleges. The categories include understanding environments and utilizing professors and other strategies. One participant expressed being prepared academically but not prepared for
the new environment. According to Grites (2013), to have a successful transition into the new environment students need to begin a new regime that includes breaking old habits, learning the institutions vocabulary, and learning the academic standards held at the new institution. When students break old habits from the community college they gain a sense of belonging at the four-year university.

One participant described her experience transferring to a new environment with a child. While attending the two-year college she received help from her mom with her son and now the entire responsibility was on her once she transferred away from home to a four-year university. She described not only getting herself acclimated to the campus but also learning the resources she would need for her toddler. The literature provides suggestions for students getting accustomed to the college campus for student resources but not suggestions for students that are also parents.

Along with getting acclimated to the social transition of campus environments one participant described understanding the environments conducive for studying. The participant explained studying in her apartment was not a good place for her to focus. She described needing to be in a neutral place to keep her on task. She also explained there are certain places on campus she would study because places that were too busy would break her focus. Overall, understanding the environments participants are in can aid students with transitional trauma.

Utilization of Professors and Other Strategies

A theme that emerged when answering this research question is utilization of professors and other strategies. Participants described utilizing their professors' office hours for asking questions about the material and studying. As stated earlier, one
participant that has a learning disability would utilize a professor office hours for a one-on-one session to better understand the course material. When participants were asked about the other strategies they learned one participant discussed note-taking. Taking effective notes are critical for the learning the course material. The participant also discussed the tips she received from an instructor on reading the material thoroughly and dissecting the material as you read. This tip helped the student break down and interpret the material.

**Recommendations**

For this study the researcher examined how prepared students are for academic success at a four-year university after transferring from community college. The results of this study are intended to improve the quality of learning and experience students receive while attending a two-year college. After reviewing the data the following recommendations and suggestions for future research became evident.

**College Student Affairs Professionals**

1. Student affairs professionals should work to prepare students transferring from the two-year college to the four-year university. Facilitating orientation the first eight weeks of school with tools that equips the student to the new environment they will be living in and learning.

2. Transfer students should be paired with a buddy that has also transferred to the university from an urban community college. Creating a Peer-Helper Program to pair new students with student mentors would allow the student to gain comfortability by having access to resources and ask question from the student point-of-view.
3. Institutions should work intentionally to create more faculty and staff interaction with students at the two-year college. It is critical for student to experience the faculty-student relationship for positive involvement. Along with better connecting students to resources at the community college.

4. Four-year institutions should consider available resources for children of students. Along with connecting student-parents to a student parent association. This will help build a community for student-parents where they can relate to one another’s college experience.

5. Community colleges and four-year universities could have transfer centers to help with the transition from the two-year to four-year institutions. The transfer centers would provide students with tools for the application process, campus visits, and information about curriculum and majors.

**Future Research**

1. Future research should be conducted to focus on the transfer experience of student-parents. Students transferring already have anxieties about their academics but student-parents have to learn about resource for their children as well.

2. Research can be conducted to determine what factors can promote a successful social transition for students. Many students are prepared for the academic load, but not the social responsibility of transferring and being more independent.
3. Future research can focus on students who have experience transitional trauma. More than experiencing transfer shock, students are affected by the environments that are unfamiliar.

4. Future research could focus on the transfer process for traditional students versus non-traditional students to investigate the differences in their perceptions of academic preparedness.

Summary

Chapter five reviewed the findings and recommendations for both college student affairs professionals and future researchers. The results from the study were compared with previous literature on the topic. Multiple categories were examined in order to determine the preparedness of students transferring from urban community colleges to a four-year university. From the categories of two-year institutions preparing students for success at four-year universities the following main themes derived: (1) importance of relationships with faculty and staff (2) departmental support (3) academic preparation for a four-year university (4) and preparedness for university academic expectation. The next category was skills did students learn to prepare them academically for the four-year university which yielded the following themes: (1) learned academic strategies (2) test-taking and time-management. Another category focused on students utilizing skills they have learned from their two-year institutions and the following themes emerged: (1) understanding environments (2) and utilization of professor and other strategies. Based on the conclusions drawn upon from the findings of the research it is important for students to experience positive relationships from faculty and staff. This is to influence the student positively and create a connection between the professional and student. The
conclusions from the study noted the importance of preparing students for the social
transition and responsibility of being on their own at the new intuition. Lastly, the
findings suggest preparing student-parents with the resources they need for their children
while attending four-year institutions.
References

4 reasons to consider community college. The Princeton Review.


Blackwell, E., & Pinder, P. J. (2014). What are the motivational factors of first-generation minority college students who overcome their family histories to pursue higher education? College Student Journal, p. 45-56.


http://archives.library.illinois.edu/features/history.php/


http://www.collegeillinois.org/PlansAndPricing/CollegeTuitionCostandFees.html


APPENDICES
Appendix A

Informed Consent

**Study Title**
Transfer Students’ Perceptions of their Academic Preparedness from Urban Community Colleges to Four-Year Institutions.

**Study Purpose and Rationale**
The purpose of the proposed study was to investigate students’ perceptions of their preparedness for academic success at a four-year university after transferring from an urban community college. The study also asked about the skills students learned to be prepared for classes and coursework at the four-year university. This study will examine how much preparation on these skills a student needs before transferring to a four-year university to have a successful experience. Specifically, this study aimed to determine what skills students learn to prepare them for rigorous work at the four-year institution.

**Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria**
Your participation in this study is based on you transferring from an urban community college to a four-year university with 24 credit hours or more.

**Participation Procedures and Duration**
For this project, you will be asked to engage with the researcher where you will be briefed on the project. Following the description of the project, you will be asked to participate in an interview session which will last up to 45 minutes. This interview session will be conducted face to face and will take place at a location which is convenient for you. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. Following the transcription of your interview you will have the opportunity to review the transcript so you can offer any corrections necessary.

**Audio Files**
For purposes of accuracy, with your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded. Any names used on the audiotape will be changed to participant numbers when the files are transcribed. The files will be stored on a flash drive for three years and will then be destroyed.

**Data Confidentiality**
All data will be maintained as confidential, and no identifying information such as names will appear in any publication or presentation of the data.

**Storage of Data**
Paper data (e.g. consent forms) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s office for three years and will then be shredded. The interview data will be entered into
Microsoft Word and stored on the researcher’s flash drive for three years and then deleted. Only members of the research team will have access to the data.

**Risks or Discomforts**
There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to participation in this study.

**Benefits**
There are no anticipated benefits related to participation in this study.

**Voluntary Participation**
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at any time for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this form and at any time during the study.

**IRB Contact Information**
For one’s rights as a research subject, you may contact the following: For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 1102 Blair Hall, Charleston, IL, (217) 581-2125.

**Study Title**
Transfer Students’ Perceptions of their Academic Preparedness from Urban Community Colleges to Four-Year Institutions

**********

**Consent**

I, ______________________________, agree to participate in this research project entitled, “A Look at Urban Community College Student Preparedness.” I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

To the best of my knowledge, I meet the credit hour and previous institution requirement for participation (described on the previous page) in this study.

**Permission to Audio Tape the interview:**  Yes  No (please check one)

<table>
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<th>Participants Signature</th>
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Appendix B

Interview Protocol

What is your age?

What is your gender? (Circle).

- Female
- Male
- Other

Which of the following best describes your race?

- Asian/ Pacific Islander
- Black/ African-American
- Caucasian/ White
- Hispanic/ Latino/a
- Native American/ American Indian
- Other (please specify):
- ___________________________________________________________________

What is your current year in school?

- Freshman (24-29 hrs)
- Sophomore (30-59 hrs)
- Junior (60-89 hrs)
- Senior: (90+ hrs)
- 5th Year+ senior
- Graduate
- Non degree-seeking
- Other (please specify):
  - 

Describe your admittance status?

Are you transferring from community college?

- Yes
- No

What is your major? What is your minor? (If applicable):

Major:_________________________

Minor:_________________________

What was your cumulative GPA (grade point average) at your community college?

Example: 0.00/4.00.

What is your cumulative GPA (grade point average) at your senior institution? Example: 0.00/4.00.

What is your current student status?

- Part-time student?
- Full-time student?

Are you a first-generation student (your parents have not completed a college degree)?

- Yes
- No

What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Widowed
• Divorced

What is your employment status?

• Unemployed
• Part-time (0-20 hours)
• Full-time (20-30+ hours)

How many children do you have?

Tell me about your community college experience.

How well did two-year college prepared you for your senior institution?

How did your two-year college prepare you for the course work at your senior institution?

Describe the help you received from faculty/staff?

When did you decide you wanted to transfer to a four-year university?

What study skills/strategies did you learn at your community college?

What did you learn about test-taking? How did you learn this skill?

What did you learn on how to manage your time from an available resource at your community college? How did you learn it?

How have you put the skills you learned to use at your senior institution? (If applicable).

What department at the community college did you receive support from?

How does your university GPA compare to your community college GPA?

While attending your community college what were the skills you learned to be successful at your senior institution?

Describe the help you received from your academic advisor?

What academic resources did your advisor refer you to at your community college?
Explain the educational plan you and your academic advisor made for your transfer process?

How affordable was your community college?

What financial aid opportunities did you take advantage of?

What additional financial aid opportunities did you take advantage of?

How did your community college prepare you for the classes you will take for your major?

How prepared were you for the university’s expectations for performance?

What were you most nervous in about learning your new environment?

Explain your process of adjusting to the coursework at your senior institution.

Describe the faculty-student relationships you gained at your community college.

How are the relationships the same or different at the university?

Describe any other assistance programs offered at your community college that you took advantage of.

What are your recommendations for faculty/administrators at both institutions?

What are your recommendations for students transferring from community college to a university?

What did you learn after transfer that you wish you would have known before?

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview.*
Appendix C

Request for Participation through Email

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Study on Urban Community College Preparedness

Dear Student,

I am currently conducting a study to understand how urban community colleges are preparing students for academic success at four-year institutions in Illinois. Specifically, the skills on studying, test-taking, and time management skills. My interest in this study is to better understand the resources the urban two-year colleges provide for students to be academically successful. I am also interested in exploring how effective the skills students have learned at the two-year college and are students utilizing these learned skills. Because of this focus, the study is entitled: Transfer Students' Perceptions of their Academic Preparedness from Urban Community Colleges to Four-Year Institutions.

If you are willing to participate in this study please reply to the email address below and I will contact you to arrange a time and place to conduct the interview.

If you have any questions, please contact me at any time.

I appreciate your consideration,

Jazmine E. Thompson
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Office #: 217-581-7950

"You know, sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Just literally twenty seconds of embarrassing bravery. And I promise you, something great will come of it."