CONTRIBUTORS TO THE SUCCESSFUL TRANSFER OF INTERNATIONAL
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by

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San Francisco, California

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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CONTRIBUTORS TO THE SUCCESSFUL TRANSFER OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Community colleges are opening their doors to international students, who, like their domestic counterparts, see the community college as a steppingstone to four-year institutions. This study explored the challenges and the contributors to the successful transfer of international community college students to four-year institutions. This study took place at two medium-size California community colleges. I used a qualitative research methodology to illuminate the connections between internationalization policies, transfer preparedness, and equity issues facing international students. To provide a balanced and deep insight into international students' experiences, I used a combination of focus groups with 24 international community college students who successfully transferred to four-year institutions and interviews with four faculty members from various academic areas. Three themes emerged from the data analysis: 1) "Challenges and dissatisfactions" highlights the difficulties facing international students at the community college level 2) "Skills and strategies to overcome challenges" focuses on the strategies used by international students and their abilities to overcome the difficulties of the transfer process and 3) "Sense of belonging" emphasizes the contribution of a supportive campus climate to the upward transfer of international students. Based on the findings, the study recommends the implementation of a comprehensive plan that includes professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators and the creation of new programs and services to serve the needs of international students.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this dissertation.

Chair, Dissertation Committee

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Chapter One: Introduction

Over the past several years, there has been a rising trend of international students choosing to start their U.S. higher education experience at the community college level (Anayah & Kuk, 2015). They do so because community colleges offer flexible admissions, affordability, and transfer opportunities to four-year institutions for students who have demonstrated academic success (Cohen, 2007). Community colleges currently host about 9% of the total number of international students enrolled in the U.S. higher education system (Open Doors, 2017). In 2016/17, the number of international students attending U.S. community colleges reached 96,472 (Open Doors, 2017), with China, Vietnam, and South Korea as the leading countries of origin for international student enrollment (Table 1).

Table 1: Top 10 Countries of Origin of International Students at Community Colleges, 2016/17 (Open Door, 2017)

Rank	Place of Origin	% of Total
1	China	20.1
2	Vietnam	9.9
3	South Korea	6.6
4	Japan	5.5
5	Mexico	4.3
6	Saudi Arabia	3.8
7	Venezuela	3.0
8	Nepal	2.9
9	Brazil	2.6
10	India	2.3
	WORLD TOTAL	96,472

In 2017, the growth of the international student population resulted in a substantial economic benefit for the U.S. economy. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, international students added more than \$36.9 billion to the U.S. economy and created more than 450,000 jobs (Open Doors, 2017). Similarly, California community colleges have benefited from the presence of international students. As the largest higher education system in America (Scott, 2009), the California Community College system serves more than 28,142 international students (Open Doors, 2017). During 2016/17, the net economic benefit from the presence of international students in California community colleges was estimated at \$807.7 million (NAFSA, 2017) and this growth generated more than 4,846 jobs.

California policymakers have increasingly encouraged higher education institutions to internationalize their campuses. In 2002, the California International Education Policy was signed into law (Anayah, 2012). In 2009, Chancellor Scott of the California Community Colleges stated that the primary goal of hosting international students is “to inspire our own domestic students with first-hand knowledge of others in the world and to bring academic excellence to all students” (Scott, 2009, p. 2). The support of policymakers increased the popularity of California community colleges internationally and resulted in a steady increase in the international student enrollment. The Institute of International Education classified 15 California community colleges among the top 40 leading two-year institutions in the nation (Table 2).

Table 2: Top 15 California Community Colleges Hosting International Students, 2016/17
(Open Door, 2017)

Rank Nationwide	Institution	City	Total Int'l Students
2	Santa Monica College	Santa Monica	3,532
4	De Anza College	Cupertino	2,792
10	Diablo Valley College	Pleasant Hill	1,641
12	Foothill College	Los Altos Hills	1,516
14	Peralta Community College D	Oakland	1,310
15	Orange Coast College	Costa Mesa	1,286
17	Santa Barbara City College	Santa Barbara	1,242
21	Pasadena City College	Pasadena	983
23	City College of San Francisco	San Francisco	967
25	Irvine Valley College	Irvine	866
28	East Los Angeles College	Monterey Park	814
29	El Camino College	Torrance	810
32	Glendale Community College	Glendale	658
33	College of San Mateo	San Mateo	652
36	Mt. San Antonio College	Walnut	614

Chancellor Scott recognized the valuable contribution of international students and his comment is an excellent example of California's commitment to international education. In addition to the considerable financial benefits, international students bring a global perspective to the campus community, add to the country's scientific and technical research (Open Doors, 2017), create an atmosphere of global learning and intercultural understanding (Hudzik, 2011), and improve the learning experience of domestic students

(Raby & Valeau, 2007). International students enrich the educational environment of California's colleges and universities with their talents, cultural backgrounds, and fresh perspectives. Their presence helps institutions to internationalize their campuses and to produce a more globally capable student body.

Although many California Community Colleges welcomed the growth in international student enrollment, their presence also triggered the resistance of some community members and administrators to the idea of community college internationalization (Anayah, 2012). This concern arises from the fact that community colleges have limited resources (Ottinger, 2012) and are overcrowded (Hagedorn & Mi-Chung, 2005). Furthermore, the upward trend in international enrollment created many challenges for international students, faculty members, and campus communities (Andrade & Evans, 2009; Mamiseishvili, 2012), which impacted the academic and social experiences of international students as well as the capabilities of community colleges to attract and retain these students through graduation or transfer to four-year institutions.

Through the lens of critical race theory (Hiraldo, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) and racist nativism (Huber, 2010) frameworks, this study adds a new perspective to the literature. It also provides community college leaders and international education practitioners with a new understanding of the successful transfer experiences from the perspectives of international students and their faculty. By focusing specifically on the transfer experience of international students, it examines an understudied area of the

literature. While previous research focused on identifying the needs (Anayah, 2012, Cohen, 2007), cultural barriers (Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010; Kegel, 2015; Trice, 2003), adjustment of new international students (Beykont & Daiute, 2002; Gebhard, 2012), the benefits of internationalization (Hudzik, 2011), this study explored the institutional factors and the coping strategies used by international students to transfer successfully from the community college to four-year institutions.

Problem Statement

As the largest higher education institution in the United States, with 2.1 million students enrolled at 114 colleges, the California community college system has a fundamental role in making higher education more accessible and affordable (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2017). This function was delineated in California's 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, which considers open access and transfer to four-year institutions as the primary missions of California community colleges (Crow, 2014). The objective is to provide students with the opportunity to complete the first two years of the baccalaureate, and then transfer to four-year institutions to complete an undergraduate degree. Since more than 80% of entering students state a desire to transfer and complete a baccalaureate program at four-year universities (Bailey, Jaggars & Jenkins, 2015; Boone, 2017), the transfer function is integral to the community college mission.

While there is no uniform method to measure the transfer performance of community college students (Hagedorn, Cypers, & Lester, 2008), there is a consensus among researchers that upward transfer rates are low (Budd & Stowers, 2015; Hagedorn et al., 2008). In line with these low transfer rates, Scott-Clayton (2011) argues that students attending these institutions are often confused and disoriented due to the lack of structure and clear academic pathways. Similarly, Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins (2015) argue that the dissimilar set of missions inhibits the ability of community colleges to focus on the needs of transfer students and consider the current transfer process inefficient, complicated, and unclear to students. In California, policymakers and educational leaders have acknowledged these weaknesses and called for the allocation of additional resources and the prioritization of the transfer function (Crow, 2014).

In addition to the multiple missions stated in the Master Plan, California community colleges are expected to serve the needs of a diverse student population and to keep pace with the ever-changing educational environment. Levin (2001) argues that the world changes during the 1990s and the globalization of the economy forced many community colleges to redefine their mission and roles. As a result, many California community colleges started to include internationalization in their mission statements, study abroad programs grew rapidly, and international students' enrollment became a vital service export (Raby & Valeau, 2007). Also, the federal and state governments were

involved in assisting community colleges in building international partnerships with institutions from various parts of the world.

The transfer function and the “two-plus-two” model contributed to the popularity of California community colleges worldwide (Anayah & Kuk, 2015) and persuaded many international students to start their U.S. higher education experiences at the community college level (Farnsworth, 2005; Ottinger, 2009). Yet, there is little to no research on the transfer experiences of this student population and the existing data suggest that many international students are not transferring on time. Hagedorn and Mi-Chung (2005) conducted a study of the Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Students (TRUCCS) Project. The findings revealed that the educational goal of 79% of international students enrolled at Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) was to transfer to four-year universities. However, only 41.6 % were transfer-ready after four years. This is particularly disconcerting given that the majority of international students aim to transfer in two years so they can get their baccalaureate degree in four years.

International students represent an underrepresented group at-risk of dropping out or stopping their education if not provided with the adequate support (Adewale, 2015). Their educational experiences are complicated by financial issues, homesickness, cultural adjustment problems, inconsistent academic counseling, communication problems, faculty misunderstanding, language obstacles, prejudice and discrimination (Adewale,

2015; Anayah, 2012; Cohen 2007;). These hindrances can impact their academic success, cultural experience, and subsequently their transfer to four-year institutions. At the same time, international community college students exhibit high academic aspirations that include overcoming the challenges and transfer to four-year-institutions (Classens, 2014; Guyton, 2017).

While many community colleges welcome the financial benefits, there is a concern that international students are used only to increase revenues without receiving proper support. As Altbach and Knight (2007) assert, "current thinking sees international higher education as a commodity to be freely traded and sees higher education as a private good, not a public responsibility" (p. 130). It is not equitable to recruit international students from different education systems and expect them to navigate the complexity of community colleges and reach their academic goals without targeted institutional support. There is a moral obligation for community colleges to adhere to their own values of inclusion, social justice, and equity and create an equitable environment for international students (Viggiano et al., 2017).

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated how international students perceive their transfer experiences from the community college level to four-year institutions. This study identified the contributors and the coping mechanisms that helped international students in navigating the educational, social, and cultural challenges they faced at selected

California community colleges. In particular, it sought to ascertain the impact of student support services at the community college level on the successful transfer of international students. The study was also designed to create a set of leadership and policy recommendations to help community college educational leaders, faculty, and staff comprehend the needs of international students and assist them to transfer successfully.

The findings have potential significance to my practice, to the institutions where I conducted the research, and to the international education field. As a practitioner, I see myself using the findings of this study to be more efficient in programming, orientation design, advising, managing and implementing transfer resources. The community colleges in this research realize the benefits international students bring to their campuses, which will allow them to view international student support as a moral obligation and a social justice priority. It will help similar community colleges to reach their goal of comprehensive internationalization, while simultaneously creating a supportive campus climate and implementing institutional initiatives to improve the academic and social experience of international students.

This qualitative study took place at two medium-size California community colleges. I used a combination of four focus groups with international community college students who successfully transferred to four-year institutions and interviews with four faculty members from various academic areas. This approach provided insight into international students' experiences, and the narratives gained from this study provided a

lens to critically revisit the literature on community college internationalization, international student experiences, and transfer preparedness. By focusing on the transfer experiences of international students, the findings may provide more transferable knowledge to help international education practitioners at the community college system in understanding the needs of international students. The following questions guided this research:

What are the international students' perceptions of the hurdles they faced in trying to successfully transfer, and how they were able to overcome these difficulties?

What are the perceptions of faculty regarding the challenges facing international students and the adjustments that faculty adopt in the classroom to meet these challenges?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lens for this dissertation relied on relevant aspects of racist nativism (Huber, 2010) and critical race theory (Hiraldo, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), two frameworks that have not been applied previously in the research literature on the successful transfer of international community college students. Both frameworks show that internationalization policies provide domestic students with opportunities to enrich their cultural skills and help many U.S. institutions to improve the quality of education; however, these same policies place extra burdens on international students. In practice, these policies reproduce inequity by disqualifying international students from equity programs. Through the dual lens of racist nativism and critical race theory, I

collected the narratives of international students and faculty and focused on the coping strategies used by international students to navigate the complexity of the community college system despite the challenges they encountered.

Critical Race Theory. Critical race theory (CRT) investigates inequity in education and critiques educational policies and practices (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT's framework is built on five guiding tenets: (a) counter-storytelling (b) interest conversion, (c) whiteness as property (d) the existence of racism, and (e) commitment to social justice (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Yosso, 2005). CRT has been used to expose inequity in teaching and learning, instructions, curriculum and education policies (Yosso, 2005), and provide educators with strategies to mitigate the effects of racism and other forms of subordination against underrepresented student groups (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Critical race theorists focus on the false promises of civil rights legislation of the 1960s; consequently, the Black vs. White discourse dominated the majority of CRT critiques (Yosso, 2005). As a result, "women and People of Color who felt their gendered, classed, sexual, immigrant and language experiences and histories were being silenced, challenged this tendency toward a Black/White binary" (Yosso, 2005, p.72). Certain research has expanded CRT to include other underrepresented groups such as the experience of undocumented students (Huber, 2010), study abroad students (Wick, 2011), and international students (Hiraldo, 2010).

CRT emphasizes that the dominant group benefits from civil rights legislation more than underrepresented groups (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Viggiano et al. (2017) argue that international students have been used as a tool to improve the educational experiences of domestic students without paying much attention to the experience of international students themselves. Furthermore, these students are labeled as a privileged group to justify the tuition price discrimination. Further, international students are not eligible to apply for need-based financial aid or work-study programs, pay a higher tuition than domestic students, have additional admission requirements, and in many cases, do not receive student services based on their needs (Hiraldo, 2010). In fact, many community colleges don't have dedicated international student counseling, offer only limited meeting time with counselors, and do not provide help with housing or transportation (Cohen, 2007).

Solorzano and Yosso (2001) argue that the marginalization of underrepresented groups in the U.S. education system is rationalized through research that dismisses the stories of marginalized student populations and propagates dominant stories. They argue that the stories of people of Color and underrepresented groups are suppressed and suggest counter-storytelling as a method to challenge the dominant discourse. By conducting focus groups with international students and interviews with faculty, I was able to collect informative stories from two different perspectives. These stories challenged the current narrative by illuminating the struggles of international students in

U.S. community colleges. International students and faculty voiced their perceptions about the academic and sociocultural factors that impede or assist them to transfer successfully to four-year institutions.

Racist Nativism. Racist nativism has been used to understand the experiences of racialized groups who do not fit the definition of the "American" identity (Galindo & Vigil, 2006; Huber, 2011; Johnson, 1997; Sanchez, 1997). The concept of nativism has three main constructs: (a) the existence of a strong antagonism to the "foreigner" (b) the creation of a shield to protect the national identity and (c) the perception that non-natives can be a threat to the well-being and the identity of the natives (Galindo & Vigil, 2006; Huber, 2010). Nativism implies the superiority of the nationals, and therefore justifies their rights to dominance and gives them priorities in resources (Huber, 2011). Hence, the racist nativism framework in this study was used to understand how international students perceive their experiences as non-natives.

Nativism positions international students as threatening foreigners who might use their knowledge to make their countries of origin more technologically and economically competitive than the West, or who might endanger the entitlements of the natives (Huber, 2010). For instance, while educational leaders in the U.S. higher education system are under constant pressure to globalize their campuses to create intercultural awareness and to respond to the new trends of globalization (Hudzik, 2011), they also face resistance when it comes to spending the limited resources on international students (Ottinger,

2012). Rhee and Sagaria (2004) assert that international students are sometimes perceived as “a bad U.S. public investment or, worse, that universities maybe preparing foreign nationals to compete with the United States” (p. 85).

Racist Nativism and CRT. The racist nativism framework was created from CRT to investigate the connection between anti-immigrant discourse and the racialization of non-natives (Huber, 2011). In the context of this study, the overlap between racist nativism and CRT exposes the false narrative that depicts international students as a privileged group, financially advantaged (Viggiano et al., 2017), and justifies the extra burdens added on them (Hiraldo, 2010). As Viggiano et al. (2017) stated, international students in the community college system “were used as placeholders and subsidizers” (p.12) for domestic students and argue that the othering of international students can negatively impact their sense-of-belonging and subsequently their campus engagement. The use of the critical race theory and the racist nativism frameworks in this study allowed me to challenge the dominant discourse and to understand the social and cultural challenges facing international community college students. Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical links between critical race theory and nativism and the intersections between the two theories.

Figure 1: Theoretical links between Critical Race Theory and Racist Nativism

Conceptual Framework

The study is grounded in the Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model presented by Astin (1993), later used by Bryant (2006) to investigate the factors that contribute to the transfer success of community college students, and then by Bauer (2014) to explore the impact of living circumstances on the retention of nursing students. The I-E-O model comprises three main elements: “Inputs” refer to the cultural and educational backgrounds the students bring with them to their educational institutions; “Environment” included the campus climate and the student experiences at the community college level; “Outcomes” referred to the transfer preparedness of the students.

This model takes into consideration students' background characteristics and investigates the environmental impacts on students' experiences. It helped me seek

answers to questions such as: What is the impact of students' countries of origins, academic backgrounds and English language proficiency level on their educational experiences? What are the institutional factors that helped students transfer successfully to four-year institutions? What are the strategies used by faculty to help international students overcome their challenges?

The three components of this conceptual framework are interconnected (Bauer, 2014). Inputs are the individual traits that students bring with them to their schools — demographic characteristics, previous academic preparation, the reasons that made the students choose the colleges and the program of study (Astin, 1993). This study took into consideration the following international student attributes — previous education preparation, country of origin, English language proficiency, the expectation from the community college, cultural backgrounds, and the reasons for starting at the community college instead of a regular four-year institution.

The second component of Astin's model is the environment, which refers to the experiences of students through the course of an academic program that could impact their educational performances. In this study, the elements of the environment comprise course offerings, faculty experience in teaching diverse student populations, pedagogy, counseling, homestay experiences, campus climate, participation in student organizations, and other support services that contributed to the successful transfer success of the

participants. The goal was to evaluate the influence of the environmental experiences on the transfer success of international students without ignoring the impact of other factors.

Outcomes refer to the students' academic achievements and personal growth that can be affected by the institutional practices. They comprise persistence, attitude, and social and academic achievement after the students leave college (Astin, 1993). The primary academic outcome of my study is transfer-preparedness. Drawing from the definition of Hagedorn and Mi-Chung (2005), transfer-prepared students are those "who had accrued 64 units of credit with the grade of "C" or better plus successful completion of both transfer-level English and Mathematics as being transfer-prepared" (2005, p.17). From the perspectives of critical race theory and racist nativism, I used the I-E-O model to learn about the transfer experiences of international community college students (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Conceptual framework based in Astin (1993) I-E-O model

Summary

As the number of international students continues to grow at California community colleges, it is essential to understand the totality of their needs before and during the transfer process. International students face different academic challenges from domestic students: they go through culture adjustment issues, communication and language obstacles, and issues of integration in the American society (Trice, 2003). Moreover, their academic, cultural and transfer experiences have been understudied. This qualitative study was designed to inform practice and to help faculty, staff, and administrators

comprehend the challenges, the expectations and the needs of international community college students. Chapter two, the literature review, highlights empirical and theoretical studies on international student experiences and community college transfer. Chapter three outlines the methodology for this study. Chapters four and five discuss the themes, the findings, and recommendations for practice.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter examines four key areas of the literature relevant to the dissertation focus. First, it presents the historical background of the internationalization of U.S. community colleges. Second, it examines the experiences of international students in U.S. higher education institutions and the reasons why they decided to start at the community college level. Third, it gives an overview of the factors that impact the transfer success of all community college students. Finally, this chapter discusses the perspective of faculty on issues connected to internationalization, their perceived role in teaching international students, and their capabilities in offering an inclusive curriculum. The four sections together give an overview of the transfer process at the community college level with special emphasis on the educational experiences of international students and the perceptions of their faculty.

International Education in US Community Colleges

The literature presented in this section outlines the historical evolution of the internationalization of U.S. community colleges, and investigates issues of the implementation of internationalization policies, and its impact on the experiences of international community college students.

Community College Internationalization: Historical Background. Fitzer (2007) stated that the first time the topic of foreign student enrollment was discussed in

the literature was in 1967 by Harold Epstein, who discussed the importance of international education for U.S. higher education institutions and criticized the passive role of junior colleges in international education. Epstein (1967) mentioned that none of the international educational reports during the 1960s included the role of the junior colleges. A year later, 1968, for the first time the Institute of International education included the enrollment statistics of international community colleges student in the *Open Doors* publication (Fitzer, 2007).

The actual incorporation of international education in the community college system started in the 1970s (Fersh 1990; Fitzer, 2007). During this decade, few community colleges offered language studies, study abroad program, or faculty exchanges. In 1979 the Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies published the *Strength Through Wisdom* report (Burn & Vaught, 1980), which highlighted the country's need for a more globally competent society and proposed more than sixty-five initiatives related to international exchange, foreign language and international studies. Based on the recommendations from this report, President Jimmy Carter considered community colleges as a key player in meeting the demands of the emerging movement of globalization (Fersh, 1990).

The growing interest in international education in the 1970s and 1980s was driven by the emerging movement of globalization. Fersh (1990) asserts that during this decade foreign educators from various world regions visited U.S. community colleges to learn

more about the vocational, technological and transfer programs. At the same time, community college leaders actively started to recruit foreign students, implemented international programs, internationalized their mission statements, and established exchange programs with foreign institutions. Their primary purpose was to create a more globally competent student body, improve international trade, and create mutual understanding between nations (Raby & Valeau, 2007).

As a result, the internationalization movement of the 1980s hastened the increase of foreign student enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities. Scanlon (1990) cited that the Association of International Educators (NAFSA) surveyed all junior colleges in 1974 and reported that the number of foreign students as about 50,000, which is approximately one-third of all foreign students then enrolled in the U.S. higher education system. In 1977, NAFSA reported that the foreign student enrollment in American community and junior colleges dropped to 20,794. Scanlon (1990) claimed that the considerable drop in numbers was due to the modifications of the definition of foreign students. In 1974, the definition of foreign students included immigrants, non-immigrant visa holders, and refugees, while the 1977 definition included only non-immigrant visa holders and refugees. The same year witnessed the creation of a partnership between the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) and the Association of International Educators (NAFSA). Scanlon (1990) considered this event as a milestone in the internationalization of U.S. community colleges. Because of this partnership,

community colleges were able to benefit from NAFSA's expertise in international education.

In the 1990s, many global forces contributed to the integration of international education in the community college system. The global changes during the 1990s and the globalization of the economy challenged community colleges to redefine their missions and roles (Levin, 2001). Levin (2001) studied the effect of external forces on the educational policies of community colleges. The study presented the impact of the economic, cultural and political domains on teaching and learning in the U.S. community college system. Levin (2001) argued that the 1990s witnessed an increase in international student recruitment and the creation of partnerships with higher education institutions from various parts of the world.

To describe the evolution of community college internationalization, many studies (Butler, 2016; Jackson, 2016; Kumari, 2017) referenced the four stages identified by Raby and Valeau (2007), who argue that international education in community colleges went through four stages. During the recognition phase (1967-1984) community college leaders and policymakers recognized the need and the benefits of international education and introduced multiple initiatives to promote internationalization. Throughout the expansion phase (1980-1990) a more significant number of community colleges embraced internationalization, and many organizations provided grants and financial incentives to assist colleges in the implementation process. The augmentation phase

(1990-2000) was characterized by the introduction of new international programs and intensification of international student recruitment.

As a result, after the year 2000, community college internationalization evolved to the stage of institutionalization. During this phase, community colleges nationwide started to include internationalization in their mission statement, study abroad programs grew rapidly, and international students' enrollment became a vital service export. Also, the federal and state governments were involved in assisting American colleges and universities in building international partnerships with institutions from various parts of the world. As a result, community colleges became more popular at the international level, and in 2016/17 the number of international students enrolled in U.S. community colleges reached 96,472, which totaled about 9% of the total number of international students enrolled in the U.S. higher education system (Open Doors, 2017). Raby and Valeau (2007) argue that during this phase administrators and policymakers understood the role of the community college system in enhancing the international literacy of their students and the communities they serve.

California community colleges witnessed a similar history as the rest of the country, and many scholars documented various events as key indicators of the state's commitment to international education. In 1985, the California Colleges for International Education (CCIE) was created to encourage the expansion of intercultural understanding through education (CCIE, 2017). Currently, the consortium plays a vital role in

communicating the concerns of international educators to the state Chancellor's office. On September 11, 2002, the California International Education Policy Resolution was enacted into law (Anayah, 2012), which indicated that California leaders showed support for international education and the presence of international students in California community colleges.

Issues with the Implementation of Internationalization Policies at American Colleges and Universities. The internationalization of higher education is not a goal to be attained; instead, it is a continuing process by which colleges and universities provide their students access to global learning (Brennan & Dellow, 2013). The American Council on Education (ACE) played an essential role in establishing a framework of internationalization by publishing many scholarly papers (Engleberg & Green, 2002; Green & Shoenberg, 2006; Olson, Green, & Hill, 2006). This framework helped many higher education institutions create comprehensive internationalization strategies. As a result, colleges and universities implemented initiatives such as study abroad for underrepresented student populations, curriculum internationalization, teaching world languages, community travel programs, building a global network of partnerships with other universities and non-government organizations, and faculty exchange programs. Olson, Green, and Hill (2006) argue that the framework of internationalization helped colleges and universities create a new synergy between the different internationalization initiatives.

Along the same lines, other organizations such as the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) encouraged community colleges to create a strategic plan to promote universal understanding and to serve the needs of the students and the community (Brennan & Dellow, 2013). Both organizations emphasized the role of community college leaders in the internationalization process. Brennan and Dellow (2013) argue that senior officials at the community college level should engage faculty in curriculum internationalization and entice students to engage in international activities such as study abroad and provide international student programs with financial resources to meet the needs of international students.

Unfortunately, many studies suggest that there is a gap between the strategies and the actions taken to implement internationalization policies in many colleges and universities (ACE, 2017; Siaya and Hayward, 2003). As part of ACE report, Siaya and Hayward (2003) conducted a study to explore the commitment of educational leaders to comprehensive internationalization. Their study revealed that colleges and universities in the United States are not doing enough to internationalize their campuses and recommended the implementation of viable international student and scholar programs.

Taking the analysis one step further, Green and Siaya (2005) conducted a follow-up study specific to community colleges. In collaboration with ACE, they conducted a national survey of 233 institutions. Again, the study revealed a mismatch between the stated goal for internationalization and the available financial resources and the

educational offerings. The study also differentiated between community colleges based on their active engagement in internationalization. Green and Siaya (2005) found that highly engaged community colleges gave their faculty access to professional development, encouraged study abroad, and created platforms for intercultural learning.

In 2011, the American Council on Education conducted another survey of 239 community colleges (Brennan & Dellow, 2013). The goal was to determine critical benchmarks of community college globalization. Unfortunately, less than 25% of community college respondents stated that they have internationalization plans which were lower than the 2006 survey. The 2011 survey also found that community college presidents play a significant role in community college internationalization. Brennan and Dellow (2013) argue that community college presidents who are vested in international education are able to implement needed changes and allocate resources to internationalize their campuses

Similarly, the 2017 ACE study elucidated the prominence of the role of college presidents and senior international officers in the internationalization process. However, based on the responses of 1,164 U.S. community colleges and universities ACE raised two significant concerns. First, the majority of U.S. higher education institutions consider faculty professional development as a low priority compared with other areas of internationalization, such as international student recruitment and study abroad (ACE, 2017). Only 28% of the respondents mentioned that they offer workshops to educate

faculty about teaching in diverse classrooms and help them understand the challenges facing international students. The data highlights a gap between institutional efforts to recruit international student and faculty preparation to meet the needs of the students.

The lack of international student support services was highlighted as a concern by the 2017 ACE report. Most institutions provide orientation and help new students with housing arrangements, however, they provide minimal long-term support. For example, only 57% of respondents indicated that they have specific programs to help second language learners, which is below the 2006 level. On the other hand, the 2016 ACE survey illuminated a considerable increase in co-curricular programming with an emphasis on enabling the domestic and international student populations to engage and learn from each other.

Many community colleges are not able to provide the resources necessary to support international students because they allocated most of the resources toward international student recruitment (ACE, 2017). Brennan and Dellow (2013) argue that the issue with unsuccessful internationalization policies at some community colleges is due to the lack of knowledge at the leadership level, the absence of commitment from administrators and faculty, the lack of funding to support internationalization efforts, and the resistance of some community members to the idea of spending financial resources on initiatives that support international programs. The next section discusses the impact of internationalization policies on the experiences of international community college students.

Issues of Equity and Access for International Students. Much of the literature on international community college students defends the increase in recruitment by highlighting the financial benefits and the educational gains to domestic students (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2013). This approach was criticized by Viggiano et al. (2017) who assert that this way of thinking defeats the purpose of international education and excludes international students from the social mission of the community college system. Viggiano et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative study to explore the ways administrators rationalize the inclusion of international students at three U.S. community colleges. The study looked specifically at the ethics of the strategies used by decision makers to recruit international students, and infers that many community college leaders consider international students as a resource to improve the experiences of local students without paying much attention to the experience of international students themselves. Furthermore, the study suggested that decision-makers at the community college system labeled international students as a privileged group to justify the price discrimination so they can charge higher tuition. By doing so, community colleges deviated from their original focus of equity for all students to a focus of economic development (Viggiano et al., 2017).

Similarly, Hiraldo (2010) argues that internationalization policies provided domestic students with an opportunity to enrich their cultural skills and helped many U.S. institutions to improve the quality of education, although they also added extra challenges

and difficulties for international students. In practice, these policies reproduced inequity by disqualifying international students from equity programs and by not providing them with the proper support services. For example, international students are not eligible to apply for need-based financial aid or work-study programs, they pay higher tuition than domestic students, they have additional admission requirements, and in many cases, they do not receive student services based on their needs. The next section highlights the challenges facing international students in the U.S. higher education system.

Experiences of International Students in the U.S. Community College System

This section presents findings from recent research about the experiences of international students in the U.S. community college system and the reasons why they decided to start at the community college level. International students face many hindrances that can impact their academic success, cultural experience, and subsequently their transfer to four-year institutions. The studies in this section reveal that international students experience homesickness, cultural adjustment problems, inconsistent academic counseling, communication problems, faculty misunderstanding, and language obstacles.

Socio-Cultural Experiences. International students, regardless of their national origin, experience a complicated cultural adjustment process (Hansen, Shneyderman, McNamara & Grace, 2018). Hansen et al. (2018) evaluated the levels of culture engagement and acculturative stress in a group of international students at a large community college in New York City. They found that during the acculturation process

many international students experience alienation and marginalization, which can limit their abilities to form friendships and focus on academic work. As a result, many international students experience high levels of acculturative stress which can have a negative impact on their lifestyle and academic engagement. Also, the study revealed that some of the international students self-segregated by forming friendships with only their co-nationals or other international students, because they were not able to assimilate with local students.

The same study found that the English proficiency of international students had an impact on their cultural engagement and acculturative stress. It is harder for international students from non-English speaking countries to become immersed in the American culture. As a result, they experience a higher level of acculturative stress than native speakers (Hansen et al., 2018). Based on the findings, Hansen et al. (2018) recommend the creation of a positive campus climate and intentional support for international students from non-English speaking countries to mitigate the adverse impacts of the culture shock and improve the experience of international students.

In a similar study, Anayah (2012) conducted a qualitative study that involves international students from small, medium and large community college districts in California. The study revealed that international students had a hard time navigating the community college system and that some of the participants are stressed and expressed feelings of homesickness. The international students expressed their inabilities to make

friends with domestic students, which limit their social network to students from their home countries and other international students. The study revealed that international students experienced a lack of social support, alienation by peers, homesickness, and posited that these challenges could have an adverse effect on the academic success of international students.

Cohen (2007) conducted a study to identify the most common challenges facing international students in a U.S. community college in suburban Washington, D.C. A total of 144 international community college students and 39 faculty, staff and administrators participated in this study. The findings revealed that international students face culture adjustment issues, communication and language difficulties, stress, lack of support services, difficulties with homework, misunderstanding of faculty expectations, and struggles to integrate into the campus community. Moreover, some of the participants expressed feelings of inferiority and cases of insult from faculty and domestic students. Similar to Anayah (2012) and Hansen et al. (2018), Cohen (2007) argues that the socio-cultural experience of international students is complicated by many challenges that can have a negative impact their academic performances.

Academic Experiences. As the enrollment of international students at U.S. community colleges is increasing every year (Open Doors, 2017), it is important to understand what attracted them to the community college system. Mamiseishvili (2012) used data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study to investigate

the reasons international students choose community colleges, academic and social integration patterns, and first-to-second-year persistence trends. Mamiseishvili (2012) found that international students choose to start at the community college mainly because of the cost, the location and the academic programs offered. Similar to domestic students, the affordability and the transfer to four-year institutions were among the top reasons international students choose to start at the community college level. Also, the study found that international students prefer community colleges located in large metropolitan areas.

The same study found that international students who had positive relationships with faculty and utilized academic counseling had higher first-to-second-year persistence. Also, the study raised two concerns. First, a large proportion (39.6%) of international students never met with their academic counselors during their first-year. Second, almost half (48.3%) of international students were never involved in study groups. Mamiseishvili (2012) argues that the academic integration of international students at two year-institutions is linked to their social integration. As a result, the study suggests to proactively engage international students with their faculty and academic counselors. In addition, it encourages faculty to use cooperative learning in the classroom as a tool to engage international students academically.

Another study that looked at the experiences of international community college students was conducted at a large Texas community college. Behroozi-Bagherpour

(2010) conducted a qualitative study to understand the factors that impacted the graduation and the retention of international students at a large Texas community college. The study found that many international students are not receiving the proper guidance when they first arrive in the U.S. because of the inconsistency and the incompetence of academic counseling. Behroozi-Bagherpour (2010) asserts that the incorrect information provided by counselors resulted in students taking unnecessary courses, which can impact their retention and on-time graduation.

Since Behroozi-Bagherpour (2010) published her findings, additional research has elucidated the importance of academic counseling for international students. Zhang (2016) used validation theory to shed light on the role of academic advising in mitigating the difficulties facing international students in a Texas community college. Eleven international students from six countries volunteered to share their perspective about the role academic advising played in their academic success and social integration. The study revealed that many academic counselors are not familiar with the issues facing international students, which caused many students to feel invalidated. Conversely, academic counselors with better training and knowledge about international student needs were able to provide better assistance for this student population. Lastly, Zhang (2016) found that weak collaboration between academic counseling and other departments resulted in providing the students with inaccurate information, selecting the wrong courses and preventing them from graduating on time.

Accurate academic counseling requires knowledgeable and well-trained counselors who are sensitive and able to communicate with international students. Zhang (2015) used a qualitative phenomenological research design to understand the perspective of academic counselors and their experience in communicating with international community college students. After interviewing 20 academic counselors from a large community college in Texas, Zhang (2015) found that the change in education systems, the language barriers and the difficulties in evaluating foreign transcripts complicated the communication process between international students and their academic counselors. All the participants highlighted cultural differences as barriers that add to the complexity of the counseling process. In addition, the study revealed some of the practical strategies used by academic counselors to maximize the learning outcomes of international students. The strategies that emerged from the collected data consist of building relationships with the students, being sensitive and respectful of other cultures, being patient, and showing empathy.

Low English proficiency is another factor that can impact the academic and cultural experience of international students (Anayah, 2012; Cohen 2007; Hansen et al., 2018). Cohen (2007) identified low English proficiency as a major challenge for international students as the language barrier impacts international students' abilities to understand lectures, course materials, assignments, and examinations. Comparably, Hansen et al. (2018) found that international students from non-English speaking

countries faced greater adjustment challenges than native speakers and concluded that English language ability has a significant impact on the social and academic experiences of international students. Since the majority of international students come to the U.S. from non-English speaking countries (Open Doors, 2017), Hansen et al. (2018) suggested that additional recourses are needed to support English language learners and suggest that professors make pedagogical changes to meet the needs of this population.

Effective communication is a successful strategy used by counselors and faculty to address the needs of international students. Ith (2014) conducted a study to explore the socio-academic experience of international community college students. The study found a connection between the academic performance of international students and their sense of belonging and self-esteem. Ith (2014) argues that to be effective in teaching international students, the curriculum development has to take into consideration the multicultural learning environment. Ith (2014) studied the classroom needs of international community college students and the impact of curriculum design on their academic success. The study revealed that international students could be more successful in an academic environment that addresses their needs of belonging and self-esteem.

International students in the U.S. higher education system face learning problems, such as faculty misunderstanding, non-relevant curricula, and misconception about teaching and learning in a diverse classroom. Ith (2014) asserted that the relationship

between international students and their faculty has an impact on their learning experiences, and argues that professors often misunderstand international students due to the differences in beliefs, standards, cultures, classroom expectations and assumptions. Ith (2014) encouraged faculty to employ teaching methods that promote the integration of international students and connect some of the elements of the curriculum to their cultural backgrounds.

Faculty Perceptions of the International Student Experiences

The growth of the international student population at U.S. community colleges has generated educational opportunities and classroom challenges for many faculty members. Many studies discuss the role of curriculum internationalization in enhancing the educational experiences of domestic and international students (Cohen 2007; Hudzik, 2011; Viggiano et al., 2017). This section presents research on faculty perspectives on issues connected to internationalization, their perceived role in teaching international students, and their capabilities to offer an inclusive curriculum.

Faculty members who understand the unique challenges facing international students in the American classroom can improve their academic performances. Nguyen (2013) used semi-structured interviews to examine the experiences of faculty in working with international graduate students at a research institution. The faculty reported that they had good experiences working with international students. They highlighted the fact that the majority of international students are highly enthusiastic, and are determined to

succeed. However, they also recognized that this population has unique challenges, such as the difficulties of adjusting the U.S. education system, language barrier, and issues of communication with their faculty and peers.

Nguyen (2013) documented that the recognition of the unique needs of international students helped many faculty members in creating special measures to ensure their success. Some of the participants indicated that they adopted different approaches with international students. For example, they gave English language learners more time to understand the lab settings, and were more flexible in grading the student work. They also noted that working with international students enriched their own teaching experiences, and gave domestic students international perspectives in understanding the curriculum.

The faculty perceptions, attitudes and the method they used to help international students are similar to the findings of a study conducted by Trice (2003) who explored the perceptions of 54 faculty members from various academic department toward international graduate students at a highly ranked Midwestern research university. Most of the participants were cognizant of the differences between teaching international and domestic students. Trice (2003) documented that international students face different academic challenges from domestic students: they go through culture adjustment issues, communication and language obstacles, deal with issues of integration in the American

education system, and financial difficulties due to the high tuition cost and the laws that restrict their abilities to work in the U.S.

As a result, some faculty members indicated that they were challenged and sometimes cannot find solutions to the problems facing their students. Some of the participants relayed that they do not have the proper professional training; instead, they learned how to deal with international student issues through trial and error. They recommended support for new faculty to familiarize them with the different services on campus to supplement their teaching. In addition, Trice (2003) highlighted some of the strategies used by experienced faculty members. For example, some of the participants were very intentional about assigning international students to do group work with their domestic counterparts.

The involvement of faculty members in the implementation of the institution's international education policy can have a positive impact on their relationship with international students. Cao et al. (2014) analyzed quantitative data collected from surveying 471 faculty members in two American universities to examine the primary motivators that inspire faculty members to provide international students with the additional support necessary for their success. Cao et al. (2014) found that the attitude of professors regarding globalization impacted their actions toward international students. Faculty members who believed in the importance of internationalization invested more time and effort to help international students. In addition, the study revealed that faculty

members are more satisfied when they perceive that their efforts resulted in improving the academic performance of international students.

Choi et al. (2014) also conducted a case study to understand the faculty perspectives about internationalization activities, reasoning, predicaments, and concerns. The study participants identified the following hindrances: the gap between the mission of the institutions and the actions implemented to support internationalization, the absence of financial and logistical support of faculty members, lack of recognition of the effort exerted by faculty members, and the indifference of some administrators and staff members. Choi et al. (2014) found that the majority of faculty members appreciated the various components of campus internationalization. However, they did not agree with the ambiguity of the rationales adopted by their institutions. The faculty members in the study suggested to acknowledge their role in the internationalization process, to be more transparent about the institutional direction, and to make the internationalization process more integrative.

The positive interaction between students and their professors can have a positive impact on international students' academic success. Mok (2013) used data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) to examine the impact of international students' interactions with their professors. The study included international students enrolled at American universities and colleges from 27 states, with 12.1% from California. It revealed that international students who interacted with their instructors had

a higher GPA, gained more confidence in their abilities to succeed, and were satisfied with their academic experiences. In particular, one-on-one meetings with faculty during office hours, information about internship opportunities and academic programs were regularly connected to international student academic success and self-efficacy. Mok (2013) recommends that institutions create an educational environment that facilitates the interaction between faculty members and their international students. For example, by incentivizing faculty members to increase their availability outside the classroom, they can provide international students with career advice, help with study skills and provide emotional support.

Factors that Impact the Transfer of California Community College Students

The relevant literature on California community college transfer can be grouped into two main threads: (1) studies on student factors that influence the transfer outcome of community college students and (2) studies related to the state and community college transfer policies. Since international community college students have cultural and academic challenges specific to their situations, and my dissertation explored the impact of these interventions and others on the successful transfer of this student population.

Studies Related to Student Factors. The literature illuminated the role of student integration, academic preparedness, and familial support in the transfer success community college students. This section presents the major student factors highlighted

in the literature as contributors to the successful transfer of California community college students.

Familial support exerted a positive influence on the success of community college students. Rodriguez-Kiino (2013) explored the experience of students who successfully transferred from the California community college system to the university. All the participants in the study emphatically mentioned their family members as reliable allies in their quest to transfer and complete a baccalaureate degree. The family support varied from one student to another. Some students received guidance in regards to the community college transfer function and open access model. Other students received financial and logistical assistance from their families, which alleviated the financial stressors and helped create a healthy work-life balance.

Multiple studies have examined the correlation between academic and social integration and the transfer success of community college students (Bryant, 2006; Rodriguez-Kiino, 2013; Scuiletti, 2014). The academic and social integration of community college students has an important role in their academic success. Bryant (2006) explored the connection between student engagement and transfer readiness at three California community colleges, and examined the relationship between the students' advancement toward transfer and their engagement in campus life. The findings reveal that the level of student involvement is related to transfer preparedness. Furthermore, the focus group participants perceived their engagement in extracurricular activities,

following an apparent education plan, involvement with faculty, and peer to peer relationships as the prominent contributors to their transfer success.

Academic preparedness is another factor that can impact the transfer experience of community college students. In the literature, multiple measures were used as indicators of academic preparedness. For example, the SAT, ACT, and other college entrance exams are used as indicators of high school academic preparation (Warburton et al., 2001), and the Academic Preparation (AP) Index developed by the California Chancellor's office is used as a measure of students' preparation while studying at the community college system (Wassmer et al., 2004).

A study by Wassmer et al. (2004) explored the influence of academic preparedness on the transfer rates of community college students. The quantitative study used data from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and the National Student Clearinghouse to conduct a 3-year and 6-year transfer analysis and revealed two major findings. First, the transfer rate is different from one ethnic group to another with Latino or African American students transferring at much lower rates than other ethnic groups. Second, students who received better academic preparation while attending the community college system have a positive transfer experience. According to Wassmer et al. (2004), a 10 % increase in the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office academic preparedness index resulted in a 7.5–19.3% growth in the transfer rates. They assert that the implementation of institutional programs to prepare community college

students academically can impact the transfer experience and improve the overall transfer rates.

Wassmer et al. (2004) findings were consistent with more recent studies.

Hagedorn et al. (2008) conducted a study that involved a large sample of students from the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD). They found that academic preparation at the community college level is important for students' transfer. Students enrolled in transfer-focused programs who completed more credits at the community college level have a higher probability to transfer to four-year institutions. Overall, there is a common consensus in the literature that better academic preparation before or after entering the community college is a major contributor to the successful transfer of all community college students.

Studies Related to the State and Community College Strategies. This section presents studies that discuss the effectiveness of various institutional and state interventions in improving the academic performance and transfer success of all community college students. This section discusses the following strategies: investing in student support services, the creation of transfer-oriented academic programs, and transfer articulation agreements.

California policies toward the transfer function. California legislators and policymakers implemented multiple initiatives to emphasize the importance of the transfer mission of California community colleges. For example, the 1960 Master Plan

for Higher Education considers the transfer to four-year institutions as the primary mission of California community colleges (Crow, 2014). As a result, many California community colleges formed articulation agreements with a number of University of California (UC), California State University (CSU) campuses and private universities.

The articulation agreements contribute to the streamlining of the transfer process. Tenbergen (2010) explored the transfer process and to evaluate the impact of transfer articulation agreements on the transfer experience of California community college students. According to Tenbergen (2010), the transfer articulation agreements represent successful partnerships that help students comprehend the course-to-course transfer from their California community colleges to the four-year institutions they intend to attend. The study found that transfer articulation agreements could have a positive impact on the participants' transfer success. The articulation officials who participated in this study identified the Articulation System Stimulating Interinstitutional Student Transfer (ASSIST) as a helpful tool for academic counselors and students.

More recently, the California state legislators introduced the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act (SB 1440), which was signed into law in 2010. The goal is to make the transfer process simple for California Community college students by creating a clear pathway to the California State University system. SB 1440 intends to improve the transfer success of community college students by given student access to a streamlined associate degree for transfer (ADT). Senecal (2017) explored the difference in student

outcomes between students who declared an associate degree for transfer versus those who did not. The study revealed that declaring an associate degree for transfer was predictive of the students' abilities to complete or transfer to four-year institutions. SB 1440 is an excellent example of a state intervention that can improve the transfer outcome and equity by helping students to navigate the complexity of the transfer process (Senecal, 2017).

Similarly, Hackbarth (2016) conducted a quantitative study to identify the positive impacts of ADTs on the academic performance of community college students who transferred successfully to the California State University system. The findings revealed that community college students who benefited from SB 1440 had a higher graduation rate than those who did not take advantage of the program. Furthermore, Hackbarth (2016) found that the associate degree for transfer contributed in reducing the achievement gap and shortening the graduation time for some students. Overall, the study describes ADT as a promising tool that can improve the transfer experiences of community college students.

Institutional factors. At the institutional level, California community college presidents play an essential role in shaping the transfer mission of the college. Crow (2014) investigated the practices of 45 California community college presidents to serve the various missions outlined in the Master Plan of 1960 and their role in the transfer success of community college students. Crow (2014) reported that the majority (70%) of

California community college presidents consider transfer to four-year institutions as the number one component of the overall college mission. In addition, although the community college leaders were philosophically committed to the transfer mission, they needed to allocate more resources to improve the transfer rate of community college students.

The commitment of community college leaders to improve the upward transfer rates is contingent on the amount of support services they provide at the institutional level. Academic counseling is among the services that have a positive influence on the transfer experience of California community college students. Rodriguez-Kiino (2013) found that community college students relied heavily on the guidance and help they received from their assigned academic counselors to navigate the complexity of the transfer process. They received assistance with services such as academic program selection, education plan, and transfer applications. Rodriguez-Kiino (2013) found that early and consistent academic counseling and proper educational planning are among the most important factors that could help community college students through the transfer process.

Nationally, the financial resources available for community colleges to spend on student support services are limited. Goldrick-Rab (2010) argued that students enrolled at community colleges with more financial resources might have access to better support, which can lead to better academic success. Gross and Goldhaber (2009) used data from

the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) 1988–2000 to explore the impact of spending on student services and the successful transfer of community college students to four-year institutions. The study revealed that community colleges that spend more on student services have better transfer rates. Additionally, Gross and Goldhaber (2009) found that a higher student-to-faculty ratio has a negative impact on students' transfer to four-year institutions; smaller class sizes have better student outcomes.

The institutional commitment of community colleges and the creation of transfer-oriented programs were identified as prominent factors in the successful transfer of community college students. LaSota and Zumeta (2016) used data from the Beginning Postsecondary Study 2003–2009 to examine the impact of state policies and institutional factors on the upward transfer of community college students. The study revealed that the characteristics of the two-year institutions and student enrollment in transfer-oriented academic programs have a positive impact on the transfer rates of community college students. In other words, students who declare a pre-defined two-year academic program and attend a community college that focuses on transfer preparation have a higher chance to transfer to a four-year institution on time.

Summary

The literature review highlighted the historical background of the internationalization of U.S. community colleges, investigated issues of the implementation of internationalization policies, and examined the experiences of

international community college students. This chapter also included seminal research on faculty perspectives on issues connected to internationalization, their perceived role in teaching international students, and their capabilities to offer an inclusive curriculum. Finally, the literature review presented studies about the contributors to the upward transfer of California community college students. The four sections of this chapter informed the methodology used in my dissertation, which will be discussed in chapter three.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study explored the barriers and contributors to the successful transfer of international community college students to four-year institutions. The study was designed to create a set of recommendations to help community college leaders, faculty, and staff to comprehend the needs of international students and assist them to transfer successfully. Data consisted of interviews with faculty and focus groups of international students who have successfully transferred from two California community colleges to four-year institutions. This research was guided by the following questions:

What are the international students' perceptions of the hurdles they faced in trying to successfully transfer, and how they were able to overcome these difficulties?

What are the perceptions of faculty regarding the challenges facing international students and the adjustments that faculty adopt in the classroom to meet these challenges?

This chapter outlines the methodology for my study on the transfer experience of international students from community colleges to four-year institutions. The first section starts with the research design and the instrumentation used in the data collection process. The second section expands on my earlier discussion of my positionality and provides details about my role as a practitioner in the field of international education and my journey as an immigrant in the U.S. higher education system. The third section describes the settings where the study took place, and the characteristics of the selected sample.

The chapter ends with the data analysis section, which describes the tools used to analyze the data and addresses issues of reliability, internal and external validity.

Research Design

Qualitative research methodology allows researchers to build meaningful conclusions based on their interactions with others (Creswell, 2009), and it allowed me to explore the student experience as it relates to the research problem (Silverman, 2010). Qualitative methods specifically helped to illuminate the connections between internationalization policies, transfer preparedness and equity issues facing international students at California community colleges. With this in mind, I designed the research to include both the voice of international community college students who successfully transferred to four-year institutions and faculty from various academic areas.

I used semi-structured with open-ended questions to collect meaningful responses from the participants (Creswell, 2009). Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008) describe semi-structured interviews as “several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail” (p. 291). I mainly chose to interview four faculty members in the English, math, and counseling departments because the majority of international students at the two community colleges have to take classes in these academic areas to meet the university transfer requirements. During the interviews, I explored the perceptions of four faculty members regarding the difficulties facing

international students and the alterations they adopted in the classroom to assist this student population.

The focus groups were used to gain a deeper understanding of the needs and strategies used by international community college students at two California community colleges. Focus group research gave the students the opportunity to share their perspectives in their own words. According to Gill et al. (2008), “Focus groups are used for generating information on collective views, and the meanings that lie behind those views. They are also useful in generating a rich understanding of participants’ experiences and beliefs.” (p. 293) The combination of conducting focus groups with international community college students and interviewing faculty from the same community colleges provided a balanced and richer insight into the participants’ experiences.

Role of Researcher

Since I am an employee of the district where the study was conducted, I had access to a large network of international students, faculty, staff, and records that assisted me to identify suitable participants for my study. Some of the participants were my colleagues or students in my program, and the rest were purposely recruited by the international program staff at HTC. I have positive relationships with the students; I interacted with many of them on a regular basis to assist them with basic international student services. Similarly, I knew some of the faculty participants from college-wide

events and through other colleagues. I was mindful of the fact that my relationship with some of the participants may have affected the way they respond to some of the questions. Therefore, I took all the necessary measures to minimize my own biases and to ensure the validity and the reliability of the research process. I had honest conversations with all the participants about the goals of my study and the significance of their honest inputs in assisting future international students.

As the director of the international program at STC, I have a clear understanding of the importance of upward transfer for the international students in my program. More than 90% of the international students at STC and HTC choose transfer as their educational goal. I have found that many of the students successfully transfer to top U.S. universities within two years, while others struggle to achieve their transfer goals. The purpose of my research is to understand the needs of this population so that I can provide them with the support necessary for their success. I felt that explaining the goal of my research to the students and faculty helped the participants understand the value of their participation and responses for future international students.

As an immigrant, first-generation college student, and English language learner who experienced many of the challenges facing international students and chose to become a practitioner in the field of international education, I am aware of issues related to power inequities in schools and the society as a whole and more importantly to be critical of my role as an international educator. I believe that educational policies must

address the needs of our diverse student populations, including those who are marginalized and othered, by establishing educational environments and campus standards that encourage the active engagement of all students regardless of their backgrounds.

Site and Participant Selection

This study took place at two medium-size California community colleges from the same district; Silver Top College (STC) and Hill Top College (HTC) (pseudonyms). Silver Top College enrolls approximately 10,000 domestic students and 300 international students. In contrast, Hill Top College enrolls 9,000 local students and about 800 international students. Despite the fact that both colleges belong to the same district, their international student populations differ in size and nationalities, and the campuses have different cultures. The site selection was based on purposive sampling on the following criteria: incorporating international education into their strategic plans and explicitly highlight the increase of upward transfer as an institutional goal. Also, as the manager of the international student program at one of the colleges, I want to utilize the findings from this study to improve the transfer experience of international students in my program.

STC and HTC's commitment to increasing their international student populations is in alignment with the district strategic plan. The recruitment of international students is centralized at the district office, though the two colleges are also involved in the

recruitment process. Each college includes an international education center to service the needs of international students. The consolidation of some of the functions at the district level provides international student at STC and HTC with access to similar support services and transfer partnerships.

Faculty Selection. A total of four faculty members from a total of three academic areas participated in this study. I contacted administrators, faculty and staff from different departments at the two campuses by email, phone and face-to-face. My main goal was to identify experienced faculty who worked with international students for more than three years. I received recommendations from colleagues at the learning centers, the research office at STC, the program director at HTC and some of the academic deans. Out of 11 suggested faculty members, I chose four faculty members from the following academic areas: English, math, and counseling.

The faculty members were also selected because they were involved in various international education activities, had experience working with international students, and taught courses with high international student enrollment. Also, I selected the academic areas because every single international student seeking to transfer to four-year institutions has to interact with faculty from the English, Math and counseling divisions (Table 3). During the interviews, the faculty responded to issues raised during the focus groups with international students, and highlighted more challenges and gave recommendations based on their experiences with successful international students.

Table 3: Profile of Faculty Participants

College	Pseudonyms	Academic Area	Experience with International Students (years)	Interview duration
STC Faculty	Linda	English	5	49 minutes
	Brian	Math	17	40 minutes
HTC Faculty	Carol	Counseling	3	60 minutes
	Marry	Math	5	51 minutes

Student Selection. As the manager of the international student program at STC, I accessed the international student transfer records, which comprised names, country of origin, contact information, transfer-out semester, and transfer institutions. I then contacted the students via phone and email to ask if they were willing to be part of the study. I used my knowledge of the international student population and the internationalization policies of both colleges to choose a representative sample that serves the purpose of the research. To ensure that the sample was representative of the total international student population, I intentionally selected students based on their country of origin, gender, transfer destination, and English proficiency. A similar strategy was employed by the persons that helped me at HTC.

After the students confirmed their willingness to participate in the study, I confirmed the focus group dates and times with all participants. Between the two colleges, 24 international students from 14 different countries joined the study. The

sample included 13 students from STC and 11 from HTC who received admission from four-year institutions at the end of the spring 2017 semester. To give enough time for the focus group participants to voice their concerns, I chose to keep the number of international students in each focus group between 5 and 7.

The ability to receive admission from a four-year institution was the main eligibility criteria for the focus group participants. Also, the majority of the selected students finished more than 60 transferable units at STC or HTC and completed English composition and college level math courses. For the study to include students with different academic capabilities, I arranged the focus group participants based on their transfer destinations: the first set included students who received admissions from highly selective universities, the second set comprised students admitted to less selective four-year institutions (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4: Focus Group Participants Who Transferred to Highly Selective Schools

College	Duration at CC	Gender	Country of Origin	Received Acceptance to
Focus Group 1 STC	2	Female	Malaysia	UC Berkeley
	2	Female	Malaysia	UC Berkeley
	2	Male	Malaysia	UC Berkeley
	2	Male	China	UC Berkeley
	3	Female	Brazil	UC Berkeley
	2	Female	United Kingdom	UC Berkeley
	3	Female	Hong Kong	UC Davis

Focus Group 2 at HTC	2	Male	China	UC Davis
	2.5	Male	China	UC Irvine
	2	Male	Malaysia	IUPUI
	2	Male	Malaysia	UC San Diego
	3	Female	Hong Kong	UC Berkeley

Table 5: Focus Group Participants Who Transferred to Less Selective Schools

College	Student Code	Gender	Country of Origin of Students	Received Acceptance to
Focus Group 3 at STC	2.5	Female	China	San Francisco State University
	2.5	Female	China	San Francisco State University
	3	Male	Poland	San Jose State University
	2.5	Male	Egypt	San Francisco State University
	2.5	Male	Saudi Arabia	San Francisco State University
	2	Male	Colombia	University of Central Orlando
Focus Group 4 at HTC	2.5	Female	Myanmar	San Francisco State University
	2	Male	Sweden	Amherst College
	2.5	Male	Nepal	San Jose State University
	2	Female	Malaysia	University of Pittsburgh
	3	Female	Nepal	CSU East Bay
	3	Male	Nepal	San Francisco State University

Ethics and Protection of Human Subjects

I started the data collection process after I received the approval for my IRB protocol by the Human and Animal Subjects Committee of SFSU. I spoke with the

participants about the goals of my research before the focus groups and the interviews, and I assured them about the confidentiality of the whole process. All participants had ample time to review and sign the consent forms. All research data was stored in a password protected file, and encrypted for my access only. In alignment with SFSU policies, the transcribed data will be destroyed after three years, and the de-identified data will be retained indefinitely.

Throughout the interviews and the focus groups, all the participants were treated with respect and dignity. This study involved adults of 18 years or older and did not involve sensitive topics. Also, to make sure I had a clear understanding of the participants' perceptions, I used various member checking methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define this procedure as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). I shared some of the unclear comments with the focus group participants for clarifications, and I shared my interpretations with two of the faculty participants and took notes on their feedback. For instance, one of the faculty members clarified her comment about plagiarism, by stating that she does not want to leave an impression that only international students plagiarize, as she has had similar experiences with domestic students. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), this process allows the study participants to make corrections, which adds to the credibility of the qualitative research.

Instrumentation

The instruments in this study consisted of semi-structured interviews and focus groups. To collect the data, I relied on questions previously used by Anayah (2012) to investigate international student needs at various California community colleges and by Cohen (2007) to explore the faculty perspectives on the support services needed for the academic success of local international students (Appendix A). Since I was looking specifically at the transfer experiences of international students, I had to modify some of the questions to make them relevant to my study (Appendix A). For both instruments, I used question banks to facilitate the discussions, which allowed me to structure and organize my ideas according to the research agenda, though I did ask follow up questions and clarifications when needed (Gill et al., 2008).

The question bank for faculty interviews was shaped by some of the issues that came up during the international student focus groups. For instance, after some of the students criticized the quality of counseling during the focus groups, I incorporated a few questions in my interview with Carol about the type of professional development counselors receive, the counseling process, and the structure of the counseling department at HTC. Carol's responses allowed me to understand why the student participants had both negative and positive experiences with the counseling departments.

The interviews and the focus groups took place at two California community colleges after the end the spring 2017 semester. I was the only person who collected and

examined the data. I piloted the instrument with two small groups of students and one faculty member. As a result, I found that some of the questions were not clear and could not be used to answer the main research questions of the study. This process allowed me to evaluate the questions and to eliminate the unnecessary ones (Gill et al., 2008).

Data Analysis

I applied some of the coding techniques suggested by Saldaña (2015), elements of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), and discourse analysis (Gee, 2010). By conducting focus groups with international students and interviews with faculty, I collected informative stories from two different perspectives. International students and faculty had a space to voice their perceptions about the academic and socio-cultural factors that impede or assist international students to transfer successfully to four-year institutions.

While I utilized software to transcribe all the data, I had to go back and make corrections and transcribe the inaudible parts of the recordings. I analyzed all the transcriptions of the focus groups and the interviews. During this process, I was cognizant that words could have opposing significance in different contexts (Gee, 2010). As a result, I did go back and listen to the recordings multiple times to avoid any misinterpretations of the topics that arose during the data collection process. In addition, I referred to the notes that I took during the interviews and focus groups. These notes allowed me to capture comments, ideas and reflections about some of the discussed topics.

Once the above process was complete for all focus groups and interviews, I uploaded the data memos, the field notes and the corrected data transcripts to NVivo software, which helped me in the coding process. As Saldaña (2015) states, "the purposes of analytic memo writing are to document and reflect on: your coding processes and code choices; how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts in your data - all possibly leading toward theory" (p. 44). NVivo enabled me to add notes, clarifications and make connections between the participants and the themes that emerged from the data.

NVivo allowed me to do multiple rounds of coding, to group the different codes in categories, to highlight new trends and themes (Saldaña, 2015). The main coding method used in the data analysis was descriptive coding. This method was used to identify the discussed topics and to summarize significant ideas in a word or short statement (Saldaña, 2015). In-vivo coding, also known as "verbatim coding," refers to the use of the exact language used by the participants to highlight important passages related to the research agenda (Saldaña, 2015). I used this coding method when I felt that the words or the statements on the transcriptions provide a good description of the discussed topic. Descriptive and in-vivo coding techniques allowed me to arrange the data in patterns, categories, and to arrive at the following themes: challenges, student strategies and skills, and sense of belonging.

Summary

This chapter discussed the details of the methodology used in this study. I used a combination of four focus groups with international community college students who successfully transferred to four-year institutions and interviews with four faculty members from various academic areas. This approach provided insight into international students' experiences, and the narratives gained from this study provided a lens to critically revisit the literature on community college internationalization, international student experiences, and transfer preparedness. The next chapter will present the findings from the focus groups and the interviews.

Chapter Four: Findings

Applying the Input-Environment-Outcome framework (Astin, 1993) to investigate the contributors to the transfer success of international students, three key themes emerged: 1) “challenges and dissatisfactions” highlights the difficulties that faced international students at two California community colleges 2) “skills and strategies to overcome challenges” focuses on the strategies used by international students and their abilities to overcome the difficulties of the transfer process and 3) “sense of belonging” relates to the campus climate and the student experiences at the community colleges. Taken together, the three themes show that the students’ background characteristics (“Inputs”) and the campus climate (“Environment”) have both positive and negative impacts on the transfer preparedness (“Outcome”) of community college students (Figure 3).

This chapter highlights the stories of 24 international students from the first day they entered two California community colleges until the day they successfully transferred to four-year institutions. The students identified the challenges and the dissatisfactions with some of the support services, the strategies they used to overcome these challenges, and the support services that assisted them during their transfer experiences. I present the analysis based on the common responses collected from the participants. When necessary, I include evidence from the focus groups and the faculty interviews and address the student participants with identifying characteristics relevant to

the context of the discussion. For the second group of participants, I interviewed four faculty members: Carol, counseling faculty at HTC; Mary, math professor at HTC; Linda, ESL professor at STC; and Brian, a math professor at HTC. I described the faculty participants by the pseudonyms in chapter three.

Figure 3: Summary of findings based on Astin’s (1993) I-E-O model

Theme 1: Challenges and Dissatisfactions

This section presents findings related to the first research question. The participants answered questions about the major challenges that faced international

students at two California community colleges. They discussed the academic, personal, institutional, social, cultural and legal challenges. The impact of these difficulties varied based on various students' attributes, such as previous education preparation, country of origin, English language proficiency, their expectations from the community college, and their cultural backgrounds. Also, some of the students shared their dissatisfactions with some of the support services (Figure 4)

Figure 4: Challenges and dissatisfactions

Socio-cultural Issues. The structure and the demographics of STC and HTC

made it harder for international students to develop a social life. As both are commuter campuses, and the majority of the domestic students have families or work engagements outside the school, many of the international students did not connect with their domestic counterparts. One of the Chinese students described the STC campus as "always empty," which made it harder for him to know American students. As a result, most of his friends are Chinese. Also, the student was more comfortable with other international students and wasn't able to fit in despite his desire to engage with domestic students. When asked if he made American friends, he stated "most of my friends are from Southeast Asia. I do not have many American friends...I find it hard to join them...whenever I join them it feels like I am left out of the group, so I do not feel like I was appreciated at that time."

The inability to form friends contributed to the alienation and the homesickness that many of the participants experienced. One of the students who was admitted to San Francisco State University felt that the lack of a good social life at STC affected her academic performance. She was not able to concentrate during class, and some days she did not have the energy to go to college. As a result, she did not reach her academic goal of transferring to UC Berkeley. She stated, "I just miss the familiarity of everything, you do not know what to do, where to go if you want something...or if you are in trouble, whom to speak with." In general, all the focus group participants experienced homesickness at some point. They all agreed that homesickness and alienation could result in serious academic, psychological, and social problems.

The international students in all focus groups had to contend with cultural challenges, and were overwhelmed with the new expectations of the American culture and the changes in the social and educational systems. Studying at HTC and STC was the first study abroad experience for the majority of the focus group participants. They discussed the impact of their unfamiliarity with the American cultures on their social interactions with others and their daily life. For example, a student from HTC stated, "It is a real embarrassment sometimes when you did not know the American culture ...during the election ... I just tried to talk with someone, to open a topic ... I asked oh who did you vote for ... they said it is a personal question." The student felt that he could have the same conversation with somebody from his home country with no problem. However, because of the cultural differences, he was perceived as an aggressive person. Similarly, a student from Colombia in focus group three mentioned that he was overly self-conscious because he was afraid to offend others.

P.C. society or what they call politically correct, that was a bit annoying because in Colombia there is no censorship because our history is different... in Colombia, all the races mingle and there's no hatred towards particular kind of people, while here they have different history... when I came here, I have a bit of a shock because I am used to speaking freely no censorship... here I feel like everything you say has to be judged or politically correct.

Also, the acculturation process impacted the participants differently. Adjusting to the American culture was harder on certain nationalities than others. For example, the student from the United Kingdom mentioned that she adjusted quickly to the campus life and to living in the United States. In contrast, the students from Malaysia in all focus groups

experienced a huge culture shock. A Malaysian student from focus group two stated, “I do experience some difficulties adapting to the environment...the food for instance, in Malaysia I can just eat everywhere, here I have to look specifically for halal food because I am a Muslim... not easy to find.” The student also mentioned that he had a hard time finding a place to practice his daily prayers on or off-campus. This was stressful for him because he had to exert extra efforts on a daily basis just to take care of his basic needs.

Some of the participants indicated that professors sometimes ignored the cultural variations in the classroom and excluded them from discussions and made the course contents hard to grasp. A student from HTC stated that “some instructors give examples from some TV shows or some public figure that I never heard of...so it is hard for me to understand their concepts...I need to find another example that I am familiar with.” According to her, this teaching style engaged domestic students in the discussion and completely excluded international students. In a multi-cultural classroom, narrowing the course content just to the American experience was described as unfair by many of the focus group participants.

Academic Challenges

Restrictive visa regulations. International students are studying in the U.S. on an F-1 or J-1 visa and pursue a "full course of study" to achieve a specific academic program at an institution certified by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. According to the U.S. government regulations, F-1 visa holders have to be enrolled full-time during their

stay and return to their home countries after graduation (Open Doors, 2017). All focus group participants are F-1 visa holders and must abide by the F-1 visa regulations. Noncompliance will result in visa termination, and the students have to leave the country. To comply with the full-time requirement, some students had to register for courses they do not need. For example, one of the students from focus group four stated, "... my major is in health, but I am now studying accounting because I had to complete twelve credits."

International students have to start and complete 12 units during the same semester and cannot drop their classes even if they are failing. Carol, counseling faculty at HTC, stated: "there are times where students will come in and want to drop a class because they are not doing well and they want to protect their GPA which makes complete sense but they cannot because of their visa requirements." In this situation, international students have two choices; they drop the class and reapply for visa reinstatement, which is a very complicated process, or they get an F grade, which will impact their ability to transfer to selective four-year institutions. In this case, this F-1 visa regulation adds an extra burden and stress on international students and puts them at a disadvantage compared to domestic students.

The F1 visa status imposes many restrictions on international students. For example, students have to get a signature from a designated school official every time they want to travel outside the U.S., they cannot work outside the college they attend without authorization or apply to certain internships, and they do not qualify for most

scholarships. Many of the focus group participants expressed their frustration with these limitations such as a student from Poland:

The most difficult things for me was actually this feeling that it has never been my home in a way, and I think the whole paperwork, visa status, immigration issues...it's not very difficult, but I know that am not recognized the same way as U.S. citizens. However, you know no matter how long I am here, it is always gonna be a travel signature or something...which is not a big thing, but it is a feeling that you are not really... you are not completely free... you are tied down by something.

Limited Course offerings. New international students at STC and HTC are required to report to the international education center one week before the start of their first semester. As soon as they arrive, they do orientation, placement test, and course registration. The participants in all focus groups discussed the limited availability of courses during their first semesters. Some of them took unnecessary courses in subjects outside of their interests just to meet the F-1 visa full-time requirements. A student from HTC stated that "it is challenging for me once I got here, I have some problem with my registration, I do not know why... I cannot register for the classes that I want...everything on the waitlist." Similarly, a student from Nepal stated that during her first semester at HTC, she arrived late because her visa interview was delayed. In the process, the international education center registered her for whatever available courses. She ended up taking a Spanish course and an ESL course below her level. She said that "if I had met the counselor before they registered me for classes, it would've really helped me because the counselor could select the subjects that are required for my

major.” She mentioned that it is not fair for the college to waste her time and charge her out-of-state tuition for unnecessary courses.

Also, some of the participants spoke about the impact of course cancellation and availability on their transfer. For example, one student had to take his biology courses at another community college because he was not able to find a seat. Another student stated:

My counselor suggested to take a history course in summer... I searched for History 200, and then, it was not- it was not available at the summer. Okay. So, how about fall? It was not available in fall. So I am like, what happened? There is no history 200; I found out that there's no professor to teach the class anymore... there is a lot of uncertainty.

The F-1 visa status limits the number of online courses an international student can take per semester. However, a few students stated that some of the courses are only offered online, which was a problem for them. Many of the students are not used to the online form of teaching and learning and felt that online courses are harder for them. A student from focus group three stated:

My major was computer science ... over the past two years all my major classes; all my programming classes are all online...the biggest problem for me HTC does not offer computer science in-person... they are all online classes. Oh! That is no good because computer science is my major and ... I can say it is terrible because that is my major. Yeah, I do not want to think that my major courses are online... I can; I can do that in China I do not have to come here.

Language difficulties. The majority of international students at both HTC and STC come from non-English speaking countries, which is reflective of the national trend (Open doors, 2017). Similarly, the majority of the participants in both focus groups were English language learners from 11 different countries with different histories of learning

English. For example, the students from Malaysia, Nepal, Burma, Poland, Egypt, and Sweden studied English as the primary language of instruction in high school in their home countries. In contrast, the majority of the students from Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, and China attended intensive English schools in the U.S. or their home countries. Although all the focus group participants had some English preparation before they started at STC and HTC, they all faced language-related difficulties that impacted their social and academic experiences.

The students' cultural and educational backgrounds also had an impact on their English proficiency. The student from Sweden mentioned that English was mandatory between first and 11th grade. He also mentioned that his family background and his previous study abroad experience in the U.S. improved his language and communication skills. He stated that "most of my English probably comes from reading, watching TV shows, playing video games. However, my strength in English definitely comes from the fact that I had lived in the U.S. for a year before I started here (HTC)." On the other hand, a student from Nepal stated that despite the fact that she studied English during high school, it was difficult for her to comprehend lectures and felt it was hard for Americans to understand her. When asked if the English courses she took during high school were helpful or not, she replied:

As the American has difficulty learning Spanish, Chinese and other languages, it is the same thing in Nepal, we were learning English as our second language, and then nobody would care for using it...it is easier to use our native language.

The same student expressed her disappointment with the placement test result. Both HTC and STC require all new international students to take two placement tests to place students in ESL (remedial English courses), English and Math. The focus group and the faculty participants raised multiple issues with the placement test process and the accuracy of the results. Many of the students were disappointed with the placement process. One student from Nepal stated that despite the fact that he had a high score in ACT and TOEFL, he was required to take the placement test at HTC and based on the results he was placed two levels below English composition. When asked about the reason for his low placement, he stated that he was not aware of the importance of the placement test results. Also, he took the test during his first week in the U.S. and the second day of orientation. At the time, he did not have housing, and he was staying with his friend. He felt that the timing of the placement test was inconvenient and that the results did not reflect his real performance. He stated that "the thing that I did not like about the placement ... I was placed in the ESL 555 (two levels below English composition), and then many friends of mine were placed in English 100, and that is the worst experience I ever had."

Similarly, the majority of the students from Saudi Arabia, China, and Hong Kong agreed that the writing and speaking expectations of the majority of the courses were very challenging, especially during the first and second semesters. One of the Chinese students mentioned that he had to withdraw from a history course during his first semester because

he could not keep up with the writing assignments. Another Chinese student stated that his public speaking professor at STC asked him to drop the course and retake it after the completion of English composition. The public speaking course has no pre-requisite; however, the professor recommended this course because he was struggling with comprehension and needed to improve his listening and speaking skills before retaking the course.

Differences between education systems. All student participants indicated difficulties in understanding the U.S. education system during their first semester. Most students come from countries where the courses were structured and planned for them before they started. For example, a Chinese student stated that the course sequence in his country was determined by the ministry of higher education. He was confused when his STC counselor asked him to choose between multiple courses from different general education areas. Similarly, a student from Malaysia stated that he was confused when his friend with the same major had a different education plan. The flexibility of the U.S. education system was confusing and in some cases resulted in students failing or taking unnecessary courses. For example, a Nepalese student stated that he chose a history course that required a level of writing above his abilities, which he could have avoided if he had chosen a different course to satisfy the same requirement.

International students come from different education systems, and most of them are not familiar with the structure and the requirements of American academic programs.

One of the Chinese students stated that in China students only take courses related to their major and their pre-requisites. Since he is a business major, he was shocked when the counselor asked him to take biology and geography. He thought the counselor made a mistake, so he went to another counselor just to get confirmation.

Inconsistent Academic Counseling. Until recently, both STC and HTC did not have academic counselors designated to help international students. Therefore, many of the participants spoke about their experiences with general academic counselors. Many of the focus group participants mentioned that they had issues with the quality of academic counseling. Some students complained that they did not get accurate transfer information. For example, the student from the United Kingdom felt that her dream to transfer to Stanford was shattered because of a counseling mistake.

I have not really had a great experience with the counselors a lot of them do not really have all the data ...I was going to apply to Stanford, and every counselor told me I did not need the SAT until it was too late for me to apply and get the SAT because Stanford told me that they would not even look at my application without it.

Besides the misleading transfer information, some students felt that their counselors were not knowledgeable about their majors. A student from HTC mentioned that his engineering professor corrected his education plan because his counselor suggested a few completely irrelevant courses for his future transfer. The student suggested matching international students with "counselors who are more proficient in the major." He thought that meeting with counselors who are specialized in certain academic areas would be

more beneficial to international students. Similarly, a student from STC stated that his transfer to UC Berkeley was delayed because his counselor suggested non-transferrable courses. He was disappointed and felt the counselor's mistake wasted his time and money.

When I first came to STC, I had no idea how college works and what I needed to do ... the Transfer Center kind of screwed me over because I went in there and I was like I want to be here for two years, and I want to transfer to UC Berkeley, and the counselor who was helping me she signed me up for 12 units and six of them were not transferable.

A student from focus group one was confused because she received conflicting information from her counselors. She had to do her own research, and contacted UCLA and relied on her friends for advice.

I wanted to TAG Davis, but the only reason I was able to because my friend had already done it and she knew how to do it ... I had a counselor tell me that I did not need to take a class that was on the ASSIST which was a requirement for UCLA because we did not have the class here at STC ... he said if it is not taught at STC you do not need to take it just state on your application that it was not taught here, but then I met with another counselor, and she said no no if it is taught at another college you need to take it ... it was too late.

Many of the participants felt that their academic counselors were pushing them to transfer to UCs or CSUs, which were not relevant to their academic goals. A student from HTC had to rely on himself and his friends to collect information about the transfer to Amherst College, an out-of-state private four-year institution. He stated that "some counselors are very, very focused on the TAG and the UC applications...I did not need it for where I was transferring." Time limitation and counselors' availability were also criticized by

many of the focus group participants. A student from HTC stated that the "counseling sessions are only thirty minutes, and then, it is really hard to schedule an appointment because it is totally busy throughout the semester."

Personal Challenges

Family Pressure. International students and their families see the community college as an alternative pathway to a U.S. higher education degree. The students are expected to learn a new culture, navigate a new education system, get used to their living arrangement, succeed academically, and meet the transfer requirements in two years. A student from STC stated that getting a degree from UC Berkeley was her family dream. He commented, "I am glad it is over...I was stressed all the time... I took six semesters on the roll...I didn't take a break since I started." The other element that added tremendous pressure on the focus group participants is the family's financial engagement to pay for their schooling while studying in the U.S. Some students had to reduce their spending, pick up on campus jobs, and felt that they had to pass every single course, so they do not incur more expenses. A student from HTC stated that "it is really so expensive compared to my home country ... I am trying to help... I work on campus so I am trying to save as much as I can and pay what I have to pay here, but that is not enough to cover even one month's rent, so I know I am like a pretty heavy financial burden to my family."

Financial Challenges. Although all the focus participants received a precise estimate of the cost of living and tuition before their admissions to STC and HTC, many of them discussed the stress they go through because of the financial challenge. The participants were able to finance their studies through scholarships or loans from their home countries, parents' income, and/or family savings. Almost all of them had limited financial resources and considered the cost of their education as a substantial financial engagement for their families. One of the students stated that "the most difficult thing for me to achieve is the financial problem ... because my mom was paying ... I am spending almost all of her money to study here ... during the semester there was a time she could not work, and I was thinking about giving up school." This quote highlights the anxiety the student went through because of an unexpected incident that impacted her family's financial situation. Despite the fact that she continued the semester, the stress of the situation had an adverse impact on her academic focus and almost ended her U.S. higher education experience.

Other than paying for tuition and books, international students have to pay for health insurance, housing, transportation and other expenses. Since both HTC and STC do not have on-campus accommodation, international students have to arrange their housing immediately after they arrive in the United States. Due to the financial pressure of the high cost of living, some international students take the minimum required units by law (12 units per semester) which costs on average \$7000 per year. As a result, they

cannot finish the transfer requirements on time. A student from focus group one stated: "I know some students here they really struggle on the financial issue ... they try to take a minimum amount of classes so that they do not have to pay a lot." The financial situation gets more challenging as the cost of the tuition increases when they transfer to a four-year institution. A student who transferred to UC Berkeley summarized the financial challenges that international students confront from the day they start until the day they transfer.

All of our savings are gone because of the pricing for rent, so yeah! Money, financial issues are definitely my biggest problem, it impacted my life, you know I cannot go out with my friends bowling because I have to save every cent... and now with the admission to Berkeley with forty-five thousand dollars, I will not be able to eat you know... how am I supposed to pay! That is my only issue it is hugely expensive out here; it is pretty crazy ... other than the tuition ... the cost of living is ridiculously expensive.

Issues with health insurance coverage. STC and HTC require all international students to purchase health insurance through them. Both colleges use a third party insurance provider to offer essential healthcare coverage for all international students. The majority of the focus group participants were disappointed with the way both colleges handle their healthcare needs. Some of the students mentioned that they did not receive the proper orientation on how to use their health insurance. As a result, many of the students misused it. Some of them end up with high medical bills. A student from China spoke about her experience with the health care system:

In China, if you are sick, you just go to the hospital and see a doctor and get the medicine you need. Here it is a little bit difficult; maybe I am not getting used to

it. You need to see a nurse first, and if it is a regular problem they can give you a simple medicine ... If they cannot solve it they will refer you to Urgent Care or family doctor, and if the family doctor cannot treat you, they send you to a specialist, and then you see a specialist... how do you learn all this?!

Students criticized the health insurance provider and the coverage they are receiving.

They felt that their insurance provider has a limited network of doctors and most of them were not accepting patients.

Challenges: Faculty Perspectives

This section presents the perspectives of the four faculty members regarding the difficulties facing international students at STC and HTC — language difficulties, differences in educational and cultural environment, and family expectations.

Language Difficulties. The four faculty members gave examples of cases where students struggled in class merely because of their low English proficiency. Mary, the math professor at HTC, stated, “I feel oftentimes... the students are frustrated because they might know how to do it in their language or they have already taken similar math courses ...but have to try and figure out what the English is asking them to do”.

However, she does not think that English proficiency is a barrier for students to learn math. She stated that for the most part students figure out a way to overcome the language challenge on their own because "much of the math is symbolic they know how to add...they know how to multiply...they know how to do calculus the hard part comes when there are word problems.” Similarly, Carol, the counseling faculty at HTC, indicated that low English proficiency is a major challenge for many international

students, it impacts their communication abilities, their comprehension and can have a negative impact on their academic performance. She shared her experience with an international student who struggled in her classes because of her low level of English proficiency:

The student was not confident in her ability to communicate...she was a drama major, and so she wanted to study acting ... imagine somebody who wants to do acting coming in and not being able to communicate; it was so frustrating and so difficult.

Brian, the math professor at STC, voiced similar concerns. He stated that almost every semester he had few international students dropping his courses or failing because they did not have the language skills to understand the course materials. Despite the fact that math is a technical course with minimal verbiage, he thinks that students have "to be good enough in English so they (international students) can reformulate difficult and conceptually deep ideas into English." At the same time, he mentioned that he had received overqualified students in some of his courses. He stated that "I joke with them; I say...you need another ESL class this is perfect; this is just your second ESL class." He also mentioned that many of his colleagues at the math department at STC sometimes move the students to a higher level of math during the semester. He explained the mismatch in course placement by the low English proficiency of some of the students and their inability to understand the placement test questions. He commented, "I get students that are way underprepared just as often as way over prepared, I think that there's a mismatch in the placement ...and I think the language is part of that."

In addition to the low English proficiency, Linda believed that there are other factors that impacted international students' abilities to communicate effectively and comprehend the course material. She stated that "it is not just about the language it is also about the pragmatics, like how you express yourself is different from one culture to another." As part of the language acquisition process, international students have to learn the semantics of words and the proper ways of using language in social situations. She gave an example of an international student who offended other students by interrupting them and being very direct in her peer review remarks. She had to intervene and educate her students about the proper ways to communicate in the classroom.

Differences in cultural and education environment.

Carol - counseling faculty at HTC: The way that our educational system is set up in the U.S. is pretty different from the way most other countries do it, the idea of general education courses is a challenging one. Sometimes because students come in they are like well I am a science major and why do I need to take these art classes and these social science classes how is that relevant to me?

Carol highlights the confusion of international students with some of the general education requirements. She helps students to select their general education courses based on their interests and transfer goals. The general education requirements allow students to take courses in various academic disciplines to enrich their knowledge of science, humanity, languages, and cultures. Based on her experience as a counselor, Carol thinks that the majority of international students come from countries that do not require general

education courses at the university level. Therefore, she understands their confusions and takes the time to explain the differences between education systems to her advisee.

Also, the curriculum and course content are different from one education system to another. Brian stated that "the way we write mathematics is different from anything they (international students) learned ... they do not have that (cultural) capital... even though they know a lot of math already this is just different." In addition to the course content, international students have to understand the differences in instructional methods, curriculum, testing procedures and classroom' expectations. Brian indicated that many international students are not knowledgeable about the American education system, which puts them at a disadvantage compare to their domestic counterparts.

Carol highlights the complexity of the transfer process for international students. Despite the fact that HTC and STC both have transfer centers and counselor specialized in transfer advising, the students are expected to do most of the research. The academic counselors are usually well-versed when it comes to the UC and CSU systems, however, they do not have the time and resources to give students the latest information about each private or out-of-state university they want to attend. The transfer requirements for each university are different, which makes the process challenging for international students and their counselors.

Carol, Counseling faculty HTC: Navigating the bureaucracy of transfer is really difficult, meeting deadlines, different websites, different logins, different requirements...at least the UCs and CSUs each have their own applications, but the private schools and out-of-state schools which a fair number of international

students apply too, they have their own deadlines their own essay questions some of them requires a letter of recommendation others do not...

Also, the faculty participants acknowledged the impact of the cultural change on their students. Brian stated, "I think culturally when you are away from what you are used to, you are away from your family, and most of your friends. You can feel very alone and not feel comfortable reaching out to somebody." It was hard for some of his international students to ask questions; he had to be intentional to get them to ask for help. He thinks that the relationship between students and their professors is different from one culture to another.

Family expectations

Carol, Counseling faculty HTC: In general there's so much pressure from families at home to have very specific majors to only transfer to specific schools, I mean probably half of the students that we end up seeing in their first semester when we do Ed plans for them are going into engineering or computer science and only want to transfer to UC Berkeley or UCLA.

The above quote highlights the amount of pressure international students endure due to their families' expectations. The other faculty participants underlined the same issue and indicated the amount of stress and inconvenience it causes students. This pressure can have a negative impact on the students' physical and psychological well-being. Also, some of the families expect their children to study popular academic programs instead of the major they prefer. Linda commented, "I have a student who's interested in Art but his parents want him to study engineering ... however, he is not interested in engineering but can't work that out with their parents." She felt that the student was stressed and

struggling academically because of the pressure his family put on him.

In addition, the faculty participants discussed the stress many international students endure because of their financial obligations. Brian indicated that the high cost of living had placed huge pressure on some of his international students — "some international students are financially burdened because it is so expensive, and yes they might have had a grantor or a sponsor, but still they feel that financial hit." He thought that the financial stress can impact students' concentration in the classroom, and their academic engagement. Carol gave examples of students got dropped from their classes because they were not able to pay their tuitions.

Theme 2: Students' Skills and Strategies to Overcome Challenges

All focus group participants were asked about the contributors to their transfer success. In acknowledging the difficulties they faced, the students remained clear about their determination to overcome the challenges and transfer to the university. This theme originated from the data collected in response to the first research question. The students shared the skills and strategies that helped them overcome the challenges that faced them at STC and HTC. The students' involvement on campus, their problem-solving skills and sense of purpose played a significant role in their transfer success (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Students’ skills and strategies to overcome challenges

Campus Involvement

Extracurricular activities. The focus group participants indicated that they were involved in various extracurricular activities. They either learned from their family members, counselors, or experienced students the importance of being involved in activities such as on-campus work, internships related to their majors, registered student

organizations, and community service. They were convinced that their involvement on and off campus made their applications to four-year universities more competitive. While their academic performances were excellent, they were convinced that many universities would look at other non-academic factors, such as their leadership abilities, reliability, and academic independence. One of the students who transferred to UC Berkeley stated,

I did as many extracurricular activities as I could. I feel like at every school that you apply to they are so interested in what else you are bringing to the table. I did not have any space left on my applications, and so I had to pick and choose the activities that I felt made the most impact.

The students also believed that their involvement with the rest of the campus community was important for their social and academic growth. One of the students from STC stated "I joined the student government and I also started working on campus and then I started making many friends. Meeting different people is important, that helped me to grow into a more mature person, and I have grown even wiser." Other students agreed that finding a job on campus helped them stay connected to the rest of the campus community. One of the students mentioned, "I used to work at the coffee shop, I got the chance to know all the people, the professors, and students. I made so many good friends." Whether they worked at the bookstore, the tutoring center, the coffee shop, or any other departments on campus the students appreciated the opportunity to interact with their peers, faculty, and staff.

The participants mentioned two student organizations that helped them during the transfer process and improved their social experiences at STC and HTC. The Transfer

Club gave the students access to a network of mentors, university representatives, provided workshops, and organized campus visits to the most popular four-year institutions in the region. Many of the participants believed that their involvement in the transfer club contributed to their transfer success. A student from HTC stated, “the club gave me the motivation and the drive. I know, I have all the support systems behind me.” He also stated that through the club he was able to meet with the UC Davis representative multiple times, and he was aware of all the transfer activities on campus.

The international student club was another popular organization among the participants. It provided them with the opportunity to meet students, faculty, and community members. Nine out of the twenty-four students in this study had leadership roles in the international student clubs at STC and HTC. A student from Hong Kong stated, “as the president of the international student club (at STC) I learned how to organize events, how to talk to people nicely, politely and professionally.” She organized events such as international food festival and the golden gate bridge tour, and decided to take on a leadership role because she appreciated the help she received from the international student club during her first semester. Through this club, she met experienced students from her home country and made friends from all over the world.

Also, the focus group participants were involved in other student organizations such as the lion dance club, the engineering club, student government, and model United Nations. Regardless, of which club they joined, the students agreed that their

participation improved their social and academic experience at the community college level and gave them a competitive edge on their applications to four-year institutions. The majority of the focus group participants were involved in multiple clubs at the same time.

An STC student from Brazil stated:

I was an introvert like I would not even make eye contact with anyone. I was so nervous, I also didn't talk to anyone, but after my first semester, I started to become more of an extrovert. I started to meet more people, talk to more people...I started joining clubs which is something I have never thought I would do. I am part of student government for two years, and I am on the executive council. I was the vice president of Model United Nations. I could never speak publicly before; I would shut down completely. Now, I will literally stand up in front of a class and be like everyone look at me; I have something to say! so even in my personality tests, it shows that I have changed from an introvert to extrovert.

Asking for help. All the focus group participants indicated that they used some of the support services offered by STC and HTC for academic and non-academic needs. Despite their dissatisfactions with some of the services, they were able to utilize support services such as counseling, learning center, STEM center, transfer center, health center, physiological services, tutoring services and others. When asked how you heard about these services, the majority of the students stated that they asked for help. One of the students from Hong Kong stated, "I struggled with my writing... but I cannot give up... I lived in the learning center (laugh), they helped with every paper." Another student from Saudi Arabia mentioned "my math class was hard... I was so confused, but I cannot lose my scholarship...I go to my professor's office hours all the time."

In general, it seemed that all the focus group participants were aware of their needs, and had the courage to ask for help. One of the students from STC stated, "it is important to know how to ask for help at school and outside school... everything is new... so I told myself you could not be shy (laugh)." She received help from her professors, friends and the various services on campus. For example, by asking around, she was able to find four-year institutions that offer generous scholarships. She was offered a \$17,000 scholarship to Mills College.

Asking for assistance was not limited to the academic matters, many of the participants reached out to the campus community to get help with personal issues such as mental health and time management. One of the students who transferred to San Francisco State University was stressed because of a family situation in his home country. He was losing weight and not sleeping well. He spoke to the international student coordinator at STC; she connected him with the on-campus psychological services and a mental health provider near the college. He stated, "...waiting to be helped, without asking for help is not a good thing... I am so glad that I contacted the international program... I could have been in serious trouble." In general, the focus group participants were very effective in identifying the available resources and the people that can help them reach their goals.

Building positive relationships. The student participants agreed on the importance of making positive relationships. They made efforts to connect with students

from their own ethnic groups, but also reached out to American and other international students. A Nepalese student mentioned that since she received her admission from HTC, she reached out to make friends with other students, "I just went to the college website and searched for people who used to study here, and I added them as friends using Facebook and LinkedIn." Despite the fact that many of her requests were ignored she kept sending friendship invitations until she made some connections — "I spoke with them for a while before I came here. And once I came here, I got a chance to meet them, and we really became close friends." When asked about why it is important for her to make friends, she indicated, "in a foreign country it was important for me to be surrounded by good friends."

Despite the difficulties to form friendships, the concept of "good friends" or positive relationships was frequently cited during the focus groups. Some of the participants indicated that they intentionally chose friends who shared the same educational goals. A student from HTC stated, "I joined the transfer club because everybody there wants to transfer...we have the same goals." Similarly, a student from STC indicated that her friendship with domestic students improved her English language skills and enhanced her understanding of the American culture in a short period. She stated, "I am completely emerged in the American culture because all my friends are American ... I always wanted to fit into the American society." Also, all the participants agreed on the importance of maintaining good friendships. One of the participants was

excited when she learned that some of her STC friends were transferring to UC Berkeley with her, which would help her in the transition to her new environment.

I have tended to have a mix of friends; it could be just in every class I just pick up a few friends, so I just kind of maintained friendships with them. But then I have always been pretty good with that ... once I have become friends with someone, I might check-in regularly and make an effort to stay in touch... it is worth it.

In addition to connecting with domestic and international students, the majority of the focus group participants valued the positive connections they made with their professors. They showed skills, courage, and motivation to reach out to their instructors. A student from HTC indicated, "It is important to use the right words and the correct sentences to communicate professionally with professors... just by talking to them it was one way for me to grow." The participants viewed their relationship with their teachers as an integral part of their academic success. Whether through email, office hours, or after class conversations, the student emphasized the importance of connecting with their professors outside the classroom environment.

The students valued the personal connections they had with their teachers. A student from STC stated, "I immediately made contact with the professors. I talked to professors in every class... the professors would know me on a personal basis, which I really appreciated." The participants felt that connecting with their professors helped them in many ways. They described them as experts, experienced, scholars, and mentors that can help with academic and non-academic matters, career suggestions, major

selections, transfer process, or general advice about the area and the culture. A student who transferred to UC Berkeley stated

There isn't a single professor who is teaching me right now that doesn't know every school that I'm going to, why I'm applying there, what I want to do further, and so they're also advising me with why I should choose the transfer school, and what I need to do.

Problem Solving

To overcome the challenges highlighted in the first theme, the international students exhibited the following problem-solving skills: applying to transfer-oriented community colleges, research the transfer requirements, and identifying the best transfer pathway for them.

Applying to transfer-oriented community colleges. The focus group participants indicated that HTC and STC provided them with an alternative to the traditional route of getting a baccalaureate degree from an American university. When asked about the reasons they chose to start at the community college, all the focus group participants showed strong strategic thinking such as comparing between community colleges, assessing the different alternatives to get a degree from top universities and evaluating the pros and cons of the community colleges before applying. For example, one of the students from HTC was able to get admission to UC Davis despite the fact that she did not finish high school in her home country.

The main reasons I chose community college: it is more affordable and doesn't require an SAT score, and I can transfer to a top university... that is why I chose

community college... plus I did not graduate from high school. It is impossible for me to get into the university in Hong Kong without a high school diploma.

The above excerpt highlights two points that can help us understand the reasons some international students decide to start their higher education journey at the U.S.

community colleges instead of universities. The first point is tied to the primary mission of the community college system, which is open access. The participant was not able to graduate from high school, the only way for her to get a baccalaureate degree from an American university is through the community college system. She mentioned that she struggled in high school, she was not able to pass the Hong Kong national exam because it was difficult for her, she was not ready to do the SAT and was not confident that she would get the score that would allow her to enter a Hong Kong university. Also, the student mentioned that she appreciated the transfer guarantee admission (TAG) that the California Community Colleges offer.

In general, the focus group participants stated that the main reason they chose to start their U.S. higher education experience at the community college system was because of the flexible admission, the apparent affordability, the transfer admission guarantees to four-year institutions, and the possibility of gaining admission to top universities, such as UC Berkeley and UCLA.

Researching the transfer requirements. As described in the first theme, many of the participants were disappointed with the quality of academic counseling. This section highlights the efforts exerted by the students to overcome this challenge. One of the

students from HTC felt that his academic counselors restricted his transfer options to UC and CSU campuses. Therefore, he had to rely on himself to build the educational plan that meets the requirements of the university that he wanted to attend.

When it comes to the transferring part, uh, we kinda shift to the counseling office. I think they are very helpful, but I think they are very, very inclined to push students into the UC, CSU systems which is natural because that is where most students want to transfer from here because they are strong systems. But for me, I do not want to transfer to these schools... I did most of the research myself.

To minimize the possibility of taking unnecessary courses many of the students consulted with their faculty. A student from STC stated that his computer science professor corrected his education plan, which saved him a minimum of one semester. He stated that academic counselors could not be experts in all subjects. Therefore, he needed a second opinion from an expert in the field. He even suggested that the institution adopt a different academic counseling model. He stated, "students should start with general counseling, but then they need to see a specialized counselor that can answer questions about majors and courses."

In addition, the focus group participants used web-based technology to overcome many of the transfer challenges. The students who transferred to out-of-state universities relied heavily on the web to learn about the transfer requirements. For example, the HTC student who transferred to IUPUI (Indiana University Purdue) indicated that the internet made it easy for her to learn about the IUPUI's transfer requirements, application deadlines, scholarships and the area where the university is located. Also, she

communicated with the admission coordinator at IUPUI via email — "I had so many questions... and I prefer communicating in writing to make sure I am receiving good information." Similarly, a student who transferred to UC Davis stated, "I become so independent now ... I did it on Google... it may take time. All the transfer stuff is there... I learned how to submit a strong application from the web."

Also, the focus group participants who transferred to CSUs and UCs identified transfer-related online resources that helped them through the transfer process. All the participants who transferred to CSUs indicated that they used "CSU Mentor" during the transfer process and they valued the information this portal provided them. Similarly, all students that transferred to UCs referenced Assist.org also known as (Articulation System Stimulating Inter-Institutional Student Transfer). One of the students from focus group two indicated that this website provided her with accurate and detailed information about the HTC courses that can transfer to UC Davis.

My counselor put a personal communication course on my education plan to transfer to UC Davis... after looking at the Assist.org, for computer engineering, they require all students to take public speaking class NOT personal communication. So, I called UC Davis, and they confirmed that I need to take the public speaking.

Also, the students used the internet to socialize with their friends and families in their home countries through various apps and websites such as WeChat, Facebook, FaceTime, WhatsApp and more to connect with their families. One of the Chinese students mentioned that she spoke with her family and friends in China via WeChat. She stated, "I

cannot imagine what to do without the internet...I talk to my mom everyday...it helps a lot". The constant communicating with her family lessened her feelings of loneliness and homesickness. Similarly, one of the Malaysian students from HTC stated that he connected with the international student club via Facebook before he even applied to HTC. The club gave him good information about the college, and some of the club members helped him with housing arrangement and picked him up from the airport.

Identifying the best transfer pathway. The student participants chose to start at the California community college system because they wanted to transfer to either a UC or a CSU. However, because admission to some of the universities can be highly competitive, many students indicated that they had backup plans to transfer to private and out-of-state universities. Many students created their backup plans based on their financial needs. For example, a student from STC was admitted to UC Berkeley, however, because of the high tuition cost she decided to go to Mills College. She was open to transfer to the college that offered her program of study and provided her with the maximum scholarships. She stated, "The private schools have the money. They're the ones who will actually fund your education yeah! So it is very important to apply to them as well, and they are more flexible".

Similarly, a student from HTC decided to transfer to an out-of-state four-year college because they offered him a scholarship that covers his tuition and living expenses. He chose to start at the community college because of the affordability. Soon after he

arrived at HTC, he reconsidered his plan to transfer to UC and CSU because of his financial situation. Instead, he was looking for four-year institutions that offered need-based financial aid to international students. He successfully identified a few and was admitted to Amherst College in Massachusetts.

Uh, but for me because of financial reasons, I cannot afford UC or CSU...-- I felt-- I was very much on my own when it came to researching private universities and out-of-state... I was researching schools and going to transfer fairs until I met the representative from Amherst.

Peer mentoring. Many of the participants highlighted the importance of peer mentoring to learn about support services, find housing during the first semester, register for courses and navigate the transfer process. During the first two semesters, many of the students did not know about the support services that HTC and STC offered. One of the participants stated, "a lot of what happens on this campus is siloed, and so the information does not flow as freely, and I think it impacts students." Also, she thought that many international students rely on their friends to navigate the various processes. She indicated that "international student ambassadors can help new students to learn about HTC and be involved." New students feel more comfortable and communicate better with experienced students from their home countries.

"The first semester is the hardest" stated a Malaysian student from HTC. He indicated that he received help from the experienced HTC students from his home country with simple everyday needs such as opening a bank account, getting a cell phone, learning about public transportation, finding housing, and learning about the areas. This

help made the transition for him much easier and allowed him to focus more on the academics. Also, the math professor at HTC indicated international students who had friends that helped them during their first semester had a better social and academic experiences. She stated that many students have “a big brother system” and also indicated that “international students need help with everything from finding a good place to eat, a cheap place to eat, where to shop, how to add and drop, how to register for classes. Almost everything!”

Mentoring by seasoned international and domestic students could ease the complexity of the transfer process. One of the STC students who transferred to UC Berkeley indicated that she benefited from the experience of her friends. She stated, "I actually found American students who knew the system and were also applying to UC Berkeley ... I asked them what they were doing, and I did the same thing (laugh!)."

Based on her friends' advice, she was involved in extracurricular activities, did a short-term internship related to her major, selected professors who are sensitive to international student needs, and was able to identify knowledgeable counselors. She believed the mentoring she received at STC from international and domestic students helped her reach her goal of transferring to UC Berkeley.

Sense of Purpose

Despite the apparent difficulties discussed in theme one, the majority of the students exhibited a strong sense of purpose, which was reflected in their capabilities to

adapt the new environment, their self-confidence, and their abilities to learn independently. The strong sense of purpose stemmed from a number of compelling factors such as the yearning for completing an American degree and achieving their family dreams. While some of the students came from educated families that provided them with resources and knowledge during the transfer process, most of them built these skills while studying at STC and HTC.

Adaptation. The focus group participants showed strong personal skills that helped them at HTC and STC. They were able to adjust to their new educational and cultural environment. A student from Malaysia stated, “My main goal when I first came here was adaptation because in a foreign country the food is different, the water is different, nothing is the same.” She expected things to be different from her home country and was open to trying new things, which helped her through the transition and minimized the impact of culture shock on her. Similarly, a student from STC mentioned, “the first semester was the hardest... I had to learn everything fast.” He had to arrange his own accommodation, register for classes, buy the books for his classes, get used to the new education system, and make sense of his surroundings in a short period. The participants agreed that in order to be successful it was necessary for them to adjust quickly to their new environment.

All student participants were determined to adjust quickly to the new environment so they can focus on their academic goals. Their primary incentive was to transfer to their

school of choice. One of the participants stated, “I took three classes over the summer ...I had to do what I had to do. I tell myself... If you want to go to Berkeley, you need to work hard.” He had a firm belief that a degree from UC Berkeley would give him access to an outstanding career. The other factor that motivated most of the participants was to fulfill their family dreams of getting a baccalaureate degree from an American university. Although family pressure was highlighted as a source of stress in theme one, it was also a source of motivation for many of the focus group participants. Some of the students mentioned that their family sacrifices motivated them to persist in school and inspired them to adjust quickly. A student from STC stated, “my mother and father sacrificed a lot for me to study in America... I say to myself all the time be strong, be successful at school.”

Self-confidence. During the focus groups, I noticed that self-confidence was a common characteristic among the students. Most of the participants were confident in their abilities to succeed, not only at HTC and STC but also at the four-year institutions they transferred to. Self-confidence helped the participants to overcome many challenges. A student from HTC stated, "I know my English is not that great, but I was self-confident in my own ability to talk to people. I never felt self-restricted in talking to anyone." By doing so, he improved his English proficiency and formed many friendships. Similarly, a student from STC stated, “I was able to face my fears by coming to a new country... that boosted my confidence.” Instead of being scared she focused on her goal of transferring

to UCLA. Every time she was able to accomplish a small success she became more and more confident.

Self-confidence helped many of the participants to recover from shortfalls and overcome hindrances. A student who transferred to UC Davis received a failing grade in one of her assignments. Despite her professor's advice to drop the class and take it in the subsequent semester, she continued and was able to pass the course with a good grade. She stated, "if I drop the class I am not gonna be ready for the UC application... I worked hard... I knew I am gonna be fine." By being confident in her ability to succeed she was able to dismiss the negative suggestion, worked harder, handled the stress and submitted her UC application on time. She acknowledged that these small victories made her more confident in her capabilities. Overall, the focus group participants were proud of their accomplishments thus far and were confident in their abilities to succeed after transferring to the four-year institutions.

Independent learners. Despite the fact that most of the focus group participants started at STC and HTC immediately after finishing high school in their home countries, they all showed a significant level of independence. For instance, they all took the responsibility to manage their own time, finances, health, relationships, learning, homework, housing, and other aspects of their surroundings. A student from STC stated, "my strategy since I came here is to be self-sufficient, very independent... I spend time researching stuff ...I do not just take people's words for it." Some of the students

acknowledged that they learned how to be independent after they came to the United States. They had to rely on themselves for almost everything. A student from Saudi Arabia stated, “my mother took care of everything... but after I came here, I had to take care of myself.” Whether they learned it in their home countries or the US, independence was a common personal characteristic among all the participants.

Focus on Academics

A Malaysian student who transferred to UC Davis: For me I want to be out in two years, some semesters I took nineteen units cuz I just didn't want to be here for more than two years...so the first semester I took thirteen units and then fifteen, nineteen. This semester nineteen again which brings me up to over sixty units.

The above quote highlights a strategy used by some of the focus group participants to finish on time. Six out of the twenty-four students were able to transfer in two years. Their strategy was to start with 12 units the first semester and then gradually enroll in more transferrable units the subsequent semesters. The first semester was essential for them to not register for many units because they needed time to learn about their new environment. The majority of the participants were convinced that taking fewer units every semester would delay their transfer, that is why most of them took more units or registered for summer classes.

Taking more units every semester implies devoting more time to school and coursework. Most of the students indicated that they had to dedicate most of their time to school. Between going to class, doing homework, and attending some of the campus

activities the students barely had enough time to take care of personal things. One of the students stated, "I live on campus (laugh)... I take classes every day of the week, and I stay on campus until I finish homework...I did that only for the last semester... it was hard." In addition to the strong study ethics and discipline, the student's focus on his end goal empowered him to persist and manage the high number of units. Overall, most of the participants agreed that taking a high course load is hard but was necessary for them to do it so they can transfer in a reasonable time.

Theme 3: Sense of Belonging

An international student from Hong Kong: Everybody here is really supportive, they are important to me, and that is how it changed my view of education... here they were trying to inspire us and yeah! They did the job for us...people here know me by name and ask me if I need help...I appreciate my teachers because they were patient with me.

All the students in this study successfully transferred to four-year institutions. Despite the challenges and the calls to improve some of the services, they felt part of the campus community. They appreciated the support they received at STC and HTC. The empathetic support provided by faculty, staff and the campus communities contribute to a greater sense of belonging among the student participants. In this section, the students identified "support and guidance" and "faculty support" as critical contributors to their sense of belonging and transfer success, which is represented in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Sense of belonging

Support and Guidance. This section presents the academic and non-academic support that assisted international students during their transfer experiences at STC and HTC (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Campus support structure by department

Academic Support

Counseling Services. Despite the counselors' mistakes highlighted in theme one, the majority of the student participants felt that the counseling services at STC and HTC played an important role in their transfer success. The two colleges in this study follow different counseling models to help international students. STC has a counselor dedicated to helping international students only. The counselor received training specific to the needs of international students. Some of the student participants described him as knowledgeable and helpful. On the other hand, HTC has a list of approved counselors who received limited training on how to help international students. Many of the participants from HTC did not like the fact that they had to see a different counselor every appointment. Also, they indicated that the experienced counselors were always

booked. Overall, many of the participants at both colleges appreciated the help they received from the counseling services. A student from HTC stated:

The counseling service really helped me to choose my major, to know what class I supposed to take, what university I am going to transfer. They helped me to know more about the classes, so I only take transferable courses...the one-on-one counseling was very helpful for me.

The above statement describes the counseling experience of a student who transferred to UC San Diego. Similarly, a student from STC stated that his counselor was patient with him, explained the transfer process multiple times, and helped him develop a comprehensive education plan that worked for his situation. In addition to the academic help, counselors work with other support services to help students with non-academic issues. A student from HTC stated, "I was very depressed, I did not know what to do... my counselor connected me with psychological services... and encouraged me to use it." Another student from STC indicated, "I kind of had a good experience with counseling discussing my career options because I am majoring in physics and I want to see what options out there for me. So I feel like the counselors at STC did a very good job by keeping me on track."

Counseling Course. Providing a counseling course was another difference in the counseling model between STC and HTC. All international students at HTC are required to take a half a unit counseling course during their first semester. The course provided an overview of the U.S. higher education system, classroom expectations, academic honesty, student visa requirements and introduced the students to the campus support services.

One of the focus group participants commented, “the counseling course taught me a lot about HTC...for the first time I was able to understand what they mean about units and credits (laugh)...and general education.” Despite the fact that the international student orientation addressed the above topics, the student was not able to grasp the presented information. He stated, “orientation was overwhelming... I think this course is an extension of the orientation.”

The majority of the HTC students in this study indicated that the counseling course clarified the transfer process for them. One of the students who transferred to UC Irvine noted, "there's a really strong focus on transfer...it helped me understand the whole journey.” Similarly, a student from China indicated he had a better understanding of the Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG) after completing this course. He commented, “counseling 101 gives the big picture...and helped me to ask the right questions when I met the counselor.” Overall, the majority of HTC students felt that the mandatory counseling course helped them during the transfer process.

Supplemental Instruction.

A student from HTC: We have a lot of academic support centers; I benefited from them a lot. At the Learning Center, we have very well-trained tutors... For every English writing class, the tutor at the writing center can revise your essay...that really helped me to improve my writing skills...I had a one-on-one conversation with the tutor at the ESL center to improve my English speaking. That was really helpful... for me there's no other place I can practice my English; they corrected my pronunciation problems... we also have science integrated Center for every science course...I loved all the extra help.

This quote highlights the role of supplemental instruction in the academic success of one of the study participants. HTC and STC offer supplemental instruction to help students in traditionally challenging academic subjects. All focus group participants used tutoring services in writing, speaking, world languages, math, biology, chemistry, and some of the business courses. They all highlighted the importance of supplemental instruction in their transfer success. In addition to tutoring services, many of the students participated in peer-assisted workshops and used other resources offered by the academic support centers. Also, they mentioned that many of the tutors at the learning center were international students which made them more comfortable to use the services.

Both HTC and STC invested in supplemental instruction centers to help students in various academic areas. For example, many of the participants were empowered to pursue degrees in the engineering field because of the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) center. A student from Saudi Arabia who transferred to San Francisco State University stated, “I did not take math classes in high school...but I want to be an engineer...I did math jam; I met with math tutors almost every week for all my math classes.” Despite the fact that the student came to STC with low math proficiency, the supplemental instruction he received from the math center allowed him to pursue his dream and reach his education goal.

Transfer support. Both HTC and STC have established partnerships with some University of California campuses, California State campuses, out-of-state universities

and private schools throughout the United States. During the application process to STC and HTC, the students get to choose the university they want to attend after completing a predetermined number of courses. Each university has its own admission conditions.

After admissions to HTC or STC, the students receive a conditional admission letter to the University of their Choice.

A student from STC: I think transfer admission guarantee (TAG) helped me a lot... the computer science major is really competitive...that's Why the TAG is really helpful for me... I had few backup universities in California and outside of California. luckily for me, I was able to TAG into UC Irvine for a computer science major.

Since every university has its own eligibility conditions, the TAG process was complicated for the majority of the focus group participants. The student who transferred to San Francisco State University indicated that he was confused with the whole process. He stated, "I tried to understand what do I need to do... what courses I needed, too much! I felt much better after meeting with my counselor." This is an excellent example of the institutional role in the TAG process. In addition to expanding the list of participating universities in the TAG program, both STC and HTC provided support to help the students take advantage of the program. Overall, most of the participants appreciated the transfer admission guarantee and mentioned other benefits to it. A student from Nepal stated:

I discovered the decent cost of the community colleges and how you transfer to those top-notch universities after attending. So, I researched, and I decided okay, it is cost saving... I also found out that some of the universities on the TAG had good scholarships after transfer... that is why I finally decided to come here.

This student chose to come to HTC because they offered transfer admission guarantee to affordable universities. Both colleges were successful in forming partnerships with four-year institutions to address the financial needs of some of the students after they transfer. Some of the transfer agreements include generous scholarships for international students. As noted in previous sections, not all international students can afford to pay the University of California tuition. Therefore, it was necessary for HTC and STC to diversify their transfer partnerships to serve the needs of international students.

Some of the participants indicated that the TAG did not include all majors and suggested that HTC and STC form agreements with highly competitive universities such as UC Berkeley and UCLA. A student from STC stated, "I was able to get into UC Davis... UC Berkeley was not on the TAG; I wish it were... it was my first choice." Even the focus group participants that received admissions from UC Berkeley appreciated the TAG because it gave them a backup plan. Some of the participants did not like the fact that highly impacted majors were excluded from the TAG. A student in the computer science major stated, "the good majors are not there." Similarly, one of the participants felt that the TAG needed to be improved especially in the STEM areas.

The STEM majors have additional requirements that are specific to the major those are not detailed in the letter...the students have to receive certain grades in certain classes and have to have a GPA in certain groups of classes in order to be eligible for the TAG.

The transfer centers at both STC and HTC are specialized in helping students with the transfer process and educating them about the TAG. This department received much praise from the focus group participants as efficient, knowledgeable, welcoming, and professional. The primary mission of the transfer counselors is to streamline the transfer process and help the students to transfer on time to their university of choice. Every student in this study indicated that they used the services provided by the transfer center. A student from STC commented, "the transfer center was very good... they kind of kept me on track, they helped me with tagging UC Santa Barbara... I also know they did a very good job in helping other students too." She was introduced to many universities by the transfer counselors and chose UC Santa Barbara because of the location and the major.

The transfer centers provided the student participants with access to the University of California, California State University, out-of-state universities and private schools from all over the United States. Every semester, they organize on-campus transfer fairs and campus tours to universities such as UC Berkeley and UC Davis. The centers provide students with catalogs and computer labs to learn about the admission requirements of various four-year institutions. A student who received admission to Amherst College commented, "I met the representative from Amherst in an event at HTC...it was the perfect college for me... they provided me with a full scholarship."

Furthermore, the transfer centers provide office space for the students to have one-on-one advising sessions with representatives from highly demanded universities.

After selecting the university and fulfilling the requirements, preparing and submitting the application was described as the most important step of the transfer process. A student commented, “It is really critical that the application is done very well.” He stated that the transfer center gave him the tools to convince the application reviewers that he is passionate and academically suitable to study at their universities. He indicated that the trained staff at the centers reviewed his personal insight statements and other application materials to make sure that he had a complete and effective application. Similarly, a student from HTC described his experience with the transfer center in the following statement:

The transfer center helped me with the application letters; it is an inviting center... I was able to work on application letters with counselors and tutors...I learned what's important to include and what's not...they are the ultimate reason why I am able to transfer to this university.

Non-Academic support

Health Center. Many of the focus group participants found the health center as a beneficial service provided by HTC and STC. They used it for medical services, mental health, doctor referrals, and health education. A student from HTC commented, “The health center was something useful especially with international students’ insurance whenever I go to the doctor I end up paying way more than I expect. So, for the small things the health center is really useful.” Another student mentioned that the

psychological services helped him overcome a period of depression. The therapist helped him manage his worries, gave him personal advice and referred him to a clinical psychologist for treatment. The health center provided a safe space for many of the participants to take care of their health care needs so they could focus on the academics.

Homestay. The other non-academic support that was frequently mentioned in the focus groups was the homestay program. STC and HTC have their own homestay program, every semester they assist international students to live with one of the local families based on their needs. All families go through a vetting process and training before they join the program. A student from China stated that he stayed with a family for his first semester before getting his own apartment. He noted that his host family helped him through the transition, they showed him the local area, they attended his first orientation with him, and they treated him as a family member. The student felt that his homestay made his transition less challenging. Other participants had similar experiences, a student from Hong Kong stated:

I want to get used to the new environment, of course, that is why I chose to live in homestay and ... I want to experience living with the local families. I think that is the best way to experience the new culture, new environment; it turns out that is very good. I did many things with my family, for example, we went out to dinner together, we pick cherries, we had a road trip to Monterey and Reno Nevada and really experience their daily life.

International Student Center. All the student participants indicated that they used the services of the international student centers at STC and HTC on a regular basis. The centers were described as a “comfort zone,” “family,” “friends,” and helpful. Their

primary mission is to help students reach their academic goals by educating them about their rights and obligations as student visa holders, creating a welcoming campus environment, and advocating for them on and off campus. The students in this study indicated that they benefited from their services from the day they were admitted to the day they transferred out. A student from Hong Kong commented:

The International Student Center provides a lots of workshops and teaches us how to communicate professionally with professors and how to manage our classes but more importantly how to stay legal as f1 visa students, and other things that are related to us being here...I've seen many people going to the center and asking for advice on what to do and what not to do especially when they are on the verge of rock-bottom.

Before they start the first semester, all international students attend a mandatory orientation organized by the international student center. The focus group participants indicated that the orientation introduced them to the support services offered by the college. During the three-day orientation, the participants were able to do the placement test, one-on-one counseling and register for their classes. The orientation was mentioned as a social event that gave the students the opportunity to meet with their peers. Both international student programs at STC and HTC intentionally invite seasoned international students to share their experiences during the orientation. Despite some of the suggestions for improvement, many of the participants indicated that the international student orientation gave them a strong start to their educational journey at STC and HTC.

The international student program at STC established a process to receive early alerts from professors to help at-risk students. One of the students who transferred to San

Francisco State University stated that during his first semester he had some personal issues that impacted his attendance and academic performance. He appreciated that the international student program at STC found out about his situation from the professors and helped him to overcome the crisis. He was offered access to an on-campus resource that he did not know existed. A student from STC mentioned that he benefited from this service. He stated, "ISP keep us on track...they know if you are slacking in the classroom (laugh), or if you are in trouble and they help you." The early alert system is a collaborative effort between the international student program and the faculty to provide early assistance to students who are at-risk of being dropped or failing their courses.

Faculty Support

Faculty support was seen as linked with inclusive teaching, cooperative learning, connecting with students, and faculty advising. All of the faculty participants indicated that they had minimal professional development. Instead, they learned how to deal with international student issues through trial and error and from other experienced colleagues.

Inclusive teaching. All the faculty participants indicated a high awareness of the international student needs. They incorporated various techniques to make the curriculum more inclusive and address the needs of their diverse student populations. The first approach was to be mindful of the student backgrounds when designing the curriculum and during classroom discussions. Linda commented, "I think making assignments relevant so that people are reading about issues that aren't just about America... I use

different texts from different writers around the globe.” Similarly, Brian indicated that during classroom discussions he avoids using slang and culturally specific examples, and tries to incorporate commonly known examples or ask the students to share their own perspectives.

Course content can be hard to understand for many international students because of the language barrier. To solve this issue, three of the faculty participants indicated that they reiterate the complicated concepts, speak clearly, summarize the lectures, and provide the students with opportunities to ask questions. Mary reported that many international students in her class had strong math skills and low English proficiency. To solve this issue, she spoke slowly and sometimes referred students to the learning center so they can work with a tutor that spoke the same language. Linda intentionally gave international students more time to process new concept before engaging them in discussions.

For students who are shy; they need time to like marinate, then they can talk to each other, then we can have a real discussion as a class. Again, many students are not comfortable having a discussion unless you do much buildup to engage them in the classroom...

In addition, Linda did not assume that the course content is obvious to all students. She recognizes that international students come from different education systems, therefore, explaining the relevance of the course content, the homework, and the exams would help them make sense of the learning process.

I think in terms of helping students who are really goal focused is to give a rationale for activities and help relate what we are doing to their goals so that they understand why they are doing the tasks that they are doing... for example, the students and I look at the calendar together and decide...when and why each draft is due to help them learn time management and also to understand why we are doing the things that we are doing so I can make the process meaningful for them.

Cooperative learning. All faculty participants used group work as a strategy to engage international students with their peers. One of the faculty mentioned that she defined “group work” on her course syllabus, and highlighted its benefits to all students. Cooperative learning is not commonly used in other countries. Therefore, it is important to be transparent and educate the students about it. Similarly, Brian used group work as a way to create a "safe "learning environment for students with low English proficiency. He placed students with low English proficiency with peers from their home countries and allowed them to discuss the concepts in their own languages. This strategy created a “safe” space where students can contribute to the discussion with less hesitation, and enabled them to make sense of the lectures and identify areas where they are having difficulties so they can seek clarifications.

I have a lot of group work in my class... when students are interacting with their peers, they can really benefit ...I sometimes think with the language barrier it helps to intentionally form the groups with the students’ language proficiency in mind.

Furthermore, group work was used by the faculty participants as a strategy to "break up the cliques” where students from the same ethnic backgrounds tend to form groups in the classroom. They all agreed that cliques negatively impact learning and can disrupt the

classroom environment. Linda intentionally engages students from different nationalities in teamwork activities. This helped the students to form friendships and to connect with other students from diverse backgrounds. She believed that the diversity of the group encouraged students to speak English with each other and improved their language and communication skills.

Connecting with the student. All the faculty participants indicated that connecting with students outside the classroom is important for their success. Mary believed that building positive relationships with students would engage them in the classroom and give them a sense of belonging. Similarly, Linda indicated that having conversations with students in a supportive manner would help them open up and share their concerns. She commented, "once you break that ice you break the barriers in terms of start to having conversations face to face, such as I want to be a doctor or what program should I study to be a doctor..." By having these conversations, she was able to address the needs of many international students or direct them to where they can receive the proper support. Mary followed a similar approach with her students.

The initial thing that I always do is try to have a relationship with all of my students and be as open as I possibly can to make them feel comfortable...I do feel my international students are comfortable with me, so I am successful in that regard.

International students were encouraged to use office hours as a way to connect with their professors. All the faculty participants implemented different strategies and incentives to get the students to meet with them during office hours. For instance, Mary took the time

at the beginning of every semester to remind her students about the benefits of meeting during office hours. Similarly, Linda acknowledged that many international students might not be familiar with the idea of meeting professors during office hours.

Every semester, I cancel class for two days and tell the students you are required to see me during office hours to make them get used to coming to a professor's office. And if you do not come to that conference, you are counted absent for two days, and you know you lose participation points or whatever ... I stole this idea from another faculty member.

Faculty Advising. Despite the fact that academic advising at HTC and STC was the task of academic counselors, the faculty participants informally advised international students about the transfer process, career options, and degree choices. International students approached them because they are subject matter experts. For example, Mary indicated that she received questions about majors such as computer science and engineering. Also, she received questions about admissions to prestigious universities such as UC Berkeley or UCLA. As a UC graduate, she was able to share her experience with the students and motivate them to have high GPA and be involved on-campus. Similarly, Linda received questions about different career pathways and connected the students with the counselors at career services.

The faculty participants indicated that showing international students courtesy and respect made them more approachable and encouraged the students to use their help. Linda mentioned that it is essential to know how and when to direct the students to see campus resources. She always tries to answer the question herself. However, if it were

something outside of her area of expertise, she would take the time to know the proper campus resource and then refer the students. She does not want the students to feel that they are getting the runaround.

Along the same lines, Carol is one of the five counselors approved to see international students at HTC. Throughout the interview, she demonstrated a deep understanding of the issues facing international students. To eliminate the barriers and connect with her advisee, she appreciated other cultures and was empathetic and patient with her students.

I help them with education plans mostly, and to make sure they are getting classes they need... making sure they are staying on track, that they are not taking classes that are extra but they are still meeting timelines and most of them they are on a very strict two-year timeline . . . I think being open and empathetic makes a big difference, being patient and willing to provide explanations...especially in the first semester, students just need a little bit more time and space to formulate their thoughts and their questions. And so, it is about giving them that time and the space to do that check-in. It is also asking the questions like how's everything going? Or how are things outside of classes?

By asking these questions, Carol understands the needs and the challenges of each student separately. She views every student as a unique individual and often shares her perspective and provided empathetic support. She acknowledges that some international students are misguided and took unnecessary courses. She indicates that some of the counselors are not equipped to help international students and suggests that they receive more professional development.

Summary

This chapter presented key findings as linked with the three main themes of “challenges and dissatisfactions,” “students’ skills and strategies to overcome challenges,” and a “sense of belonging.” Overall, the students showed appreciation for the academic and non-academic support they received at STC and HTC. The intentional efforts they received from the campus community increased their sense of belonging and their connections to the campus environment. Chapter five includes recommendations and implications based on the experiences of the international student participants. The purpose is to inform practice and to help faculty, staff, and administrators comprehend the challenges, the expectations, and the needs of international community college students.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

In this study, I explored the successful transfer experiences of international students at two California community colleges. As I investigated the experiences of international students, and spoke with faculty, I identified several significant contributors and coping mechanisms that helped them navigate the educational, social, and cultural challenges they faced in the upward transfer process. This qualitative study took place at two medium-size California community colleges. I used a combination of focus groups with international community college students who successfully transferred to four-year institutions and interviews with faculty members from various academic areas. This method allowed me to collect informative testimony and stories from two different and yet interrelated perspectives. Twenty-four international students and four faculty voiced their perceptions about the academic and socio-cultural factors that impede and/or assist international students during the transfer process. The data analysis resulted in the following themes: challenges and dissatisfactions, skills and strategies, and a sense of belonging. Overall, the findings highlight the resources, goals, and needs of international students and the institutional factors that have negative and positive impacts on their upward transfer experiences.

Discussion

The tenets of CRT and racist nativism frameworks provide an effective lens to analyze the findings, answer the research questions that guided this study, and provide a

window onto new practices and policies to strengthen supports for the successful transfer of international community college students. The false narratives about international students' economic and familial backgrounds is a form of deficit thinking that can lead to neglecting their true social and academic needs for successful upward transfer. This study provided evidence that the educational experiences of international students are complicated by academic issues, language obstacles, communication difficulties, social challenges, cultural adjustment problems, and inconsistent institutional support services. In some cases, these hindrances impacted international students' academic performances, socio-cultural experiences, and transfer goals. Many of my findings align with the current literature that suggest that international students represent an underrepresented group at-risk of dropping out or stopping their education if not provided with adequate support (Adewale, 2015).

My findings regarding the obstacles that the international students confronted and overcame in the transfer process, primarily through their socio-cultural and personal strengths and assets, provide a strong counter narrative to racist nativism and current anti-immigrant discourse and the racialization of non-natives (Huber, 2011). My findings also expose the false and harmful narrative that depicts international students as a privileged group, financially and academically advantaged (Viggiano et al., 2017), and justifies the extra burdens added on them (Hiraldo, 2010). My study confirms that international students are not a privileged group (Viggiano et al. 2017) as they have financial and

academic needs, pay higher tuition than domestic students, have extra restrictions because of the current visa policy, and do not qualify for financial aid and many scholarships. In addition to challenging the dominant discourse, the CRT lens allowed me to identify the cultural values and attributes that empowered international students to overcome the challenges. Just as Yosso (2005) argues that underserved groups have the ability to draw from their cultural knowledge to overcome difficulties and navigate system, my study shows how and why international students benefit from certain community college services to successfully transfer to four-year institutions. The primary focus of the study was to learn about the transfer experiences of international students, many of whom shared the institutional factors and the strategies that assisted them.

Contributors to the Transfer Success of International Students. Despite the institutional and individual challenges, the international students in this study successfully transferred to four-year universities. Friends and families, the support services, and the desire to receive an American degree played pivotal roles in the students' persistence, and are connected with individual and environmental contributors.

Individual contributors. Through the CRT lens, Yosso (2005) argues that racialized communities develop their knowledge and skills through many forms of capital. In this study, the international student participants were successful not because they were privileged but because they nurtured their transfer knowledge through aspirational, social, linguistic, navigational, and familial capital.

As mentioned in chapter four, the aspirations to receive an American degree and to achieve the dreams of their families played a pivotal role in the transfer success of the student participants. As Yosso (2005) argues, aspirational capital helps individuals from underrepresented communities to maintain high ambitions, pursue dreams beyond their circumstances, and face barriers with confidence. The majority of the students in this study exhibited strong sense of purpose as reflected through their capabilities to adapt to the new environment, their self-confidence, and their abilities to learn independently. They adjusted to their new educational and cultural environment, and were confident in their abilities to succeed, not only at the community college level but also at the four-year institutions. Aspirational capital was a common individual factor that helped the student participants to recover from shortfalls, and overcome real and perceived hindrances.

Familial support also played an important role in the transfer process. Yosso (2005) considers the emotional support and the knowledge transferred from families to students as familial capital. Despite the unfamiliarity of the families with the cultural and educational environment, they provided financial, inspirational, logistical, and emotional support that contributed to the transfer success of the students. Since most of the students come from families with limited knowledge about the U.S. education system, they relied on peer mentoring, faculty, and counselors to learn about the campus support services, find housing during the first semester, and register for courses.

In addition to their families' help, the students benefited from non-familial

networks and community resources. Yosso (2005) describes these networks as the social capital that provides students with emotional reassurance and a sense of belonging. For example, based on their research and the advices they received from peer mentors, academic counselors and faculty members, most of the student participants were convinced that their involvement on and off campus would facilitate the transfer process and make their applications to four-year universities more competitive. They joined extracurricular activities, sought to build constructive relationships with faculty and peers, and asked for help when needed. They participated in activities such as on-campus work, internships related to their majors, registered student organizations, and community service.

Building on Yosso (2005)'s work and the social capital concept, Laanan, Starobin, and Eggleston (2011) present the concept of Transfer Student Capital (TSC), which refers to the abilities of students to gain knowledge and maneuver through the transfer process. Although many of the students did not know much about the U.S. cultural and educational environment, they showed good planning and problem-solving skills. Before coming to the U.S., they had done their online research by comparing between community colleges, assessing the different alternatives to get a degree from top universities and evaluating the pros and cons of the community colleges they tend to attend. While studying at the community college, they were open to various transfer possibilities. They created backup plans to transfer to UCs, CSUs, private or out-of-state

universities, based on their financial needs, program of studies, and educational goals. In addition to the help and guidance they received from their families and the college support services, the students were strategic about where to transfer after the community college and exerted a considerable effort to research the transfer requirements of four-year institutions.

Additionally, the students navigated the transfer process to find solutions for the inconsistencies of some of the support services. Yosso (2005) argues that navigational capital helps minority students to navigate systems not designed to serve them. In this study, the students overcame counselors' mistakes by consulting with their faculty, comparing notes with experienced friends, and using web-based technology to identify transfer requirements. Also, in the classroom, they understood curricula not designed for international students by connecting with their professors during office hours, seeking help from their peers, and utilizing the supplemental instructions offered by the college.

Environmental Contributors. Despite the challenges and the dissatisfaction with some of the support services, the students appreciated the support they received from faculty, staff and the campus community. As discussed in the literature in chapter two, my study confirms that international students can benefit from the same environmental factors that help other student populations.

Despite the counselors' mistakes highlighted in chapter four, international students discussed the importance of academic counseling in reaching their educational

goals. They preferred STC's counseling model because it provides them with designated international student counselors. They valued knowledgeable counselors who were patient and treated them with respect. The comprehensive education plan provided by the counseling division during their first semesters gave them a clear understanding of the transfer process. Furthermore, the international students appreciated the mandatory counseling course at HTC, which provided them with an overview of the U.S. higher education system, classroom expectations, academic honesty, and student visa requirements and introduced them to various support services.

The transfer centers at both colleges benefited international students during the transfer process. Their primary goals are to educate students about available transfer agreements, assist with transfer applications and promote transfer to four-year institutions. The primary task of the transfer counselors is to streamline the transfer process and help the students to transfer on time to their university of choice. The transfer center assisted international students in understanding the established partnerships with participating University of California campuses, California State University campuses, out-of-state universities and private schools throughout the United States.

Following the advice of family members, faculty and the counseling divisions at STC and HTC, international students took advantage of supplemental instructions and faculty expertise while studying at the community college level. They utilized tutoring services in writing, speaking, world languages, math, biology, chemistry, business

courses, and other traditionally challenging academic subjects. Furthermore, international students received assistance from their professors outside the classroom. They used office hours to ask clarifying questions about the curriculum and complicated concepts. Overall, international students considered supplemental instructions as one of the major institutional factors that helped them transfer successfully.

Despite their calls for improvement, international students found the homestay program and the health center beneficial to their psychological and physical comfort. The homestay gave them peace of mind during their first semester and made the transition less challenging. They received social, cultural, and emotional support from their host families, which gave them a greater sense of belonging. The health center provided medical services, mental health, doctor referrals, and health education. It was a safe space for many international students to take care of their health care needs so they could focus on their academic goals.

The other non-academic support that was frequently used by international students was the international student center at both colleges. The primary mission of this department is to help students reach their academic goals by educating them about their rights and obligations as student visa holders, creating a welcoming campus environment, and advocating for them on and off campus. The center organizes orientations to help new international students with the placement test, counseling, course registration, and integration in the campus community. In addition, the center manages an early alert

system, which is a collaborative effort with faculty members to provide early assistance to students who are at-risk of being dropped or failing their courses.

Overall, the services provided at both campuses, the guidance and the support offered by faculty, staff, and other members of the campus community had positive impacts on the sense of belonging and the transfer experiences of the international student participants. Despite the challenges and the dissatisfaction presented in chapter four, the intentional efforts of the community colleges in this study to help international students significantly contributed to their transfer success. As a result, the students felt connected, supported, engaged, and in some cases took on ambassadorial roles to represent their cultures.

Faculty Perspectives. The study findings also align with the literature that explored the perspectives of faculty on issues facing international students (Trice, 2003; Nguyen 2013), their perceived role in teaching in a diverse classroom (Mok, 2013), and their capabilities to offer an inclusive curriculum (Cao et al., 2014; Choi et al., 2014). In my study, the four faculty participants exhibited awareness of the unique difficulties facing international students at the community college level and shared some of the strategies they used to resolve these challenges.

Even though I interviewed only four faculty members, they showed a high level of awareness of the issues facing international students. They confirmed many of the challenges shared by the students in previous sections, and discussed the stress many

international students endure because of cultural differences, financial issues, communication challenges, family expectations, financial obligations and the complexity of the transfer process. At the same time, they highlighted the differences between education systems as the major hurdles that can impact the students' academic and socio-cultural experiences. International students are not knowledgeable about the American education system, which puts them at a disadvantage compared with their domestic counterparts, who are more knowledgeable about instructional methods, curriculum, testing procedures and classroom' expectations.

Additionally, the faculty participants indicated that many international students struggled because of English language difficulties. They shared cases where international students dropped or failed courses because they did not have the language skills to understand the course materials. Some international students faced communication problems with their faculty and peers. Also, low English proficiency caused a mismatch in course placement, because some students were not able to understand the placement test questions. Overall, the faculty members agreed on the importance of addressing these challenges, otherwise they could lead to the othering of international students, which could negatively impact their sense-of-belonging (Viggiano et al. 2017) and subsequently their transfer success.

To address the classroom needs of international students, faculty incorporated various techniques to make the curriculum more inclusive. They used culturally

responsive pedagogy that valued knowledge from other cultural and educational systems (Beykont & Daiute 2002; Ith, 2014). Although they had minimal professional development, the four faculty members learned how to support international student issues through trial and error and from other experienced colleagues, and recognized the importance of students' cultural backgrounds when designing the curriculum and discussing course materials.

The faculty also used cooperative group learning to improve the classroom experiences of international students and engage students from different nationalities in teamwork activities to help them form friendships and connect with their domestic counterparts. Faculty also used cooperative learning to help students with language difficulties, and placed students with low English proficiency with peers from their home countries and allowed them to discuss the concepts in their own languages. This strategy created a "safe" space where students could contribute to the discussion with less hesitation and make sense of the lectures and identify areas where they are having difficulties and seek clarifications (Trice, 2003).

Additionally, the faculty emphasized the importance of connecting with international students outside the classroom by building positive relationships with students to engage them in the classroom and give them a sense of belonging. They treated international students with courtesy and respect, which made them more approachable and encouraged the students to use their help. This study includes many

examples where international students approached faculty members to seek clarification about course materials, transfer process, career options, and degree choices. Overall, the faculty connections and relationships outside the classrooms enhanced the experiences of international students and contributed to their transfer success, which is in agreement with previous university level research (Cao et al., 2014; Mok, 2013).

Implications for Community College Leaders

Although the students in this study benefited from many of the services, there were issues of inconsistency with the quality of some of the services. As more community colleges in California and nationally commit to growing their international student populations in response to the vision of community college internationalization, improving international student success and baccalaureate transfer takes priority. The first step is to establish a mutual understanding around the benefits of international students' presence and the moral obligation to support them. The second phase is to frame an ambitious college-wide vision and to increase the leadership support, while simultaneously creating a supportive campus climate and implementing institutional initiatives to improve the academic and social experiences of international students.

To overcome the challenges and avoid the inconsistency of support services, the inclusion of international students has to be part of the strategic planning and the moral beliefs of the entire institution. The creation of an equitable environment for international community college students is tied to the support they receive at the institutional level.

This study confirms that the international students' worries and fears have a profound impact, not only on their academic performances and transfer to four-year institutions, but also on their mental and psychological well-being. Therefore, addressing the needs of this student population has to be an on-going concern of community college leaders.

At the institutional level, leaders have to transform the dominant discourse that continues to position international students as an advantaged group with the proper resources to navigate the complexity of the community college system (Viggiano et al., 2017). There is a moral obligation for community colleges to adhere to their own values of inclusion, social justice, and equity and create an equitable environment for international students (Viggiano et al., 2017). For this transformation to be effective, the change has to come from within from faculty, staff, and administrators through initiating and sustaining institutional transformation (Russakoff, 2014).

This level of change necessitates a clear vision, effective leadership, and the involvement of the various stakeholders in the internationalization process, as well as active measures to ensure the sustainability of the initiatives. In order for international students to achieve their transfer goals; community college leaders need to provide the logistical and financial resources to serve the unique needs of this population; faculty need to lead the internationalization of the curriculum and implement new pedagogical ways of teaching and learning that endorse the inclusion of international students; and administrators and staff need to create platforms where international students can connect

with their domestic counterparts and other community members. Based on the findings from this study, I present the following practical recommendations for the district and college leadership, the department of student services, and the International Student Center (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Recommendations to improve the transfer experiences of international students

District and College Leadership. In addition to creating a welcoming campus for international students, the institutional leadership at the district and college level should advocate for more financial resources. As mentioned in previous sections, faculty

and counselors had minimal professional development, there is no on-campus housing for international students, and some services are impacted because of the high demand.

Therefore, college presidents should invest more financial resources toward the institutionalization of a comprehensive plan that includes professional development for faculty, staff and administrators and also to advocate for the creation of new programs to meet the needs of international students. The findings also suggest that leaders should extend the open access policy to international students by providing financial assistance to students in need (Viggiano et al., 2017).

Provide access to suitable accommodation. Arranging accommodation is one of the major concerns of international students and their families. Many of the student participants indicated that their homestay experiences made their transitions to the American culture less challenging and mitigated their anxieties before their arrivals. Due to the importance of this issue, community college leaders should provide international students with access to either homestay program or on-campus housing.

A college-managed homestay program could assist international students in finding a safe and a welcoming home prior to their arrival to America. It is important that all families participating in this program are adequately trained to care for international students. The main tasks of the homestay program are to identify hosting families, evaluate their competence to host students from different cultural backgrounds, provide training, match students and families based on their preferences, and monitor the good

quality of services. A well-trained host family could alleviate the burden of acculturation on international students, improve their language skills, and provide them with the social support they need away from their home countries.

On-campus housing is the second option that could improve the social, cultural and academic experiences of international students. The literature suggests that on-campus accommodation intentionally designed to engage the students academically and socially can enhance their academic performance (Sackett, 2015) and provide students with a greater sense of belonging and college life.

Professional Development. The professional development suggestions in this section can be administered by paid experts in the field of international education. However, since most community colleges have limited budgets, the training can be done in collaboration between departments. For instance, staff from the international student center and experienced faculty could share their experiences with the rest of the campus community. Based on the findings I suggest professional development for the following groups:

Faculty. Faculty should take into consideration the cultural backgrounds of students when designing the curriculum and discussing course materials. It is essential to offer international students the opportunity to present their perspectives about the course content and the pedagogy of teaching. Also, faculty should avoid culturally specific

discussions that exclude international students. For this teaching strategy to have an impact on all students, it needs to be adopted by the whole institution.

Academic Counseling. Academic counselors should be aware of the challenges and limitations facing international students. The professional development opportunity should help them gain knowledge of F-1 visa regulations, transfer pathways to UCs, CSUs, private and out-of-state universities, multiple measures for course placements, and intercultural communication. The student participants appreciated counselors who respected their decisions and did not limit their transfer destinations to UCs and CSUs. Therefore, the training should prepare the academic counselors to be open-minded, respectful, patient and empathetic when assisting international students. Given the importance of academic counseling in international students' success, I suggest that academic counselors have the opportunity to participate in international education conferences such as NAFSA, which will give them access to professional development and networking opportunities with other international education professionals.

Campus Community. Based on this study, the transfer experiences of international students were shaped with their interactions with faculty, staff, students and the campus community as a whole. Therefore, community college presidents and administrators should implement campus-wide professional development events such as workshops, and invite guest speakers who advocate for intercultural understanding. These workshops should educate the campus community about the challenges facing international students

and provide them with tools to effectively and respectfully communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Peer mentoring program. In this study, peer mentoring assisted many students with the transfer process. Community colleges should consider implementing a peer mentoring program to connect new international students with their experienced peers. The main mission of the program is to create social and cultural events to help new international students acclimate to their new environment, learn about support services, register for courses, make friends, and navigate the transfer process. An institutional mentoring program could ease the complexity of the transition and improve the students' social and academic experiences.

The International Education Center. Since the international education center is the first department that makes the connection between international students and the college, it should implement a first-semester transition plan. The student participants described the first semester as the most challenging. They had difficulties finding relevant courses, and they were not prepared to deal with the transition to the new environment. The purpose of the first-semester transition plan is to make the transition less challenging by implementing the following initiatives:

Guaranteed full-time enrollment. This study provided evidence that during the first semester the course availability was limited, and many international students end-up taking unnecessary courses. To avoid this situation, community college should consider

reserving seats in highly impacted courses such as English and Math, or enable the students to register online prior to their arrival.

The Department of Student Services. The department of student services is in charge of counseling, health services, transfer agreements, student life and many other non-instructional services. Based on the findings I recommend the following:

Use multiple measures for course placement. To avoid misplacing international students in English and Math, academic counselors should use multiple academic indicators for course placement. In addition to placement test results, they should take into consideration the students' academic preparation in high school, and their performance in other tests such as SAT, ACT, TOEFL and IELTS. Ngo et al. (2013) assert that the use of multiple measures for community college students could improve the accuracy of placement test results and assist students to place in higher-level courses. Community college leaders should consider multiple measures as a standard process for the course placement of new international student.

Dedicated international student counselor. The international student participants in this study classified the quality of counseling services as a challenge as well as a contributor to their transfer success. International students who received academic counseling from trained counselors had better experiences than those randomly assigned to general counseling. Therefore, it is important to dedicate a sufficient number of trained academic counselors to assist international students with their academic needs. This

counseling model will enable counselors to build a personal relationship with their advisees and comprehend the unique needs of each international student.

Create an international student counseling course. International students were satisfied with the half-a-unit counseling course they took during their first semester at HTC and they acknowledged its benefits during the focus groups. A mandatory counseling course during the first semester could make the transition between education systems and cultures less challenging for international students. The course should provide an overview of the U.S. higher education system, classroom expectations, academic honesty, student visa requirements and transfer process, and familiarize the students with the campus support services. This course should expand on some of the topics presented during orientation and gives students the opportunity to ask questions.

Early Alert System (EAS). One of the community colleges in this study uses an early alert system to learn about the classroom performances of international students. This system was helpful for some of the student participants. EAS is a collaborative process between the faculty and the counseling division. The purpose is to learn about international students at-risk of being dropped or failing their courses before it is too late. After identifying at-risk students, an academic counselor should assess their needs and direct them to the proper support services. EAS provides the counseling division with the opportunity to develop a support structure based on the student needs.

Comprehensive Education Plan. The plan provides international students with the list of courses they need based on their majors and transfer goals. International students should receive this document during their first semester. The purpose of this tool is to mitigate the risk of taking unnecessary courses and provide students with a guided pathway from the community college to the four-year institution of their choice. Also, it is essential for academic counselors to take into consideration the students' transfer destination when building this plan.

Establish transfer admission guarantee (TAG) partnerships based on scholarships. International students in this study were concerned about the high cost of tuition after transferring. While the current transfer agreements focus mainly on course equivalency and transfer articulations, it is essential for the department of student services to seek transfer pathway partnerships with universities that offer scholarships to international students. These partnerships could alleviate the students' anxiety and provide them with peace of mind.

Expand the offerings of the on-campus health services. This study provided evidence that international students face many stressors that can impact their mental and physical wellbeing. Community colleges should have sufficient mental health professionals to assist international students with their concerns. Health services should collaborate with faculty, staff, and academic counselors to identify students at-risk and reach out to them. Furthermore, community colleges should identify health insurance

providers that give access to clinical mental health professionals in close proximity to the campuses. And more importantly, encourage international students to utilize the service and educate them about the U.S. health care system.

Conclusion

California community colleges can benefit international students who want to receive an American baccalaureate degree. International students can earn credits to meet the transfer requirements of four-year institutions, benefit from the state-wide transfer articulation agreements, adjust to the American educational and cultural systems, enhance their social and academic skills, benefit from the affordability of the tuition, and be prepared for the transition to the four-year institutions. To help international students utilize the services, overcome the challenges, and benefit from the community college experience, educational leaders at all levels must provide intentional support and create a supportive campus environment.

Despite the successful transfer of the international students in this study, their educational experience was complicated by financial issues, homesickness, cultural adjustment problems, inconsistent academic counseling, communication problems, faculty misunderstanding, language difficulties (Adewale, 2015; Anayah, 2012; Cohen 2007). It is not equitable to expect international students to navigate the complexity of community colleges and reach their academic goals without targeted institutional support. There is a moral obligation for community colleges to adhere to their own values of

inclusion, social justice and equity and create an equitable environment for international students (Viggiano et al., 2017).

As a leader in the field of international education, I am aware of issues related to power inequities in schools and the society as a whole and more importantly to critique my role as an international educator. I realized through my research, that the needs and talents of international students are largely invisible both in the research literature and on community college campuses. The students' strong and articulate voices need to be heard at the local and state levels of community college policy and leadership, and are an important foundation for conceptualizing and actualizing a strength-based view of the transfer process for international students. I believe that community college policies must address the needs of our diverse student populations, including those who are marginalized and othered, by establishing educational environments and campus standards that encourage the active engagement of all students regardless of their backgrounds. Such policies could lead to a more globally responsible education, where students can dynamically contribute to the creation of a safer, more civilized, and sustainable globe.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Focus Group Questions

1. What are your perceptions of your satisfaction with existing support services?
2. During the current school year, how accessible was your counselor?
- 2a. During the current school year, how accessible was your international student advisor?
- 2b. How do you assess the effectiveness of student counseling in your college?
3. How much did your experience at this college contribute to your knowledge, skills, and personal development?
4. How often did you participate in campus activities?
5. How often did you participate in campus activities especially oriented toward international students?
6. Would you please describe your perceptions of the campus climate?
7. Would you please tell your reasons/goals for attending this college?
8. How easy was it for you to acclimate to U.S. culture and community college?
9. What barriers did you face in your first year at this college? Take a moment to think about this, and then we'll start.
10. What strategies helped you address these difficulties?
11. What has the college provided that has helped you to transfer to four-year institutions?

Faculty Questions

1. What are your connections to international students?
2. Were you ever an international student?
3. Where and for how long have you worked with international students?
4. What adjectives would you use to describe international students?
5. Are you challenged differently as an instructor/administrator/advisor/staff member by these students? If so, how?
6. What alterations or additions to academic support (within or outside the classroom) could the college offer to improve international student success in school?