FROM ASPIRATION TO ATTAINMENT: AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENT EXPERIENCES THROUGH BACCALAUREATE DEGREE ATTAINMENT

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The purpose of this dissertation was to explore African American community college transfer student experiences through baccalaureate degree completion. The current study used qualitative methods to examine the experiences and perceptions of eighteen African American community college transfer students who recently graduated or were within 30 credit hours of graduating from a four-year university in Texas. Ten female and eight male students, ranging in age from 21 to 56 years old, with an average age of 28, composed the sample. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews which were transcribed and analyzed based on an integrated conceptual model of Padilla’s (1999) model of minority student success and Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth model. Findings suggest that African American community college transfer student experiences are very similar to transfer student experiences revealed in current literature. However, findings indicate students perceive their experiences differ from student of other races/ethnicities when dealing with negative stereotypes, lack of role models, and racial bias. Findings also suggest African American community college transfer student persist by employing transfer student capital, familial, aspirational, and resistant capital to learn how the traverse transfer, transition, and persistence through baccalaureate degree attainment.
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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.................................................................................................................. iii

LIST OF TABLES .......................................................................................................................... ix

LIST OF FIGURES ......................................................................................................................... x

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 1

Problem Statement .................................................................................................................. 3

Purpose of Study ..................................................................................................................... 4

Research Design ..................................................................................................................... 5

Significance of the Study ......................................................................................................... 6

Definition of Key Terms ......................................................................................................... 7

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .......................................................................................... 9

Chapter Overview .................................................................................................................. 9

Literature Review Process ..................................................................................................... 9

Community College Students and Transfer ......................................................................... 11

Transfer to Four-Year Institutions .......................................................................................... 15

Individual Factors. .............................................................................................................. 16

Institutional Factors. ............................................................................................................. 19

African American Community College Transfer Students ................................................. 25

University Transition ............................................................................................................ 28

Transition ............................................................................................................................... 28
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site Selection</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Recruitment</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Procedures</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Questionnaire</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed Consent and Questionnaire</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Plan</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity and Reliability</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member Checks</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Review</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity and Researcher Role</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Overview</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer Preparation</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing For Transfer</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Study</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions About Experiences</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions About Persistence Through Degree Attainment</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Policy</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Practice</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer Information and Support</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer Student Voices</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting African American Transfer Students</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Future Research</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A_INVITATION EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B_DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C_INTERVIEW PROTOCOL</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D_INTERVIEW PROTOCOL MATRIX</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Big State University enrollment compared to U.S. population by percentage ............. 57
Table 2 2012-2013 Baccalaureate degree attainment rates by percentage ................................ 58
Table 3 Summary of participant demographic data ................................................................. 61
Table 4 Participant profile table .......................................................................................... 62
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. A “black box” of student campus experiences. From Padilla, 1999. ......................... 46
Figure 2. The campus experience includes barriers students must overcome to succeed .......... 47
Figure 3. A model of community cultural wealth. From Yosso, 2005. .................................... 50
Figure 4. An integrated model of minority student success.................................................... 52
Figure 5. Model of finding summary..................................................................................... 126
Figure 6. Revised integrated model of minority student success............................................. 136
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Historically, African Americans have highly valued education. A coveted privilege denied during slavery, education represented a form of freedom (Klugh, 2005). Following emancipation, education empowered Blacks to advance their freedom and forge their own destinies (Span, 2002; Williams & Ashley, 2004). Each generation would sacrifice to afford their descendants greater educational opportunities. In some ways, educational attainment would signify a long-sought victory in the struggle for social and racial equality.

Today, educational attainment provides African Americans an avenue for career advancement, financial gain, upward social mobility, and extended opportunities for racial equality (Harris, 2008; Herndon, & Hirt, 2004). Ample literature attests to tangible and intangible benefits of a college degree (Baum & Ma, 2007; Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011; Harris, 2008). An example of a tangible benefit is employment security. Figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2013) reveal a correlation between educational attainment and employment security. As educational attainment rises, unemployment rates decline. The December 2012 unemployment rate for African Americans stood at 14%, nearly twice the national average of 7.8% (U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2013). Increasing degree attainment could reduce African American unemployment figures. Beyond employment advantages, degree earners improve their lives in other ways and positively influence society. For example, they are more likely to earn greater lifetime incomes, advance their social status, prepare their children for college attendance, and enjoy a greater quality of life. Societally, they are more likely to pay taxes and engage in civic pursuits such as voting and volunteerism (Baum & Ma, 2007; College Board, 2007; Perna, 2003). Although all these benefits hold true for
African American college graduates, civic engagement is particularly important because it provides an opportunity for African Americans to gain a stronger voice in society. This voice brings to the forefront viewpoints, perspectives, and issues critical to the well-being of African Americans and African American communities. These issues include access to quality education, poverty, employment equity, and social justice. As important as a strong societal voice is, perhaps the greatest intangible benefit of increased African American degree attainment is the perpetuation of academic achievement. Children with college-educated parents are more likely to succeed academically from kindergarten through postsecondary education (NCES, 2003b; West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000). Adding to the number of African American college graduates strengthens this achievement cycle. At the same time, a historical African American cultural value, educational achievement, is reinforced.

Empowering African Americans through degree attainment does more than help African Americans on a personal and community level. It has broader national and global implications. For example, increased African American educational attainment bolsters our country's global standing. As a nation, the United States (U.S.) has fallen behind other developed nations in post-secondary attainment (Carnevale & Rose, 2011). To remain a global economic competitor, the United States must produce college graduates (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, & Tran, 2011; Obama, 2009; Seidman, 2005). President Barack Obama outlined a plan to re-establish America as the world’s higher education leader. The American Graduation Initiative charges U.S. community colleges and senior institutions to confer an additional eight million certificates and degrees by 2020. Meeting this goal will once again position the U.S. as the world’s leading college graduate producer (Obama, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). African Americans must be among these new degree holders to reach this national goal.
Problem Statement

Increased African American participation in higher education must come before increased degree attainment. The good news is enrollment trends reveal greater African American post-secondary participation. Over the twenty year period from 1990 to 2010, African American higher education enrollment in degree-granting institutions grew 5.5% (NCES, 2011). Among all racial/ethnic groups, the African American enrollment growth rate was exceeded only by Hispanic enrollment which rose 6.2% during the same two decades.

Interestingly, these enrollment increases are occurring in both the two-year and four-year sectors (NCES, 2011). When comparing enrollment by sector from 2005 to 2010, two-year enrollment grew from 42.5% to 46.9%, a 4.4% increase, while four-year enrollment rose from 13.4% to 14.9%, a 1.5% increase. Clearly, among African Americans, two-year enrollment is outpacing four-year enrollment. Although these figures offer hope for African American higher education gains, they are tempered by degree attainment data.

The percentage of baccalaureate degrees conferred on African Americans grew from 9.0% in 2000 to 10.3% in 2010, rising only about 1%. This is in the context of enrollment increases from the same decade of 3.2%. Degree attainment is not keeping pace with enrollment growth (NCES, 2011, 2012). Moreover, African Americans continue to earn degrees at disproportionately lower rates than their White counterparts (Carter, 2001; DeAngelo et al., 2011; NCES, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Given these two disparities: (1) African American enrollment and degree attainment and (2) African American degree attainment compared to White degree attainment, the following questions naturally arise: How can enrollment gains be translated into degree attainment? How
can higher education capitalize on growing participation in the two-year sector to contribute to overall African American degree attainment?

Nationally, 49% of all African American undergraduates are enrolled in community colleges (AACC, 2013). Given this significant proportion of African Americans entering the higher education pipeline through community colleges, facilitating successful transfer to four-year institutions and providing support through the baccalaureate become viable means to increasing African American degree attainment.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American community college students who transfer to four-year institutions and earn baccalaureate degrees. Today, more than ever before, community colleges represent a gateway to higher education for African Americans. This research sought to understand what happens in the period between community college entrance and graduation from a four-year institution. More specifically, how do these students successfully navigate the transfer process, transition to a four-year environment, and persist to earn their baccalaureates?

Two primary research questions guided this study:

1. What are African American community college transfer students’ perceptions about their experiences?
   a) How do students describe their transfer and transition experiences from community college to the four-year institution?
   b) How do students describe the role of family and community support during their transfer and transition experiences?
c) How do students describe institutional support during their transfer and transition experiences?

2. What are African American community college transfer students’ perceptions about their persistence through baccalaureate degree attainment?
   a) How do students describe their persistence through baccalaureate degree attainment?
   b) How do students describe the role family and community play in their persistence through baccalaureate attainment?
   c) How do students describe institutional support during their persistence through baccalaureate attainment?

Commenting on her study of African American high school students and college choice, Freeman (1997) writes, “The research presented in this article points out that the missing link to previous research has been the voices of the students” (p. 548). In a similar way, this study sought to give a voice to African American community college transfer students who persist and attain baccalaureate degrees. This voice is a “missing link” in understanding the success of transfer students, more specifically, successful African American transfer students. Through their own experiences, these students can provide answers to a number of unanswered, even unasked, questions about their success. This research explored their untold stories between aspiration and attainment broadening our understanding of this understudied student population.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to explore experiences of African American community college students who transfer to four-year institutions and earned baccalaureate degrees. This methodology was chosen because it allowed me to explore student experiences
and perspectives through individual student stories (Creswell, 2009). Students’ stories painted a picture of how and why they successfully transferred to a four-year university and persisted. Qualitative inquiry also allows the researcher to understand how African American community college transfer students made sense of and interpreted their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Research occurred at a senior research university located in Texas which is among the largest public universities in the state. Transfers student enrollment at this institution stands among the highest in the nation. The sample consisted of African American students who had graduated within one year this study’s commencement or students who were within 30 semester hours of earning the baccalaureate. Each participant transferred to the university from a Texas community college. Data was collected using individual semi-structured interviews. Eighteen students were interviewed.

Significance of the Study

Substantial literature exists on community college students (Adelman, 2005; Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Hagedorn, Perrakis, & Maxwell, 2007; Laanan, 2003; Townsend, 2008). A growing body of research describes community college transfer student experiences and persistence at four-year institutions (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Laanan, et al., 2010; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Little is known about the experiences of underrepresented populations’ transfer and degree attainment, and even less is known about African American community college students who transfer to four-year institutions and persist through graduation. This lack of scholarship confirms the need to explore these students’ journeys to degree attainment.
In general, this research expands our understanding of African American college student achievement. More specifically, it adds to the sparse scholarship on African American community college students and the even more limited literature on those who transfer to four-year institutions to earn degrees. African American cultural perspectives on transfer experiences and persistence are also advanced. Further, this study reveals what is working rather than what is not. Padilla (1999) succinctly captures this thought:

While it is necessary to understand why some students fail to complete their programs of study so that students and institutions can be told what to avoid, it is crucial to understand what accounts for students’ success when they do complete a degree program so that students and institutions can be told what to do. (p. 132)

Overall, these findings promote African American degree attainment which holds individual and national implications. African Americans who earn degrees experience economic and social benefits. Further, as parents with degrees and higher household incomes, they contribute to degree attainment for their children and subsequent generations. Engle and Lynch (2009) summarize the importance of degree attainment among historically underrepresented student populations when reporting on higher education access and achievement: “America cannot afford to fail to develop the talents of young people from low-income and minority families. It’s not good for our economy. And it’s not good for our democracy” (p. 1). These words underscore the significance of this research.

Definition of Key Terms

Community colleges in 17 states grant baccalaureate degrees (Lewin, 2009). For this study community college refers to a two-year, public, non-baccalaureate conferring, higher education institution. Degree-granting institutions are four-year universities referred to as baccalaureate granting, degree-granting, four-year and senior institutions or simply universities interchangeably. Transfer is a complex concept. Students can transfer any number of ways.
including from two-year to two-year, four-year to four-year and two-year to four-year.

Throughout this study transfer means moving credits from a community college to a four-year institution. The term forward transfer was used interchangeably with transfer. The term transfer student holds a variety of meanings (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Transfer student can mean any student moving credits between post-secondary institutions via enrollment. These students can move credits to or from vocational, two-year, or four-year institutions. This research defines transfer students as students who move credits from a community college to a four-year public institution. Persistence, like transfer, holds multiple meanings in higher education literature. For this study, it means continuation through baccalaureate degree attainment rather than continuation from enrollment through the first year. Degree attainment refers to a baccalaureate degree when not specifically stated. Native students are students who enter four-year institutions as first-time college students and remain at the same institution. African American refers to students who self-identified as African American which includes students whose parents were born in the U.S. as well as those who had a parent or parents who immigrated to the U.S.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Overview

Research on community college transfer students is primarily composed of empirical studies yielding data on the general population. Although some of these studies reflect transfer trends and outcomes by race/ethnicity, minority transfer experiences are rarely explored. Chapter two opens with a description of how the literature was reviewed. The literature review is composed of three major sections: (1) community college and transfer, (2) transition to four year institutions, and (3) degree attainment at four-year institutions. Section one reviews literature on who attends community college and their transfer to four-year institutions. After transfer, students must transition into the four-year environment. Section two synthesizes literature addressing this transition. Finally, section three discusses transfer student degree attainment at four-year institutions. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the conceptual model that frame this study.

Literature Review Process

This literature review is based on a review of 20 years of journals, books, foundation publications, and other published reports. Journals from three broad categories, general higher education, community colleges, and African Americans in higher education, were selected and a systematic table of contents search conducted. To examine general higher education information related to this study’s purpose, *Journal of Higher Education, Research in Higher Education*, and the *Review of Higher Education* were reviewed. For the community college focus, contents from *New Directions for Community Colleges*, the *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, and the *Community College Review* were searched. Contents of *Diverse Issues in*
Higher Education (and its predecessor Black Issues in Higher Education), the Journal of Negro Education, and the Journal of Black Studies were reviewed for the final category, African Americans in higher education. Among these journals, only three, the Journal of Higher Education, Research in Higher Education, and the Community College Review, provided open access to articles from 1994 through 2013. The remaining journals were reviewed from their first available date through their most recent publication date. Searches of electronic databases via the EBSCO database were also conducted. The following keywords guided these searches: degree attainment, baccalaureate attainment, academic persistence, student retention, transfer, African American student, Black student, transfer student, and community college. American Council on Education, College Board, Lumina Foundation, and the Pew Research Center publications were also reviewed.

This systematic review uncovered sparse research focusing solely on African American community college students. Even fewer documents described African American community college transfer students. From 1990 to 2000, published research on African Americans in higher education increased. During this period, researchers began to explore African American student experiences more. Interestingly, a considerable number of studies explored African American student experiences at four-year Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). These studies investigated campus racial climate as well as African American integration and involvement as they relate to retention and outcomes at PWIs. Although these were not the only studies, they represented the bulk of the higher education literature that focused on African American students. A review of 20 years of research revealed few studies focused specifically on African American transfer students.
Community College Students and Transfer

Community colleges play a major role in higher education access. Known for open enrollment, lower tuition, convenient locations, and vocational as well as academic curricula, they open post-secondary education doors to those who otherwise might not enter (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Cohen & Brawer, 2008). This broadening of access to higher education is referred to as community college’s “democratization effect” (Rouse, 1995). Their open door policy attracts students from a wide range of backgrounds with varying goals. Although much of community college literature offers insight into why students choose community colleges, predictors of their success, and their outcomes, their lived experiences are less explored.

When comparing students who attend four-year institutions with those attending community colleges, community college students tend to be older, less academically prepared, female, African American or Hispanic, and from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Horn, Nevill, & Griffith, 2006). Those entering U.S. community colleges are on average 28 years old with just over 60% enrolling in for-credit courses. Forty-five percent of all undergraduates and 45% of all first-time freshmen attend community colleges (AACC, 2013). More than half of all entering students must enroll in at least one developmental course to close academic gaps and prepare for college-level coursework (Bailey et al., 2005). Female enrollment outpaces male at 57% and 43% respectively. Fifty-nine percent attend part-time, while 41% are full-time students. Forty percent of part-time enrollees work full time, while 47% work part time. Twenty-one percent of those enrolled full time also work full time. Most full-time students, 59%, who work do so part time. Forty-two percent work part-time and 19% full-time (AACC, 2013, CCSSE, 2012). White students comprise 58% of community college enrollment, African
Americans 15%, Hispanics 18%, Asian/Pacific Islanders 6%, and Native Americans 1% (AACC, 2013). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds choose community colleges more often than any other public higher education institution type. In their comprehensive study on low-income and minority community college students, Bailey et al. (2005) report that about 29% of community college students are first-generation compared to 16% for public four-year institutions. Considering parental education, 20% of community college students have a parent who earned a baccalaureate degree or higher compared to 45% of four-year public school attendees. Six-year completion rates for community college students seeking any type of credential range from 50% to 60% (Bailey et al., 2005; Hoachlander, Sikora, & Horn, 2003). These statistics portray the general population of community college students.

State figures show Texas community colleges enroll 55% of the state’s public higher education students and 74% of the state’s freshmen and sophomores (Texas Association of Community Colleges, 2010; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011). California community colleges comprise the largest higher education system in the U.S. More than 60% of that state’s first-time college students enter higher education through community colleges (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2013). Florida community colleges enroll 53% of the state’s undergraduates (SREB, 2013).

Looking specifically at minority students, 45% of minority undergraduates in the nation are enrolled in community colleges. Forty-nine percent of all African American and 56% of all Hispanic undergraduates attend community colleges (AACC, 2013). In certain states, minority enrollment far exceeds the national average. For example, minority students make up 75% of Texas’ community college freshmen and sophomore enrollment (Texas Association of Community Colleges, 2011; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2011). By
comparison, minority groups compose 46% of Florida community college enrollment and 82% of the state’s community college freshmen and sophomores (The Florida College System, 2012). Over 84% of first-time college student who enroll in California community colleges belong to a minority race/ethnicity group (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, 2013).

Minority students who enter community colleges are more likely to be from a lower socioeconomic status (SES) and underprepared for college-level coursework (Bailey et al., 2005; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Regarding completion, they are less likely to earn any type of credential within six years. When a credential is earned, it is more likely to be a certificate as opposed to an associate’s degree. With the exception of Asian Americans, minority community college students complete certificates at higher rates than White students (Bailey et al., 2005; Oseguera, 2005).

Unlike universities, community colleges tend to mirror the populations of the community in which they are located. This is most prominently seen in African American and Hispanic enrollments. For example, in 2003, African American community college enrollment equaled or exceeded African American community population figures in 36 states, an increase from 18 states in 1999. For Hispanics, this was true in 17 states, rising from 11 states in 1999 (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). These numbers reflect a growth in community college minority enrollment and highlight the importance of community colleges to minority populations.

Swigart and Murrell (2001) compare African American and Caucasian community college students. They discuss similarities and differences among these students, their differing community college outcomes, and factors that impact the educational attainment of these two groups. These researchers argue that past studies identifying college student characteristics do not accurately represent the characteristics of community college students. They suggest that
community college students need to be examined separately, since community college students differ characteristically from those attending a four-year college. Swigart and Murrell’s study used September 1999 through June 2000 data from the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ) national database kept at the University of Memphis in Tennessee. Of the 650 randomly selected students, 268 were African American representing 48.6% of the sample while 284 were Caucasian representing 51.4% of the sample. Deletions due to incomplete data account for the difference between the 650 selected and the 552 studied. Student ages ranged from 20 to 22 years old.

The data revealed that White community college students were younger and took more credit hours and African American community college students showed more involvement with their studies. African American students used the library more, had greater social interaction, greater interaction with faculty, and used computer technology more. Involvement with their studies impacted the self-reported gains among African American students. Swigart and Murrell note that findings by MacKay and Kuh (1994) support these findings.

This investigation makes a significant contribution to the study of community college to four-year institution transfer. Its comparison of African American and Caucasian students identified differences in practices and outcomes. The characteristics of successful African American community college students must be considered when developing policies and practices that facilitate minority transfer success. This present study sought to discover if the experiences of African American students who successfully transfer and complete degrees are indicative of the above research. Do these practices actually contribute to the success of this student population? Are these practices characteristic of African American students in this study?
Transfer to Four-Year Institutions

Students aspiring to the baccalaureate start at community colleges for a number of reasons. Underprepared students take courses to close academic gaps before entering a four-year environment. Other students who wish to save money choose the more affordable option and pay lower tuition for their first two years, then transfer to a more costly senior institution. A third group attends community colleges based on location. These students prefer to stay close to home while taking their core curriculum. Still other students, unable to secure admission to four-year universities due to narrowing admissions criteria and enrollment caps, are entering community colleges and transferring as an alternative route to gain admission into four-year institutions (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). In this way, community colleges provide access to the baccalaureate through transfer for those who might not have initially considered them. For those whose first choice is the community college, transfer offers opportunities to extend educational attainment beyond a certificate or associate’s degree. In their exploration of urban community college transfer students, Hagedorn, Cypers, and Lester (2008) describe the community college as “an ‘access bridge’ to other levels of postsecondary education” (p. 644). This bridge offers those academically underprepared or financially unable to enter a university a chance to earn a baccalaureate via transfer. Rendón (1993) explains the importance of this bridge to minority students.

The community college is a critical institution for students of color…if the community college transfer function is neglected and allowed to decline, students of color, as well as students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, will be left with no alternative for initiating an education leading to a bachelors’ degree. The prize will be lost, and all of society will be poorer. (p. 12)

Growing minority enrollment in the community college sector makes the transfer path to the baccalaureate more critical for raising minority degree attainment.
Although key, the transfer process is only one aspect of a student’s transfer experience. Community college scholars divide influences on transfer into two broad categories: (1) individual factors and (2) institutional factors. Individual factors denote students’ demographics, academic history, family background, and other personal characteristics and behaviors. Institutional factors center on academic advising, the role of faculty, transfer student support, and transition programs.

Individual Factors

Demographics

Transfer likelihood differs by socioeconomic status (SES), age, race/ethnicity, gender, and parental educational attainment. For example, students from higher SES, of traditional age, and White or Asian American, are more likely to transfer. Dougherty & Keinzl (2006) found females more likely to transfer than males. In contrast, other studies show that male community colleges students transfer at equal or greater rates (Bailey et al., 2005; Hagedorn et al., 2008). When parental educational attainment is considered, community college students who have a parent with at least a bachelor’s degree transfer at higher rates than first-generation students (NCES, 2003a; Pascarella, 1997; Porchea, Allen, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010).

Goals and aspirations

Goals and aspirations influence attainment. Community college students come to college with a variety of strengths, and their aspirations are among their greatest. Educational aspirations drive transfer intent. The majority of students who enter community colleges indicate transfer intent (Bailey et al., 2005; CCSSE, 2012; Hagedorn, 2004). Laanan (2003) explored community college student aspiration using data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and the Student Information Form (SIF) from fall 1996. By examining
aspirations of nearly 14,000 first-time full-time freshmen entering 50 public and 25 private two-year colleges, he explained the link between students’ aspirations and their demographics and backgrounds. His findings revealed a positive correlation between being female, parental educational attainment, and parental income and educational aspirations for attendees at public and private institutions. Conversely, a negative correlation exists between age and aspiration which means younger students tend to have greater aspirations than older students. For students attending public colleges, age, gender, parental education level, and race/ethnicity predicted aspirations, whereas gender primarily predicted aspirations for private college enrollees. Although Laanan’s study could not determine whether these students earn the baccalaureate, it provides insight into how demographics influence community college student aspirations.

Students who enter community college with baccalaureate degree attainment aspirations earn bachelor’s degrees at higher rates (Adelman, 2005; Bailey et al., 2005; Dowd, et al., 2006; Dougherty & Keinzl, 2006; Lee & Frank, 1990; NCES, 2003a; Porchea et al., 2010). These students seek transfer information and resources in preparation for transfer. They also enroll in prescribed courses designed to prepare them for upper-level courses at four-year institutions. Hagedorn et al. (2008) and Berger and Malaney (2003) conclude that transfer readiness is a key determinant in transfer likelihood. Students entering with transfer intent have taken the initial step of preparation, and prepared students experience greater transfer success.

*Student Behavior and Characteristics*

While aspirations reflect transfer and degree attainment likelihood, there are student behaviors that promote degree attainment. A student’s choice about when to enter community college relative to high school completion influences likelihood. Students who enroll in community college immediately following high school transfer at higher rates (Laanan, 2003).
Furthermore, those attending full time transfer at higher rates (NCES, 2003a; Porchea et al., 2010). This may be a direct reflection on part-time students’ family or financial situations. Part-time students may have family obligations that do not allow full-time attendance or their enrollment status may indicate a need to work full-time to meet financial commitments. Part-time students may transfer less often because they lack the financial resources to transfer to a more expensive four-year institution.

In what they describe as a “retrospective approach” (p. 644), Hagedorn et al. (2008) compared activities and behaviors of urban students who successfully navigated transfer to a four-year university with those who expressed intent yet did not complete the transfer process. Through transcript reviews, they discovered academic performance and course-taking patterns predicted transfer success. Students who successfully transfer perform well academically and take a greater number of semester credit hours than those who do not (Hagedorn, et al, 2008). At the same time, they enroll in and pass more math and science courses.

Hagedorn et al. (2008) further confirmed assertions (Adelman, 2005) that students’ academic backgrounds are predictive of transfer likelihood. Generally, community college students are less likely to have taken courses that prepare them for college-level academics. Those who enter community college with more rigorous high school preparation, higher achievement test scores, and higher secondary grade point averages (GPAs) are more likely to transfer to four-year institutions. Transcripts of students who successfully transferred revealed higher English and math placement test scores. These findings also confirm other scholarship that asserts that students requiring remediation are less likely to move on to senior institutions (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Porchea et al., 2010; Roska & Calcagno, 2010; Hoachlander et al., 2003). Seventy-two percent of community college students taking required placement tests prior
to enrollment need at least one remedial course. According to some, remediation hinders transfer and the negative effect is particularly detrimental to minority students who are more likely to take developmental courses (Adelman, 2005). Scholars differ on the actual effects of developmental coursework. Some argue inadequate student tracking and measurements make it hard to determine the actual effect on transfer (Bailey et al., 2005; Melguizo, Hagedorn, & Cypers, 2008). Courses designed to help students close academic gaps and pave the way for higher education attainment may in fact hinder transfer and degree completion.

Institutional Factors

Institutions create environments that influence transfer success. Literature points to institutional factors such as academic advising, the availability and accuracy of transfer information, the role of faculty, and institutional programming as prominent institutional factors.

Academic Advising

Few will argue the importance of academic advising to the success of community college transfer students. Students who receive accurate advising navigate transfer more successfully than those who do not (O’Gara, Mechur-Karp & Hughes, 2009; Melguizo & Dowd, 2009). Well-meaning but ill-informed advisers can hinder students’ transfer efforts resulting in wasted time, money, and credits. The more time students spend at community colleges taking courses unrelated to their transfer goals, the less likely they are to successfully transfer to a four-year institution (Hagedorn, et al., 2008). Accurate transfer advising can prevent this from occurring.

In their study of low-income community college students, Dowd et al. (2006) describe community college academic advising as inconsistent noting “...that the critical relationships between transfer counselor and students at community colleges have a haphazard, ‘accidental’ quality – suggests the need for greater institutionalization of the perspectives and experiences of
transfer students in recruitment, admissions, and financial aid offices” (p. 5). Dowd et al. also concluded that poor advising contributes to lower transfer rates among minority students. This is understandable given the high percentage of minority first-generation students. Unable to rely on familial sources of support and guidance, these students often seek informal advice from peers rather than institutional staff (Lee, 2001). Misinformation transmitted through these informal channels may only exacerbate student frustration causing further delays and missteps in the transfer process (Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009). Noting the importance of academic advising, Kuh (2008) calls for well-trained advisers who are experts in the field of advisement. Flaga (2006) suggests if “community college advisers have an understanding of both campus environments, they can help students to prepare for the differences they may encounter at the 4-year university” (p. 11). While Flaga’s notion is ideal, it is not practical, especially if a community college acts as a feeder institution to multiple four-year institutions. In contrast to institutional specialization, Kuh (2008) advocates that advisers become experts in their fields and practice the “adviser as teacher model.” In this approach, advisers act as coaches or facilitators in teaching students how to ask the “right” questions that lead to information and resources that best fit their individual needs. Not only is this approach practical, it equips students to advocate for themselves.

Articulation

Transfer students commonly report difficulty in finding consistent information about the transfer process. Inaccurate and poorly communicated transfer requirements pose a threat to successful transfer to four-year colleges and universities (Adelman, 2006; de la Torre, 2007; Hagedorn, Perrakis, & Maxwell, 2007). Perhaps the most critical informational need for transfer students is transfer articulation. Articulation agreements identify which community college
courses will be accepted at a four-year institution. These agreements create a smoother transfer pathway between two and four-year institutions. Although articulation agreements exist between community colleges and four-year universities to facilitate transfer, they can be unclear and confusing to students.

Measures to ensure clear articulation are being undertaken in a number of states. As transfer students increasingly depend on online resources to navigate the transfer process, de la Torre (2007) reports a number of states are moving articulation information online. When asked how they obtained knowledge about transfer to a university, community college students acknowledged advisers, faculty, family, and friends, but overwhelmingly reported using the internet (Ellis, 2013). Web-based articulation agreements can readily be accessed by students and easily updated by institutions. This trend could effectively reduce the number of challenges students face when trying to understand articulation (Adelman, 2006; de la Torre, 2007, Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Yet, web-based articulation can prove detrimental. For example, outdated and incorrect information misleads students resulting in frustration, wasted time and money (Adelman, 2006).

Well-informed community college transfer students transition and perform better academically at senior institutions. Easily accessible information is a key to transfer success. Equally important, is information accuracy and clarity. Whether through traditional means such as flyers, campus posting, and mailing or through modern means such as email, texting, websites, or social media, incorrect and hard to understand information hinders transfer. Two- and four-year institutions must take added care to ensure accessibility and accuracy of transfer information given its effect on transfer success (Adelman, 2006).
Faculty

Research shows a strong correlation between faculty interaction and students’ successful transfer to four-year colleges. Cejda and Kaylor (2001) found students who interact with faculty at the community college level are more likely to transfer to four-year colleges. This directly influences lower SES student transfer rates because they are less likely to interact with faculty, a successful transfer predictor (Cabrera, Burkum, & LaNasa, 2005; Suarez, 2003; Walpole, 2008).

Additionally, faculty work status influences likelihood of transfer to four-year institutions. The more coursework students take from part-time faculty the less likely they are to transfer to four-year institutions. Eagan and Jaeger (2009) examined faculty’s effect on community college transfer. They sought to determine the relationship between exposure to part-time faculty and the likelihood of transferring to a four-year college or university. Using California Community College System data, the authors frame this quantitative study with prior research and social and human capital theories. They argue diverse student goals, varying attendance patterns and fluctuating transfer rates highlight the need to identify specific factors affecting transfer.

Eagan and Jaeger found when exposed to part-time faculty, student likelihood of transfer decreases. Students benefit from engaged and available faculty. Part-time faculty members are less engaged and less available than full-time faculty. Nationally, part-time faculty represent just over 46% of all higher education faculty. In community colleges, this number rises to 67%. Given this, Eagan and Jaeger recommend community colleges find ways to incentivize part-time faculty engagement and availability with students.
Institutional Culture and Collaboration

The significance of institutional culture cannot be underestimated in student transfer and transition. Effectively promoting transfer must occur throughout the institution (Flaga, 2006; Mery & Schiorring, 2011). Handel (2007, 2011a) pointed to a transfer-going culture in which community colleges create environments that promote the idea of transfer to a four-year institution. This responsibility does not solely rest with community colleges. Four-year institutions must actively engage in supporting transfer students (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Flaga, 2006; Kisker, 2007). Flaga (2006) suggests even information fairs at community colleges and pre-transfer orientations sponsored by four-year institutions would help bridge these institutions for transfer students. Kisker’s (2007) findings from her qualitative study of community college–university partnerships support Flaga’s suggestion. She recommends universities establish a consistent presence on community college campuses to establish and strengthen two-year/four-year partnerships.

Beyond a campus presence, Eggleston and Laanan (2001) call for community colleges and four-year institutions to more heavily weigh students’ needs when establishing partnerships and developing transition programs. For example, transfer centers at community college and four-year universities not only build bridges between institutions they can address students’ needs specific their campuses (Zamani, 2001). Personnel familiar campus policies and procedures and those who are well-trained in academic and financial aid advising should staff these centers (Freeman, Conley, & Brooks, 2006). Whether formal or informal, it is clear that institutional collaboration must occur if transfer student success is to increase.

Zamani (2001) discusses transfer barriers and possible institutional solutions. She states that research indicates African American and Hispanic students who enroll in community
colleges are less likely to complete their bachelors’ degrees than their Caucasian counterparts. Noting the often cited causes of these inequities such as limited financial resources and inadequate academic preparation, Zamani suggests institutional factors also pose significant barriers to non-Asian minority transfer to four-year institutions. She posits that community colleges contribute to these institutional factors because a “less collegiate environment and culture” exists at this level. Most community college students commute, work more hours, and consult faculty less than four-year institution students. Despite these realities of community college life, the creation of “learning communities” and a more academically supportive environment would facilitate transfer success. At the four-year level, climate and culture play a role when minority transfer students feel culturally alienated. They may see the four-year institution as culturally homogeneous and have difficulty transitioning into this environment. These institutions can develop policies and programs that promote minority and multi-cultural inclusion and involvement.

Like Hagedorn, Lester, Garcia, McLain, & May (2004), Zamani argues the establishment of transfer centers can address these barriers at both types of institutions. At the community college level, these centers can provide transfer services such as transcript review, articulation agreement clarification, and support through the transfer process. The addition of these student services will be instrumental in creating a more “collegiate environment”. At the four-year institutions, these centers can assist in easing transition shock and support acclamation to the four-year less culturally diverse environment. These transfer centers can also serve to bridge two-year and four-year institution joint efforts in facilitating the transfer process. Zamani recommends stronger two-year and four-year institution partnerships as a key to increasing minority transfer success. Designing policies and programs that foster transfer success cannot
occur in isolation. It must be a joint effort. In light of these findings, the present research sought
to discover how institutional factors influence African American transfer student degree
attainment, more specifically, which factors were the most helpful and which represented
barriers to their success.

African American Community College Transfer Students

Research reveals transfer experiences differ among races (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). Cultural and economic backgrounds as well as expectations play a role in transfer and the transition process at four-year institutions which directly impact minority attrition, persistence and degree attainment. African American community college students have higher educational aspirations than White community college students (Carter, 2001). Among African Americans and Whites with the same educational aspirations, African Americans transfer at lower rates (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006). Moreover, African Americans are more likely to require remedial courses than White students. They also interact less with faculty (Grimes & David, 1999; Porchea et al., 2010). As noted earlier, a majority of scholarship indicates that remedial coursework has a negative effect on forward transfer and faculty interaction promotes transfer and degree attainment. These two factors significantly influence transfer rates (Adelman, 2005; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Porchea et al., 2010)

Research on minority student transfer indicates with the exception of Asian Americans, minorities transfer at lower rates than White students (Bailey et al., 2005; Zamani, 2001). Wassmer, Moore, and Shulock (2004) looked specifically at community college race/ethnicity composition and transfer rates. Results showed institutions with higher Latino or African American enrollment had lower transfer rates. Community colleges with higher populations of traditional-aged, high SES, and academically college ready students had greater transfer rates.
They suggest social and cultural factors impact transfer rates and argue the amount of social capital students possess contributes to differing transfer outcomes among different student populations. They explain how students’ life experiences, cultural backgrounds, opportunities, social supports, and non-familial relationships make up their cultural and social capital. They posit minority students’ limited cultural and social capital place them at a distinct disadvantage in their transfer pursuits. Wassmer et al. (2004) also describe how community colleges’ lower expectations may inspire lower student expectations that may directly affect minority student transfer. Zamani (2001) classified lowered expectations at community colleges as an institutional barrier to non-Asian minority transfer to four-year institutions. She also identified limited financial resources as a cause for lower minority transfer rates.

Blau (1999) investigated two-year community college transfers rates among African Americans and reported how institutional size influences community college transfer rates and student transition. She used data from the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC), public two-year institutions, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), and PWIs. Study results show higher African American transfer rates were associated with larger-sized community colleges. Community colleges located in neighborhoods with higher African American populations and a higher mean income also had higher African American transfer rates. Blau further identified an association between community colleges that provided daycare services with higher African American student transfer rates. Institutions where African American enrollment in vocational programs exceeded White student enrollment had lower African American student transfer rates. Blau attributes higher transfer rates at larger institutions to their larger budgets that enable them to provide transfer student support services that smaller
institutions cannot. She states these include academic resources, transfer support program, scholarships, financial aid, and family assistance such as daycare services.

Lee’s (2001) qualitative research sought to gather data from African Americans who had successfully transferred from community colleges to four-year institutions. Student comments reflected frustration and uncertainty when it came to understanding transfer requirements and procedures. One specific obstacle was articulation. Articulation agreements outline which courses transfer from a particular community college to a four-year institution. Students often found articulation agreements unclear and had difficulty understanding course equivalences. Additionally, the research indicates that students seldom took advantage of available advising designed specifically to clarify transfer requirements. Transfer programs represent another obstacle minority transfer students faced. Though easily finding programs to support their transfer process at the two-year institution, students reported they did not find programs offering similar support at the four-year institution. Moreover, the size of the four-year institution, the difficulty in finding the exact personnel to address their specific questions, and the difficulty in establishing relationships with faculty, led some transfer students to continue to look to their two-year faculty for support. Students also tended to seek informal advice from peers rather than university staff.

Although Wassmer et al. (2004) used cultural and social capital to explain how minority student deficit contributed to lower minority transfer rates, the current research seeks to understand what African American transfer students bring to their transfer experience that contributes to their success. Similar to Lee (2001), this exploration looked to student experiences and perspectives to shed light on which individual factors aid African American
community college students along their paths to successful transfer and baccalaureate degree attainment.

University Transition

Transition to a four-year institution may be the most crucial phase in community college transfer students’ pursuit of the baccalaureate (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Laanan, 1996). What students do before transferring affects this transition. Berger and Malaney (2003) evaluated adjustment by measuring transfer student satisfaction in three areas, social, academic and general satisfaction with the four-year university. Data was gathered from University of Massachusetts Amherst students who transferred from two-year institutions. Researchers used a two-week telephone survey to reach 372 transfer students at the university. Students reported the lowest level of satisfaction with university academic support. Overall findings reveal students who proactively prepare for transfer at community colleges experience smoother transitions to senior institutions. The blame for lack of transfer success at one time was placed on students. Then the blame shifted to the failure of community colleges in preparing their students for four-year institutions. Berger and Malaney (2003) suggest community colleges and universities promote early transfer preparation by community colleges students. This will result in smoother transitions and increase transfer success. The researchers suggest universities improve advising services, faculty availability, and other academic supports specific to transfer students to aid transition.

Students may encounter transition difficulty inside and outside the classroom. Inside the classroom, they face increased academic rigor, larger class sizes, and challenges with a new faculty relationship (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Eggleston & Laanan, 2001). Tobolowsky and
Cox’s (2012) single-institution study found transfer students often confront negative stereotyping by faculty who express little confidence in their academic ability. Real or perceived negative feelings about transfer students from faculty or native students can impede successful transition (Rhine et al., 2000). These findings supports Berger and Malaney (2003) who describe reluctance by four-year institutions to aggressively recruit community college students due to the institutions’ perceptions that these students are less prepared and less able to succeed at 4-year institutions.

Outside the classroom, transfer students must often adjust to larger campuses, new institutional procedures, and connecting socially which facilitates integration (Flaga, 2006; Owens, 2010). Townsend and Wilson (2006) explain social integration is a challenge for traditional and non-traditional aged students. When traditional-aged students arrive on campus, they find their peers have already established social relationships. Difficulty establishing social support leaves many transfer students feelings marginalized and isolated. For example students reported a need for some freshmen but not all. Further, they desired transfer-specific services but did not want to be stigmatized as a “transfer” student.

Learning how to navigate university infrastructure poses added difficulty (Flaga, 2006). At the institutional level, faculty and staff’s lack of understanding about transfer students’ needs and negative perceptions about transfer student academic abilities contributes to hindrances (Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Transfer Shock

Most commonly known as “transfer shock,” difficulty adjusting to new academic, social, and institutional environments can lead to transfer student attrition (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Ishitani, 2008; Ishitani, & McKitrick, 2010; Laanan, 2007; Pennington, 2006). Most research on
students who experience transfer shock reaches similar conclusions. One major finding is the link between transfer transition and poor academic performance. Initially, transfer students are typically outperformed by native counterparts as indicated by lower GPAs. This is known as transfer grade shock or TGS (Glass & Harrington, 2002; Pennington, 2006). Transfer shock is cited as the cause of this weaker academic performance (Laanan, 2001). Some scholars point to grade inflation at community colleges as the primary cause of TGS (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000).

Students who grow accustomed to less demanding standards at the two-year level underestimate academic requirements at senior institutions. However, Pennington (2006) found transfer students who enrolled in more courses their first semester earned higher first semester GPAs than their counterparts enrolling in fewer courses.

It is important to note that although they initially earn lower GPAs, as community college transfer students increase their post-transfer GPAs, they increase retention likelihood (Ishitani, 2008, Laanan, 2001). Carlan and Byxbe (2000) and Glass and Harrington (2002) report after first semester adjustments, transfer students perform just as well as native students earning GPAs comparative to those of native junior and seniors. Their findings not only revealed GPAs varied little between transfer students and natives students after the first semester, but transfer students persist at similar rates as native juniors at this point (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Ishitani, 2008; Ishitani, & McKitrick, 2010; Rhine et al., 2000).

Besides lower GPAs, transfer shock can lead to social isolation and eventual attrition. Efforts by institutions can help alleviate the consequences of transfer shock.

Transfer Student Support

At the institutional level, transfer centers, transfer counselors, mentors, and buddy programs can assist in easing transition shock and support acclamation to the four-year
institution (Laanan, 1996; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Research often cites community colleges’ failure to prepare students for four-year institutions as a hindrance to successful transition (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Eggleston & Lanaan, 2001; Lee, 2001; Townsend, 2008; Zamani, 2001). Others have specifically identified community college nurturing as most detrimental (Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009). However, regarding nurturing, Carlan and Byxbe (2000) offer balance by noting “when criticizing community colleges for their nurturing approach, however, it may be prudent to keep in mind that many of its students may never have attained junior status without that less intimidating approach” (p. 39). Thus “nurturing” can be seen as a double-edged sword that is beneficial when moderately applied but detrimental if over used.

Despite calls for less “hand holding” at the community college, when students transition into the university environment, they do need a measure of support during transition (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Caught between upper-level academic status and the need for various freshmen services, transfer student needs can easily go unnoticed. They are beyond some basic first-year student services, yet need to know how to navigate the physical and administrative landscape of a university (Laanan, 2007; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2008). As community colleges face charges of supporting students too much, senior institutions are often accused of not providing enough support. Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) not only report limited transfer support programs at four-year institutions, but policies that overlook transfer student needs. Along with Eggleston and Laanan (2001), Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) oppose a “one size fits all” approach. Diverse transfer student needs require various approaches. Transfer specific advising and orientations and transfer centers support transition to four-year institutions.
Special programs support transfer success. Transfer students who participate in mentoring, buddy programs, athletics, even transfer student honors programs face fewer transition obstacles (Hoffman & Wallach; 2005; Kane, 2001; Laanan, 1996; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Zamani, 2001). These programs support students transitioning to four-year institutions by providing liaisons in the form of program directors, coaches, and specially assigned faculty. Programs such as these create a formal transfer support system (Hoffman & Wallach; 2005; Kane, 2001; Laanan, 1996; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Zamani, 2001). Transfer support programs can facilitate social connection and foster student integration. Special programs such as TRIO and GEAR UP offer added support to low-income, first-generation community college transfer students and minority transfer students by increasing college awareness, and academic preparation (Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000; Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009). This is particularly helpful because these student populations are at least likely to benefit from parents who have attended college.

Eggleston and Laanan (2001) describe programs institutions employ to facilitate community college student transfer to four-year institutions. They focus on the effectiveness of support programs at four-year institutions to reduce transfer shock and promote success. Eggleston and Laanan call for greater participation by both four-year institutions and community colleges when developing transition support. Programs designed specifically to meet transfer student needs prove the most effective. Simply including transfer students with the general student population fails to address these needs. Eggleston and Laanan (2001) defend the necessity of specific transfer services rather than adopting a “one size fits all.”
Transfer Student Retention

Similar to transfer likelihood, parental education affects persistence and degree attainment (Sandy, Gonzalez, & Hilmer, 2006). First-generation students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to persist after transfer (Bailey et al., 2005). When compared to native students, transfer students were more likely to initially earn lower GPAs (Glass & Harrington, 2002; Laanan, 2001; Pennington, 2006). However, as community college transfer students increase their post-transfer GPAs, they also increase retention likelihood (Ishitani, 2008; Laanan, 2001). In addition, generally after first semester adjustments transfer students perform just as well as native students. GPAs vary little between transfer students and native students after the first semester and persist at similar rates as native juniors (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000, Glass & Harrington, 2002; Ishitani, 2008; Ishitani, & McKitrick, 2010). Non-traditional-aged community college transfer students outperform traditional-aged students. Their drive to complete their degrees is cited as the cause (Pennington, 2006).

Degree Attainment

Research on degree completion consistently associates educational attainment with demographics. Socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity, parental education levels, gender, and age reflect differing rates of baccalaureate degree completion (Bowen et al., 2009; Thompson, Gorin, Obeidat, & Chen, 2006; Kuh et al., 2006; Titus, 2006; Walpole, 2003). Bowen et al. (2009) report students from lower SES where family income is in the bottom quartile, earn bachelor’s degrees at far lower rates than students in the second, third, and top SES quartile. African American, Hispanic, and Native American degree attainment rates consistently lag behind White student rates (NCES, 2011). Thompson et al. (2006) used NCES and College Board data to compare degree attainment indicators for African American and White students.
Results indicate different predictive factors for these two student populations. Gender, high mathematic achievement, and high parental expectations were most predictive for African American students with gender emerging as the strongest. For Whites, student expectations, SES, and high mathematic achievement predicted degree attainment. When considering parental education levels, students who have a parent with some college attain the baccalaureate at twice the rate of first generation students. Students with at least one degree-holding parent attain baccalaureates at over four times the rate of first generation students (Bowen et al., 2009).

For more than a decade, degree attainment trends show females outperforming males (Peter, Horn, & Carroll, 2005). Similarly, traditional-aged students earn degrees at higher rates than non-traditional aged students (Cabrera et al., 2005). This supports findings that students who enroll in four-year institutions immediately following high school are more likely to earn bachelor’s degrees than those who delay entry (Horn, Cataldi, & Sikora, 2005).

Scholarship also points to institutional influences on degree attainment. Institutional revenues and expenditures have been associated to degree completion. Ryan (2004) proved a positive correlation exists between allocations for instructional, academic, and student services support and degree attainment. Along these same lines, Titus (2006) investigated the relationship between institutional revenues and completion. His data suggests institutions receiving greater tuition revenue reflect greater degree attainment.

Transfer Student Baccalaureate Degree Attainment

Similar to transfer likelihood, transfer student degree attainment is influenced by a number of factors including demographics and academic background. About half of all community college students intend to transfer to a four-year institution to earn a degree (CCSSE, 2006). Studies examining baccalaureate attainment among community college transfer students
point to several contributing factors to transfer student baccalaureate degree attainment. Similar to baccalaureate degree attainment for native students, socioeconomics, age, gender, college readiness, educational aspirations, and the ability to integrate into the four-year environment all influence community college transfer student degree attainment (CCSSE, 2006; Kuh, et al, 2006; Freeman, et al. 2006; Wang, 2009).

Freeman et al. (2006) and Wang (2009) present two extensive investigations pertaining to community college transfer student baccalaureate attainment. Wang’s findings closely parallel results from Freeman et al. (2006). Freeman et al. (2006) utilized NCES 1996/01 Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study 1996/01. Freeman et al.’s (2006) study reveals how gender, economics, geography and age influence transfer student degree attainment. However, unlike Wang (2009), it did not consider race and ethnicity. Wang’s (2009) comprehensive quantitative study of community college transfer student degree attainment replicates portions of earlier studies. She used NELS: 88/2000 and Postsecondary Education Transcript Study (PETS) data in her investigation and found 63% of community college transfer students earned a bachelor’s degree by 2000. Her study will be used comparatively to review previous research on community college transfer student degree attainment. Wang specifically investigated the relationship of key individual and institutional factors to degree attainment. She arranged these factors into three categories predictive of community college transfer student persistence and degree attainment: precollege characteristics, college experiences, and environmental factors and concluded degree attainment likelihood is related to demographics, precollege characteristics, and college experiences. Her findings support earlier research on community college transfer conducted by Freeman et al. (2006), Hagedorn et al. (2008), and Hoachlander et al. (2003).
Precollege Characteristics

Demographically, Wang looked at SES, gender, and race/ethnicity. Higher SES showed a positive effect on degree attainment agreeing with previous studies. Females were twice as likely to earn the baccalaureate as males. According to her study, race/ethnicity is a significant predictor of degree attainment. Her analysis revealed African Americans are least likely among all racial/ethnic groups to persist and earn the four-year degree. These findings agree with a number of earlier studies including Baily et al.’s (2005) investigation of low-income and minority community college students; Dougherty and Kienzl’s (2006) examination of the influence student aspiration, social background and precollege academics on degree attainment; and Freeman et al. (2006).

Following Hagedorn et al. (2008) and Hoachlander et al. (2003) findings on college readiness, Wang concludes transfer students with stronger high school academic backgrounds are more likely to persist through degree attainment. Analyzing college readiness in relation to SES, she found that although lower SES tends to negatively affect transfer and degree attainment, rigorous high school academics can offset negative effects of lower SES.

Wang supports the findings of Hoachlander et al. (2003) and Freeman et al. (2006), that traditional-aged students transfer and earn degrees more often than non-traditional-aged students. Considering aspirations, students entering community college with baccalaureate rather than associate degree aspirations are more likely to earn a baccalaureate degree within 6 years than those aspiring only to associate’s (Fox, Connolly, & Snyder, 2005; Hoachlander et al., 2003). A later study by Porchea et al. (2010) offers support for this relationship between aspiring to the baccalaureate degree and actual attainment outcomes. Regarding gender, female community...
college transfer students are more likely to persist and earn bachelor’s degrees than males (Freeman et al., 2006; Wang, 2009).

Community College Experiences

Wang (2009) also measured remediation effects. Similar to its influence on transfer likelihood, remediation has a negative effect on bachelor’s degree attainment. For one reason, remedial courses delay enrollment in college-level coursework, and a greater amount of time spent at the community college adversely affects transfer likelihood. Required remediation also reflects limited college readiness. Thus, community college students who take at least one remedial course are less likely to complete the baccalaureate than those requiring no remediation (Bailey et al., 2005).

Enrollment status is linked to degree attainment likelihood. Work demands, family life, finances, and other circumstances determine student enrollment intensity. Wang’s results showed community college students who were enrolled full-time earned degrees at higher rates than those who attended part-time. This is not surprising since full-time students are able to spend more time on campus and engage with other students and faculty. They also may be of traditional age, shown to increase post-transfer degree attainment, and may not share the work or family obligations of part-time students.

Just as high-school academic performance influences the transfer likelihood for community college students, community college academic performance influences their post-transfer persistence and degree attainment. Poor academic performance at the community college decreases degree attainment likelihood following transfer (Dennis, Calvillo, & Gonzalez, 2008). Wang’s study indicated this through high community college GPA. Students with high GPAs relative to other community college students attained the degree at greater rates. In fact,
her statistical analysis revealed “a one-point increase in GPA is associated with an increase in the odds of earning the baccalaureate by a factor of 3.029” (p. 580).

Environmental Factors

Besides addressing pre-college and college experiences of community college transfer students, Wang (2009) examined environmental factors at the four-year institution. Just as work and family commitments influence enrollment status, the number of hours worked and whether a transfer student cares for dependents affect degree attainment. As work hours increase, attainment likelihood decreases. Further, having dependents negatively affects degree attainment likelihood at four-year institutions. Related to the need to work and dependent care, post transfer finances matter as well. Freeman et al. (2006) discovered Pell Grant recipients who continued receiving funding after transfer were more likely to attain degrees than those who did not continue receiving grants. This echoes Yang’s (2005) conclusion that cost differences between community colleges and four-year institutions attendance may discourage minority student decisions to transfer forward.

Wang’s results affirm involvement at the four-year campus promotes transfer student degree attainment. Ishitani and McKitrick (2010) explored post transfer experiences and degree attainment. Their findings indicate students who attend classes full-time at the four year institution, have greater involvement levels and greater involvement is associated with greater transfer student persistence and degree attainment.

The “Diversion” Or “Community College” Effect

Community college scholars are divided about the effect of community college attendance on baccalaureate degree attainment. Reflective of Clark's (1960) "cooling out" notion, some scholars question whether community colleges actually hinder baccalaureate degree
attainment. Labeled the "diversion" or “community college” effect by more recent scholarship (Alfonso, 2006; Doyle, 2009), substantial research supports the phenomenon. Most argue community college students are less likely to earn degrees than those who start at four-year institutions (Alfonso, 2006; Christie & Hutcherson, 2003; Dougherty, 1992, 2006; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Townsend, 2007). Known as the “community college effect,” this commonly occurs because a push toward occupational programs and the associate’s degree distracts student from pursuing four-year degrees. This is particularly true for first generation, low-income, and minority students who have been traditionally tracked into vocational studies or certificate programs (Dougherty, 1992; Wassmer et al., 2004). A significant portion of students who enter community colleges simply stop out or drop out before earning any type of credential (Bailey et al., 2005; Driscoll, 2007). Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey (2006) suggest “many students at community colleges are socialized to accept a less desirable option than a bachelor’s degree” (p. 890)

Findings from Arbona and Nora’s (2007) study on Hispanic student degree attainment support the idea of a “community college” or “diversion effect”. Results show Hispanic students who enroll in four-year institutions are more likely to earn bachelor’s degrees than those entering community colleges. Long and Kurlaendar (2009) found students starting at community colleges were 43% less likely to earn a bachelor’s degree when compared to those entering four-year institutions as first-time, first-year freshmen. When they directly compare the effect on Black and White students, they further found Blacks experience a greater negative affect from pursuing the baccalaureate through the community college path than Whites. They acknowledge this could be attributed to the higher level of academic preparation of Whites students compared to Black student in the sample.
Fewer studies contradict findings on the likelihood of differing outcomes between community college transfer students and native students. Countering the idea of a “community college effect,” other research suggests transfer students are just as likely to earn degrees as native students (Leigh & Gill, 2003; Hoachlander et al., 2003; Lee et al., 1993; Melguizo & Dowd, 2009). Although somewhat dated, Lee et al.’s (1993) investigation found community college students are just as likely to transfer and attain the baccalaureate as native students who entered four-year institutions following high school. They assert on the whole, transfer students with high GPAs perform just as well as native university students. A decade later, Leigh and Gill’s (2003) study also sought to determine whether community college attendance adversely affect baccalaureate degree attainment. By using National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) data, that spans a 25 year period from 1979 through 1996, they captured student postsecondary aspirations, institutional choices and outcomes. Results evidenced little support for the “diversion effect.” This bolsters Lee et al.’s (1993) findings.

More recently, Melguizo and Dowd (2009) questioned whether community colleges attendance hinders degree attainment. Using the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS 88/2000), they explored completion rates of student who graduated high school in 1992. They compared community college transfer students and native juniors to determine the effect of SES and institutional selectivity on bachelor’s degree attainment. When controlling for SES, Melguizo and Dowd actually found little difference in degree attainment rates of transfer and native students. However, when they only considered SES, results suggested low-SES transfer and low-SES native juniors had similar attainment rates. Regarding selectivity, findings reveal a positive correlation between senior institutions’ selectivity and their transfer student degree attainment rates. In other words, the more selective the university, the higher their transfer
student completion rates are. Higher transfer student degree attainment rates among selective
universities could be attributed to at least two things, namely that top performing community
college student are more likely to gain admittance to these institutions than lower performing
students and that selective institutions provide effective transition and support services that lead
to degree attainment. This study raises serious challenges to the “diversion effect.”

African American Transfer Student Degree Attainment

African American and Hispanic students who enroll in community colleges are less likely
to transfer and complete bachelors’ degrees than their Caucasian counterparts (Bailey et al.,
2005; Zamani, 2001). Limited financial resources, inadequate academic preparation, and feelings
of cultural alienation can hinder minority community college transfer and degree completion
(Green, 2001; Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Rendón & Nora, 1994; Rendón & Valadez, 1993;
Zamani, 2001).

The majority of literature on African American postsecondary experiences focuses on
students at PWIs and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Allen, 1992;
Brown, Bertrand, & Donahoo, 2001; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006;
Thompson & Fretz, 1991). Little is devoted to African American community colleges students.
However, Bailey et al. (2005) found African American community college students are least
likely than any other group to complete the bachelor’s degree. Only about 2% transfer
successfully and earn the baccalaureate (Bailey et al., 2005; NCES, 2002; Zamani, 2001).

In a unique investigation, Buck (2009) explored African American females who began
their college experience in community colleges and earned doctorate degrees. Although this is a
helpful discussion because it describes common challenges among African American community
college students, further investigation of all African American community college transfer
students is warranted. Besides Blau (1999) and Lee (2001) there is little published research investigating African American community college transfer students. Research primarily discusses African American transfer students either in the context of minority students or in the general population of transfer students. Studies specifically exploring African American community college transfer student bachelor’s degree attainment consisted of a handful of dissertations (Granger, 2011; Harvey, 2010; Morrice, 2011; Younger, 2009). This underscores the need for this study.

Summary of Literature

Community colleges provide vital postsecondary offerings from continuing education courses to vocational training and preparation for transfer to four-year institutions. Students enter from a variety of social, economic, and educational backgrounds. For historically underserved students, these institutions represent a gateway to higher education and access to the bachelor’s degree. Student demographics, academic experience, and individual behavior are predictive of transfer likelihood. Students less likely to transfer are those from a minority group, with the exception of Asian Americans, from lower SES, require remediation at the community colleges, and those who attend part-time.

Students unfamiliar with transfer requirements including course articulation face barriers in the transfer process. Institutional barriers such as poor and inconsistent academic advising, limited faculty involvement, and inaccurate information hinder community college students’ transfer progress. Transfer specific advising, access to accurate transfer information, transition services, and two-year/four-year partnerships support the transfer process. Transition links students’ community college experiences with their four-year experiences. Integration at the four-year institution poses challenges to transfer students. This critical phase often reveals how
well students prepared themselves and how well institutions prepare their students for the university environment. During transition, transfer students may face academic and social challenges.

Community colleges are seen as gateways to higher education, yet scholars dispute their effect on baccalaureate degree attainment. Some argue community colleges hamper students’ effort to transfer and earn a bachelor’s degree. In contrast, others conclude community college attendance does not negatively affect transfer student baccalaureate attainment.

Similar to two-year to four-year transfer, post transfer bachelor’s degree completion is related to demographics and academic performance. African American and Hispanic students who enroll in community colleges are less likely to complete the bachelor’s degree. Various factors influence transfer student achievement at four-year institutions. Although a growing number of scholars are examining community college transfer, we know little about African Americans who enter higher education through the community college, transfer, and complete the baccalaureate. Limited literature informs us that this student population transfers and earns degrees at relatively lower rates than other student groups. Further study is needed to inform higher education about what promotes successful transfer and baccalaureate attainment among African American community college students.

Conceptual Framework

Few college discussions on college student retention occur without mentioning Tinto’s (1987, 1993) Model of Student Departure. Researchers widely use Tinto’s Model when examining student retention and success. Tinto’s model suggests students leave college because they have not integrated academically and socially into the college environment. He bases successful integration on separating from former support systems and establishing new ones.
within the college context. Scholars have questioned this model’s applicability to minority
students, particularly those entering PWIs (Guiffrida, 2006; Kuh & Love, 2000; Rendón, Jalomo,

Tinto (1993) bases his model on Van Gennep’s (1969) anthropological model of cultural
transition. Tierney (1992) points out Van Gennep’s (1969) model addresses intra-cultural
assimilation. For minority students attending PWIs, transition into a four-year college
environment may represent a cross-cultural rather than intra-cultural transition. The distinction
between intra-cultural and cross-cultural transition matters because reference points differ.
During intra-cultural transition, a person retains certain cultural norms, values, and perspectives.
When leaving one culture and moving to another, a person may be forced to leave behind these
critical points of reference that actually facilitate change and transition. Removing or abandoning
their familial and cultural ties when entering college essentially cuts minority students off from
important support systems, leaving them without the necessary reference points - their primary
culture - to navigate their new culture, which is the college environment (Kuh & Love, 2000;
Tierney, 1992).

In fact, research indicates maintaining familial and cultural ties have proven critical to
minority student higher education success (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn,
1999; Guiffrida, 2005). Cabrera et al. (1999) compared White and African American college
student adjustment. For African American students they concluded “disengagement with family,
friends, and past communities is not a precondition for the successful adjustment to college; the
reverse appears to be more truthful” (p. 152). Interestingly, Guiffrida (2005) found African
American student perceptions about their families’ influence on their academic achievement
vary. In his study, he looked at three groups of African American students: (1) the leavers,
students who left college before graduating, (2) the low achievers, students on academic probation or suspension, and (3) the high achievers, students who self-identified as academically successful. Students Guiffrida labeled leavers and low achievers reported that family ties distracted from academics. They cited family obligations as hindrances to academic success. This finding supports Tinto’s assertions that separation from family promotes retention and success. The high achievers reported family ties had the opposite effect. These students stated their family ties contributed to their college success by providing emotional, academic, and financial support. Experiences of the high achievers differ from Tinto’s Model. They support Cabrera et al.’s (1999) conclusions that family support systems contribute to African American success. For some African-American college students separating from family contributes to academic success. For others, staying connected to family is the primary reason why they succeed. While Tinto’s traditional model offers insight into some African American students’ attrition and persistence, it cannot sufficiently account for the complexity of familial ties among this student population. Moreover, this model cannot address the cultural assets or strengths that facilitate African American higher education achievement.

Padilla’s Model of Minority Student Success

There is a prevailing focus in higher education research on student departure rather than student success (Wirth & Padilla, 2008). When it comes to minority students, even less attention has been paid to their success. Padilla's Model of Minority Student Success provides a way to explain how minorities succeed in higher education. What is success? Wirth and Padilla (2008) recognize “the idea of success is not the same across higher education sectors” (p. 691). For students entering a community college, success may mean completing a certificate program or earning an associate’s degree. For this study, success meant earning the baccalaureate degree.
With this in mind, Padilla (1999) suggests minority students succeed by successfully by learning to negotiate barriers in their college experience. Students enter college with an array of family, social, academic, and economic backgrounds that influence how they experience college. Padilla describes a student’s campus experience in terms of a “black box.” He notes, “When the inputs and outputs are fairly clear but the in-between processes are little understood or not all, then the in-between processes can be considered as a ‘black box’” (Padilla, 1999, p. 133). What happens in this “black box” determines whether students exit successfully with a degree or dropout and exit without a degree (Figure 1).

![Diagram of student campus experiences]

*Figure 1.* A “black box” of student campus experiences. From Padilla, 1999.

Padilla (1999) further explains that within the black box are barriers that minority students must overcome to earn their degrees. These barriers can vary by campus and student (Padilla, 1999). Students who develop the skills or “expertise” to negotiate or overcome these barriers exit college as graduates. Students who do not learn to effectively overcome these barriers dropout (Figure 2).
Figure 2. The campus experience includes barriers students must overcome to succeed. From Padilla, 1999.

How do minority students learn to navigate these barriers? Based on Harmon and King’s (1985) expert system that classifies knowledge into three categories: theoretical, heuristic, and compiled, compiled representing the combination of theoretical and heuristic, Padilla (1991, 1997) argues minority students succeed or learn how to negotiate barriers, by employing two types of knowledge: theoretical and heuristic. Theoretical knowledge is gained from books or formal study. In other words, what a college student learns in the classroom or through coursework. An example of theoretical knowledge is knowing the steps involved in operating a car. Heuristic knowledge is gained through experience or by doing. Subsequently, the knowledge of how to drive a car and the know how or ability to drive are the difference between theoretical knowledge and heuristic knowledge. The theoretical knowledge can be assessed with the written drivers test while heuristic knowledge can be assessed with a performance task such as the driver’s road test. Padilla argues theoretical knowledge alone may not be enough to solve practical problems. Students need both theoretical and heuristic knowledge or what Padilla calls compiled knowledge.
Students lacking sufficient theoretical or heuristic knowledge to overcome barriers must
develop new forms of knowledge. They must learn new, more effective ways of solving
problems and negotiating barriers. When minority students’ effectively apply this new
knowledge and existing knowledge they exit their college experiences as graduates.

Literature that identifies African American community college students among the least
likely to transfer and earn a bachelor’s degree points to the barriers this student population faces.
Those who successfully transfer to a senior institution, transition, and earn the bachelor’s degree
utilize a host of skills and knowledge. This research utilized Padilla’s (1999) model to frame
how African American students overcome transfer, transition, and persistence barriers. Padilla's
Model of Minority Student Success poses students cultivate the skill necessary to navigate
barriers. This model focuses on what students are doing right rather than what they are not doing
or doing incorrectly. What Padilla's model offers the current research is a way of looking at how
minority transfer students succeeded by considering what students bring to their college
experiences coupled with what they learn from navigating barriers they encounter as they pursue
degree attainment that leads to success.

Community Cultural Wealth

Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of cultural capital describes the social or cultural
knowledge that middle and upper class families value and possess. Cultural capital can be used
to perpetuate social status and facilitate upward social mobility. For example, McDonough
(1997) used Bourdieu’s cultural capital to frame her research on college choice and noted
“middle and upper class families highly value a college education and advanced degrees as a
means of ensuring continuing economic security” (p. 8). She goes on to explain that though
these assets are valued, they are not necessarily formally taught or acquired. “Cultural capital is precisely the knowledge that elites value yet schools do not teach” (p. 9)

Community Cultural wealth acknowledges unique forms of capital that minority families and communities possess. Similar to Bourdieu’s (1977) cultural capital, which derives capital from social class, the concept of cultural wealth acknowledges capital from cultural backgrounds (Villalpanda & Solorzano, 2005; Yosso, 2005). Yosso contends communities of color cultivate at least six forms of capital: aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistance, and linguistic. She argues these forms of capital are neither mutually exclusive nor unchanging. They are interrelated and dynamic, building on one another. Aspirational capital denotes the ability to retain hopes and dreams despite real and perceived barriers. Linguistic capital consists of the intellectual and social skills developed through communicating in more than one language. Familial capital represents the cultural knowledge nurtured within families or kinships. This knowledge includes “a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition” and “engages a commitment to community wellbeing” (Yosso, 2005, p.78). Social capital refers to the people, social contacts, and community resources that “can provide instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society’s institutions” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Navigational capital refers to the minority students’ abilities to progress through social institutions “not created with communities of color in mind” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Resistant capital can be understood as the skills and behavior developed to oppose or “resist” inequality (Yosso, 2005) (Figure 3).

Strengths students bring to college from family and community often go unnoticed by academic professionals and students themselves, yet they contribute to achievement. In a higher education context, familial capital can be seen in a minority parent offering the encouragement and emotional support she can provide in the place of the academic expertise she may not
possess. For example, after a holiday break, an African American mother may support her son’s higher education pursuits by sending him back to college with words of affirmation and a supply of food for his dorm room. Reflective of the African American historical value for education, this mother’s practices serve to motivate and inspire her son to “press on” to completion. It is important to note that the six forms of community cultural wealth overlap. “These various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth” (Yosso, 2005, p. 76).

Figure 3. A model of community cultural wealth. From Yosso, 2005.

Thus, she fuels his aspirational capital, his desire to make his dream of earning a college degree a reality. At the community level, some traditional African American churches honor college students with special recognition during the worship service, or they may collect a special
monetary offering to help with college expenses. Applauding these students’ higher education efforts is a form of community wealth that equips students with another tool that promotes success. This is cultural wealth. It is a family or community practice or tradition that supports achievement. While these practices may not be recognized as contributors to African American college student achievement by school officials or academia, they do play a significant role in academic success.

Villalpando and Solorzano’s (2005) explanation of the influence of culture on student success serves to explain how Padilla's Model and the Cultural Wealth Model provide appropriate frames for this study.

But perhaps the most important dimension of culture for students of color is that it is very often a guide for their thinking, feeling and behaving -- indeed. It is a means of survival. The cultures of students of color can nurture and empower them. (p. 17).

Three striking terms stand out: "survival," “nurture,” and "empower.” When African American students transfer, transition, and persist through degree attainment it is a form of “survival.” How cultural assets “nurture” and “empower” paints a picture of the support African-American students receive from families, cultural values, and perspectives. The strength of the Cultural Wealth Model is that it is based on student strengths. Again, rather than looking at a deficit model, what students do not have and what is not working, this research seeks to explore what these students bring to their academic successes and what is working. This model allows this study to explore the forms of cultural wealth African American community college transfer students utilize during transfer and degree attainment.
Integrated Model of Minority Student Success

Padilla’s Model of Minority Student Success explains that within the “black box” or college experiences, minority students learn to navigate obstacles by applying prior and acquired knowledge. Students who learn to successfully apply this knowledge persist and earn their degrees. The Community Cultural Wealth Model acknowledges the forms of capital minority students bring to their college experiences.

By merging these two models, placing navigational, familial, and aspirational capital into the “black box,” we can explain how minority students utilize forms of capital, namely, navigational, familial, and aspirational, to learn how to successfully apply prior and acquired knowledge to navigate barriers through degree attainment. Since this study explores African American community college transfer students experiences through baccalaureate attainment, this integrated model provides a comprehensive way to view their success and acknowledge the cultural strengths they employed to navigate barriers and exit as graduates (Figure 4). This Integrated Model of Minority Student Success framed this exploration.

Figure 4. An Integrated Model of Minority Student Success. An integration of Padilla’s Model of Minority Student Success (1999) and Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth Model (2005).
Transfer Student Capital

Handel (2011b) argues that “if two- and four-year institutions represent distinct and sometimes oppositional academic cultures, then students must possess specific kinds of knowledge and insight to traverse the two- to four-year institutional chasm” (p. 415). This specific knowledge is what Laanan (2007) terms transfer student capital (TSC). Laanan, Starobin, and Eggleston (2010) describe the transfer student experiences as complex and look beyond transfer shock to explain community college transfer student experience. Building on social and cultural capital theory, they explain the notion of transfer student capital (TSC). “TSC refers to the experiences of community college students who transfer to four-year institutions. Specifically, TSC indicates how community college students accumulate knowledge in order to negotiate the transfer process” (p. 177). Laanan et al. (2010) delineate four components: (1) community college academic counseling experiences, (2) students’ perceptions of transfer process, (3) experiences with community college faculty, and (4) learning and study skills acquired at a community college. Examples of TSC include a student’s understanding of credit transferability, their ability to adjust to higher academic standards, and their positive perceptions about their transfer experiences. The significance TSC lies in the fact that as student increase this form of capital, they increase the likelihood of successful transfer to a four-year institution. The concept of TSC is important to this study because it allows the consideration of African American transfer student use of this form of capital when navigating transfer to the four-year university.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

This chapter contains a description of the research methods that used to explore experiences of African American community college transfer students who earn bachelor’s degrees from senior institutions. First, an overview of research paradigms and design is presented. Second, a rationale for selecting a qualitative methodology is presented. Third, site and sample descriptions are presented followed by data collection procedures and the plan to analyze data. Finally, validity and reliability measures and the researcher’s role conclude the chapter.

Research Design

Research design is an approach to study involving plans and procedures that outline data collection and analysis methods (Creswell, 2009). Design choice is based on the researcher’s paradigm or worldview and the research problems. Merriam (2009) advised researchers to “consider whether the design is a comfortable match with your worldview, personality, and skills” (p. 1).

Four worldviews or paradigms frame a researcher’s choice of methods: (1) postpositivism, (2) constructivism, (3) advocacy and participatory, and (4) pragmatism (Creswell, 2009). Postpositivists seek objective conclusions, look for cause and effect relationships, and rely on replicable observations and measurements. In light of these goals, they use the scientific method and employ quantitative inquiry. Conversely, constructivists seek subjective conclusions, use participant perspectives, and rely on individuals to construct or “make sense of” their realities within context. Researchers with an advocacy and participatory
worldview conduct inquiry related to a social, cultural, or political agenda and seek to empower
the marginalized. Merriam (2009) terms this paradigm a critical worldview. Researchers with a
constructivist or critical worldview use qualitative inquiry. Pragmatists deconstruct problems in
search of solutions and utilize quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative inquiry is distinct from quantitative. First, qualitative investigators aim to
understand perspectives and how individuals make meaning of their experiences. Participants
provide in-depth understanding of the perspectives and experiences addressed in the research
question(s). For this study, transfer students were selected who could offer insight into the
perspectives and experiences of African Americans who successfully navigated transfer,
persisted, and earned the baccalaureate degrees. Second, exploration drives inquiry rather than
measurement. Thus the depth and nature of experiences takes precedence over the frequency of
experiences. Third, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument. Keeping this in
mind, the researcher’s role holds greater significance in qualitative inquiry. Researcher
background, biases, and experiences should be considered prior to and during inquiry. Merriam
(2009) called for “critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview,
bias, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation” (p.
229).

Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

This study sought to understand African American transfer students’ subjective
experiences and how they “make sense of” their success. For this reason, this research fit the
constructivist paradigm and employed qualitative methods.

Quantitative research comprises the majority of studies investigating community college
students who transfer and earn the baccalaureate (See for example Alfonso, 2006; Doyle, 2009;
Lee et al., 1993; Wang, 2009). A handful of quantitative studies explore this study’s student population (Blau 1999; Lee, 2001; Zamani, 2001). Whereas quantitative analysis can measure rates of transfer, persistence, and completion, it cannot explain transfer student experiences and perceptions (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

A smaller volume of literature undertakes qualitative exploration of transfer student experiences. Even fewer studies exclusively capture African American transfer student perspectives. From their ten-year review of the *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, Lewis and Middleton (2003) found only a handful of studies that considered African American transfer students. They concluded additional research is warranted to reflect experiences of this student population. These findings underscore the need for this qualitative inquiry to in part fill this gap in understanding.

**Site Selection**

Research was conducted at a large research institution located in Texas. Big State University (BSU) enrolls just under 30,000 undergraduates and awards credentials from baccalaureates through doctoral degrees. Its male-female enrollment ratio is 47% to 53%. About 25% of its students are enrolled part-time while the remaining 75% are full-time students. Whites make up the majority of the undergraduate population at 55% followed by Hispanics at 17%, African Americans at 14%, Asian at 5%, and American Indian/Alaska Native at 1%. BSU is well suited for this research for four specific reasons. First, it enrolls a large transfer student population compared to other four-year, baccalaureate-granting institutions in the nation. Second, BSU’s location near a metropolitan area where students transfer from nearly ten different community college systems helps increase the possibility of capturing a wide variety of transfer student experiences. Third, during the past decade African American student bachelor
degree attainment rates have steadily increased at this institution. Latest institutional data reveal African American students earn slightly more than 13% of total conferred baccalaureate degrees at BSU. Finally, enrollment figures closely reflect national census population with the exception of the White student population which stands at 58%, slightly lower than the U.S. percentage (see Table 1). The same is true for Texas populations which are White, 42%, African American, 12%, Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.1%, and American Indian/Alaska Native, 1%. BSU’s Hispanic student enrollment, however, falls well below Texas’ Hispanic population of 40% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Table 1 Big State University Enrollment Compared to U.S. Population by Percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>White</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaska Native</th>
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<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Census Data</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSU Enrollment</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)

Note. BSU figures total less than 100% due to 6% of students categorized as “International” or “Unknown.” U.S. figures total less than 100% due to rounding.

BSU’s African American degree attainment rates are slightly higher than national and state figures (see Table 2). BSU’s 2012-2013 degree attainment data reveal White students earned 61 of conferred baccalaureates, African Americans 13%, Hispanics 14%, Asian/Pacific Islanders 5%, and American Indian/Alaska Natives about 1%. 
Table 2 2012-2013 Baccalaureate Degree Attainment Rates by Percentage$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>White</th>
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<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
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<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Texas</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSU</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2012; NCES, 2012)

Note. U.S. figures total less than 100% due to rounding. Texas figures combine Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Native American. BSU figures total less than 100% due to 6% of students categorized as “International” or “Unknown.”

Regarding transfer support services, BSU offers pre-admission partnerships with a number of Texas community colleges districts. The goal of these partnerships is to allow students to complete the first two years of course work at their community college and seamlessly transfer to BSU. The university requires all transfer students to attend a one-day transfer orientation. It also employs full-time transfer advisers and offers transfer student housing community, a transfer student honor society, a transfer ambassadors program, mentoring, a transfer student lounge, and social events designed to help transfer students build connections on campus. BSU’s transfer student center, housed on campus, coordinates and sponsors the majority of these transfer student support services.

Sample

Eighteen participants completed individual interviews. Twenty-two participant interviews were scheduled for the study. Two students did not come to their scheduled interviews. Two student interviews were excluded from consideration because participants attended another four-year institution with the BSU system. A more detailed explanation of why these two participant interviews were excluded is presented in the following section on
participant recruitment. The researcher aimed for a 50% pre-graduate (students needing 30 hours or less to earn the baccalaureate) and a 50% post-graduate (students who had earned the baccalaureate) participant pool to ensure more meaningful results. The final percentages were 61% pre-graduate and 39% post-graduate. However, five participants, or 28%, were scheduled to graduate before this study concluded. Counting those students as graduates would change percentages to 33% pre-graduate and 67% post-graduate.

Table 3 summarizes demographic data for the sample which consisted of ten females and eight males. Six participants were first generation, defined as neither parent having attending college. Student ages ranged from 21 to 56 years old with an average age of 28 years old. Age at time of transfer ranged from 19 to 54 years with and average age of 26 years. Four participants were non-traditional transfer students aged 25 years old or older at the time or transfer. Most participants, 10 of the 18, had plans to transfer to a four-year institution before enrolling in community college. Only seven took developmental coursework. The majority of participants earned no credential before transferring from their community colleges. Six participants earned associate’s degree and one participant earned an associate’s degree and a certificate. Four students attended a four-year university before enrolling in community college. Table 4 outline participate profiles.

Purposeful sampling was used to select research participants. Purposeful sampling is used when investigation seeks to gain an understanding of a specific population (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). This sampling method allows researchers to “select participants...that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research questions” (Creswell, 2009, p. 178). Initially sample selection utilized two criteria: (1) students who had earned baccalaureate degrees within one year prior data collection, (2) students who were within 15 credit hours of
earning the baccalaureate, and (3) students who had transferred from a Texas community college. Limiting participation to these students ensured all students were subject to the same state-wide transfer policies. Differing state transfer policies may influence transfer student experiences at the community college and four-year institution. However, in order to obtain a minimum number of participants, I had to change the number of credit hours needed to earn the degree from 15 to 30. Despite this modification, these two groups provided distinct perspectives. Pre-graduation students offered insight into ongoing experiences. Graduates offered views reflective of their completed experiences.

Participant Recruitment

Big State University’s Office of the Registrar provided the email addresses of all African American community college transfer students. Two thousand, six hundred seventy-five invitation emails were sent requesting student participation. Approximately 25 returned as invalid addresses. One hundred eighty-two students responded to the initial invitation. Once students responded, a follow-up email was sent to determine whether respondents met study criteria. This emailed filtered respondents to only include those who had graduated in December 2012, May 2013, or who would graduate in August or December 2013. From the remaining pool, I scheduled interviews. During the second participant interview, I discovered students’ emails from another university within the BSU system had been included in the email addresses from the registrar’s office. Following this interview, the decision was made to exclude these students from the study for two reasons: the size and age of the institution. Though a four-year university, this institution had been established for less than two years. It had not developed the infrastructure nor had the traditional campus climate that characterized older, more established four-year institutions. Furthermore, the relatively smaller enrollment, under 5000, and campus
Table 3 *Summary of Participant Demographic Data*

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<th>Average age at interview</th>
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<th>Entered community college with transfer intent</th>
<th>Completed developmental courses</th>
<th>Earned community college credential prior to transfer</th>
<th>Attended 4-year university prior to community college</th>
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<td>Yes – 10</td>
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Table 4 Participant Profile Table

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size this campus did provide a comparable four-year experience for transfer students. Student participants were contacted via an invitation email in June and July 2013. To increase participation rate, a $20 cash incentive was offered. Data collection ended July 12, 2013.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected using student interviews and a participant demographic questionnaire completed before interviews.

Interviews

Student interviews were conducted to collect data. Twenty respondents were selected to participate in interviews. Ultimately 18 student interviews were transcribed and analyzed. A semi-structured interview format with open-ended questions was used to allow participants to freely describe their experiences. A protocol consisting of three sections guided interviews. General questions opened and closed interviews. More specific, open-ended questions asked participants about their experiences from transfer through degree attainment. These specific questions were aligned to the study’s research questions and framework (Appendix D). Interviews were not limited to these questions, but follow up questions were asked as needed to clarify responses and gain a deeper understanding of student experiences. During interviews the researcher took field notes recording observations, reflections and impressions. Interviews took place at a time and location on campus convenient to participants. Each was recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim.

Demographic Questionnaire

Students were asked to complete a questionnaire before the interview (Appendix B). The purpose of the questionnaire was to systematically capture participant demographic data. This data was used to build individual participant profiles and allowed the researcher to more
accurately describe the study’s sample. This research-based questionnaire provided transfer predictive data such as participants’ educational backgrounds, college experiences prior to transfer, parental educational attainment and student aspirations (Bowen et al., 2009; CCSSE, 2006; Kuh et al., 2006; Freeman et al., 2006; Wang, 2009). Responses remained anonymous and students were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Questionnaire data were compiled using Qualtrics, a web-based survey instrument, and presented in the research findings.

Informed Consent and Questionnaire

Prior to data collection, participants signed a consent form acknowledging they understood the purpose and methods of the study. Students were guaranteed anonymity to eliminate participant concerns about confidentiality. This anonymity guarantee was designed to encourage interviewee honesty which increases data validity. Following collection, data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify themes in student transfer experiences.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis involves making sense of collected data and began during data collection (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). As data collection concludes, the researcher devoted more time to analyzing the data. A thorough review of transcripts and the notes taken during data collection allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of participants’ responses and perspectives. Creswell and Merriam agree that the researcher uncovers deeper meaning layer after layer during data analysis similar to peeling away layers of an onion. Understanding occurs when the researcher continually reflects upon the data. As the researcher organizes the data, common ideas, thoughts, and experiences surface, and the broader picture begins to appear. Individual voices then converge to tell a collective story. At this point the researcher finalizes themes.
Data Analysis

General themes became apparent during data collection. Thus data analysis began after the researcher’s first interview. Merriam (2009) points out advantages to beginning analysis during data collection. First, the researcher builds continuity with the earliest collected data and data gathered toward the end of collection. Second, this approach allows the researcher to remain closely connected to the data throughout the collection process without losing sight of initial thoughts, findings, and impressions. Merriam (2009) explains the process.

…you sit down at the dining room table with nothing more than the transcript of your first interview or the field notes from your first observation, or the first document you collected. You read and reread the data, making notes in the margins commenting on the data...Months later, as you sit down to analyze and write up your findings, you have a set of tentative categories or themes – answers to your research questions from which to work. (pp. 170-171)

Employing this procedure following the initial interview not only ensured continual connection between research and data, it allowed the researcher to recognize common student experiences and general themes that later led to findings. Throughout collection and analysis, the study’s research questions were referenced enabling the researcher to note how certain student experiences, behaviors, and perceptions related to the study’s purpose.

Coding

Coding is a systematic process of labeling analyzed data. Researchers arrange these labels or codes into categories to help organize the data. Open coding is the process of developing labels as data is analyzed. The codes come from the analyzed data. For example, if a majority of transfer student participants say they had difficulty finding programs or activities to help with their transition to the four-year university, then “four-year institutional support” could be a possible code. Participant responses determine the codes.
Coding took place in two steps: manual coding and software assisted coding via ATLAS.ti. The researcher began to identify possible codes during data transcription. This served as a starting point for manual coding. Manual coding consisted of several readings of interview transcripts. During these readings, an initial list of codes was developed. From this list formal coding began. A system of colored highlighting was used to distinguish codes and ease identification within transcripts. Subsequent readings served to confirm, refine, and extend initial coding. After each interview had been manually coded using the color-coding system, it was uploaded into ATLAS.ti. Codes, notes and memos were entered in ATLAS.ti, which allowed for code refinement and identification of categories or themes. Themes were identified from the coded data and organized based on how they addressed each research question. Findings based on these themes were reported with supporting student quotations. Participant profiles were presented with study findings.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative inquiry. Thus, the research is more open to investigation bias and data misinterpretation (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Member checks, peer review, and researcher reflexivity were used to reduce the possibility of bias and data misinterpretation and to increase data validity. Merriam (2009) explains validity “deals with the question of how research findings match reality” (p. 213). Qualitative inquiry is based on subjective interpretation of data. Member checks solicit participant feedback during preliminary and final data analysis to prevent researcher misinterpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Merriam, 2009). Peer review is another means of increasing reliability of data interpretation. It is a credibility measure in which colleagues familiar with the research yet not personally involved, review the methods, data interpretations,
findings, and conclusions (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 2009). Reflexivity is the process by which researchers “become aware of what allows them to see, as well as what may inhibit their seeing” (Watt, 2007, p. 82). Reflexivity is important because it critically considers researcher experiences, biases, and assumptions and their possible effect on data interpretation.

Member Checks

Member checks increase validity by moving validation from the researcher to the study’s participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This validation method allows the researcher to view the data from the participant perspective. Participants review, correct, and comment on the researcher’s findings and interpretations of the data. I invited nine students to participate in member checks. I emailed each student the preliminary findings and asked them to review the findings, comment their accuracy, and offer interpretive feedback, clarifications and changes. I also solicited participants’ overall impressions and any additional comments. Participants confirmed data interpretations and provided reflective comments about the findings. They expressed appreciation for being asked their opinion and hope that these findings would help others traveling a similar path. The following summarize participant feedback.

“Overall I feel the study is important as a guide for transfer students of all ages. Hopefully it will make a difference in the way universities serve all students. The findings are quite interesting and I believe accurate since no one knows your troubles better than you. I was honored to be able to have my say in what I feel is important research. Participating in this study made me feel included and fostered hope that sharing my experiences may make a difference in how universities treat non-traditional transfer students moving forward” (female, personal communication, August 15, 2013). “I thought the findings were presented accurately and fairly. I enjoyed reading them and realized many of the students shared my same struggles. I was
honored to be a part of this study. I loved telling my story, and hopefully I will encourage others through it” (female participant, personal communication, August 16, 2013). “I felt that your finding accurately reflected the points that were discussed during the course of our conversation. I believe your findings unearthed the realities that transfer students of African American background experience” (male participant, personal communication, August 26, 2013).

Peer Review

Merriam (2009) explains reliability is “problematic in the social sciences simply because human behavior is never static,” thus, “the more important question for qualitative research is whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (pp. 220-221). Peer review was used to increase reliability of data interpretation. I selected my peer reviewer because she has conducted research on community college students, is a current community college practitioner, and a past four-year institution academic advising administrator. Equally important, is that she is an African American community college transfer student who earned her baccalaureate from a four-year university. She is not directly involved to this study. I emailed her preliminary findings and she provided feedback. She agreed on my interpretation of the data and noted several findings that warranted implications for practice. The following summarizes her impression of the preliminary findings.

As a peer reviewer I would say that your findings are consistent with the African American transfer student experience. Their words paint a vivid picture of what the literature says about African American students, community college students and transfer students. As a past community college student, I can also say that their words are accurate. As a higher education professional and practioner, your findings provide me with ways to better serve this population.
Reflexivity and Researcher Role

Reflexivity is another form of self-disclosure through which researchers acknowledge backgrounds, beliefs, values, biases, and assumptions brought to the study and clarify their role in the inquiry (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The purpose of researcher reflexivity is not to eliminate these influences, but to reveal them to the reader allowing “the vityreaders to better understand how the individual researcher might have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data” (Creswell, 2009, p. 219).

When I initially considered my role as a researcher exploring African American community college transfer students, I saw few similarities between the experiences of this student population and my own higher education experience. Growing up, I knew very little about community colleges and did not personally know anyone who attended one. My parents attended a Historically Black University (HBU) as did my older cousins and older sister. I, too, would have attended this HBU had a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in my state not offered me an academic scholarship. My only association with community colleges is limited to two summer courses I took during my undergraduate years to save time and money. Although I transferred these credits back to my senior institution, I did not go through the two-year to four-year transfer process. I did not have to seek academic advising, and taking these courses in no way interfered with the possibility of my degree completion. For these reasons, I cast myself as an “outsider” to my research based on Hellawell’s (2006) definition. He states “outsider research is where the researcher is not a priori familiar with the setting and people s/he is researching” (p. 485). Although I am an African American, I believed there were few other similarities: thus, I was an “outsider.”
Fortunately, a casual discussion with a transfer scholar revealed just how wrong I really was. A host of common experiences and connections beyond race directly linked me to this student population. First, beyond racial background, my aspirations were similar. I entered college to earn a degree and so do they. Second, although I was not a first-generation college student, I was a first generation college student at a Predominantly White Institution. My entry into college nearly paralleled a transfer student’s navigation of the transfer process and transition to a four-year institution. I had to figure things out as I went along. Because my parents, older cousins, and older sister attended an HBCU, they could offer little assistance beyond moral support and encouragement.

Most recently, my involvement in transfer student research as a graduate student added to my perspective on the community college transfer student population. I have conducted research for three transfer student studies, one on a national level, one on a state level, and one on an institutional level. The institutional study was a pilot study conducted to inform my dissertation. Having conducted interviews with community college students who intended to transfer and post-transfer students a four-year universities, I saw firsthand the joys and frustrations these students experience as they pursue the baccalaureate. On the one hand, this research experience equipped me to design a more valid study and formulate better research questions. On the other hand, familiarity with the student group may have caused me to make assumptions about their experience or even overlook unique aspects of their stories.

Understanding my initial disassociation with these participants made me aware of potential bias. I unknowingly failed to recognize fundamental similarities. During my research, I remained aware of these similarities and as the researcher, I guarded against making assumptions that reflect my personal college experiences. I carefully considered how to allow
participant voices to tell their stories without projecting my perspectives. I utilize our shared experience to lead to a deeper inquiry about their experiences. My primary task was twofold: (1) to recognize my biases and potential misinterpretations and mitigate them through validity measures, and (2) to effectively engage these students and attentively listen to their voices in order to create an accurate portrait of their experiences and perceptions.

Limitations

This study was limited by location, participant selection, and timing. Research was conducted in the southwest region of the United States. Regional student perspectives made transferability of findings more difficult. All participants were selected from one research university. Institutional type may have also posed a limitation.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore African American community college transfer student experiences through degree attainment. In this chapter, key findings are presented from interviews of 18 students who transferred from Texas community colleges and earned or will earn the baccalaureate degree from BSU, a research university in Texas. Two primary research questions guided this study: (1) What are African American community college transfer students’ perceptions about their experiences? (2) What are African American community college transfer students’ perceptions about their persistence through baccalaureate degree attainment? Findings indicate experiences of this student population reflect experiences of other students cited in the literature. Five primary themes emerged from students’ stories: (1) academic advising, (2) transfer preparation, (3) transitioning to the four-year environment, (4) experiences unique to African American transfer students, and (5) how they persisted through degree attainment. In the first section of this chapter, I present student experiences with academic advising. In the second section, student perceptions and experiences with transfer preparation are presented. The third section contains a discussion about transitioning to the four-year environment. In the fourth section, I discuss experiences students cite as unique to the African American transfer student experience. The fifth section contains, student perceptions of how they persisted. I conclude the chapter with participants’ overall reflections of their journeys and their advice to others who chose the community college pathway to the baccalaureate.
Institutions create environments that influence transfer success. One of the most important institutional factors promoting successful transfer is accurate and adequate academic advising. Research suggests community college transfer students who receive accurate advising navigate transfer more successfully than those who do not (O’Gara, Mechur-Karp & Hughes, 2009; Melguizo & Dowd, 2009). When asked how they prepared for transfer, eight participants said they consulted academic advisers at their community colleges. Only one of the eight described their community college adviser as helpful. The remaining seven descriptions ranged from unhelpful to unnecessary. Most participants reported using resources other than academic advisers or conducting their own research when they prepared to transfer. Uncertain about what she wanted to do after high school, one female participant chose to attend her local community college. She described her experience as disappointing and dissatisfying because most of the students seemed stuck with little direction and appeared to have no goals. During her first semester, she started making plans to transfer to a four-year university. After receiving little support from her community college academic advisers, she actively began conducting her own research and looked to other resources to find out how to transfer.

Every chance I got I was looking for other schools (four-year universities). I went to the advisers at the community college, and they couldn't help me at all. They just gave me online sites and places to go to take all these exams. I thought, “That’s’ it? You can't talk to me? Give me ideas?” No, she didn't help me at all. I tried another lady and still nothing.

Eventually, she consulted her mother who had been taking college courses off and on for a few years and had recently completed her college degree. She found her mother an invaluable resource.

I talked to my mom. She was actually my adviser through the whole thing. I did not ever once step back into that advising office. Mom was in school for a while, so she learned
what to do and what not to do. She was my personal adviser, and I am really glad she
was able to help me through it all. I'm really happy I had my mom because my other
friends who don't have parents who went to college have to depend on bad advisers.

Likewise, another participant received little support from her community college
academic advisement office after she decided to transfer to a four-year university. In fact, they
suggested she contact BSU to find out about transferring.

Getting transfer help from my community college was actually a little bit harder.
I originally talked to my community college, and they told me to contact BSU
advising. I spoke with the adviser, and they gave me all the information. I got
pretty much all of my information from BSU.

Once at the university, academic advising is just as important because students begin
taking upper division, major specific coursework and have fewer credits to spare. Wasting
credits and time was precisely what this student wanted to avoid. She found the university staff
supportive and had little reason to doubt the accuracy of their academic advisers. However,
when preparing to register for her second semester, she was told she had not completed her upper
division prerequisite coursework. It was only then that she realized she had been under advised
at her community college and misadvised at BSU.

My community college did not advise me enough. When I spoke with the BSU
advisers about transferring, they didn’t advise me properly. I didn’t find this out
until I tried to register for my second semester at BSU. The adviser said, “You
still have three or four classes to take at community college.” I didn’t realize I
had that many classes. I had to return for another semester to my community
college.

Misadvising at BSU also resulted in some students taking more rigorous coursework
earlier than needed. A first generation student shared how she unknowingly selected more
difficult courses in her major soon after arriving at the university when she could have taken the
same courses her senior year. She states that she did not fully understand the numbering system
and her academic adviser did not point out the course differences to her.
Some classes that I took were challenging just because of the timing in which I took them. When I was a sophomore, my first year at a university, my second semester I took 2000 and 4000 level classes. My advisers didn't even warn me not to do it. I should have taken those classes in my senior year because they were so challenging, but no one warned me.

A non-traditional female student felt universities should better tailor transfer student advising, especially for non-traditional transfer student.

When it comes to nontraditional students, advisers need to ask questions that they don't ask. Ask nontraditional students about their background, their strengths, and weaknesses. They need to ask questions that a normal adviser may not ask. She explained that this line of questioning will help academic advisers better understand the advising needs of nontraditional students.

This will help them to better understand the nontraditional population because not all of us come from middle class families. Nontraditional students have encountered so many things that can negatively affect them in so many ways. We are not as apt to just tell you about it, but if you ask, we will tell you. We feel if you ask us, then that means you are interested in our success.

Participants who cited positive or helpful experiences with community college advisers went to advisers with specific questions about transfer. Most questions were about course transferability. Students wanted to ensure certain courses would transfer before registering. One student who began his college career at a Texas four-year public institution, returned home to attend a local community college, then transferred to BSU, said all of his courses transferred because he spoke with an adviser specifically about transferability. “I wanted to make sure my credits would transfer so that’s one of the things I went to talk to the adviser about at the community college.”

Unlike the majority of participants, an older female participant had an extraordinarily positive experience with her community college adviser. She noted that she had an adviser specifically trained to meet transfer student needs and describes this adviser as “very supportive”
and recalled, “She did everything in her power resolve my issues. She would make calls for me directly to the university and explain different aspects of my situation to them. She was very instrumental in my eventual transfer.” This student was also informally mentored by a community college professor who highly recommended she attend BSU. The two maintain contact and the student credits her former professor with enriching her beyond academics.

I talked to her last night for two hours...She got me out of the dinosaur age and introduced me to things that I had never seen before like culture and the arts. She is gregarious, smart, and has a lot of social capital. She is funny and wants the best for all her students, especially those who show initiative and who want to do better. She is a great lady.

A lighthearted, positive, first-generation male student, who was eager to share his experiences, spoke about his mentor’s role in his higher education achievements. His mentor brought him to tour BSU, helped him with the transfer process, gave him a ride to orientation and even helped him move into his on-campus apartment.

Just having that person to bring me to orientation was so helpful. He even helped me move in. That day we started about six in the morning, got my stuff packed up, and drove up here. We just relaxed until they opened the residence hall. Then, I checked in got my keys, and he helped me move my stuff in.

This young man’s mentor was a former high school teacher with whom he had remained in contact during his time at the community college.

Transfer Preparation

Transfer readiness is a key determinant in transfer likelihood. Students entering with transfer intent have taken the initial step of preparation, namely knowing they want to transfer, and prepared students experience greater transfer success (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Hagedorn et al., 2008). Consistent with the literature was the finding that participants who prepared early for transfer experienced fewer transfer and transition problems.
Preparing for Transfer

Participants who understood the importance transfer preparation and prepared experienced fewer challenges than those who did not. For example, once one male participant knew he had been accepted to BSU, he began to prepare. The oldest of four sons, this participant wanted to be a model for his younger brothers and planned his next steps before he entered community college. He recalled his mother telling him, “Don’t get too comfortable here. Always remember there’s a bigger goal at hand.” With this in mind, he shared, “You’ve got to have a plan. Some people just want to sit back and think it’s all just going to happen. That’s not true.” He applied, forwarded his transcripts, completed his financial aid package, and then began working on his housing. The next thing he did was attend orientation. “I registered for my classes during orientation, and I was ready to go. I had everything situated to just come in and start doing what I planned to do, start my classes.”

In the same way, another first generation student had a plan. She developed her plan based on the mistakes she made during her first transfer from her community college to another four-year institution. Following her first two-to-four-year institution transfer, she had not made a successful transition and had returned to her community college. When she decided to transfer to BSU, she made sure she adequately prepared herself by making a lot of calls and doing her research on the internet.

I really had a plan going in. I was printing out information, making sure classes transferred, and calling the adviser’s office every week. I was doing my part. I was on the BSU website and saw there was a transition and orientation office. I took advantage of those things and it helped me a lot.

Another female student also actively took steps to secure a smooth transfer and transition. She looked into transferring and started following BSU’s social work program curriculum during her last year at her community college. She took all the prerequisites she needed and used
BSU’s website to ensure her classes would transfer. “I called to make sure I was understanding and doing everything correctly. I even came up here once just to make sure everything was okay.” She did not recall widely using advisers at her community college nor BSU when she made preparations to transfer. “I think once I got towards the end of my transfer preparation, I didn't need an adviser because I knew what I needed to do. I was doing everything on my own.”

One clear distinction between those who made early transfer preparations and those who did not were the academic goals they had when entering community college.

Goals and Aspirations

Entering community college with clear goals and aspirations has a direct effect on transfer preparation and readiness. The literature indicates educational aspirations drive transfer intent (Bailey et al., 2005; CCSSE, 2012; Hagedorn, 2004; Laanan, 2003). Students entering community college with baccalaureate rather than associate degree aspirations are more likely to earn a baccalaureate degree within six years than those aspiring only to associate’s (Fox, Connolly, & Snyder, 2005; Hoachlander et al., 2003; Porchea et al., 2010). Further, they are less likely to face fewer challenges during the transfer process because they enter with plans to transfer to a four-year institution (Porchea et al., 2010). Students who enter community college with baccalaureate aspirations seek transfer information and resources in preparation for transfer. They also enroll in prescribed courses designed to prepare them for upper-level courses at four-year institutions.

The majority of participants, 10 of the 18, aspired to the baccalaureate and had plans to transfer to a four-year university when they entered community college. Six had no transfer plans and two were uncertain about their higher education goals beyond community college. Data reveal that students who made the decision to transfer after they entered community college
had more difficulty during the transfer process than those who entered with plans to transfer. For example, one student had no definite transfer plans or baccalaureate degree aspirations when she enrolled in her local community college. Her desire to join a sorority sparked her desire to transfer to BSU. Subsequently, she had to return to her community college to take prerequisites for her upper division coursework at BSU.

When I entered community college, I wasn’t really sure what I would do; I was just going because I knew you’re supposed to go to college. I didn’t really know if I would transfer and I didn’t really think about it.

Because she had no plans to transfer, she did not complete her core curriculum at the community college before transferring to BSU. She would discover after transferring that completing the core curriculum is prerequisite for taking upper division coursework at the university. She eventually returned to her community college to complete the core curriculum while she continued taking courses without core curriculum prerequisites at BSU.

Students who make transfer preparations experience greater transfer success and fewer transition difficulties. Like the previous student, a young man who entered community college because his parents suggested it was the better path for him than attending a university, had no plans to transfer to a university when he entered community college. Once he earned his associate’s degree, he considered his higher education complete. He freely acknowledged not preparing for his transfer to BSU. This lack of forethought and planning resulted in a more difficult transition.

I’m going to give you the honest truth. I didn’t prepare myself to transfer. I thought, “I got my associate’s, so I can do it all. Nothing is going to stop me.” When I transferred here, I thought that it wouldn’t be much harder than community college, but there was a big difference. I was wrong. I didn’t do so well my first semester because I guess I was kind of cocky.

Although he performed poorly his first semester and received an academic warning from the
university, he sought assistance, earned higher grades his second semester, and avoided academic dismissal.

Articulation

Perhaps the most critical informational need for transfer students preparing for transfer is articulation and credit transferability. Literature indicates inaccurate and poorly communicated transfer requirements pose a threat to successful transfer to four-year colleges and universities (Adelman, 2006; de la Torre, 2007; Hagedorn, Perrakis, & Maxwell, 2007). Lee (2001) found that African Americans who had successfully transferred from community colleges to four-year institutions experienced frustration and uncertainty with course articulation. Although these students often found articulation agreements unclear and course equivalences difficulty understand, they seldom took advantage of the academic advising designed specifically to clarify transfer requirements.

Another study finding was participant perceptions about the availability and accuracy of transfer information. Surprisingly, only two participants expressed difficulty with articulation and credit transfer. Each shared how their limited understanding of articulation affected their progress toward the baccalaureate. The first student was angry that he lost credits and had to retake courses he had already completed at the community college. He reported how this not only cost him time and money, but negatively affected his morale. In his opinion, articulation issues are the greatest difficulties any transfer student could face.

That’s one of the challenges, taking all those classes and having no easy way to find out what’s going to transfer and what isn’t. It’s a headache. I think it’s very discouraging to spend an additional year or two retaking classes. Plus the money. You pay cheaper at the community college, and then you pay again at $1000 per class to take it here. I had to retake marketing, business law, and other business courses. I retook them, but that’s what angers people the most. That’s one of the biggest challenges I faced.
He also felt he had little guidance at the community college with his course selection.

You’re taking all these classes, wasting your time, and thinking they’re going to transfer, but there is nobody to talk to beforehand to know specifically what will transfer.

It is important to note that this student entered community college with no clear plan to transfer. He took courses he enjoyed rather than a prescribed sequence designed to facilitate transfer to a four-year institution.

I chose to go to community college first because I didn’t know exactly what I wanted to do. I wasn’t really a big fan of the core curriculum. I focused more on what I wanted to do versus all these classes that I don’t care about like science, English, and math.

The second student, the only participant who attended a for-profit university before transferring to BSU, also experienced frustration with articulation. Some of her prerequisite coursework initially transferred as electives. By the time the university decided to give her the actual course credit, she had already retaken the courses.

I took a basic Principles of Management course that transferred in as an elective. It didn’t replace the required management course until a year later. By that time, I had already retaken the course. I was kind of upset about that. Then it happened again with my marketing class.

Ellis (2013) found that when asked how they obtained knowledge about transfer to a university, community college students overwhelmingly reported using the internet. Consistent with this research, participants typically reported learning about articulation and course transferability online. States are taking measures to clarify articulation by moving articulation information online as transfer students increasingly depend on online resources to navigate the transfer process (de la Torre, 2007). The fact that only two participants spoke of articulation problems, may confirm the efficacy of these efforts. This could also indicate students are growing savvy about finding articulation information online.
Transitioning to the Four-Year Environment

Successful transition to the four-year environment is critical to persistence and eventual degree attainment. Adjusting to a new academic and social environment can pose a number of transition obstacles (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Flaga, 2006; Laanan, 1996). However, successful transition requires students learn how to make these adjustments as well as learn how to navigate the university infrastructure (Padilla, 1999).

Transfer Student Support Services

Transfer students often find themselves caught between upper-level academic status and the need for various services typically provide to freshmen. They are beyond some basic first-year student services, yet need to know how to navigate the physical and administrative landscape of a university (Laanan, 2007; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2008). Senior institutions are often accused of not providing enough transfer-specific support (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012).

Transfer Orientation

Research suggests transfer specific orientations at four-year institutions support transfer student success (Dowd, et al., 2006; Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Hoffman & Wallach, 2005). BSU requires that all transfer students attend a transfer student orientation session. This is a relatively new requirement. Participants had a number of complaints and suggestions for improvement for the orientation. All 18 participants attended a mandatory transfer orientation session. More than half of the participants felt the orientation could have been more helpful. Some participants felt rushed and a little lost during the one-day event. One female, a first-generation student, recalled feeling rushed and hustled through transfer student orientation.

I'm going to be quite honest - BSU's transfer orientation is horrible. It was not thorough. I feel like it should have been longer than a day. I felt very rushed and
pressed at times to make decisions that I probably should have slept on. Transfer students need a lot of support because they're about to come into a whole different culture. I think that their transfer orientation definitely needs some work.

Participants suggested having a longer, more thorough orientation session similar to BSU’s freshmen orientations in which students spend at least one night on the campus. A first generation student suggested,

It would have worked much better to offer an overnight program. An overnight program would have done wonders for a lot of students. For me it would have been a much more pleasant experience because it would have given them more time to understand the basic things like where everything is and how the system works.

Another first generation student described transfer orientation as a “waste of time.” She remembered little about her orientation session.

The only thing I remember about transfer orientation was learning the Alma Mater. That is it. I remember nothing else. Learning the Alma Mater and walking out of the auditorium and trying to find lunch on my own. It was not helpful.

Interestingly, both are first generation students and on the whole seemed to have had greater expectations from the transfer student orientations than those students who were not first generation. The concept and goal of transfer student orientation may have been unfamiliar to these first generation students. Thus, greater expectations resulted in greater disappointments.

BSU provides a host of transfer specific support services including a transfer student housing community, orientation, academic advising, a transfer student honor society, a transfer ambassadors program, mentoring, a transfer student lounge, and social events designed to help transfer students build connections on campus. The university’s transfer student center manages the majority of these special services. Only two participants mentioned the university’s transfer
student center. However, they did not frequent the transfer center nor did they take advantage of its services. This raises another obstacle students faced: simply not knowing about university transfer student services and events. Several participants reported finding out about transfer events after they had occurred. A female student overheard a classmate discussing one such event.

I wasn’t aware of some of the things that they offer to the transfer students. I heard one of the girls in my class saying that she was at something for transfer students. I asked, "What was it? How did you know about it?" She said, "They told us about it." I started checking my email and looking through stuff and I didn't find it.

Even though half of the participants suggested transfer student orientation was less than helpful, just as many found it helpful. One male student who reported a positive transfer orientation experience agreed that attendees received a great deal of information in one day but found the transfer orientation beneficial.

It was very helpful! I really enjoyed it. There was so much information, but it was needed. And for those who didn't have a chance to go to orientation, they found it (transitioning) harder. The orientation prepares you for what's to come. It was a great, great experience.

Yet, another believed the transfer orientation helped her get to know other students and the campus. “I got familiar with the campus and where everything was. I met and talked to other students and saw how the campus was set up. It was really a nice, brief introduction to the school.” A number of students enjoyed attending an orientation designed just for transfer students.

It was nice knowing that everyone was a transfer student like me and that we were all in the same boat. It gave me a chance to get acquainted with the school. I didn’t feel nervous coming after the orientation.
Special Programs

Special programs support transfer success. Transfer students who participate in mentoring, buddy programs, athletics, even transfer student honors programs face fewer transition obstacles (Hoffman & Wallach; 2005; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Zamani, 2001). Through these programs transfer students have access to program liaisons, specially assigned faculty, and activities designed specifically to support transfer and transition to the four-year campus (Hoffman & Wallach; 2005; Kane, 2001; Laanan, 1996; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Zamani, 2001). Special programs such as TRIO offer added support to low-income, first-generation community college transfer students and minority transfer students by increasing college awareness and academic preparation (Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000; Smith, Miller, & Bermeo, 2009). Four students participated in a special program. Three were members of TRIO and one lived in a specialized residence hall community. Two of the three TRIO members took full advantage of program services and believed the program helped them prepare for transfer to BSU. Through the TRIO Program at her community college, a female student visited the university for the first time. “After that tour, I knew I wanted to transfer here. So I made sure that I applied early and had all of my money together to do things like orientation, application fees, and the deposit for my dorm room.” She continued,

I probably wouldn't be here had it not been for TRIO because with them I had one-on-one advising which helped me reach my goal. I didn't have parents to tell me about college and how things worked. TRIO did that for me. They probably played the biggest role in getting me across that stage.

Unfortunately, she did not continue her relationship with TRIO after she transferred to BSU. “Here they're a great program, but at orientation I found it hard to approach the director. After that, I got very busy and just never made the effort anymore, although I probably should have.”
The other student met with his community college TRIO adviser each semester to make sure he was on the right track to transfer. “I would visit her to see where I stood as far as transferring to BSU. We would meet to make sure that my classes matched up with the degree that I planned on pursuing at BSU.” Unlike the previous student, this student’s TRIO adviser became a mentor who kept up with him after transfer. She urged him to contact key individuals at BSU who could assist him at the four-year campus.

My mentor was a great person. She exposed me to so many opportunities and made sure that I got connected with the program at BSU. She said “when you get out there, I want you to go visit this office.”

One proactive biological science student found a specialized resident hall community for his major during his online search for transfer information. He credited his positive transition experience to the programs his residence hall coordinated.

I was just searching the BSU website and looked up housing. I found about 10 or 12 special residence hall communities here on campus. There were some for engineering majors, transfer students, and biology majors. I figured the pre-health organization one fit me best.

He explained his residence hall experience enhanced his academics because he lived on the floor designated for science majors. “I met people that were more attuned with what I planned to do. We took a lot of field trips that helped me with my major and internships.”

Academic Transition

Inside the classroom, transfer students face a new academic environment, increased academic rigor, and a new relationships with faculty (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). Participants shared the challenge they encountered and how they learned how the make a successful academic transition.
Larger class sizes

The university academic environment involved attending classes with a more students in larger classrooms. One male participant described how he adopted new seating habits to stay focused and compensate for the loss the smaller, more personable community college classrooms.

You really have to position yourself to learn in these classes. If you sit way in the back where there are 40 rows of chairs between you and the professor, good luck. You have to sit in the front where the professors can see you and you can ask questions.

Increased Rigor

Research indicates transfer students may encounter transition difficulty inside the classroom in the form of increased academic rigor (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Eggleston & Laanan, 2001). Laanan (2001) noted that native juniors typically outperform transfer students as indicated by first semester GPAs. He associated transfer students’ weaker academic performance or transfer grade shock (TGS) with transition difficulty. Carlan & Byxbe (2000) point to grade inflation at community colleges as the primary cause of TGS. They suggest students grow accustomed to less demanding standards at the two-year level and underestimate academic demands at senior institutions. Despite the causes of TGS, generally, after first semester adjustments transfer students perform just as well as native juniors and persist at similar rates (Carlan and Byxbe, 2000; Glass and Harrington, 2002; Ishitani, 2008; Laanan, 2001). This precisely describes one resilient student’s experience.

I was not ready. It's hard for me to describe. I’ll just give you an example of not being ready. My GPA dropped to a 2.0. I had never had a 2.0 GPA since coming back to school, even at my age. The transition was like day and night.

She overcome her initial setbacks, performed well academically, and shared “I even made the Dean's List last fall with a 3.75 from a 2.0 my first semester.”
Nearly every participant recalled facing academic challenges after transferring to BSU. Conversely, few felt academically overwhelmed at the community college. For example, one recent graduate described his community college academics as “a breeze.” Once he arrived at BSU things changed.

I had to really kick it up a notch as far as studying, listening more, taking more notes in classes. You’re definitely having more study groups than community college and more time spent studying and doing the class work. That was a really big thing that I had to adjust to.

Several students reported that they approached their studies differently in the university environment. During his time at the community college, another male student learned how to study and how to be a successful student. He had to apply these skills to his studies at BSU.

Even though the academics are more challenging here at the university, I did well. I had to work a little harder than I was working at the community college. Back there I had more free time to socialize. I knew I had to cut some of that stuff out in order to succeed here.

He also took advantage of the academic support services to aid his transition. “They actually have study sessions here which were very helpful. I really appreciated them.” This participant explained that he learned about the study sessions from tutors who made in-class announcements and passed out fliers around campus. Once he learned how to navigate the university academics, he experienced greater success than he had experienced at his community college.

I'm doing better at BSU than I did at the community college, actually. It’s probably because I'm studying more, I'm taking this seriously, and I'm focused. Also, this is a big thing. The classes are so much more expensive. I can't waste any of this money, this time, or this opportunity here. I have to make the most of it.

Like the previous student, three others had to learn how to study at BSU. The first participant had to learn to study harder. “I studied like I’ve never studied before. It just took
more study time than I’ve ever put in.” The next student learned he had to shoulder greater responsibility for his learning.

Another thing that I had to learn when I started taking upper level courses was that no one will necessarily teach you anything. You have to read and figure it out yourself. Now that I made that adjustment, it will serve me well in grad school.

The third, reported how he learned to organize study groups even though it took some trial and error to figure out just how they worked best for him.

I just realized that I had to prepare to even to prepare for a test. A lot of times I would have study groups. I used to have big study groups but found out other people’s sense of urgency to understand was not always the same as mine. I learned to voice to others “you know I really need to spend these 3 hours wisely.”

Another female student who expected an increase in academic rigor after she transferred, eagerly looked for peer support, but she experienced frustration finding others with whom she could study. She desired the support of a study group but believed she encountered bias as a non-traditional. As a non-traditional student, “I didn't have a supportive study group. So everything was on me and sometimes you need a study group, somebody to bounce questions off of, do the drills or whatever. I didn't have that.”

Although some participants earned lower grade point averages during their first semester, a male participant who said learning how to study was one of his greatest challenges experienced academic struggles throughout his years at BSU. His challenges persisted through the final week of classes, just days before graduation.

My whole college career at BSU has been a struggle. I was just staying above water because my study habits weren’t the best. I always got carried away in conversation with people when I should have been studying. I have a low attention span and struggle with focusing. Until the last week of school, I was working toward graduation because I had to obtain a certain grade to graduate.
Another participant acknowledged BSU’s increased rigor but did not allow it to overwhelm him. He simply accepted the change as part of transferring to a university.

Some of my most difficult challenges were failing courses because I just didn’t understand the material the first time. That comes with the territory. You’re not going to be able to do everything exceptionally well. Having academic challenges, that’s just part of it. So the challenge was being able to accept that and move on without letting it tear you apart.

A few students overestimated the difficulty of university classes. A female participant who was a dual-credit student in high school based her overestimations on the opinions of others. She thought her BSU coursework would be far more difficulty than her community college courses. She was prepared for the worst.

I had this perception that my community college was easier than four-year universities. That is not true. It's really not. I think people think that because community colleges tend to offer more basic courses than they do upper-level courses. When I took a chemistry class at BSU, it was the easiest class I've ever taken. There were classes at my community college that were just as much or more work. For me, I would say the academic transition wasn't too bad.

Limited Access to Faculty

Literature suggests community college transfer students must also adjust to limited access to faculty at their four-year campuses (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Lee, 2001). Nearly all of the 18 participants spoke about the change in access to faculty when they transferred from their community colleges to BSU. Students noted how they had to take greater initiative when seeking help from faculty. They reported that university professors did not remain after class to interact with students or answer additional questions like their community college counterparts. This student’s perceptions echoed most participants’ regarding their new relationship with faculty.

I had to be bolder about asking them for help. At the community college, they were there after class. You could just talk to them. But here, at BSU, a professor comes in for 50 minutes and after that, they are off to do something else. I really
had to adjust that. I needed to find time to talk to my teachers. I didn’t have access to them like I did at the community college. Just understanding that was one of the biggest challenges I had.

Another recalled making the same transition.

At junior college you can just walk up to your teachers whenever it’s quiet in class and ask them questions. In the university environment it’s, “I have office hours. You can come and see me then.” It is different from the junior college.

Still another had to learn how to be more assertive to gain access to his professors.

I had to build up my confidence in approaching them. I had to go to office hours because those were the only times they were available. So I would be bolder in saying, “Hey, Dr. So and So, I need to your help. When can we meet?” I couldn’t say, “Oh, I'll just see them in the hallway and have a conversation with them.” No, that doesn't work here.

Another student who struggled academically throughout his time at BSU also reported having to learn to be bolder when interacting with faculty. At the beginning of the semester, he introduced himself to his professors.

Over time I learned to voice my concerns to my professors in advance. Starting each semester, I would go and talk to them. In courses that I had to retake, I would say, “I struggle with this subject obviously since this is the second time you are seeing me. I really am going to do my best to excel in this class. All I asked is that you give me the grade that I deserve for the efforts.”

Padilla’s Model precisely describes how these students learned or acquired new knowledge and skills and built on previous abilities to successfully navigate university academics. Each of their descriptions clearly depicts how they built on existing knowledge and skills and acquired new ones to meet the academic rigors at BSU.

Social Transition

Beyond the academic transition, transfer students must adapt to a new social environment. A lack of social integration can negatively affect overall integration into the university (Flaga, 2006; Owens, 2010). Townsend and Wilson (2006) noted social integration
can be challenging for traditional and non-traditional aged transfer students. When traditional-aged students arrive on campus, they find their peers have already established social relationships. The challenge of integrating socially and finding their place at the four-year campus represented the greatest obstacle for some participants in this study.

*Social Adjustments*

A number of participants recounted difficult social adjustments. One female admitted to making few transfer and transition preparations. She related her greatest social adjustments to a new living situation.

I decided to transfer, I guess, it was the summer of 2010. I made very little preparation. I just knew that I had enough hours to leave, and so within a couple of weeks, it was done. I was here talking to an adviser.

She described her transfer as “quick” which involved a move to the town where BSU is located. “I had a big garage sale at my apartment, sold most of all my things.” However, her quick transfer resulted in an unfortunate housing situation. “I moved here, and having not lived with anyone in hundreds of years made it very, very difficult. I rented a room in the lady’s house because I needed to move quickly and needed to be approved quickly.” She explained that although she lived near the BSU campus, it was an extremely difficult situation. “The combination of living with someone who was different in terms of things like cleanliness and excessive drinking and the combination of the coursework was just difficult.” She went on to describe the depth of her difficulty.

Before the first semester was over, I was so depressed that I could barely get out of bed every day. A couple of my classes suffered. Because of the depression, I just didn't have the wherewithal to get them done.

A setback in her social work course added to her first semester challenges.

I wasn't approved for service learning. That is a major part of the class. I always felt as though I didn't belong in that class. It was like I was on the outside looking
in, but I was paying the same amount of money everyone else was. I just started spiraling and I struggled. I got an F because I missed a major paper.

She made some changes, including moving back home, commuting the 40 miles to campus when necessary, and taking as many online courses as she could.

First of all, I started taking my medication again which helped with my depression. Things got significantly better because I was in a different frame of mind. I lived with her (the housemate) for another few months and then I moved back to home. Every semester after the first one, my GPA started to reflect the student that I knew that I was.

Social Connections

Despite her initial excitement about leaving home to attend BSU, a traditional-aged female student, found herself alone and homesick. Fear contributed to her unwillingness to get involve socially. She reported that she really tried to get involved but was “too scared. I didn’t have that push to go and join a club.” Like other participants, she found juniors who started BSU as freshmen had already established friendships. “It seemed like everywhere I looked people had their own friends. It seemed like people were always together, and I was always walking around by myself.” She even described being less than honest with her mother about her social life.

My mom would call me and ask, "Are you meeting people?" and I’d say, "Yeah, I'm meeting people all over the place." I was totally lying. I’d ask God, "Please send me a friend or somebody." I was like that for maybe the first month and a half.

Meal times posed a particular challenge for this young lady.

I was scared to go to the dining halls because it was overwhelming. There were so many people. The tables are set up to all connect so when you sat there you were sitting with other people. I didn't want to sit there by myself and be a loner. So I would skip out early or just not go.

One non-traditional student did not feel like she was part of the university community. She felt so excluded that she began taking online classes to offset these feelings of isolation and disconnection on campus. “I started taking a lot of classes
online because I didn't feel that I was really a part of the university community. I found that we nontraditional students were often marginalized and not included.” Another a non-traditional student felt connecting at BSU was a challenge. “It’s hard to connect. I think the university will accept us because it has a big transfer population, but they’re trying to fit us into this traditional mold and that’s really hard.”

_Campus Involvement_

Wang (2009) and Ishitani and McKitrick (2010) concluded that greater campus involvement is associated with greater transfer student persistence and degree attainment. Sixteen of the 18 participants indicated they were involved in at least one campus activity or organization at BSU. However, levels of involvement ranged from membership in name only to holding an office in a club or organization. A female student who indicated membership in a student honor society reported little involvement beyond her membership.

On the other hand, two business majors actively engaged in their campus organizations. Each even held an office in their respective organizations. The first student joined a campus organization when he arrived at BSU and served as the organization’s president during his final year. The second student participated in programs specific to his major to network, meet people, and build a support system. He served as an officer his second year. “An organization for business majors allowed me to display and improve my leadership skills.” He found out about this organization at a university sponsored event aimed at getting African Americans and Latino students involved in BSU student life.

Another program I joined when I first came here was the Leadership Program. Once you join these programs, you network and meet people. Then down the line, whether they are a mentor, a professor, or even another student, they become avenues or sources that can support you. They may offer you insights or lend you a book or just say “take this class and we can take it together.” Things like that really helped me a lot.
Like most participants, one female student chose not to be involved in organizations at her community college, but intentionally became more active at BSU.

When I was at community college I made an effort not to be part of any student-led programs. I didn't want to be part of campus. I just wanted to go to class and come home. I just didn't have time because had a job.

When she arrived at BSU, initially she did not want to be a part of a student-led organization, but Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) caught her attention. She believed her involvement in SIFE helped her mature and gain career focus. Through efforts to connect at BSU, “I learned to take a hands-on approach about doing what I want to do after I graduate.”

Though another female participant struggled to get connected at BSU and “to find her place,” she did not give up and it eventually paid off. She learned how to navigate the social scene and not only found her place, but formed lasting relationships.

For the first couple of weeks, I wasn't involved at all. I just stayed in my room. It was my birthday a couple of weeks after that, and I wanted to go somewhere fun. So I went to this comedy show and met a group of friends there. It was fun.

It was in this group that she would meet her boyfriend and make friends who would help her navigate BSU. She went on to describe how she blossomed in the organization and how its members became a solid support system.

During the time that I was an active member we performed improv together. I was the social butterfly of the group. It was a great opportunity for me, and I owe a lot to them. I'm very grateful for those people. They helped me through a lot of tough times. They're some pretty amazing people.

Another female student who described herself as “shy” did not get involved with any student organizations. “I didn't join any clubs because I’m not a very social person. I’m extremely shy. The thought of showing up at a club was just out of the question.” She did
however connect with a classmate who eventually became a friend.

My junior year I started seeing a lot of the same people in my classes because we were on the same track. There was a girl that was in my organic chemistry class who I would see in the tutoring center. We ended up being in another class together. So we sat by each other, started talking more, and became friends. She introduced me to some of her friends, and we’ve remained friends even though she graduated. We still talk.

Campus Diversity

Adjusting to diversity at BSU was another form of social transition participants experienced. Literature addressing transition indicates four-year climate and culture play a role when minority transfer students feel culturally alienated (Zamani, 2009). They may see the four-year institution as racially and culturally homogeneous and have difficulty transitioning into this environment. Participants’ reported experiences differed slightly from the literature. A number, having transferred from racially homogeneous institutional settings, commented on the diversity rather than homogeneity of BSU’s student population. For some, the racial diversity represented a pleasant change. A female student who transferred from a small rural community college embraced the racial diversity. She said she had not spent much time interacting with other races since her high school and community college enrollment was predominantly African American.

“This is my first time being around different races. I love it. It has made me a better person.”

For a male student who also transitioned from a predominantly African American community college and neighborhood to a culturally diverse university, the social transition proved a bit daunting. The perceptions he formed during a summer visit and tour of BSU vastly differed from what he would face in the fall.

I wasn’t ready for the culture shock I received at BSU. When I went on the tour during the summer everybody seemed happy. Then I came in the fall. I wasn’t ready for the cultural differences. I attended a predominantly Black high school and community college. When I came here, there was so much diversity. I’ll admit I didn’t know how to communicate with different ethnicities and cultures.
One female student who lived at home with her parents before coming to BSU arrived with strong religious beliefs and values. She reported her dismay at encountering diverse ideas in her residence hall and shared how she learned how to accept others with differing lifestyles and opinions through her roommate.

I had to get used to living with other people. On a personal level, I had to learn how to be more mature and that not everybody has the same views I do. There were times when my roommate and I had debates. We weren't flat-out arguing. We would just debate with each other, and I learned that it's okay to agree to disagree.

Embracing Personal Role in College Success

In addition to the academic and social transition students experienced after arriving at BSU, stories revealed how they embraced a greater personal role in their college success. This is another key finding that supports Padilla’s notion of applying prior and acquired knowledge and skills to persist through graduation. It seems that once students understood their personal roles in succeeding, they accepted these roles by learning what needed to be done and doing it. Sixteen participants lived at home while they attended community college. Several students described how they relied on a parent, parents or other family members to keep them on track academically. They further shared how they had to learn how to take greater responsibility after arriving on a four-year campus. One student’s thoughts reflected these experiences.

So now there are things called bills and rent. When I got here, I had to understand that. I also had to understand that I’m out here all alone in a way. Nobody’s going to ask, “Did you do your homework? Did you do this? Did you do that?” You’ve got to do that on your own.”

One recent female graduate looked to her parents for guidance and spoke of their unfailing support. She also spoke of their admonishments to take her college experience seriously and not waste their money. When faced with the choice between studying and attending a campus party, she drew upon her parent’s wisdom. “My parents always have this
quote, ‘Do what you have to do in order to do what you want to do.’ If you want to go to that party, you probably should do your homework before you go.” She said she learned the hard way about the consequences of missing class.

Well, some days I would miss class, and they would give extra credit or they would let people know a pop quiz was coming. I learned the hard way. You need to get your butt up and just go to class even if it means rolling out of bed and looking like whatever. Missing some of those extra credit points and not knowing about a pop quiz lowered my grade an entire letter by the end of semester.

Participants like these two, described their acquisition of new skills - learning how to manage greater personal responsibility – to succeed in the university environment.

Other students arrived with some prior knowledge of how to handle difficult circumstances yet increased or refined this knowledge when they encountered obstacles. One student’s biggest challenge was her finances. She came to BSU with a working knowledge of how to manage her finances and reported that she learned what not to do by watching her family’s mistakes.

For me, budgeting was something that I had to learn on my own. My family is not known for being as good with money. I knew I didn't want to end up like I had grown up. I've learned from a lot of my family's mistakes.

A mix up in the financial aid office resulted in her not receiving her financial assistance until the end of the semester. Although she had a job cleaning the campus chapel, the pay was minimal. She applied and refined her budgeting skills to stretch these meager funds and some unused vacation pay from a previous job to survive the semester. “During September, the company sent me a check for about $800 for unused vacation. I lived off that $800 check and my small paycheck for about a semester.”
Another student reported that when his financial aid was delayed, he took a short-term loan to pay his tuition until the issue was resolved. When asked how he knew to take out a short-term loan, he responded,

When option one didn’t work (financial aid), I had to figure out other ways to pay for school. So I talked to the financial aid office, and they told me about the short-term loan. Also, I had worked that summer and saved some money for school.

He shared that his parents were unable to help him financially through college, so he understood he had to improve his budgeting skills and manage his finances carefully.

One self-determined male student had a similar experience with limited finances and had to overcome personal tragedy before transferring to BSU. After completing core requirements at his community college and finalizing his plans to transfer to BSU, his father passed away. As a result, he entered BSU with few financial resources. His greatest challenge was managing his limited finances. His family’s conservative view of debt and his financial struggles prompted him to learn how to budget. He enrolled in *Financial Peace University*, a Dave Ramsey course on budgeting and financial planning. This course took him step by step through the budgeting process. “About two or three years ago, I found out about Dave Ramsey and I went through his 13-week course. That was something that I had to take upon myself.”

The majority of participants were first generation students, 12 of 18. These students relied more heavily on their personal abilities when learning to navigate college. A self-described shy first female generation student shared that community college was never the stopping point for her because she knew she wanted to earn a bachelor’s. She explained that her single-parent mother could not formally assist her and described how she handled a lack of parental guidance through her transfer experience.
I think the only difficulty I had was not really having direction coming from junior college to university because my mom didn’t go to college. She couldn’t really provide any insight into what I needed to do. She didn’t really encourage me to go to college because she didn’t go to college.

For this first generation female, completing the transfer paperwork was especially difficult. “I just read through the paperwork, completed what I could on my own and when I needed my mother’s information, she would just tell me, and I would fill it her part.” She relied on self-determination and persistence to figure out the process on her own.

Experiences Unique to African American Students

Literature supports the idea that transfer experiences differ among races (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). Researchers assert cultural and economic backgrounds play a role in transfer and transition to four-year institutions which directly impacts minority persistence and degree attainment. Although on the whole, the experiences participants described differed little from those of other racial/ethnic groups, a few distinctions surfaced. Interestingly, these differences only emerged after students were directly asked how they perceived African American transfer student experiences differed from other races/ethnicities. Participants perceived three specific differences in their experiences. They noted dealing with negative stereotypes others have of African-Americans, a lack of role models, and racial bias.

Negative Stereotypes

Participants spoke about negative stereotypes others have of African-Americans and how these perceptions influence their transfer, transition, and persistence. A female student explained that the low expectations of African Americans prevalent in higher education interfere with effectively addressing students’ needs. “They don't know what to do with us as a race, as an ethnicity because they think, ‘You made it to college? Well now what?’ They just don't expect us to be here.” Two other female students felt African Americans face different expectations
than a non-African-American transfer student. The first one shared how these expectations cause
African American student to perceive themselves differently.

When you’re a minority going through the college system, it’s so much more than just going to college. My perspective is different because when I go to school every day, I’m thinking, “I’m a Black woman going through this, so I’ve got to make it happen. I have to reach above the circumstances that are supposed to be holding me down. I have to keep going.” I think the perspective we have of ourselves is a big difference between minority and non-minority students.

The second female expressed similar feelings.

One difference is just how people view me, not just as a person, but as a double-minority since I’m a woman and a racial minority. It’s how I’m perceived. People view me differently and have different expectations. They say, “Okay, you’re going to fall by the way side. You’re not going to complete college because the statistics say that these many people go through school and actually transition and get their degree. If you fall by the way side, that’s just the norm.”

This participant even expressed a sense of duty to complete her degree.

My perception is ‘I have to finish school. I have to get through it. It’s a bigger picture than school. It’s so much more than just being in school.’ I think that’s true with a lot of things minorities do.

Lack of Role Models

Students also perceived that a lack of African American role models on campus as a challenge distinct to their experiences. Villalpando and Solorzano’s (2005) statement that “the cultures of students of color can nurture and empower them” (p. 17) partly explains why African American students seek African American role models. One student explained that African American students had few role models or confidants with whom they could identify because of the relatively few African-American faculty and staff at BSU. She spoke fondly of one such faculty member she met at a university diversity conference. “Everyone loved her. I think she knew the importance of being that presence and that beacon for African-American students. Sometimes you just need
that person to go and be yourself with.” This student seemed to derive a sense of comfort just knowing an African American faculty was available to her. Unfortunately, this role model is no longer at BSU.

Racial Bias

Participants also mentioned experiencing racism or racial bias. A 56 year old female who entered community college because she had grown tired of being laid off, downsized, and being turned down for positions because she did not “have a piece of paper,” had this to say. “When you are as old as I am and have been Black as long as I have been in America, you know racism when you see it. I've had to overcome racism from 20-somethings.” She went on describe one incident.

In one of the groups in my social work class, there were only three of us. The young White woman in my group didn't contact me or the other group member, a Hispanic male. We had two meetings prior to even knowing that she was a part of our group. It was very obvious that she did not want to group with us but because she wasn't in class, the professor put her with us. During the rare meetings when she would show up, she wouldn't talk to me. She would talk to my partner or she would talk over me like I am some stupid or dumb kid.

A traditional aged student said she felt she was being held to a different standard as an African American student.

It seemed like all eyes were on you, how well you were going to do on the test or how well you did on an assignment. I always felt like I was being watched even harder just being a black student. I have had some professors who I thought had their nose up at me wondering ‘Is she's trying to succeed?’ or ‘Is she is trying to do better?’ I don't know. They might not be like that, but there definitely was some negativity.

Literature suggests transfer students often confront negative stereotyping by faculty who express little confidence in their academic ability. Real or perceived, negative feelings about transfer students from faculty or native students can impede successful transition (Rhine et al., 2000;
Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). This student, however, associated the negative stereotyping she experienced with racism rather than her transfer student status.

Means of Persisting

Community college transfer students use various resources to learn how to successfully transfer and persist through degree attainment (Laanan, et al., 2010; Hoffman & Wallach, 2005; Zamani, 2001). Institutional resources such as specially trained advisers, orientations, transfer student housing, and buddy and mentoring programs support students' academic and social transitions. Study findings support The Integrated Model of Minority Student Success’ idea that minority students use navigational, familial, and aspirational capital to learn how to successfully negotiate transfer, and persistence. Findings also indicate transfer student capital plays a greater role in supporting African American community college student transfer than previously considered. Surprisingly, findings also reveal students use of resistant capital as a form of motivation to persist.

Navigational Capital

Initially navigational capital was considered a key component in how African American transfer students learn to transfer and adjust to the university environment. However, after further analysis, participant stories seem to point more to the use of transfer student capital than navigational capital. Navigational capital is the ability to maneuver through social institutions and systems “not created with communities of color in mind” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Transfer student capital refers to the accumulated knowledge students possess or acquire in order to negotiate the transfer and transition (Laanan et al., 2010). One main difference between navigational and transfer student capital is the source of the students’ abilities and knowledge. Navigational capital
originates in minority students’ families and communities whereas transfer student capital may originate from any number of sources including higher education entities, personal research, friends, and family. For example, on mother encouraged her daughter to navigate the financial barriers she faced by praying. This non-traditional female’s mother encouraged her to rely on her faith and believe that God would provide for her financial needs.

My mother always tells me, ‘Just pray about it and God will open the doors for you.’ Because my mom is a single mom, she couldn’t just write me a check for school, living expenses or anything like that. She just says, ‘Ask God for what you need, and be faithful, and He’ll open doors for you.’

Another student reported that his mother modeled for him during the transfer student orientation how to aggressively pursue involvement opportunities and get connected at BSU as a transfer student.

At the orientation she was grabbing things everywhere we went. I’m walking through just trying to get done with the orientation and she’s grabbing flyers and talking to people. I thank God for her being there. She may not even realize how much she supported me along this path.

The fact that these two quotes appear a second time in the findings highlights Yosso’s (2005) assertion that forms of capital in community cultural wealth overlap.

When the data were reanalyzed with transfer student capital in mind, fewer instances of students using navigational capital were identified. Experiences previously labeled as students’ use of navigational capital were re-categorized as transfer student capital. For this reason, transfer student capital was added as a lens through which findings were viewed.

Transfer Student Capital

Handel (2011b) argues that “if two- and four-year institutions represent distinct and sometimes oppositional academic cultures, then students must possess specific kinds of
knowledge and insight to traverse the two- to four-year institutional chasm” (p. 415). This specific knowledge is what Laanan (2007) terms transfer student capital (TSC). Laanan, Starobin, and Eggleston (2010) describe the transfer student experiences as complex. They looked beyond transfer shock to explain community college transfer student experience. Building on social and cultural capital theory, they explain the notion of transfer student capital (TSC). “TSC refers to the experiences of community college students who transfer to four-year institutions. Specifically, TSC indicates how community college students accumulate knowledge in order to negotiate the transfer process” (p. 177). Laanan et al. (2010) delineate four components: (1) community college academic counseling experiences, (2) students’ perceptions of transfer process, (3) experiences with community college faculty, and (4) learning and study skills acquired at a community college. Examples of TSC include students’ understanding of admissions requirements, credit transferability, course articulation, and the ability to adjust to a new academic and social setting at a four-year university. When asked how they learned about transfer, participants’ experiences revealed they acquired and used TSC a number of ways. Several participants spoke of conducting their own research to learn about transfer. For example, one student reported researching the possibility of transferring to BSU before making her final decision.

I started doing more research online. I was looking at different class times and started gathering more information. When I contacted the advising department they also explained to me my options. Once I realized it was doable, I decided to transfer to BSU.

Another student and her parents used online resources and word of mouth to accumulate TSC.

We pretty much figured it out by going online. It wasn’t too hard. The BSU website is really easy to utilize. Once we figured that out, we came for a campus tour. I also learned other things through word of mouth.
A student who wanted to make sure she fully understood the transfer process also conducted personal research.

I was on online looking through the website and doing my research. I called BSU a lot. I’m sure I got on their nerves, but I was just making sure that I was doing my part. I knew that there were things that I could do.

Students who learned how to locate, interpret and apply transfer information were acquiring transfer student capital.

The significance TSC lies in the fact that as student increase this form of capital they increase the likelihood of successful transfer and transition to a four-year institution (Laanan et al., 2010). The concept of TSC is important to this study because it allows the consideration of African American transfer students’ use of a combination of institutional, and in some cases, interpersonal capital acquired outside the context of family and community when navigating transfer to the four-year university. Participants clearly related how they maneuvered through the community college and university systems by utilizing prior and acquired knowledge and skills as Padilla (1999) suggests.

Familial Capital

Familial capital represents the cultural knowledge nurtured within families or kinships that fosters a commitment to community wellbeing (Yosso, 2005). All but one participant spoke of receiving some form of familial support.

Financial, Emotional, and Other Support

When asked about perceptions of support from family, students described financial, emotional, and even inspirational forms of support. A first-generation student described her family as very supportive. She reported they often expressed their support by saying how proud they are that she is pursuing her degree. “My family is really supportive. They always tell me
they’re proud of me and happy that I want so much for myself. I know that they want to see me do well and finish.” She also reported how they bought her groceries and sent money when she needed it.

Just the other day, my laptop stopped working, and I really need my laptop for my Cost Accounting class. My grandma told me, "Why don't you call your uncle? You know he'll support you since it's for your class. You know we want to see you do well." So now they're sending me the money to get another laptop.

Through tears, she described the support she received from her family during down times when she wanted to quit.

When things got hard, my whole family, especially my grandma and my mom, were there for me. Even now when things get hard or a class is not going right, they just tell me “don't give up because you can do it. You can do it. You’ve come all this way, and there's nothing that you can't overcome.

A first generation male, shared that he considered quitting not because the university was difficult but because it was taking too long to earn his degree. He grew weary and described how he changed his plans from pursuing the baccalaureate to just earning a technical certification or the associate’s degree. When his mother found out, she challenged him not to give up. “Once I got that pep talk, I came back to reality and decided to press on,” he said.

Another student’s greatest challenge was limited finances. He shared how his brother assisted him financially. “When I moved into my apartment here I didn’t have all the rent money that I needed. So each month my brother would give me $200.00 to make up the difference.”

His brother also provided emotional support.

He would call me or text me to see how I was doing. Although it was only once in a while because everyone is busy, just knowing that someone else was thinking of my well-being is something that was very supportive. That gave me peace.

Students most often spoke about how critical support from parents and immediate family members proved to their success. However, for one student, this familial support came from extended relatives. She described how her aunt felt when she was accepted at BSU.
My aunt was ecstatic because as of now, I'm the only person in the family period, out of her children and my mom's children to have ever graduated and gone on to a university. I had her and my uncle's support and it was a great feeling because my mom and my father were not there.

Her aunt also helped her complete her BSU paperwork and even accompanied her to orientation.

I had to fill out a lot of paperwork to be declared an independent student. She helped me do all that. She drove me to orientation and was a vital support for me in my transfer. My aunt was big cog in the wheel. I don't think I could have done this without her.

Because her parents were not in the picture, this student relied on her aunt for emotional and practical support as she transferred. When she grew discouraged and decided to leave BSU, she boarded a bus, took the two and a half hour ride home, and found her aunt there waiting with emotional support.

Academically, I was great, but socially and emotionally I was torn up. I gathered my stuff and caught the bus home. My family was worried. They thought I had officially quit. My aunt told everyone, "It's going to be okay. I got her." I just rested at my aunt’s house, we talked for a few days, and then I came back to BSU.

Another student reported that his mother urged him to get involved after transferring.

At the orientation she was grabbing things everywhere we went. I’m walking through just trying to get done with the orientation and she’s grabbing flyers and talking to people. I thank God for her being there. She may not even realize how much she supported me along this path.

He also described how his mother discouraged him from working and sacrificed financially so he could focus on his academics.

My mother didn’t want me to work my first year. She said take this time and get situated in school. So I didn’t work and it was a blessing, but at the same time that also meant that my mother was back home having to pay bills and support me out here by paying my rent.

He described the emotional comfort he received from his mother.
Sometimes I would call my mom and say, “Mom I’m really struggling with school right now or I didn’t do as well on my test and it kind of has me down,” and she would encourage me. To receive words of encouragement, especially from a mother, there’s nothing like that.

He concluded that his family’s emotional encouragement was one of the greatest expressions of support they could have offered. “Just knowing family members were behind me, pulling for me and proud of me meant the world.”

Likewise, another student acknowledged the importance of emotional support from family. “If you don’t have that emotional support from home, you can venture off into your own world of depression.” He reported how his mother periodically expressed concern about his financial burdens.

She’s even worried about my student loan repayments because she knows I’ve taken on a lot to support both of us. Every once in a while when we’re talking about bills, she starts putting herself in the “we” circle saying, “We got to start paying back these loans.” I tell her that’s not a “we” thing. That’s all on me.

He said that’s her way of saying you’re not on your own.

She’s like “we’re in this together, I got your back. I’m going to do whatever I can to help.” That has helped a lot. It’s that unseen emotional support that a lot of people really don’t talk about. They just feel it.

Five of the six first-generation students’ experiences revealed that familial capital played a significant role in their persistence.

**Spiritual Beliefs and Practices**

Spiritual beliefs and practices, which I extend as a form of familial capital, emerged as another common source of support for students. Ten of the 18 participants reported leaning on spiritual beliefs or employing spiritual practices during difficult times. Each of the ten mentioned praying in some form. Four, spoke of casual prayer, and six described in great detail how their spiritual beliefs helped them persist.
When one student unexpectedly experienced homesickness shortly after arriving at BSU, she turned to prayer even though she does not consider herself a very religious person. “I just prayed a lot. I wouldn't say I'm very religious, but I do have faith and I just prayed.” When asked how he faced difficult academic times, a first generation male participant replied, “Honestly, I just prayed. Overcoming, in my experience, was by prayer and the support of others. I just leaned on God.” He even gave credit to God for assisting him during the final days of earning his degree.

Until the last week of school I was working toward graduation because I had to obtain a certain grade to graduate. I overcame that through prayer and faith. I have to give credit to God. It was a blessing.

A non-traditional female’s mother encouraged her to rely on her faith and believe that God would provide for her financial needs.

My mother always tells me, ‘Just pray about it and God will open the doors for you.’ Because my mom is a single mother, she couldn’t just write me a check for school, living expenses or anything like that. She just says, ‘Ask God for what you need, be faithful, and He’ll open doors for you.’

Still another, whose father is a pastor, reported his Christian faith was one the primary reasons he has persisted. “There were plenty of times I’ve thought about quitting, but what motivates me is my faith. That’s the biggest reason why I’m still here. When I’m going through something, I talk to God about it.” He believed his difficult college experiences have strengthened his faith.

My faith is stronger because of the things that happened in my college career. At one point, it seemed like there was no way I was going to get back in school because there was no housing. Then, the week before classes started, I was able to get housing. It’s just little things like that. I just depend on Him and thank God every day for what he’s doing in my life.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital denotes the ability to retain hopes and dreams despite real and perceived barriers (Yosso, 2005). When asked why they wanted to earn the baccalaureate degree
and why they did not quit, students expressed a wide range of reasons. By far aspirations and expectations surfaced as primary reasons. Participants consistently voiced expectations of a better future as a catalyst for completion. For some, the positive expectations of relatives and friends propelled them to attainment. Others wanted to forge a new trail in their family lineage, successfully traverse uncharted waters, prove that earning a college degree is a viable option, and set an example for other family members.

When asked why she wanted a college degree, an older female participant, like most participants, sought personal achievement and a brighter future.

Attaining my degree, was a personal goal as well as to elevate myself in society. It was something that I had to do because I had waited all this time. I am in my 50s and I am just now getting an undergraduate degree. It was really important that I stick it out even though I did have reservations after that first semester.

Another set of participants wanted to earn their degrees for themselves and family members.

I want a bachelor's degree to be quite honest with you, not just for me. One of the main reasons that I want a bachelor's degree is to show my family that it is possible and that it can be done. It's not easy, but it is worth it in the end and it can be done.

Similarly, another female expressed a desire to move beyond what her family had accomplished and provide for her future family.

I really want a degree because growing up we really didn’t have much, and I want better for myself. No one in my family has graduated from college. I don't have any children now, but I want more for my future children and family.

A first generation student, who decided to quit on more than one occasion, described her second decision to quit. “One morning I got up, and felt I just couldn't do this. I packed some clothes, gathered the little money I had, got on a bus, and ran home. I stayed for about three or four days.” She eventually returned and cites not wanting to disappoint her family and herself as reasons for persisting.
I was pretty determined not to quit, even though I felt like it. I knew that I would disappoint not only my family but myself if I didn't finish this. I knew that it would haunt me for a long time. I also knew it would be even harder emotionally and otherwise to come back after quitting. So, I just came on back and braved through it.

When confronted with the overwhelming challenge of adjusting to BSU, another female student reminded herself why she transferred. “It was so hard to get adjusted, but I had to just keep remembering the reason why I came in the first place. I have to finish. This is something I really want to do.”

Others focused on financial gain like this student. “I don’t like being poor. Right now, I’m very poor, and I don’t like it. Getting my degree will help my future earnings.” This student went on to explain her thinking shortly after she transferred to BSU. “It was about completion. I knew that whatever it was that I needed to do to get out of here, I needed to do. The goal is graduation.”

Others were walking through doors parents had opened for them. A female student whose parents were Nigerian immigrants shared that they more than encouraged but almost demanded that she earn her degree. She explained her parents’ value for education stemmed from limited opportunities in their home country.

They came to this country simply to work for little to nothing to give us an opportunity for the American dream. They really wanted us to go to college and have that American dream. Since that's what they came here for, they would be upset if I just quit.

Though his mother told him he was going to college, one student said he was driven by self-motivation.

Most people’s parents tell them that they’re going to college. And my mom did that too. But it I didn’t feel like I was forced to go. It was something I’ve wanted to do since I was little. I knew if I wanted to get somewhere in life, I needed to get a bachelor’s degree.
Resistant Capital

Another interesting finding was student utilization of resistant capital. Resistant capital can be understood as the skills developed when opposing inequality (Yosso, 2005). Although most participants described being motivated by positive expectations, others used negative expectations, particularly negative stereotypes of African Americans, as motivators to cross the finish line and reach their higher education goals.

Students consistently voiced the belief that less is expected of them as African American students. Most participants felt that other races expected them not to earn their degrees because they were African American. David explained, “Sadly, I would say that being African American society expects less out of us.” He went on to express how he believed this negative stereotype should serve as a motivator.

It's our job to resist what society thinks of us because the only way that we can change how we're viewed is by changing it ourselves. Period. It's important that we come out here, put in the hard work, make something of ourselves, and make sure that people understand that not all African American's are lazy individuals, because we're really not.

David went on to explain that the goal is not only to change the negative perceptions of others, but to give back to your community.

You want to come here, work hard, earn good grades, make something of yourself so you can go back and put back into your community. You want to be that person that they say “Hey, he’s from here. I’ve known him since he was a little kid and now he's back doing better things.”

One student acknowledged a double-standard based on race. She explained her view of how African Americans are perceived when they fail to earn a college degree compared to White students who do not complete college. Her desire not to be a statistic drove her to endure difficulty and press on to completion.
If a Caucasian student doesn’t finish college or they just have a high school diploma, they’ll have a good job. If you are a Black student and you just have a high school diploma or you dropped out of college, that’s what people expect of us. If you drop out of college and you’re Black, you’re just another statistic that didn’t do something with your life.

Her desire not to be a statistic drove her to endure difficulty and press on to completion. “I set out to finish college, and I’m going to do it. I don’t want to be another statistic because it’s different for minorities than it is for Caucasians.”

Students also expressed feeling a sense of responsibility as an African American to complete their degrees. Another student said, “Just being Black, society already says, ‘They're not going to make it. They're not going to get that degree.’ That just made me want to prove to them that we could.” A male participant spoke about resisting negative predictions on a more personal level. He shared how former employers doubted his intelligence and showed little faith in his potential to be more than a common laborer.

I want to show some people that I can do this. I want to make it. Many people doubted me, people at work and teachers. I’ve had all sorts of jobs where I worked with people that really had no goals. I used to be a valet and a cook. I guess my managers would assume I was just going to be nothing, and I didn't want to grow or get better. That’s not the case. I want to succeed so I don't ever have to work jobs like that again.

Study findings suggest students coupled forms of community cultural capital with transfer student capital to persist through attainment. It is important to reiterate that forms of community cultural wealth overlap (Yosso’s (2005). For example, students’ experiences that represent aspirational can easily be classified as resistant or even navigational.

Reflections and Advice

Reflections – What the Journey Meant

On the whole, participants perceived their journeys as beneficial both academically and
beyond. A number shared how their higher education experiences, though difficult at times, resulted in personal growth.

*Community College Experiences*

The majority of participants reported positive experiences at their community colleges and felt their decision to start there before transferring to BSU was a good one. Students frequently spoke about enjoying a greater level of support at their community colleges. The oldest participant described her community college experiences in overwhelming positive terms. As a non-traditional student, she felt comforted with her community college’s nurturing environment.

I enjoyed my time at the community college because of the number of nontraditional students who were part of the classes. Plus, I found that the professors were more attuned to the nontraditional student. I guess you could say they nurtured us in a way that was comforting and that made us to feel good about our decision to come back to school. They encouraged us.

Another student reported that she grew through her experiences and felt her time at the two-year institution was a necessary part of her university success.

I had some great experiences and they taught me a lot. Not only academically because I had some great academic teachers to start with, but emotionally. It was a great stepping stone for me. I believe that had I gotten into a university immediately, I would have been eaten alive.

She also thought it was helpful to be at home with her family when she first entered college. “It was very beneficial for me to learn some things near my family so that I had a support system to fall back on. For me, community college was a great experience.”

At her community college, another young lady experienced less stress and more support. “At that level, there wasn’t the same pressure as here. They wanted you to succeed no matter what you were there for, going on to a university or getting that associate’s.”

Although he found it difficult at first, a male student described his community
college experience as good.

At first, I found it hard. Even though it was community college, it’s still college. The experience was really good even though I’d say it started off a little shaky. I eventually, I got the hang of it and joined some organizations that would make me really good at networking and meeting people.

Another young man described his experience at the community college as a growing period where he learned about himself, how to study, and how to be a successful student. He attended an HBCU immediately after high school but said “things didn’t work out.” So he returned home and enrolled in his local community college. Although negative circumstance led to his entry, he believes his time at the community college educated him beyond the classroom.

It was a good experience. I learned how to be a better student, how to study, and what it takes to be successful as a student. I learned how to learn. I also learned lot about people, the people I should hang out with and the people I shouldn’t hang out with. Most importantly, I learned who I was.

A few participants like a one young lady who did not feel academically challenged, expressed regret that they had started at the community college rather than the BSU. She felt her community college teachers and administrators did not care for her. “They didn’t really care. I just did what I went there to do. I was so ready to get out of there. It was such a boring school.” Another female participant described her community college as “high school senior year part two.” She wanted more for herself and explained after her first semester at community college, she knew she wanted to transfer to a four-year institution. “I knew I wanted to transfer right after I started community college. I said to myself, "Okay, I've got to go somewhere else. This is not for me." She went on to describe the teachers and administrators as unhelpful and the students as uncommitted.

They were not even professional. They didn’t help you. As far as the students were concerned, it was all about whose doing what and what party's happening somewhere. People would get their financial aid and you wouldn’t see them again. It seemed like a big joke. I was upset because it wasn’t such a joke to me.
For one young man, who began his higher education at a four-year university and returned to earn enough credits to transfer to BSU, his stay at the two-year institution temporary from the beginning.

Community college felt like high school. There’s a big difference. Once I moved from a four-year to a two-year and I saw what community college was all about, it just gave me more motivation to move back to the four-year.

Although a few students eagerly anticipated their departure from community college, the majority of participants expressed positive sentiments about their community college experiences.

University Experiences

Similar to community college experiences, the majority of participants reported positive experiences at BSU. A number believed they matured after transferring to the four-year institution. The traditional age students said they came to the realization that they could no longer depend on their parents to keep them accountable for their academic performance. One young lady who held fond memories of her journey, said she learned the hard way about the consequences of missing class when she received a lower than expected semester grade. She believed transferring to BSU helped her mature, become more focused on completing her degree, and prepare for a career.

I would honestly say I grew up and matured because I had to focus on school and do what I needed to do to pass. I said "Okay. Well, I need to figure out what I need to do to build my resume." I need to focus more on graduation. I need to get my GPA up. I guess my values started changing and I started maturing.

Her only regret was not having the confidence to enter BSU as a freshman instead of attending a community college first.

I really enjoyed it and I'm glad everything worked out. Sometimes I think ,“What
if I had done it differently.” I wish I had come here the first year instead of being a scaredy cat. I would have found more resources my first year versus finding them my second or third year here, and I could have gotten involved in organizations a long time ago.

A recent male graduate describes his time at BSU as one of the "greatest experiences" of his 23-year-old life.

I’ve grown so much academically, mentally, and spiritually. I’ve honestly learned so much about life, people in general, and myself. I’ve built relationships that will last forever. I’ve had mostly positive experiences and the negative ones eventually turned out positive. I really value this experience.

Although his plan to enter a four-year university right after high school was sidetracked, he was proud that he still accomplished his goal via transfer.

It was really never my intent to transfer but to go directly to BSU and earn my degree. Even though I didn’t get in initially, I had in my mind, “I’m still going to get there.” So, I did, just by a different route.

For a recent female graduate, earning the baccalaureate from BSU was the fulfillment of such an impossible dream that she began to doubt the true worth of her accomplishment. “I have done this, now what? Is it going to be worth it? What am I going to do with it? I know that’s crazy but I thought it.” A friend helped her refocus.

One of my friends had to talk to me about my thinking. She said, "Stop taking your joy away. You've done this. Accept that you've come a long way and overcome a lot in your personal life. You had the courage to go back to school after a hundred years and you stuck it out." That really helped because I was stealing my own joy.

Even though he spent two years at a four-year university before he had to return to a community college and then transfer to BSU, an engineering major still sees the benefits of his journey beyond academics. “For me, it’s a character thing. You have to hang it there even though it’s hard because it will pay off in the end.”
Advice – A Final Word

As part of the interview wrap-up, students were asked to advise other African American community college students with transfer and baccalaureate degree attainment aspirations. Participants eagerly offered advice ranging from words of guidance to words or warning as a way of reaching out to those following in their footsteps. Students advised that being prepared before and during transfer will lead to success. Furthermore, after arriving at the university, getting connected would aid transition and help build networks of support at the four-year institution.

Stay Focused

By far the most common advice participants offered was “stay focused.” In fact, 16 of the 18 participants advised students to stay focus. After learning the hard way how to stay focused, one female student advised others to learn to focus on their goals while they are in community college and bring that focus to the university.

Use that community college experience to learn how to be focused. You can be a lot more focused at a community college because there are a lot more distractions at a university. Stay focused and finish what you started. Remember, you’d rather pay off your student loans after you earned a degree instead of paying them off when you didn't get anything out of it.

Another echoed these words of wisdom by advising students that staying determined, staying busy, and staying away from the wrong people go hand in hand with staying focused.

You have to stay determined, stay focused and stay busy. The minute that you let yourself linger, you're asking for trouble. Also, stay away from the wrong people. You can't get caught up in those people that are just here for the wrong reasons.

A male participant, who had first-hand knowledge about hanging around the wrong people, underscored the previous caveat about how bad company can interfere with
I'd say you need to watch who you're hanging out with. If they're not the type of people that want to succeed and are driven and ready to get through this, then you don't need to be around them. Hang out with people that want to get out of school just as bad as you do. Really focus on school right now.

Yet another advised “Once you get here, just keep your eye on the prize. Don’t allow the transition to take you out of the game.” One student offered a series of questions to help students stay focused.

Look into your future, where you want to be? What you want to do? If you stop now, do you want to stay here for the next ten years? Just look at it that way. Do you really want to quit now? Is this the end of your life? Are you ready to start a family? Don't you want a home? Don't you want some security for the future or do you just want to grow old somewhere?”

A female nearing graduation reiterated, “You just really have to be focused. If you really want to succeed, you have to have to stay focused and just to do it.” Another advised,

Don’t let anybody distract you. Have a goal. A lot of people start at community college and say “When I graduate community college I'll think of what do to next.” Don't get too comfortable in community college. Always think one step ahead. What's next after this?

Others suggested students maintain their focus by setting long-term goals. “Have a long-term goal. You don’t have to know what you’re majoring in right away, but find your passion and keep in mind that you are going to finish.” Another student whose goal centered on completing his community college prerequisites and moving on to the university as soon as possible echoed this advice.

Don’t waste your time in community college. If you are going to take a class, make sure that you take it and pass. Don’t spend time repeating classes. To be honest community college is great, but don’t get hung up there. Just finish what you need to finish at a community college and get into your four university because time passes quickly.

Even if students don’t have a long-term plan on which to focus, a female graduate advised they can focus on the task at hand and not succumb to the stress of long-term planning.
She advised that during your “first semester or second semester, if you aren't aware of what you want to major in don't stress out about it, just focus on your prerequisites”

Be Prepared

One student who benefited from early transfer preparation advises student to be prepared and do the hard work in the beginning to make things easier down the road.

Even though it is hard upfront, find ways to make things a little bit easier later. Now that I have my housing paid off I can worry about school. I don't have to work a job after I get out of class. I don't have to run to class and struggle with this and that. I know it's hard but try to find ways to make things better for yourself in the beginning. That's really helped me.

Two others suggested students prepare for transfer by contacting their four-year institutions while still at the community college. They felt mapping out a plan with the university before beginning the transfer process would reduce transfer obstacles. Looking back, a student who received little support from her community college advisers would have taken this approach rather than trying to map out her plan with her community college.

Go to the university that you want to attend and speak with their advisers. They are always willing to help. They know more about the university and they’ll get the information that you need while you’re at the community college. Don’t hesitate because the more information you have, the more prepared you’ll be and the transfer process will be easier.

A male participant who experienced credit transfer problems suggested the same thing.

Talk to the four-year university. Ask about the major you want to pursue after transfer. Get specifics so you know beforehand which classes are going to transfer and which ones are not. That puts a lot of foot work on the student, but it will be helpful after your core classes are complete and you transfer.

Asking questions is a natural part of preparing for transfer. A student who learned to asked questions encourages student to ask as many questions as necessary.

Ask questions, all day, every day. I don’t care if they’re annoyed with you, ask questions. Sometimes, you don’t want to feel like you’re the only one asking the
questions. I probably could have saved so much time and so much heartache had I just asked questions sooner.

*Get Connected*

A third recurring piece of advice was to get connected. Consistent with the literature, students advised that getting connect with the four-year campus will aid persistence. Through connections, students built networks that provided academic and emotional support. These networks also served as information channels and avenues to voice opinions. Sasha advised students to begin to make connections at the university before transferring.

Somehow find a way to connect with the campus that you desire to go to. Find someone that you would feel comfortable talking to. Send them an e-mail and say, “Hey, I’m a junior college student and I want to come there. Can you tell me about the process?” They can at least say, “Contact this person in the advising office about what major you’re interested in.

Surprisingly, the two participants who were not involved during their time at BSU, recommended that transfer students get involved in order to succeed. The first urged others to take advantage of opportunities to connect with the campus after arriving. “There are so many opportunities to get involved at school. Take those opportunities. Meet people.” She further advised students to connect with specific organizations to receive guidance from older students.

Be involved with the Multi-cultural Center at your school so that you can talk to students who’ve been through the same things that you’ve been through; students that are maybe juniors or seniors that have transferred; that happened to be minorities; that can give you advice.

The second participant concluded by pointing out that these connections benefit beyond the academic experience. They can hold future value and serve as a catalyst for personal growth.

Stay connected and not just with groups that focus on racial populations, but on all groups. It’s good to get other people’s perspective and grow personally. Get involved because it builds connections with people not just for school, but for
later on.

Another advised that students to get involved for career purposes because it can add to a well-rounded professional portfolio.

I’ve always said that I think the most important thing is to get involved. You know I’ve met a lot of people who have come to school and they are top students, straight A’s and everything. They go through and they get those grades and by the time they graduate they say “wow, I don’t have anything but grades to support my qualifications.” So I think getting involved in organizations as something good to have as backing. Get involved as soon as possible.”

Echoing a previous sentiment, a male student suggested students connect with a variety of people. From his perspective, this adds to a student’s ability to contribute to society as a whole.

Network with many types of people. You don't have to have just all Black friends. You don't have to have just all White friends. Put yourself out there, diversify yourself. Make yourself accessible to different people. At the end of the day you want to be a beneficial member of society and we all work together. Be willing to put yourself out there and make society a better place.

_Do Your Best_

Another recurring piece of advice involved student effort. Participants urged those following in their footsteps to give it their all and do their best. A participant nearing graduation advised students to do well at while they were in community college. “Make sure you keep your grades up and have a really good GPA because slacking or just not applying yourself will follow you to wherever you transfer. Definitely keep your grades up at your community college.” One recent graduate admonished that after transfer you’re here “to get a degree, not a C degree, not D degree so do your best.” Another offered:

Do your best. Really try hard because when you do get to a university, it's going to be challenging. If you're not ready for that big step, it may be too hard for you to get through it. Work hard so you will be prepared for whatever comes.

Several participants advised transfer students to aim high and do not settle for less than their best.
Don't settle for less. As a tutor, I've heard students say, I'll just take a B. That's not the greatest thing if you know you can get that A. If you have an 89, you're so close! Why don't you just push for one or two more points? An A will give you a 4.0, a B you're a 3.0. So push to those points, they're really important in the long run.

Summary of Findings

This chapter presented the key finding from this study which sought to explore African American community college transfer student experiences through baccalaureate degree attainment. Findings indicate that African American community college transfer student experiences reflect those of other students cited in previous research. However, two findings do add to previous research. Five themes emerged from the data: (1) academic advising, (2) transfer preparation, (3) transitioning to the four-year environment, (4) experiences unique to African American transfer students, and (5) how students persisted through degree attainment. Participants' experiences revealed inconsistent academic advising at the community college and university. Students who received advising from transfer advisers or advisers associated with special programs, experienced smoother transfers. Students perceived early transfer preparation as a key to successful transfer and transition. When transitioning to the four-year environment, students benefited from transfer student orientation and special programs, but indicated they had little knowledge of other transfer student support services at the university. Two key findings added to the literature on African American community college transfer students. One finding is that student perspectives about how their experiences differ from those of other student groups, and two is how they persisted through baccalaureate attainment. Students perceived their experience differed from others groups in that they lack role models, face negative stereotyping and encounter racial bias. Findings suggested African American community college transfer student persist by employing transfer student capital, familial, aspirational, and resistant capital
to learn how the traverse transfer, transition, and persistence. Participant reflection and advice to other transfer students concluded findings. Figure 5 models study findings.
African American Community College Transfer Student Experiences

Institutional & Personal Experiences
- Academic Advising
- Transfer Preparation
- Transition to 4-yr
- Experiences Specific to African American
- Reflections & Advice

How Students Learned to Apply Previous & Acquired Knowledge/Skills
- Navigational & Transfer Capital
- Familial Capital
- Aspirational Capital
- Resistant Capital
  - Ability to maneuver transfer, transition & persistence
  - Financial, emotional, & other support
  - Motivation
  - Motivation

Institutional Support
- Transfer Student Support Services
- Special Programs

Figure 5. Model of Finding Summary.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explored African American community college transfer student experiences through baccalaureate degree completion. Qualitative methods were used to examine the experiences and perceptions of eighteen African American community college transfer students who recently graduated or were within 30 credit hours of graduating from a four-year university in Texas. Ten female and eight male students, ranging in age from 21 to 56 years old, composed the sample. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews which were transcribed and analyzed based on an integrated conceptual model of Padilla’s (1999) Model of Minority Student Success and Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model. Findings suggest that African American community college transfer student experiences are very similar to transfer student experiences revealed in current literature. However, findings indicate students perceive their experiences differ from students of other races/ethnicities when dealing with negative stereotypes, lack of role models, and racial bias. Findings also suggest African American community college transfer students persist by employing transfer student capital, familial, aspirational, and resistant capital to learn how to transfer, transition, and persistence through baccalaureate degree attainment.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American community college students who transfer to four-year institutions and earn baccalaureate degrees from students’ perspectives. Thus two primary research questions guided this study:

1. What are African American community college transfer students’ perceptions about their experiences?
a) How do students describe their transfer and transition experiences from community college to the four-year institution?

b) How do students describe the role of family and community support during their transfer and transition experiences?

c) How do students describe institutional support during their transfer and transition experiences?

2. What are African American community college transfer students’ perceptions about their persistence through baccalaureate degree attainment?

a) How do students describe their persistence through baccalaureate degree attainment?

b) How do students describe the role family and community play in their persistence through baccalaureate attainment?

c) How do students describe institutional support during their persistence through baccalaureate attainment?

Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to understand participant perspectives and how individuals make meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 2009). Since the current study sought to examine the experiences and perceptions African American community college transfer students, qualitative methods were used. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with eighteen students who recently graduated or will graduate within one year of the study from a four-year university in Texas. Each participant transferred from a community college in Texas. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to identify themes. Qualitative inquiry is based on subjective data interpretation. Member checks, peer review, and researcher reflexivity were used to address validity and reliability. Member checks solicit participant
feedback during preliminary and final data analysis to prevent researcher misinterpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Merriam, 2009). Peer review involves a review of the methods, data, and interpretation by a colleague familiar with but not directly involved with the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 2009). Reflexivity is the process by which researchers “become aware of what allows them to see, as well as what may inhibit their seeing” (Watt, 2007, p. 82). Data was analyzed based on two conceptual models that frame minority student success.

The conceptual framework that guided this study was the Integrated Model of Minority Student Success, which merges Padilla’s Model of Minority Student Success and components of the Community Cultural Wealth Model. Padilla’s Model poses minority students who learn to successfully apply prior and acquired knowledge when navigating higher education barriers persist and earn their degrees. The Community Cultural Wealth Model acknowledges the forms of capital minority students bring to their college experiences. Merging these two models, offers a way to explain how minority students utilize forms of cultural capital to successfully apply prior and acquired knowledge to navigate higher education through degree attainment.

Findings suggested that African American community college transfer students experiences differ little from those of other student groups in regard to academic advising, transfer preparation, and transition into the four-year environment. However, findings indicate African American transfer students perceive that their experience do differ in some ways from other student groups. Moreover, findings reveal how these students persist through baccalaureate degree attainment. Implications for community college and university policies and practices and recommendations for future research are presented.
Discussion

Higher education research informs our understanding of who enrolls at community colleges, why they choose to attend, and the important role community colleges play in higher education access for minority students (Bailey et al., 2005; Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Hagedorn, Cypers, & Lester 2008). A growing body of literature describes transfer and transition to four year institutions (Doyle, 2009; Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Porchea, et al., 2010; Townsend, 2008). However, quantitative research comprises the majority of studies investigating community college students who transfer and earn the baccalaureate (See for example Alfonso, 2006; Doyle, 2009; Lee et al., 1993; Wang, 2009). Although some of these studies reflect transfer trends and outcomes by race/ethnicity, minority transfer experiences are rarely explored. Only a handful of published studies investigate African American community college transfer students (Blau 1999; Lee, 2001; Zamani, 2001).

Perceptions about Experiences

Finding from this study are supported by published research and add to the sparse publications on African American community college transfer students. In answering the first research question, findings are consistent with research on community college transfer students. African American community college transfer student experiences differed little from other student groups in regard to academic advising, transfer preparation, and transitioning to the four year environment. Current literature indicates academic advising is a key component to successful transfer, transition and degree attainment (O’Gara, Mechur-Karp & Hughes, 2009; Melguizo & Dowd, 2009).

Participant descriptions of academic advising experiences at both the community college and university reflect previous research findings that transfer students often receive inadequate
and inaccurate advising (Dowd, 2006; Hagedorn et al., 2008) However, participants who received advising from specially trained advisers or from advisers in special programs, experienced fewer transfer and transition difficulties. These findings could indicate ineffective institutional approaches to transfer student advisement or poor advising practices by individual advisers. In either case, these findings affirm that critical accurate and comprehensive advising is critical to transfer students’ success, thus echoing calls for well-trained advisers who are experts in the field of advisement (Dowd, et al., 2006; Flaga, 2006; Kuh, 2008). It further supports the “adviser as teacher model” in which advisers act as coaches or facilitators in teaching transfer students how to ask the “right” questions that lead to information and resources that best fit their individual needs.

Published research asserts that early preparation leads to smoother transfer and transitions (Berger & Malaney, 2003). Furthermore, students who enter community college with baccalaureate degree aspirations earn bachelor’s degrees at higher rates (Adelman, 2005; Bailey et al., 2005; Dougherty & Keinzl, 2006; Porchea et al., 2010). These students seek transfer information and resources in preparation for transfer. They also enroll in prescribed courses designed to prepare them for upper-level courses at four-year institutions. Participants who prepared for transfer reported fewer difficulties during the transfer process than those who did not. This finding underscores conclusions by Hagedorn et al. (2008) and Berger and Malaney (2003) that transfer readiness is a key determinant in successful transfer. This finding is directly linked to the previous finding about academic advising. Understanding that early preparation is one key to successful transfer influences the academic advising models we implement at two-year institutions. When students are informed about transfer, whether they indicate transfer intent or not, they are one step closer to preparing for the transfer. The significance of early
preparation to transfer student success should also alert universities. Four year institutions that form partnerships with community colleges and provide easy access transfer information such as articulation agreements, admissions requirements, and transfer student support services, aid early preparation and facilitate transfer student success.

Findings about transitioning to the university, is the third area where findings agree with previous research. Eggleston and Laanan (2001) suggest that transition to a four-year institution may be the most crucial phase in community college transfer students’ pursuit of the baccalaureate. Students may encounter transition difficulty inside the classroom in the form of increased academic rigor, larger class sizes, and new faculty relationships (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). Outside the classroom, transfer students must often adjust to larger campuses, new institutional procedures, and difficulty connecting socially (Flaga, 2006; Owens, 2010; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Participants reported facing most of these transition challenges and found transfer student orientation and special programs helpful. Literature highlights the importance of transfer student support services and special programs to transition success (Hoffman & Wallach; 2005; Kane, 2001; Laanan, 1996; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Zamani, 2001). However, participants reported that they were unaware of most of the transfer student services the university offered. This indicates that universities must go beyond providing transfer support services to effectively promoting them and insuring transfer student know that they exist. These results point to an ongoing need for both community colleges and universities to actively engage in creating transfer-friendly cultures. As previous research suggests, this occurs as individual institutions support and welcome transfer student and through two- and four-year partnerships designed to promote seamless transfer (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Handel, 2007; Mery & Schiorring, 2011).
What this study adds to the literature is the African American community college transfer student perspective of their experiences. These perspectives highlight the similarities and differences in their experiences and those of other student groups which has implications for how higher education supports this student population.

Perceptions about Persistence through Degree Attainment

In answering the second research question, findings are consistent with the conceptual model that framed the study. This model suggests a key component to student persistence is their use of capital. Research on minority student transfer suggests social and cultural factors impact transfer rates. Some scholars argue that minority students’ limited cultural and social capital place them at a distinct disadvantage in their transfer and baccalaureate pursuits (Wassmer et al., 2004). Contrary to Wassmer et al. (2004), findings from this study demonstrate that African American transfer students bring at least three forms of community cultural wealth and transfer student capital to their transfer experiences as contributors to successful transfer, transition, and persistence.

When participants were asked if they ever considered withdrawing from the university and giving up their pursuit of the baccalaureate, all 18 responded “yes.” The follow-up question, “why didn’t you quit?” elicited a rich array of responses. Reasons ranged from desiring to reach personal goals to wanting to establish new patterns of achievement in family lines. Each response was rooted in the use of cultural capital. Aspirational and resistant capital served as sources of motivation for participants to persist. The finding that participant used aspirational capital was expected based on the conceptual framework that guided the study. The emergence of resistant capital was unexpected. However, the use of resistant capital is consistent with participants’ perceptions about negative stereotyping of African Americans. Hence, aspirational
capital represented a motivational source that drew upon hopes, dreams, and ambitions and resistant capital, a source that rejected low expectations, negative stereotypes, and racial bias toward African American students. Students effectively employed both forms of capital to persist.

Similar to aspirational capital, participants’ use of familial capital to support persistence was expected. The fact that the majority of first-generation students, five of six, described the importance of familial capital is consistent with Yosso’s (2005) descriptions of the role of familial capital in minority student success. Despite the limited academic support, the financial, emotional, and inspirational support students received is just as critical. Initially navigational capital was considered a key component in how African American learned to maneuver through higher education. However, participants’ stories pointed to the use of transfer student capital (TSC) rather than navigational capital. Employing the knowledge they accumulated during the transfer process supported their persistence. In this way, African American students are similar to the general population. The definition of community cultural wealth emphasizes that higher education has not previously acknowledged these forms of capital. However, their significance to African American transfer student experience informs our understanding of these students’ success. Community colleges and universities must consider these forms of capital when designing support services that facilitate the success of all students.

This study also adds to previous research an understanding of how African American community college transfer students successfully navigate transfer and persist through degree attainment. Utilizing forms of cultural capital as presented the Community Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso, 2005) and transfer student capital (Laanan, et al., 2010), students apply prior and acquired knowledge to negotiate barriers.
Conceptual Framework

The Integrated Model of Minority Success explains how African American community college transfer students learn how to negotiate higher education barriers and persist through degree attainment using four forms of capital. The Model merges Padilla’s Model of Minority Student Success (Padilla, 1999), Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), and Laanan et al.’s (2010) transfer student capital (TSC). The initial Model suggested students use four forms of cultural wealth (navigational, familial, aspirational, and resistant capital) to negotiate transfer, transition, and persistence.

Padilla (1999) explains that through college experiences, minority students learn to navigate obstacles by applying prior and acquired knowledge. Students who learn to successfully apply this knowledge persist and earn their degrees. The Community Cultural Wealth Model acknowledges the forms of capital that minority students bring to their college experience. Laanan et al.’s (2010) TSC indicates how community college students accumulate knowledge about transfer in order to negotiate transfer to four-year institutions.

The Integrated Model of Minority Student Success offers insight not only into the knowledge students possess and acquire as they traverse higher education, as Padilla poses, but how students learn to apply this knowledge or in other words, what students bring to their higher education experience that equips them to learn how to apply prior and acquired knowledge, namely familial, aspirational, resistant capital, and transfer student capital. Findings indicate that African American transfer students’ use of resistant capital and transfer student capital should be added to the Integrated Model of Minority Student Success. Figure 6 illustrates the revised Integrated Model. The ovals within Padilla’ “black box” or students’ college experiences,
represent forms of community cultural wealth, namely, familial, aspirational, resistant, and navigational capital.

Figure 6. Revised Integrated Model of Minority Student Success.

The square denotes a different form of capital, transfer student capital. These forms of capital represent the means by which students learn how to apply prior and acquired knowledge to persist through graduation. The Model further acknowledges the institutional supports at the two- and four-year levels that facilitate successful transfer and attainment, thus the rectangle. As findings further indicate, these support include accurate and thorough academic advising, transfer student orientation and special programs.

It is evident that African American community college transfer students clearly utilized three forms of capital from the Cultural Wealth Model when responding to barriers during transfer, transition, and persistence. Familial capital provided reference points for progress by reminding them of who they were and where they came from. Moreover, familial capital supplied financial support, emotional encouragement, and religious beliefs and practices to guide
and sustain students through attainment. Aspirational capital energized them to focus beyond current difficulty to the ultimate goal, degree completion. Students employed aspirational capital as a form of positive motivation. Resistant capital fueled their desire to overcome negative stereotypes and low expectations. This form of capital was used when responding to negative motivation. Participants’ use of cultural wealth, navigational, familial, aspirational, and resistant capital to overcome challenges, affirm the Integrated Model of Minority Student Success.

In summary, the Integrated Model of Minority Student Success provides a comprehensive way to view African American community college transfer student success by acknowledging the cultural wealth they bring to their college experiences and the transfer student capital they accumulate and how these forms of capital help them to learn how to navigate barriers and exit higher education as graduates. This Model explains how these students employ at least three forms of community cultural wealth, familial, aspirational, and resistant capital and TSC to learn how to apply prior knowledge and new knowledge to successful complete the transfer process, adjust to the four-year environment and earn their baccalaureate degrees. Thus, the Integrated Model of Minority Student Success proposed in this study appropriately frames how African American community college students transfer and earn the baccalaureate.

Conclusion

Three major conclusions were drawn from this study. First, African American community college transfer student experiences are similar to transfer student experiences revealed in literature regarding academic advising, transfer preparation, and transition to the four-year institution. Participants’ experiences revealed inconsistent academic advising at the community college and university. Students who received advising from transfer advisers or advisers associated with special programs, experienced smoother transfers. Students perceived
early transfer preparation as a key to successful transfer and transition. When transitioning to the four-year environment, students benefited from transfer student orientations and special programs, but findings indicated students had little knowledge of other transfer student support services at the university.

Second, students perceived their experiences differ from other races/ethnicities in that they lack role models, face negative stereotyping, and encounter racial bias at the university. Students seemed to derive comfort from the presence of African American faculty and staff on campus and looked to them as role models. Students also perceived negative stereotyping and racial bias against African Americans by student, faculty, and society in general. They responded by rejecting these views and setting out to disprove them. Third, African American transfer students utilize at least four forms of capital to successfully transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions and persist through degree attainment, namely familial, aspirational, resistant capital and transfer student. Two key findings added to the literature on African American students who transfer from community colleges to four-year universities. The first finding is students’ perspectives about how their experiences differed from those of other student groups, and the second is how they persisted through baccalaureate attainment.

Implications for Policy

Differing missions and goals guide community college and four-year university policy (Cohen, 2008). What is best for transfer students too often falls through the cracks between diverse institutional missions. Crafting policy that effectively addresses the goals of two different higher education sectors and supports transfer student achievement is possible. In her investigation of the efficacy of Texas transfer policy, Fann (2013) recommends two-year and four-year institutions collect transfer student data as a measure of accountability because “rarely
do current measures of accountability include tracking transfer students” (p. 31). This tracking allows reporting on community college student transfer and degree completion rates at four year institutions (Handel, 2008). Fann (2013) goes on to note that “tracking student data and communicating with receiving the university is imperative to creating a comprehensive institutional state transfer profile and identifying gaps in services” (p. 31).

Based on the same Texas study, Marling (2013) discusses the redistribution of credit for transfer student success. She explains that transfer students who leave the community college “prior to achieving the associate degree are currently not counted toward the reported success rates of their original institutions, and four-year institutions are most often credited only for retention and graduation of direct-entry students, not transfers” (p. 84). Therefore, two and four-year institutions have little incentive to dedicate resources to transfer student success.

A reverse transfer policy sufficiently addresses this dilemma. Reverse transfer agreements apply credits earned at the four-year university toward a community college degree thus reverse awarding the associates degree. Community colleges, four-year universities, and most importantly, transfer students benefit from this policy. Community colleges win by receiving credit for degree completion. Universities enroll students who might not have considered transfer until completing the associate’s degree. Students earn a two-year degree after moving forward in pursuit of the baccalaureate. Reverse transfer policies add alignment to higher education institutional goals. Marling goes on to add, that “transfer student academic performance is not calculated in national rankings for four-year institutions” (p.84). Policy stipulating four-year institutions calculate transfer students in completion in data also encourages this sector to invest in transfer student success. Policies such as these strengthen community college student transfer to four year universities by incentivizing their success at both levels.
Implications for Practice

Well-crafted policy represents one aspect of an effective transfer pathway that moves community colleges to four-year institutions. Implementing these policies is the other vital component.

Transfer Information and Support

Based on the aforementioned Texas study, Fann and Marling (2012) cite the following recommendation to improve transfer practices.

- Implement a comprehensive advising model which presents community college students with a full-range of academic options including transfer. An added strength of this model is that it teaches student how to understand and use the transfer information they receive.
- Design and encourage student participation in student success courses in which students can learn about transfer and the transfer process.
- Introduce students to special programs including TRIO, athletics, and honors in which they receive one-on-one advising and support before, during, and after transfer.
- Maintain accuracy and accessibility of online transfer information. Students’ growing dependence on the internet and online resources when navigating transfer makes this practice essential.
- Mandatory transfer student orientations ensure students are introduced to the university infrastructure and support initial transition to the four-year environment.

In addition to Fann and Marling’s (2013) recommendations for transfer-specific orientations, diversity among the transfer student population, call for diversity among transfer student orientation offerings. For some students, a one-day all-inclusive event that orients them to the campus, introduces campus services, and allows them to select courses is sufficient. For others,
a two-day event with an overnight stay at the university is more helpful. Not surprisingly, for others still, a half-day event would be more than enough. The wide variety of transfer student backgrounds suggests the need for expanded orientation offerings. Grites (2013) underscores this idea noting that the “magnitude and complexity…of a successful transition from a two-year to a four-year institution cannot be addressed in a single program, on a single day, for a few hours” (p. 66). Furthermore, first-generation parents differ from parents who have first-hand experience with higher education. An effective transfer student orientation provides options that increase all parents’ chances having an informative, worthwhile experience. By offering an array of choices, students and parents can leave having connected meaningfully with the institution.

Finally, Miller (2013) suggests collaborative institutional practices that facilitate transfer student baccalaureate completion. One form of collaboration is two and four-year partnerships. Partnerships provide a clearly defined academic pathway for students transferring from community colleges to four-year institutions and share resources dedicated to transfer success. Institutional articulation, course transferability, alignment of degree plans for specific majors all can be established. Transfer centers connected through partnerships can share information and co-sponsor events that bridge the institutions. Furthermore, connections can be used to introduce student to the four-year environment and expectations, thus addressing research citing community colleges’ failure to prepare students for four-year institutions.

Transfer Student Voices

An effective approach to facilitate transfer student success is by asking those who have successfully transferred, transitioned, and earned the baccalaureate. Engaging transfer students in the design, development and implementation of transfer student services incorporates transfer
students lived experiences and perspectives that program directors and administrators may lack. Surveying or interviewing current or recently graduated transfer students is one of the easiest ways to solicit input. Surveys can be conducted online. Students wishing to offer more detailed feedback, may complete open-ended questions or be invited to participate in an interview. Meeting transfer student needs is a key to creating a smoother pathway to the baccalaureate. Instituting meaningful and effective practices by listening to transfer student voices is a critical first step in meeting transfer student needs.

Supporting African American Transfer Students

Since African American transfer student experiences resemble those of other races/ethnicities, policies and practices designed to support transfer student success in general will also benefit this population. Yet, it is important that higher education practitioners also understand the unique aspects of African American community college transfer students experiences to provide targeted assistance through degree attainment. With this in mind, targeted assistance can include assessing minority students’ perspectives of the institutional racial climate, designing and supporting programs that foster minority transfer student transition into the four-year environment, and recruiting diverse faculty.

Implications for Future Research

Given the sparse literature on African American community college transfer students, ample opportunity exists to learn more about their experiences, needs, and how higher education can better serve them. First, an extension of this study with a greater number of participants is in order. Although 18 student interviews yielded informative findings, a greater number of participants would perhaps serve to strengthen some themes and reveal new ones. Incorporation of student focus groups might also surface new findings. Conducting focus groups could allow
participants to voice even more shared experiences as group conversation and discussion trigger thoughts and memories participants might not recall during individual interviews.

Second, a greater understanding of their utilization of community cultural wealth when successfully transferring and persisting through degree attainment would be helpful. Findings from this study suggest the use of four forms of capital from this Yosso’s (2005) Model. What other forms of cultural wealth might African American students be employing to facilitate their success? How can these forms of capital be strengthened? Inquiry aimed specifically at investigating student use of cultural wealth would increase our understanding of the student population.

Finally, and perhaps a more difficult question for future research to consider is what are the perceived reasons why students within this population express transfer intent and aspire to the baccalaureate yet do not fulfill their aspirations? This inquiry would target three specific groups of students: 1) students who entered community colleges with transfer intent but earn the associate’s and did not transfer; 2) students who entered community colleges with transfer intent but withdraw before earning any type of credential; and 3) students who entered community college's with transfer intent, transfer to a four year institution, but withdrew before earning the baccalaureate. The greatest challenge with this type of exploration is isolating true contributing factors because the reasons for student attrition and reduced aspiration can be complex.

Closing

Enrollment trends indicate African Americans with baccalaureate aspirations will continue to enter higher education through community colleges. Facilitating successful transfer, transition, and persistence at four-year institutions will become even more critical to their degree attainment. As higher education policy makers and practitioners seek to craft policy and design
institutional structures that serve this student population, research informing these decisions also grow in importance. Based on the stories of 18 African American community college transfer students who have earned or will earn the baccalaureate, this study hopes to contribute to this body of literature.

Although much of community college literature offers insight into why students choose community colleges, predictors of their success, and their outcomes, their lived experiences are less explored. Given the significant proportion of African Americans entering the higher education pipeline through community colleges, facilitating successful transfer to four-year institutions and supporting degree attainment becomes a viable means to increasing African American degree attainment. This qualitative study sought to understand the experiences of African American community college students who transfer to four-year institutions and earn baccalaureate degrees. This research sought to expand our understanding of African American college student achievement, add to the sparse scholarship on African American community college students, and especially to broaden the limited literature on those who transfer to four-year institutions and earn the baccalaureate.
APPENDIX A

INVITATION EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS
Dear (student name),

My name is Dawna Wilson. I am a doctoral candidate examining UNT African American transfer student experiences for my dissertation. If you are African American, have recently graduated or are within 15 hours of graduation, and transferred from any Dallas County Community College District campus, you are eligible to participate in this study!

All you need to do is participate in either one individual interview. Each interview will last 45 - 60 minutes and will occur at place and time convenient to you. In appreciation of your participation, a $20 gift card or cash will be given to you upon completion of the interviews. will be recorded, however all participants will be given pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

If you are interested in participating in the study or know someone who may be, please reply to this email. If you have any questions about my research, please feel free to contact Dr. Amy Fann in the College of Education Higher Education department.

Thank you.

Dawna Wilson  
Doctoral Candidate  
College of Education  
Higher Education Program  
University of North Texas
APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE
1. Gender: Male ____ Female ____  2. Age ____  3. Age at transfer ______

COMMUNITY COLLEGE
4. How long after high school did you enter community college?
   Immediately ____  1-2 years ____  3-5 years ____  More than 5 years ____
5. When you entered community college, did you plan to transfer to earn a bachelor’s degree?
   Yes   No
6. From which community college did you transfer? ________________________________
7. What other community college have you attended? _______________________________
8. How many credit hours did you transfer? ______
9. Did you take any developmental classes?     Yes  No
   If yes, which one(s)? ____________________________________________________
10. Did you earn a degree or certificate?    Yes   No
    If yes, which one(s)? __________________________________________________

UNIVERSITY INFORMATION
11. Have you attended any other 4-year colleges or universities?     Yes    No
    If yes, which one(s)? ___________________________________________________
12. When did you transfer to this university? __________
13. Which best describes what your student status is/was?    Full-time _____ Part time _____
14. What is/was your graduation date? _______  14. What is/was your major? __________
15. Were you involved in any organizations?    Yes     No
    If yes, which one(s)? _________________________________________________
16. Do/did you live on campus?         Yes    No
17. Do/did you work?   Yes  (full-time or part time)  (on campus or off campus)    No
   (circle one)   (circle one)
Family Educational Background Information

17. What is your parents’ and siblings highest level of education? (Please check)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Sibling 1</th>
<th>Sibling 2</th>
<th>Sibling 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>High School/GED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associate’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
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<td>Master’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
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</table>

18. If you have already graduated, what are you currently doing to do?
   - Working
   - Attending Graduate school
   - Other, (please explain) _____________________________

19. If you are an upcoming graduate, what are you planning to do?
   - Work
   - Attend Graduate school
   - Other, (please explain) _____________________________
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
1. Tell me why you chose to attend community college and a little about your experiences as a community college student.

2. When did you decide to transfer and how did you prepare?

3. Describe the process you went through to transfer to this university.

4. Tell me about some of the difficulties you encountered during your transfer. How did you handle these difficulties?

5. Help me understand your transition from community college to this university. Describe any difficulties you encountered during your transition and how you handled these difficulties?

6. Why did you decide to transfer to this particular university? Tell me a little about your experiences here.

7. Tell me about some of the challenges or difficulties you face while earning your bachelor’s degree. How did you handle these difficulties?

8. Did you ever want to quit? If so, why didn’t you? What kept you going?

9. Describe the support you received from your family as you earned bachelor’s degree.

10. Describe the support you received from your university as you earned your degree.

11. How do you think your transfer, transition and experiences while earning your degree differed from community college transfer students of other racial/ethnic groups?

12. What advice would you give African American community college students who want to transfer to a university and earn a bachelor’s degree?

13. What would you like me to know about your transfer, transition, and degree attainment experience that we have already discussed?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Opening Questions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Wrap-up Questions</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are African American community college transfer students’ perceptions about their experiences?</td>
<td>1. Tell me why you chose to attend community college and a little about your experiences as a community college student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. When did you decide to transfer and how did you prepare?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are African American community college transfer students’ perceptions about their persisted through baccalaureate degree attainment?</td>
<td>1. Describe the process you went through to transfer to this university.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Tell me about your adjustment from community college to university.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Describe some of the difficulties you encountered during your transfer and transition. How did you handle these difficulties?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Describe the support you received from your family during your transfer and transition.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Describe the support you received from your community college and/or university during your transfer and transition.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Tell me why you decided to transfer to this particular university and a little about your experiences here.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Describe some of the difficulties you encountered while earning your bachelor’s degree. How did you handle these difficulties?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Describe the support you received from your family after transfer as you earned your bachelor’s degree.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Describe the support you received from your university after transfer as you earned your bachelor’s degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. How do you think your transfer, transition and experiences while earning your degree differed from community college transfer students of other racial/ethnic groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. What advice would you give African American community college students who want to transfer to a university and earn a bachelor’s degree?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. What would you like me to know about your transfer, transition, and degree attainment experience that we have already discussed?</td>
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