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The Influence of Associate Degree Attainment on Baccalaureate Degree Completion for Reverse Credit Transfer Students

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
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Abstract

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MEd, University of South Carolina, 2001

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Nationally, reverse credit transfer is a practice of transfer credit. The reverse transfer program at the study site was implemented in 2013, but no information had been analyzed about the experiences of participating students. This study explored students' experiences of the reverse transfer program at the study site. The theory of student persistence framed the study to understand students' early departures from a two-year institution and persistence at a four-year institution. The research question was designed to capture students' experiences with and perceptions of the reverse transfer program. In this basic qualitative study, 12 reverse transfer program participants were interviewed. Interview data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. Three themes emerged from the findings: associate degree value, benefit, and eligibility; lack of program awareness; and the insignificant degree completion impact. Understanding the benefits of this relatively new initiative is paramount to measuring its success for the student, institution, state, and generating positive social change. Results of this study showed that participants viewed the primary benefit to this program, and thereby the value of an associate degree, to hasten their progress toward a baccalaureate degree. Surprisingly, the study also revealed another program beneficiary, early college students. These findings led to the development of a position paper. Readers of the study and position paper may better understand the reverse transfer program's influence on a student's baccalaureate degree progression to inform interventions for better student outcomes, resulting in positive social change.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my project study to my family (Linda, Michael, and Ashley) and parents (C.W. and Sandra) who supported me throughout every step of this endeavor. Thank you.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

A relatively new transfer pathway called reverse credit transfer (RCT) has emerged within many states. The National Student Clearinghouse (2019) purports RCT leads to stronger community college and four-year institution partnerships and increases community college graduation rates. Reverse credit transfer is the retroactive application of credit earned at a four-year institution towards an unearned associate degree at a two-year institution. Research on the impact of reverse credit transfer on baccalaureate degree attainment is still in its infancy. Yet, many states and institutions have embraced this program to foster stronger relationships between community colleges and four-year institutions while also providing students with an intermediate credential (Taylor, 2017).

Taylor (2017) theorized that the opportunity for retroactive credit awarding might serve as an incentive for students to complete their baccalaureate degrees. The Reverse Transfer Program was implemented at the study site in 2013, but there was no information about how it was received and perceived by participating students. No review had been conducted to determine if a student's earned associate degree resulted in, or improved, overall baccalaureate degree completion at the state system level or the study site since the implementation of reverse credit transfer (State Board of Governors, June 19, 2014; State Board of Governors, October 29, 2015). This basic qualitative study sought to explore students' experiences with the reverse credit transfer program at the study site.

Definition of the Problem

Historically, community colleges have been the starting point for many students desiring to earn a baccalaureate degree (Friedel & Friesleben, 2017; Kopko & Crosta, 2016; Taylor & Jain, 2017; Wang et al., 2017). Based on National Student Clearinghouse data of those students who enrolled at a community college, about one-third earned a certificate or associate degree before transferring to a four-year institution (Shapiro et al., 2017). Within the United States, 13.3% of students starting at a community college earned a baccalaureate degree within six years (Shapiro et al., 2017). Alternatively, students who transferred from primarily occupational programs earned a baccalaureate degree at a rate 1.2% higher than students who transferred from academic programs (Shapiro et al., 2017). While this may seem to provide support for reverse credit transfer, there was a paucity of research linking this new transfer pathway to baccalaureate degree completion.

After examining 3.8 million college student reenrollees and 940,000 completers, Shapiro et al. (2019) concluded that the pathways to degree completions differed significantly. Out of the 940,000 completers, 58,000 could not be matched to enrollment records and were presumed to have been awarded through reverse transfer programs. Essentially, the students' enrollment dates did not match their degree award dates. While their study focused on students' first undergraduate credentials, it has not been established whether that credential was earned through the retroactive awarding of credit. The presumption was that it could be related to reverse credit transfer, but it could not be known for sure without further research. Further research into students' perceptions and

understanding of reverse transfer and the associate degree needs to include the influence of RTC on student persistence (Taylor & Giani, 2019).

The Local Setting

The local setting for this project study was a doctoral-granting institution with high research activity within the southeastern region of the United States. The institution had the highest transfer enrollment population of all campuses within its state system (Statistical Analytics Software [SAS], 2021). The State's Statistical Analytics Software (2021) referenced 61.4% of the state system's transfer population was from its two-year community college system. The state system piloted and later scaled to all state system universities, a process to award associate degrees to eligible students transferring from one of the state's 58 community colleges while enrolled at one of the state's four-year baccalaureate granting institutions (State System Office, October 14, 2015). Participation in this reverse credit transfer program, known as Reverse Transfer (RT), is voluntary, and eligible students are given three opportunities to participate.

According to Ishitani and Flood (2018), reverse transfer refers to students' movement from four-year institutions to public or private two-year, nonprofit, or proprietary institutions. The RT program's description, objectives, and intended audience are focused on combining the credits earned at the university with credits already earned at the community college (State System Website, 2021). This RCT, a variation on the original reverse transfer, could result in meeting degree requirements for an associate degree at the community college for which the student studied prior to transferring to the university. Hence, the state's reverse transfer program is more closely aligned to Taylor's

(2016) definition of RCT. RCT is the transfer of credits from a four-year institution back to a two-year institution for the purpose of conferring an associate degree without a physical transfer (Taylor, 2016). Future state and local study site references within this study used RCT to align more closely with Taylor's (2016) terminology and definition.

My research helped fill a gap in practice in the local setting by exploring the experiences of students participating in the reverse credit transfer program. Understanding students' experiences with reverse credit transfer helped identify disparities in what students think of the program. The findings helped address the program's efficacy and emphasized the need to better promote the reverse transfer program as a degree planning tool.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Initially, when RT was introduced in 2013, the state's university system hired a full-time director of RT using grant funding from six foundations (MB, AB & KB, 2015; SO, Memorandum, March 7, 2013). The director was responsible for overseeing the statewide pilot and full implementation for the state university and the state community college systems. Ishitani and Flood (2018) referred to reverse transfer as the movement from a four-year institution to a two-year institution. The focus of this pilot was on what Taylor (2016) called reverse credit transfer, whereby the credits, not the student, move from a four-year institution to a two-year institution. During this reverse credit transfer pilot, initial student surveys found that 50% of the respondents chose to participate, 41% declined participation, and 9% deferred participation due to not understanding the program or not knowing whether they would qualify (M.B., A.B. & K.B., 2015).

Following the pilot, the state's 58 community colleges and 16 universities adopted the reverse credit transfer program.

In 2015, two years after it began, the program was fully automated at the university level and awarded over 1400 Associate Degrees (State Board of Governors, October 29, 2015; State System Office, October 14, 2015). For students who elected to participate, credits were automatically shared with the most recent community college attended or, if more than one, the community college where the most credit was earned prior to transfer to one of the state's university system institutions. In June 2016, after a successful pilot, full implementation, and a one-year state extension on the grant funding, the director of RT position ended (Personal Communication, December 8, 2020). Courses and credit hours are shared with the community colleges, who manually reviewed each student's credits, awarding associate degrees if the student qualified.

Since 2013, state community college students who did not earn an associate degree before transfer continued to be presented with the opportunity to participate and, if elected, share their course history at the university level with their prior community college. Since that time, no review occurred to determine if a student's earned associate degree resulted in an improved overall baccalaureate degree completion at the state system level or at the study site (State Board of Governors, June 19, 2014; State Board of Governors, October 29, 2015). Following a seven-year absence due to the state's grant funds ending and leadership changes, recent monthly conversations were reignited between the state university system and its seventeen campuses to discuss the timing and collection of data elements. A future objective of this group was to streamline the data

collection and eventually evaluate the performance of the reverse transfer initiative (State System RT Videoconference, July 27, 2021).

Leadership within enrollment management at the study site was interested in understanding the institutional benefits of reverse credit transfer and its implications on degree completion from the student perspective (personal communication, February 27, 2019). If participating associate degree awarded students were more apt to persist to graduation at the study site, it indicated an area of marketing and resource investment needed in the future. The result could translate into increased lifetime earning potential for students and their degree could signal to prospective employers that the student has valuable skills and knowledge, thereby giving them an advantage in the labor market (Cortes-Lopez & Taylor, 2020). The current participation requests and reverse sharing of transfer credit information were automated and not monitored or evaluated for effectiveness. The assistant provost for institutional research (APIR) at the study site, responsible for all institutional reporting, confirmed that the university has data on participants and degrees awarded. Still, no one at the university or state system level ever made an attempt to review the efficacy of the Reverse Transfer program (personal communication, June 14, 2021).

This absence of information supports the limited focus and resources assigned to the marketing of reverse transfer at the study site (University Registrar, personal communication, May 12, 2021). The study site is not unique in its lack of data on reverse credit transfer. The vice president for student affairs (VPSA) for the state's university system office pointed out that there was no substantive review of reverse credit transfer at

any campus within the system or at the state's university system office (personal communication, June 16, 2021). The VPSA disclosed that there was a need and interest in further studies related to reverse transfer. My research filled a gap in practice at the local setting.

There were no data analyzed to show the influence reverse credit transfer has on students at the study site or other institutions within the state's university system. Quantitative data was being collected at the state's university and community college levels, but the data was not being analyzed (personal communication, January 25, 2021). This study is qualitative in nature, but in the future, it is anticipated that the findings from this qualitative study could be merged with data collection at the state's university system to help provide a clearer picture of the program's efficacy, both for the student and institution.

Transfer in the State to be Studied

According to Shapiro et al. (2019), the study state represents 3% of the nation's student enrollment and 2.8% of the nation's student population with some college credit but no degree. The study state is considered the ninth state in the nation with the highest number of students with some college but no degree (Shapiro et al., 2019). The study state is also one of six states where the student's last enrollment was a community college and exceeded 80% (Shapiro et al., 2019). To positively influence credit mobility and student transitions, additional research was needed at the local and regional levels to understand how state policies are implemented (Holiday-Millard, et al., 2022).

According to the study site's fall 2020 demographics depicting from where students transfer, 10,283 (61.4%) originated from the state's community college system (SAS, 2021). In the fall of 2020, 61.7% of the state's transfer student population were vertical transfers from one of the state's community college campuses (SAS, 2021). Horizontal transfers from other state university system campuses made up 12.8% of the transfer population (SAS, 2021). Transferring from an in-state private institution, switch transfer students made up 5.8% of the transfer population (SAS, 2021). Out of the vertical transfer population identified here, 58.4% of the students transferred before earning their Associate Degree (SAS, 2021).

Transfer at the Study Site to be Studied

The study site had the highest transfer enrollment of all campuses within its state university system (SAS, 2021). In the fall of 2020, 64.5% of its transfer student population were vertical transfers from one of the state's community college campuses (SAS, 2021). Horizontal transfers from other state university system campuses made up 12.8% of the transfer population (SAS, 2021). Transferring from an in-state private institution, switch transfer students made up 5.8% of the transfer population (SAS, 2021). The state university system and private institution transfers matched the study site's horizontal and switch transfers. Out of the vertical transfer population identified here, 53.4% of the students transferred before earning their associate degree (SAS, 2021).

While not representative of all the fall 2020 matriculating students who opted into reverse credit transfer, 12% of the fall 2020 vertical transfer students' courses and credits were shared with the community college for review and evaluation for an associate

degree (State System DataMart, June 19, 2021). Data sharing for those opting into RVT only occurred when students were within a specific range of combined credits at the university level. Since reverse transfer at the study site began, 2,161 students obtained an Associate Degree through participation in the state's reverse credit transfer program (State System DataMart, November 17, 2021).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Taylor (2017) noted that RCT is meant to recognize educational investments by awarding a degree and potentially increasing degree attainment rates in the process. While most community college students transferred without earning a degree (Shapiro et al., 2015), they were more likely to earn a baccalaureate degree if they had earned an associate degree or certificate before transferring (Kopko & Crosta, 2016). In 2012, the national initiative Credit When It's Due (CWID) provided grant funding for 15 states to develop partnerships and expand programs that award associate degrees while pursuing a baccalaureate degree (Taylor & Bragg, 2015). There is a need for a stronger understanding and investment at the student, state, and institutional levels to realize the benefits of reverse transfer (Rockey et al., 2021; Taylor & Bragg, 2015; Taylor & Giani, 2019). Suppose an associate degree positively impacts baccalaureate degree completion. In that case, there needs to be stronger advisement of student courses and credits at the university level to ensure retroactive completion of the associate degree (Shapiro et al., 2017; Taylor & Bragg, 2015;).

Continued research is needed to understand better and document the benefits and increase participation in reverse transfer initiatives (Rockey et al., 2021). Taylor (2017),

who first proposed reverse credit transfer terminology, did so after the Lumina

Foundation's initiative, CWID, started expanding across the country. Even as the

initiative quickly expanded and reverse credit transfer programs and policies were being

developed all over the country, little was known about why these programs spread so fast

and how they work (Taylor, 2017). To date, no qualitative study related to RCT has been

found in the literature. The need to understand the benefits of this relatively new initiative

is paramount to measuring its success for the student, institution, state, and generating

positive social change.

Rationale

My study sought to explore students' experiences with the reverse transfer

program at the study site. While multiple factors impact whether students transfer early to

a baccalaureate program or following associate degree attainment, understanding what

affects their decision to pursue a reverse credit transfer program is equally important but

not well-researched (Kopko & Crosta, 2016). Taylor and Giani (2019) examined the data

from two states and determined that 90% of reverse credit transfer degree recipients

continued pursuing baccalaureate degrees. Their data suggested that reverse credit

transfer helped maintain that momentum. While this seems to support reverse credit

transfer programs, additional qualitative research is needed to understand student

perceptions of reverse credit transfer and its influences on persistence (Rockey et al.,

2021; Taylor & Giani, 2019).

The Educational Policy Institute's (2018) review of the National Center for

Education Statistics' longitudinal data revealed that anytime students transferred

institutions, it reduced their likelihood of completing a baccalaureate degree. However, there is a critical need to understand whether the retroactive awarding of credit produces the same result or increases the likelihood that students will complete a baccalaureate degree. The national manager for RT with the National Student Clearinghouse (personal communication, April 25, 2018) asserted that additional reverse credit transfer research is needed, especially in the areas of participation and motivation. Because reverse credit transfer programs are growing, understanding how they influence students' ability to complete a baccalaureate degree will contribute to positive social change by informing the program's future direction at the study site.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions and terms inform this study:

Dual credit (DC): The transfer of college credits taken during high school (Taylor & Jain, 2017; Townsend, 2001).

Dynamic transfer (DT): A model of transfer that reflects the 'swirling' nature of enrollment, credit accumulation, and the many different paths to degree completion (Katsinas et al., 2019).

Horizontal transfer (HT): Students' movement from one public institution to another or one private institution to another (Ishitani & Flood, 2018).

Lateral transfer (LT): Students' movement from one four-year institution to another four-year institution (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Taylor & Jain, 2017).

Reverse credit transfer (RCT): Transferring credits from a four-year institution back to a two-year institution to confer an associate degree (Taylor, 2016; Taylor & Jain,

2017). The RCT definition was first coined by Jason Taylor (2016), to provide a more strategic clarification for transferring credits, not students.

Reverse transfer (RT): Students' movement from four-year institutions to public or private two-year, nonprofit, or proprietary institutions (Ishitani & Flood, 2018; Taylor & Jain, 2017; Townsend & Denver, 1999). The RT definition has been around for more than 30 years (Lichtenberger, 2011).

Switch transfer (ST): Students' movement from a public institution to a private institution or from a private institution to a public institution (Ishitani & Flood, 2018).

Vertical transfer (VT): Students' movement from a two-year institution to a four-year institution (Ishitani & Flood, 2018). The VT movements are the more traditional and dominant paths (Taylor, 2016; Taylor & Jain, 2017).

Significance of the Study

The reverse credit transfer program was initiated in 2013 on all state university system campuses. The study site went live with the program in 2015. According to the University Registrar (personal communication, February 27, 2019), there had not been any study or review of the program's effectiveness since its implementation. The State Commission Steering Committee (2019) identified reverse transfer as one of its 115 strategies, focusing on ensuring seamless transitions across education sectors. While this program is offered at the study site to apply baccalaureate credits to the completion of an associate degree, the benefit to the baccalaureate institution had not been determined. The state's university system reverse transfer initiative involves automating reverse transfer credit back to the community college for associate degree completion. Still, the university

system campuses were unaware if the program improves baccalaureate degree completion, one of the unsupported initial benefits of participation.

The university registrar and associate provost for enrollment management (personal communication, February 27, 2019) wanted to determine whether students' participation in the reverse credit transfer program influenced their decision to persist to graduation. My research helped fill a gap in practice in the local setting by reviewing students' experiences related to how participation in the program influenced their decision to persist and complete a baccalaureate degree. This program has the potential for positive social change by solidifying reverse transfer as a demonstrable benefit for baccalaureate degree completers within the state, but not if its influence is unknown.

My basic qualitative study sought to explore students' experiences and perceptions of the reverse transfer program at the study site. Providing a deeper understanding of how students perceive the influence of reverse credit transfer programs on academic persistence will inform the state's community college and four-year institution transfer policies and impact the resources currently being employed to facilitate the retroactive application of credit. Exploring student perceptions of this program will help determine whether this latest state initiative leads to positive social change. The results from this study will be used to inform and shape policies at the local site and provide a foundation for further research through the development of a position paper. This position paper, outlining the purpose, criteria, and outcomes of the project, will be shared with key stakeholders at the study site and potentially with other institutions in the state university system.

Research Question

Student graduation rates are a common performance indicator for assessing outcomes, performance, and future budgetary allocations at all levels. As such, it is important to know what factors contribute to increasing student graduation rates. The institution's desire to increase the number of graduates intersects with the student's desire to earn a degree, but for the student, it is without regard to where it is earned (Tinto, 2017b). With this understanding, institutions and educators must explore ways to influence student persistence to degree completion. At the study site, reverse credit transfer program participation is automated. There has not been a review of its impact on baccalaureate degree persistence. I explored students' experiences with the reverse transfer program and whether the reverse credit transfer program influences students' persistence to obtain a baccalaureate degree. The guiding question for this research is:

RQ (Qualitative): What are students' experiences and perceptions with the reverse transfer program?

Review of the Literature

A literature review was performed to understand whether reverse credit transfer prompted or inspired participating students to complete their baccalaureate degrees. I sought out information in the literature regarding why students transfer before completing their associate degree, the importance of an associate's degree, and whether an associate's degree promotes baccalaureate degree attainment. I used several electronic resources and databases within the Walden University Library, such as ProQuest, Eric Educational, EBSCO, Google, and Google Scholar. The following keywords were used:

reverse articulation, reverse credit transfer, degree attainment, reverse transfer, transfer, and *vertical transfer.* In addition, I referenced scholarly articles, peer-reviewed publications, research journals, official state, local, and federal reports, and publications within the last ten years. Credit Transfer was only introduced nationally in 2012 and in North Carolina in 2013. There is a finite amount of research on this topic.

Conceptual Framework

Vincent Tinto (2017b), a renowned theorist on student persistence, purported that students seek to persist, not to be retained, and to be influenced by several personal motivations such as family, finances, and community engagement. While his model for student departure has not yet been applied to retroactive credit transfer (RCT), Tinto's theory can be used to help explain the early departure from the two-year institution and student motivation for four-year institution completion. This study sought to move past the belief that Associate degree attainment will increase students' employability or salary until a bachelor's degree is earned and explored whether awarding retroactive credit might also serve as an intrinsic motivation factor affecting their persistence. There is little evidence showing the influence associate degree attainment has on baccalaureate degree attainment and even less on the influence of attaining an associate degree post-transfer (Taylor & Giani, 2019). The newness of RCT requires a greater understanding and exploration of the impact reverse credit transfer has on degree completion.

Stages of Separation

Before reviewing the various types and motivations for transfer, understanding the stages of separation helps determine the connection students have with their

respective institutions. Tinto (1987) addressed the multiple stages of the college career, starting with separation, then transition, and finally, the act of integration. These stages are not neatly identified in all students, as some stages overlap, and some may never cycle through all three stages (Tinto, 1987). Tinto (2017b) further explained that a strong sense of self-efficacy is important but cannot be assumed. The ability for a student to separate, transition, and integrate is often molded by the extrinsic responsibilities and experiences leading up to initial college enrollment (Taylor & Jain, 2017). These stages are presented to understand better why students stay with their first institution or transfer to one or more subsequent institutions.

Separation

Tinto (1987) identified separation, or disassociating oneself from the past, as the first stage of the college career. The past is often the student's local high school, family, and local community. Separation may not be as prevalent for students attending a local community college. While they may feel a continued local connection, they are often less socially and intellectually attached to their local community college (Tinto, 1987). Students may be intrinsically committed to the goal of completion, but the pathway is extrinsic. Some students commit to one institution and continue until completion, while others know they will complete their degree, just not at the first institution in which they enroll (Tinto, 2017b).

The complexities surrounding students' initial decision to begin their college experience at a community college are vast and unique to the individual. Students' self-efficacy is initially based on their early support structures and experiences (Tinto, 2017b).

Family background, skills, and prior education are some of the factors that can lead to a strong or low sense of self-efficacy. When combined with external factors such as academic rigor, in and out-of-classroom obligations, and harmful stereotypes, a student's self-efficacy can become a subject of stress (Hallett et al., 2020; Tinto, 2017b). Separation then becomes the process of determining what is most important intrinsically. Students' self-efficacy affects motivation, which in turn affects persistence to degree completion, even if the path to attainment remains unclear (Tinto, 2017b).

Transition

The transition stage is when students begin to distance themselves from their past and just before they completely adopt new norms and patterns of behavior (Tinto, 1987). While students attending local community colleges may take comfort in remaining local, they are beginning to experience new ways of thinking. Their past experiences have not provided adequate preparation. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2019), community colleges are among the most diverse institutions in higher education. These diversities bring new ideas, experiences, encounters, and more. Subsequently, how students respond to these new experiences will ultimately determine whether they will stay or leave (Tinto, 1987).

Student transition is just as much about finding connections. Hallett et al. (2020) focused on several dimensions of catering to and understanding a student's transition. They challenged the assumption that certain programmatic endeavors provided the support structures for students to be successful and remain engaged but explained that carefully monitoring student experiences is key to discovering when and what barriers

exist and how they might interfere with a student's connection and persistence (Hallett et al., 2020). Tinto (1987) posited that, among other things, transition is most often affected by the difference between students' past experiences and those required for a successful transition to college. A targeted programmatic emphasis on more significant issues related to college transition may not address the unique challenges presented, as the student moves from one well-understood past to the new experience that college brings. Each student is motivated in different ways, and intrinsic experiences inspire persistence just as much as extrinsic experiences. Transition and the stress surrounding it often reflected a student's individual goals and intentions (Tinto, 1987). The student's persistence is a balance of extrinsic connection and intrinsic motivation.

Integration

The integration stage is the culmination of students being incorporated into the college's traditional society, adopting new norms, and socially immersing themselves in college life (Tinto, 1987). Although there are numerous ways in which colleges attempt to hasten integration, like fraternities, sororities, residential life, and intramural sports, to name a few, community colleges, due to their local, nonresidential nature, are not always able to provide as many opportunities. Students may then leave the institution without having established intellectual and social membership in search of a stronger community connection elsewhere (Tinto, 1987). Institutions seek to provide such opportunities to promote student investment in hopes of improving student graduation rates (Tinto, 2017b) when, the student simply wants to earn a degree regardless of where it is earned.

Therefore, dynamic transfer flourishes within that dichotomy of integration as students are less inclined to follow one pathway to degree attainment.

Transition Theory

The three stages of separation, transition, and integration are complex and unique. Students bring the collective experiences and backgrounds that have inspired them to seek further education, whether through repeated acknowledgments from family or a need to grow beyond their current location. Student backgrounds and experiences, along with personal factors such as drive, motivation, and commitment, are factors in their persistence to degree completion (Tinto, 2017b). It is the swirling of various intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that affects the decision to enter college and how the student interacts with the selected college (Tinto, 2017b). The theory discussed here primarily focuses on the students' experiences leading up to, during, and throughout their collegiate journey.

Student Departure

Chen et al. (2019) studied the persistence, retention, and attrition of 2011-2012 first-time beginning post-secondary students. They found that 18% of students who began at a two-year institution emerged with an earned associate degree. Of those same students, 13% completed a baccalaureate degree during that six-year period. Students who left a prior two-year community college, for whatever reason, to pursue a baccalaureate degree before obtaining their associate degree are disproportionally affected (Chen et al., 2019). The Educational Policy Institute (2018) data suggested that institutional transfer works against the student's goals of earning a baccalaureate degree.

The more often the student transfers, the more negatively it affects baccalaureate degree completion. For those students who left their two-year community college before earning an associate degree and continued to a four-year baccalaureate granting institution, it would be helpful to know if retroactively earning their associate degree while working towards a baccalaureate degree strengthened their self-efficacy for baccalaureate degree completion.

Transfer in the United States

Katsina et al. (2019) termed a dynamic model of transfer (DMT) to reflect the mixing of enrollments, accumulation of credit, and multiple pathways that today's college students migrate. As a result, it is suggested that states and institutions need to develop policies to accommodate this behavioral model. In most cases, transfer is shaped by state policies, but in 2017 the federal government took an interest and introduced the Reverse Transfer Efficiency Act (Reverse Transfer Efficiency Act, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021). Both houses of Congress introduced legislation focusing on the release of students' educational records to an institution the student has previously enrolled without the student's consent (Reverse Transfer Efficiency Act, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021). These bills would alter the current, restrictive language used in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, whereby colleges and universities need student consent to divulge this information (20 USC § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99). While introduced again in July 2021, these bills remain as introduced legislation only status.

Shapiro et al. (2017) examined the fall 2010 cohort of U.S. students who enrolled at a community college and determined that 31.5% transferred to a four-year institution

within six years. Among those students, 34% transferred after receiving either an associate degree or certificate (Shapiro et al., 2017). Of those community college transfers, 42% earned a baccalaureate degree within six years of their community college start (Shapiro et al., 2017). Thus, 13% of the original students starting in the fall 2010 community college cohort earned a baccalaureate degree (Shapiro et al., 2017). Sixty-six percent of these students left their respective community colleges without an associate degree or certificate, and 24% of these community college noncompleters also did not complete their baccalaureate degrees.

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2020) examined the first-year persistence and retention data on the 2018 beginning cohort of post-secondary students. Seventy-six percent of first-time freshmen in the fall of 2018 returned for their second year (NSCRC, 2020). Of the students that started at a public two-year institution, 62.1% persisted (NSCRC, 2020). NSCRC (2020) defined persistence as continued enrollment at any higher education institution. The retention rate for those that started at a public two-year institution was 53.7% (NSCRC, 2020). NSCRC (2020) defined retention as continued enrollment at the same higher education institution. While both of these national figures are important, persistence would include potential transfer students. This cohort of persisting students may very well be students who matriculated to a four-year institution without earning an associate degree.

Transfer Patterns

Taylor and Jain (2017) suggested that vertical transfer, lateral transfer, reverse transfer, transfer swirl, dynamic transfer, reverse credit transfer, and dual credit are all

different forms of transfer. Taylor (2016) affirmed that the movements of transfer

students in any manner are often coined as transfer patterns. While vertical transfer, or

movement from a community college to a four-year institution, has long been thought of

as the primary pattern, recent trends suggest a shift to dynamic transfer or transfer swirl

(Katsinas et al., 2019). Katsinas et al. (2019) indicated that RCT is just another example

of vertical transfer. Reverse Credit Transfer follows an initial vertical transfer path, but it

follows a pseudo reverse transfer path when only the credits are shared back to the prior

community college. Reverse transfer is the act of matriculating from a four-year

institution to a two-year institution (Taylor & Jain, 2017).

Similarly, other transfer methods such as lateral, swirl, and dynamic represent a

singular institutional enrollment, albeit in different institutional directions. For this

review, as defined by Townsend (2001), dual credit is a transfer model. Still, it does not

align with any future directional pathway for students since students may apply the

credits anywhere. Dual credit does not seem to align with the other patterns identified.

Taylor (2017) first introduced the latest transfer pattern, reverse credit transfer

(RCT). Five policy rationales were identified as the impetus for RCT (Taylor, 2017). The

first is that many transfer students resulted in some college but no degree (Taylor, 2017).

The second is the acknowledgment that students deserve an associate degree like those

who earned prior to transfer (Taylor, 2017). The third and most enlightening for this

study is that it serves as a benchmark or milestone, possibly propelling or motivating the

student toward baccalaureate degree completion (Taylor, 2017). The fourth is an

acknowledgment for both institutions, primarily since many community colleges are not

credited for contributing to student transfers who earn baccalaureate degrees (Taylor, 2017). The final rationale is the benefit to the state for completion efforts at all levels and increasing the proportion of students with a college credential (Taylor, 2017). These rationales are compelling, and states and institutions investing in these programs alongside the students who opt into these programs are doing so with very little realized benefit since the policies are still new (Taylor, 2017). Still, the question remains whether they provide motivation for baccalaureate degree completion.

Transfer Experiences

Very little research exists examining student perceptions of the associate degree or the perceived value (Cortes-Lopez & Taylor, 2020; Taylor, 2016). Nationally, approximately 73% of students transfer from a community college to a four-year institution before earning an associate degree (Shapiro et al., 2017). Cejda and Kaylor (2001) studied why students transferred without having earned an associate degree. Their study focused on traditional-aged students transferring from a public community college to a public state university. Cejda and Kaylor, out of a sample population of over 100 students, found two-thirds had no intent to earn an associate degree before transfer. Faculty interaction, family, financial influences, and transfer barriers were among other reasons students transferred before earning an associate degree (Cejda & Kaylor, 2001). Reviewing and incorporating the reasons for early departure from two-year institutions is essential. Still, it is more relevant to understand how the associate degree is valued and its potential to positively impact baccalaureate degree completion at any point in the student's collegiate career.

Shapiro et al. (2017) found that students who completed an associate degree before transferring to a four-year institution earned a baccalaureate degree thirteen percentage points higher (or 73% more) than those who did not. The data examining those students who transfer without an associate degree but earn the degree retroactively do not exist. Still, it would be interesting to explore whether students renew their interest in pursuing a baccalaureate degree as a result of that retroactive awarding. Shapiro et al. also found that students who transferred with an associate degree had a lower rate of nonenrollment than those students without a degree. While student departure prior to earning an associate degree is variable, it is interesting that having an associate degree provides a greater propensity for baccalaureate degree completion and fewer nonenrollments.

Student departure prior to earning an associate degree is subject to a number of variables, including various motivations (Tinto, 2017) and personal experiences (Cejda & Kaylor, 2001). While the literature outlines several factors affecting degree completion and the various transfer pathways (Taylor, 2017) students take throughout their collegiate career, the RCT strategy is also not without its challenges. The primary barriers to success were consent, local partnerships, student participation, and the varying methods of student transfer (Rockey et al., 2021). Student consent has been a barrier since 2015 (Taylor & Bragg, 2015), yet the multiple legislative bill introductions (Reverse Transfer Efficiency Act, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021) needed to resolve the barriers remain as introduced bills only. Reverse credit transfer is described as a student-centered program that places value on coursework completed but lacks sufficient resources and research to

address low levels of student participation (Rockey et al., 2021). The concept of reverse transfer has not been around long, and research is only beginning to emerge and remains very limited (Cortes-Lopez & Taylor, 2020; Taylor & Giani, 2019). In most states, the connection between community college and baccalaureate degree completion remains unclear (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Future qualitative research is needed to understand better the value of the associate degree and how the associate degree influences student persistence (Taylor & Giani, 2019).

Implications

With reverse credit transfer, the two competing interests of the institution's desire to graduate the student and the student's desire to persist towards graduation, potentially align as credit is retroactively sent to the community college for associate degree-awarding, partially motivating the student's desire to persist at the four-year institution. Persistence is unlikely without the effort engendered by motivation, yet motivation can be enhanced or diminished by student experiences in college (Tinto, 2017b). Tinto (2017a) further explained that if students want to persist to degree completion, they must expend considerable effort to do so. Tinto (2017a) described self-efficacy, or the belief that success is obtainable, as the effect of past experiences on how individuals perceive themselves and their control of their environment. If positive, these past experiences can have a significant impact and can be the impetus on a person's future performance. Thus, to some extent, awarding an associate degree while enrolled at the four-year institution may be the internal motivation needed to induce additional effort resulting in the students' persistence toward their baccalaureate degree.

The implication of this needed research and study, filling a current void in the qualitative understanding of this phenomenon, could provide researchers with insight into the motivation an associate degree provides to students (Cortes-Lopez & Taylor, 2020; Taylor & Giani, 2019). Automatic awarding of credentials, barrier removal, and advising improvements are significant for improving transfer and graduation practices (Rockey et al., 2021). Additionally, and more importantly for the state's university system and study site for my study, this research helps guide current policy and identify marketable advantages to participation. The benefits of student participation and general awareness of reverse credit transfer are unknown (Rockey et al., 2021). Any research to understand the benefits of participation that identifies best practices is helpful to all practitioners looking to advance RCT initiatives (Rockey et al., 2021). Providing a deeper understanding of how students perceive the influence of reverse credit transfer programs on academic persistence informs the state's community college and four-year institution transfer policies and the resources currently being employed to facilitate the retroactive application of credit.

Summary

Section 1 introduced the study foundation, problem, research question, and literature review. Since 73% of students (Shapiro et al., 2017) transfer before earning an associate degree, an increasing interest in reverse credit transfer policy is generated (Katsinas et al., 2019). But there remained a gap in the literature for understanding the influence that participating in the reverse credit transfer program has on student persistence to obtain a baccalaureate degree. This lack of understanding is a problem

nationally, within the state, and at the study site. If there is ever to be a policy or practice change, it is necessary to understand the students' perspective.

A literature review supported the absence of substantial research in this area and the need for more information on reverse credit transfer (Rockey et al., 2021). Authors and researchers identified and concurred about the speed at which reverse credit transfer was adopted nationally, but with a paucity of research to substantiate the growth. Several research authors identified the quantitative outcomes of earning an associate degree before transferring to a four-year institution. In addition, the patterns, or pathways, for which transfers progress were defined and are numerous. This study affects positive social change by impacting local policy, marketing, and resources.

Section 2 discusses further examination about how my study explored students' experiences and perceptions of reverse transfer. This includes a review of the research design selected and the approach taken to collect data. In addition, Section 2 also examines my role as the researcher, the participants targeted for inclusion, sampling technique, data collection, data analysis, and accuracy and credibility of the research.

The project rationale, review of the literature, project description, implications, and reflections and conclusions are all discussed in sections 3 and 4. Respectfully, reflections and conclusions consisting of strengths and limitations, recommendations for alternative approaches, personal learning growth as a scholar, social change implications, and directions for future research are discussed.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

This basic qualitative study aimed to explore students' experiences and perceptions of the reverse transfer program at the study site. Understanding students' experiences with RCT informs the program's efficacy and determines whether additional emphasis should be placed on promoting the reverse credit transfer program as a degree planning tool. The following sections of this study include the research design and approach, participant selection, instrumentation and materials, data collection, and data analysis. Additional information includes my role as a researcher and the accuracy and credibility of this study.

Research Design and Approach

This study used a basic qualitative research design to understand better how participating in reverse credit transfer influences students' perceptions of their academic persistence to complete a baccalaureate degree. Capturing student experiences with the RT program at the study site was the premise of this research. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a basic qualitative research design is the best way to examine how students might interpret their experiences, how their worlds are constructed, and what meanings they might attribute to those experiences. The focus was to engage with RT program participants to capture their experiences and how those experiences might provide meaning for their future studies.

The research design, a basic qualitative study, was selected because it is one of the best methods for collecting useful information when the researcher is unable to

observe the participants directly, and it allows the participants to provide personal, detailed information (Creswell, 2012). Observing the participants was not viable because participation in the reverse transfer program is not a scheduled event. Participation occurs after students opt into the program and is realized after credits are equated to an associate degree. Creswell (2012) added that qualitative studies using semistructured interviewing ensures the researcher maintains control over the information received. Even while interviewing is the most common form of qualitative research, it is not without drawbacks (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Information has the potential of being filtered by the interviewer, the participant may answer with a perspective that the participant wants the researcher to hear, and the researcher's presence may alter the participant's response (Creswell, 2012). For these reasons, a basic qualitative study was selected and led to the development of my research question.

While other types of qualitative study may also be applicable in some way, they would require examination of the lived experiences of participating students, spending time with them as they are engaged with the program or telling the story of their journey through higher education. The RT program is not an event nor is it a program that requires routine investment by the student. The RT program starts with an opt-in and ends with the students' earned degree or timing out of the program. A basic qualitative study was the best way to capture the students' experiences. This study captured how the outcome of their participation influenced their baccalaureate degree persistence.

Creswell (2012) provided five process steps related to qualitative data collection that include: (a) identifying participants and site to be studied, (b) gaining access and

permission to the participants and site, (c) considering the types of information to answer the research question best, (d) designing the protocols or instruments for collecting the information, and (e) administering the data collection avoiding ethical issues. I followed these protocols in the execution of this study.

My research helped fill a gap in practice at the local setting by exploring students' experiences and perceptions of the reverse transfer program. Additionally, I sought to explore if earning an associate degree retroactively influenced their decision to persist and complete a baccalaureate degree. The views expressed by students provided invaluable feedback for not only the study site but also the state's reverse credit transfer program.

Participants

Criteria for Selection of Participants

I identified 12 program participants, two participants, who had earned an associate degree through participation, and ten participants who had not yet earned an associate degree. These two participant populations provided a representative collection of data to identify themes and address the selected research question. Qualitative research sample sizes can be variable but are usually kept small to allow time for the researcher to gain access to the research site, gather in-depth information from the individual participants, code the information collected, and analyze the data for themes (Creswell, 2012). As of November 2022, and since spring 2013, 16,525 students opted into the reverse credit transfer program and have been shared with the community colleges (State System DataMart, November 13, 2022). Based on the number of potential reverse

transfer participants, I assumed that finding 10-12 participants would be easy. After several recruitment attempts, I found 12 participants, making up a convenience sample, who were willing to share their perceptions of the reverse credit program.

Procedure for Gaining Access to Participants

Following IRB approval, 12 participants who opted into the program and agreed to be study participants were interviewed to explore the research question until saturation was achieved. Purposeful sampling was initially selected to ensure a variety of subjects would be included, but not necessarily identifying in what proportion they appear in the larger population (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007). However, a variation of purposeful sampling called convenience sampling ended up being used, where participants were selected based on availability and agreement for interviewing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants included RCT students obtained by the Office of Institutional Research at the study site for additional protection since I already had access to participant information. An invitation to participate, which included the purpose of the study and what participation would mean if the participant agreed, was sent to all identified participants, along with the informed consent form.

Establishment of Researcher-Participant Relationship

During initial conversations, a working researcher-participant relationship was cultivated to ensure that permission was obtained, participation occurred, and the participant was willing to verify transcript interviews afterward. I identified two program participants who earned an associate degree through participation and ten who had not

yet earned an associate degree. Saturation was the point when answers became redundant, similar, and no new insights materialized (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Methods for Ethical Protection of Participants

The researcher made every effort to protect participant privacy and keep the participants' identities confidential. Personally identifiable participant information was withheld and excluded from this research study. Each participant was asked to sign an informed consent document indicating the nature of the study and the implications for participation and assigned a pseudonym. The only expected implications were the time involved during the interview and reviewing the transcript for verification after approval. Participants were not visibly negatively affected by participating or not participating in this study.

<div align="center">

Data Collection

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Instrumentation and Materials

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I have experience with interviewing, managing the flow of conversation and ensuring the subject's comfort. However, additional reviews and practices were explored before engaging with interview subjects.

The secondary instrument was Zoom web-conferencing interviews. All interviews were recorded. I created a self-developed interview protocol, vetted by my doctoral committee because no qualitative studies or other instruments could be found for reverse credit transfer. The developed interview protocol can be found in Appendix B. This instrument was designed to ask open-ended questions to encourage participants to

provide maximum opportunities for elaboration in their responses. This instrument was validated using a pilot test of four participants prior to the final interviews. They were not part of my final study. The information obtained resulted in a few modifications to the instrument used to conduct the final interviews.

Justification for interviews.

For most qualitative research, interviews are used to collect data, and the most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). From the start, the objective of this study was to elicit perceptions directly from reverse transfer participants. Biklen and Bogdan (2007) pointed out that the primary benefit of using interviews is gathering descriptive data in the subject's own words, so the researcher can develop insights into how the subject interprets the topic. Understanding exactly how a participant's perceptions of reverse credit transfer impact their current and future degree progression is missing from the literature today.

Semistructured interviews.

After identifying the value of interviews to meet the needs of this study, I further determined that the interviews would be semistructured. All interviews occurred via Zoom, with cameras turned off. Semistructured interviews have structured and unstructured components, allowing the researcher to be flexible during interviewing and respond to the normal flow of information from the interviewee (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). The initial four questions were more structured and provided basic information depicting from where the student transferred, their age, the number of enrolled institutions they attended, and their most recent community college. This basic

information allowed me to frame the themes identified in the research. The remaining

eleven questions were less structured and designed to elicit feedback on how the student

learned about, became interested in, and perceived any personal benefit resulting from

their participation. The culmination of the questioning was centered around participants'

overall perceptions of reverse credit transfer and perception of its baccalaureate degree

progression impact.

Storing Collected Data

I securely maintained all recordings, transcripts, and notes related to the study in a

locked cabinet that only I have access to and in a password-protected computer that only

I have access to. All data collection processes were identified within the study. The data

will be retained for a minimum of five years after completing my research and

subsequently destroyed as per Walden University protocol.

Procedure for Gaining Access to Participants

Following IRB approval, 12 conveniently sampled participants, who opted into

the program and agreed to be study participants, were invited to participate in a

semistructured interview designed to explore students' experiences with the reverse

transfer program at the study site. This population size was expected to enable me to

explore the research question until saturation is achieved. The participants included RCT

students obtained by the Office of Institutional Research at the study site for additional

protection since I already had access to participant information. An invitation to

participate, sent by email, including the purpose of the study and what participation

would mean if the participant agreed, was sent to all identified participants.

My Role as Researcher

I have worked in higher education, specifically enrollment management, for 27 years, spanning five colleges and universities. At my former and current institutions, I was involved in the rollout of the state's reverse credit transfer program and responded to questions about the program when posed by interested students. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that the interviewer and respondent both come to the table with biases, predispositions, attitudes and other characteristics that can affect the dialogue and data elicited. My role and involvement at the study site could be misconstrued as biased in the study's outcome. To minimize or remove potential biases, an interview protocol was followed, and I refrained from leading the responses. Participants were encouraged to express their perceptions and answers truthfully. I did not anticipate having any personal influence over the candidates, as my position at the university is a support role with no ability to harm students negatively. In this study, I acted as a single interviewer and transcriber, providing the necessary data for analysis.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

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Data Collection Plan

After completing each interview, I transcribed the interviews and provided transcripts to each interviewee to accurately capture and validate their responses. I used open and axial coding of transcripts to highlight and organize participant responses. Open coding is grouping various data points into categories early in the analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Axial coding is a further refinement of related categories and properties to each other after interpretations and reflections are made (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I

planned to classify data points discovered early in the study and later followed up with a refinement of the categorical themes. Those categories and themes helped guide and connect the data from each interview.

Research Accuracy and Credibility

To establish reliability in this qualitative study, meticulous transcriptions of interview conversations were recorded and written, and conscientious analysis of the student responses was used to code and identify common themes. The interviews represented the primary data source for this study. Additionally, the researcher asked if the interviewee would be willing to review their responses after being transcribed from the recording. All interviewees were presented with a transcription of the interview, and corrections were noted. These two methods consisted of interview transcripts and member-checking. Member checking is a process whereby the exact response is transcribed, or interpretations are accurately represented (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These steps helped minimize misunderstandings and potential biases. The results of this study are expected to serve a wider audience than simply the research site itself and will help guide the future of reverse credit transfer within the state.

Procedures for Dealing with Discrepant Data

During the review and validation process, I scrutinized for responses or notes from participants initially deemed discrepant or disagreeing with established themes and categories. Discrepant data would contradict emerging categories or themes and provide a varying perspective (Lodico et al., 2010). One early study participant's responses prompted their interview removal because I did not feel they were reflecting on the same

program. This was noted, identified as a variation, and held aside. This discrepancy was referenced often throughout the study, revisited, and included in the findings. No additional discrepancies were noted.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

Data Gathering

Volunteers consisted of the first thirteen participants responding to an email sent to all participants at the study site. These participants did not materialize all at once. The wait for potential participants spanned several months and multiple invites. Initially, two to three students volunteered to participate in the study over a few months, and then I failed to recruit more participants. I returned to the Institutional Research Board and requested an incentive option, which was granted. Readvertising the study with the incentive quickly filled the desired number of volunteers. The participant recruitment for this study became an unexpectedly long convenience sampling.

Data consisting of recorded interview conversations with participants were collected using the predetermined interview protocol. In many cases, the additional probing questions were utilized to clarify and give insight to strengthen the research questions. Field notes were captured in a journal that included my feelings, perceptions, and impressions during the interview (Mattimoe et al., 2021). Thirteen interviews were captured, even when twelve were targeted. One interview was excluded based on assertions made and doubt about the volunteer's participation in the reverse transfer program during the interview and captured in the field notes. Interviews were recorded

using Zoom, using audio only. This platform was selected so that transcription could be automated. This did not prove to be a perfect transcription, but it did help.

RQ: Students' experiences and perceptions with the Reverse Transfer Program.

The interview protocol was used to collect data to address the research question: *What are students' experiences and perceptions with the reverse transfer program?* Thirteen past and present participants were interviewed, and twelve interviews were included in this study. Respondents provided detailed responses to each question asked and provided insightful reflections on their experiences. Additional probing questions were used to obtain further insights into the research questions. I made initial notes during the interviews as preliminary themes surfaced. An additional interview was added to replace the volunteer interview that was excluded. The discussed experiences led the researcher to believe they had participated in a different program, not the reverse transfer program. A random first name generator, no gender-controlled names, was used to create the pseudonyms. Participants were assigned pseudonyms as follows:

- Students earning a degree in the program: Joseph and Tommy;
- Students not yet with an earned degree in the program: Paula, Otis, Fern, Abby, Charlie, Rosa, Billy, John, Troy, and Ana.

Before data analysis began, I emailed each volunteer a complete interview transcription and allowed them to review our conversation for accuracy. Following the data collection and transcription of notes, the data was reviewed and coded.

I employed Creswell's (2012) approach to thematic analysis, whereby interview transcripts and observation notes were read, studied, and coded. Creswell (2012)

identified phase one as open coding, or categorization. The second phase utilized axial coding, which consisted of selecting one category at the center of my research question and then relating the other categories to it (Creswell, 2012). The final phase consists of selective coding, whereby I related all the categories and generated my theory (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2021) recommends using this three-pronged approach to ensure more robust procedures for developing my findings.

Phase 1. I began making notes during the interview and performing preliminary open coding following the interview, concentrating on identifying initial categories based on questions and responses. This consisted of reading each interview transcript and associated notes multiple times, highlighting key words, phrases, and ideas. I entered the highlighted points of interest that became my initial categories into NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), which is helpful when sorting, organizing, and analyzing qualitative data (Dhakal, 2022). All transcribed interviews, field notes, and highlighted categories were imported into NVivo after each interview. NVivo provided coding, classification, and mapping tools to aid in the organization of data so I could query, analyze, draw conclusions from, and verify findings across all units of analysis (Dhakal, 2022). I used the related highlights to generate initial codes related to the research question and subsequent questions. These relevant codes, identified in Table 1, were then grouped to construct related categories.

Table 1

Generated Codes

Cost/financial aid	No interest
Did not apply self	Needing stronger partnerships
Graduated (high school)	General education waiver
Moved on	Job prospects
Missing classes	Low risk
Advisor unawareness	Reduced cost
Early college	Temporary credential
Opt-in communications	Trial run
Length of the program	Motivation
No knowledge	Planned for baccalaureate
Legitimacy	No change of plans
Associate degree outcome	No benefit
Advisement	

Phase 2. Each interview and all notes were reviewed independently but were framed holistically in the context of the purpose statement. Axial coding was used to sort the generated codes into categories. During this phase, I combined codes and discarded some irrelevant to my research topic. For example, the following three codes, *advisor*, *high school counselor*, *opt-in email/portal*, and *no awareness until completed,* were combined into the subtheme *awareness*. These combinations are visually defined in Figure 1. One of the sub-questions in my interview protocol asked why students selected the study site for transfer. I initially thought that the study site, as a destination, would highlight student perceptions and experiences related to their participation. I discarded the categories pertaining to *first choice*, *second choice*, *friends attending*, *love of campus*, and *location*. These did not relate or share any significance with the other categories in any relational manner, as it pertained to their participation in the reverse transfer program.

Figure 1

Reverse Transfer Participant Concept Map
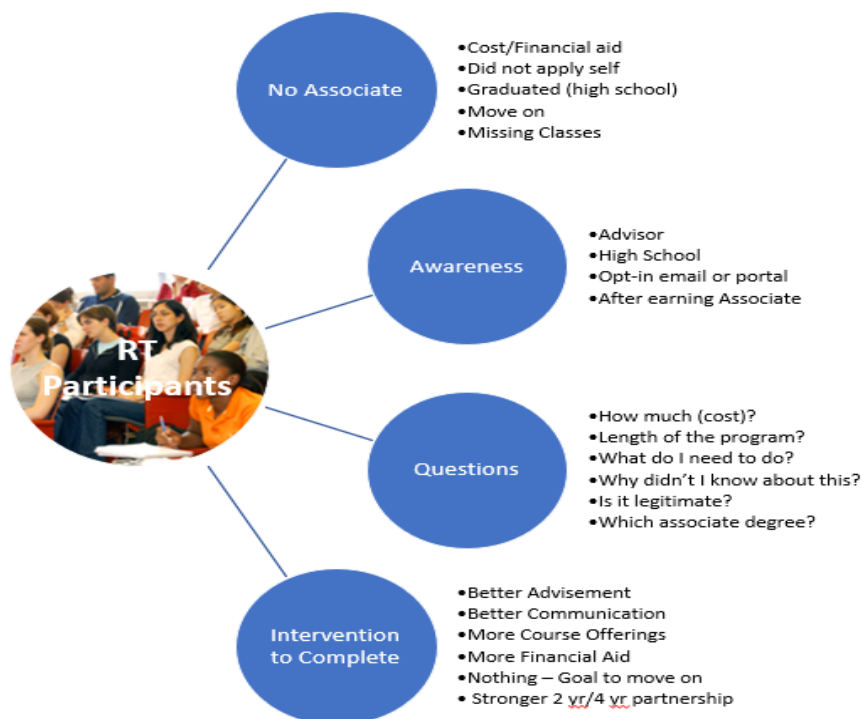
Phase 3. This phase is referred to as selective coding, whereby I focused on one category from the interrelationships of the other categories in the phase 2 axial coding model and developed my themes (Creswell, 2012). Axial coding, or relating categories to each other, was the basis for this data analysis. Still, I began to see themes develop after identifying the core category and recognizing its interdependency with the other categories. Creswell (2012) indicated that axial coding is the selection of one core category, addressing the study's purpose and relating the other categories to that category.

The core motivation category became very clear in this study but lacked depth without the context of the other categories. The other categories became causal categories that helped provide that context. As visualized in Table 2, the emerging codes became the basis for phase 4.

Table 2

Case Study Themes and Categories

Theme	Category	Early College/ Dual Enrolled	Earned Associate	Associate Not Yet Earned
Value, Benefits, and Eligibility	General Education Waiver			X
	Job Prospects	X		X
	Lower Risk			X
	No Benefit	X		X
	Reduced Cost	X		X
	Temporary Credential	X	X	X
	Trial Run	X	X	X
	Motivation	X	X	X
Program Awareness	Questions	X	X	X
	Motivation	X	X	X
Reverse Transfer Program Impact	General Education Waiver	X	X	X
	Motivation	X	X	X

Phase 4: In this final phase, I continued refining the categories and organizing them into separate themes. Themes surfaced related to understanding the experiences that led to participating in the program and how the program impacted participants. Those themes became the support or context for the central theme of motivation. I identified three themes and articulated each as they related to the participants' experiences and

perceptions of the reverse transfer program. The final themes and subthemes that emerged from the data are presented in Table 2.

With the aid of NVivo, concept maps were developed to illustrate who a Reverse Transfer (RT) participant is, as depicted in Figure 1, and how the RT program impacted them, as depicted in Figure 2. These figures illustrate how axial coding was applied to better understand RT participants and how their participation in the RT program impacts their continued study.

Figure 2

Reverse Transfer Program Impact Concept Map
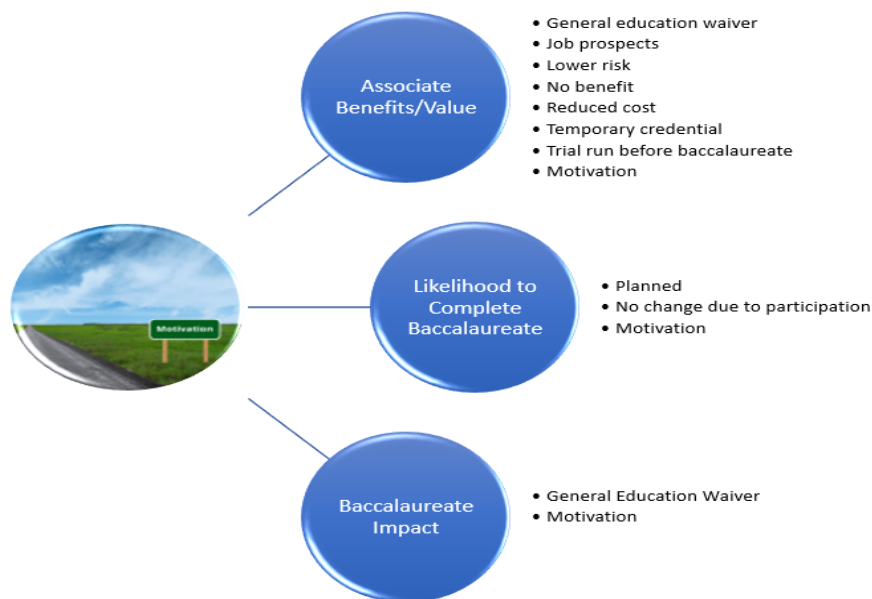
The themes identified later in Table 2 were based on the frequency of responses and trends in each category of RT participants.

Theme 1: Value, Benefits, and Eligibility

Before examining RT program participants' experiences and perceptions of the program, it was important to understand their view of an associate degree and how they became eligible for the program. Answers to this question varied greatly. A quarter of the interviewees responded, like Otis, "I was able to get a taste…and see if I was able to handle it". More than half viewed the associate degree as a temporary credential. Joseph provided the most straightforward answer stating that

My associate degree, I think, was on my resume while I was in school. But, after I graduated from undergrad, I think my associate degree was deleted from my resume for space. I ultimately had to get rid of it. It kind of got overwritten from a professional career standpoint.

An extreme impression of the associate degree was provided by two students, from which Tommy provided the best summary by saying, "In this day and age, I don't really see any benefit (to the associate degree)." Even while two students noted no value, they, along with the others, chose to participate in the program, concluding that the associate degree carries value and earning the degree fills at least a temporary need. John captured this sentiment the best, stating "Well, I feel like a degree doesn't ever hurt. You know, there's never going to be a situation where you can get penalized for having one and it's almost like, the more the merrier." The responses were indicative of participants participating in the program and potentially earning an associate degree simply because it exists.

Students needed to transfer to a baccalaureate degree-seeking institution to be eligible for the program without earning an associate degree. The researcher

unexpectantly and interestingly found in the sampling that seven of the interviewees, Ana, Billy, Charlie, John, Joseph, Rosa, and Troy were enrolled in an early college program, whereby they took community college courses while enrolled in high school. Their continuance at the community college without an associate degree was linked to their graduation from high school. Troy stated, "I could only take two classes a semester. It was during a high school, outside of other classes, so I just didn't have enough time to finish the rest of the credits." Ana further added, "I didn't have enough time, honestly, during high school. So, I just figured that I would take the classes that I could have taken with the community college at the four-year university." These experiences mirror similar findings by Duncheon (2020), who suggested that early college students' associate degree attainment depends on the experience's quality while dually enrolled. This student population was not initially considered as a beneficiary of the state's Reverse Transfer program (State System Reverse Transfer Videoconference, August 23, 2022). Later, in table 2, a column was added to reflect this unexpected population.

The remaining students indicated other reasons for not completing an associate degree, ranging from missing or failing classes, not applying themselves, and wanting to move on. Tommy described his experience,

> I think, just like being at home, it just felt too much like high school. I did
> not excel in high school, so it was much of the same thing. I just didn't
> really apply myself very well at the community college.

Joseph's experience was more attuned with making the jump quicker, stating,

In part because I got me feet on the ground at Charlotte instead of staying

(at his community college) longer, I was able to be a fairly involved

student in the accounting department. So, I think, for me, going ahead and

jumping in with both fee at Charlotte, instead of waiting another semester

or year, paid dividends.

Abby described her decision to move was based on class availability. She stated,

"I ended up failing a class in my last semester (at her community college). It was

available for the summer, but by the same professor again, and I just figured I'd

take it at (the study site)." This exit aligns with Vincent Tinto's (1987) theory of

individual departure in that their degree aspirations remained clear, but the route

they chose to take included an early departure and transfer.

Theme 2: Program Awareness.

As part of the RT program's participant experiences and perceptions, it was also

important to understand their awareness of the program and subsequently opting in as a

participant. The majority of the interviewees received no prior information on the

program until presented with the opt-in question upon their initial registration at the study

site. Additionally, no further involvement occurred after opting into the program. John

stated, "It asked me a question, would you like to do the reverse transfer program? It was

a yes or no, and so, I opted into it." Otis did not recall getting that notification, saying, "I

didn't hear about it until I got it (the associate degree)." The advisor at the study site was

credited with making Abby aware after declining the three opt-in options. She explained,

"I actually missed the pop-up somewhere when I was signing up for classes. But my

advisor doubled back and let me know about it." While the reverse transfer program seemed to be summed up in a single, declarative opt-in statement, the decision to participate remained a definitive why not.

The interviewees shared similar questions prior to and after opting into the RT program. Aside from costs and extending degree completion, most wanted to know more about the program and how it worked. Some students indicated potentially transferring earlier had they learned about the program. Tommy added, "Honestly, if I had known that this was an option, I probably would have come to (the study site) earlier." After opting in, most questions moved toward the immediate benefit the program could provide to assist in their baccalaureate degree progression. Charlie, who earned an associate degree through the program, stated more succinctly, saying, "Why wasn't I told that having that degree will fulfill my agenda and requirements. Why did I waste a whole year of time and money taking classes that I had already signed up for a way to fulfill?" It was evident that none of the interviewees knew that earning an associate degree, whether prior to transfer or through reverse transfer, would result in waiving their general education requirements at the four-year institution. A year ago, the University Registrar at the study site added this distinction to its Reverse Transfer program's frequently asked questions page, not necessarily generating more interest in the general education waiver (Personal Communication, June 16, 2022).

Theme 3: Reverse Transfer Program Impact.

The single research question that prompted this study was, what are students' experiences and perceptions of the reverse transfer program? The students' interviews

revealed they were already motivated to obtain a baccalaureate degree. None of the

interviewees indicated any significant change in baccalaureate degree completion

likelihood before or after program participation. Fern, one outlier, indicated.

> I think (likelihood of completing a baccalaureate degree as a participant) is
>
> higher. After I get that second degree it's going to open up a whole lot of
>
> those classes and I'll be able to start working faster towards my bachelor.

John added, "The associate degree through the reverse transfer program is kind of like

icing on the cake". The effects of participation in this program, whether earning or

hoping to earn an associate degree, affected motivation in different ways. The effects of

participation in this program provide varying degrees of motivation to keep going and

appreciation of having something to recognize performance to date until they finish their

baccalaureate degree. Three students viewed the associate as a trial run. Joseph expressed

a similar view but added, "In the event that you don't finish, you have something to show

for the courses that you completed and the work that you did successfully clear."

All participants revealed that participation in the reverse transfer (RT) program

provided some degree of motivation. Joseph, who earned an associate degree through the

RT program, was asked whether earning an associate degree through reverse transfer

impacted their progression toward baccalaureate degree completion. Joseph stated, "That

goes back to the motivation component and just that little bit of energy boost." Joseph

went on to describe a rough start in his first year. While he could not put his finger on

precisely what turned his studies around, he did attribute earning an associate degree

through the program as a motivation factor, and his performance, commitment, and

dedication "up ticked" after that. Similarly, when Paula, a current RT program participant who has not yet earned an associate degree through the program, was asked the same question, Paula said she "sees the potential of an associate degree and the reverse transfer program as a whole, as just motivation to keep going." These two responses resonated throughout the twelve interviews and pointed to the central theme of motivation in this research.

The themes identified in Table 2 were based on the frequency of responses and trends in each category of RT participants. The first theme, value, benefits, and eligibility was derived from responses to questions three and four in the interviewing protocol. These questions pertained to what the participant thought the benefits of earning an associate degree were and if any value was placed on its earning. Several responses surfaced, with the most frequent occurrences centering on continued motivation towards a baccalaureate, providing an artifact of their progress to date and serving as a test case of their endurance. As previously stated, the summative participatory benefit seemed to be, why not utilize the program to complete an associate while pursuing a baccalaureate.

The second theme, program awareness, provided a unanimous response from all participants. This theme was derived from responses to questions one and five in the interviewing protocol. Overwhelmingly, all participants discussed a lack of awareness and outlined several questions that came to mind when contemplating participation and after opting into the program. The nature of the participation question and when it was asked resulted in a hasty and uneducated response. Students interviewed indicated a desire to have known more about the program well in advance of the question and a

means to monitor progress semesterly after participation. Overwhelmingly, the interviewees indicated wanting to learn more about their involvement, and many ended up performing their own research.

The third theme, Reverse Transfer program impact, was derived from questions six, seven, and eight in the interview protocol. These questions focused on changes in their likelihood to complete a baccalaureate degree and the influence if earned. Participants were just as likely to earn a baccalaureate, as this was their original intent before and after opting into the program. Motivation continued to be a benefit but surfaced in an unexpected way. The motivation came from earning a general education waiver or as an obligation to finish a prior commitment, not as a means to positively alter their baccalaureate degree trajectory.

Results

Evidence showed that participants viewed the primary benefit to this program, and thereby the value of an associate degree, to be its motivating influence on their baccalaureate degree completion. While they were already focused on their baccalaureate degree pursuit prior to the program and enrollment at the study site, they all provided evidence that when and if earned, it would not serve as a motivating factor singularly but would serve to reinforce that a baccalaureate degree was or is obtainable. The emerging themes further supported the findings for this project study, and the need to develop a position paper titled, What Do We Really Know About Student Experiences with Reverse Transfer?

Conclusion

This section explained the research design and approach. I used a basic qualitative study to explore students' experiences and perceptions of the reverse transfer program at the study site. Justification for the design selected was presented, along with a rationale for why participant observation was not viable by the nature of the program itself. While purposeful sampling was selected initially to identify subjects for interviews, due to the apathetic nature of students, a convenience sample was utilized, which captured the first twelve study volunteers. Selection criteria, justification for the 12 reverse transfer interview participants, the procedures for gaining access to the participants, and the ethical protections of participants were also presented. Initial documents used to properly gain access to participants and conduct the interviews consisted of using the following documents: invitation, consent form, interview protocol worksheet, and introductory email message. Participants initially received an invitation from the study site's institutional research office to ensure volunteers initiated contact. Data collection following the establishment of the project study design, number of participants, and initial documentation ensued.

Semistructured interviews were the method selected to collect the data. Following the participants' agreement with the informed letter of consent, I explained the purpose of the study to each participant prior to each interview and offered opportunities to exit the interview at any time. Also, prior to any data collection, I outlined how I would collect, transcribe, store, and later share their responses. Following the interviews, all data were transcribed and shared with each participant volunteer, including any interpretive notes

captured, as a means of member-checking for accuracy. This was to ensure I had captured their responses correctly and interpretations were accurately reflected. Coding began even as the interview occurred, noting key points of interest. Coding continued following the interviews. Transcripts were uploaded to NVivo, a qualitative coding resource software. This enabled me to further group, categorize, and develop themes. Included in this section was how I handled discrepant data. One volunteer's responses led to the conclusion that they were part of another program, similar to the reverse transfer program. The interview continued through its entirety but was noted as discrepant and finally excluded, requiring the addition of another volunteer. No other discrepant data were noted. The data collection, analysis, and validity of the findings were ensured.

Subsequent information shared in this section represented the data analysis, theme development, and findings. Those findings from the data collection and analysis supported the need to develop a policy paper (or position paper) to share the findings in such a way that could be quickly and easily shared with the study site and university system administrators. The results and the recommendations outlined in the position paper are expected to positively address misunderstandings about the program, share student expectations and experiences of the program, and result in positive social change.

Section 3 further describes the introduction of the final project, description and goals, rationale, and review of the literature to support the project genre, project description, evaluation plan, and implications. And finally, Section 4 describes the project's strengths and limitations, alternative approaches, reflections, implications, future directions, and conclusions.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Section 3 includes the project, the main points of the findings, the rationale for the selected project genre, and a review of the literature related to recommending policy changes. The project's purpose was to address the findings from this study, particularly the need to understand student perceptions of the reverse transfer program and how that understanding might impact the program's future development and evolution. For the project's selected genre and content, I reviewed the literature on policy recommendations on similar programs. After reviewing the literature, a detailed project description, evaluation, and implications are provided.

In the project study findings, I found that participants became eligible for the RT program through several different pathways and experiences. Additionally, I found that participants viewed earning an associate degree through the RT program reinforced their intention to earn a baccalaureate degree. The additional experiences and perceptions indicated that they were unaware of the program's existence until they were prompted to consider participation. To bring more attention to the program, harness its potential marketing power, and better understand its impact on baccalaureate degree completion, I have written a position paper that discusses participants' experiences and perceptions with the program. The position paper is titled What Do We Really Know About Student Experiences with Reverse Transfer? (Appendix A).

Description and Goals

The primary goal of this project was to identify the need for a critical review of the reverse transfer program outcomes and whether they supported the initial, marketed four-year institutional goals of the program upon inception. The 2,161 students who have received an Associate degree since the program's inception seemed to indicate that the program results in more associate degree-awarding than if the program was not in place. However, the marketed benefit of the program at the four-year baccalaureate level was that earning the associate degree through reverse transfer would result in continued enrollment and eventual completion of a baccalaureate degree. My study served to better understand whether this goal was met.

Now that the study has been completed, the findings will be shared through a position paper to recommend potential changes in how the reverse credit transfer program is defined and marketed. The overall purpose of this position paper is to highlight student perceptions of the program and how those perceptions might influence reverse transfer policy and practice. As a result, specific recommendations will be made to enhance the program and outline how administrators might utilize this new understanding to influence social change locally and at the state level. The resulting position paper will be made available to both levels of administration and will inform a continued study focus for the program.

Rationale

My study sought to explore students' experiences with the reverse transfer program at the study site. Examining these experiences and sharing them, alongside other

research data, with policymakers will inevitably increase institutional buy-in and strengthen best practices (Rockey et al., 2021). The state for this study was one of the first 15 states to implement a reverse transfer program. The development and implementation of the program and its guiding policies were funded by one of six foundations in 2012. Since that time, the program has changed very little (Personal Communication, June 14, 2021). A broader understanding of the program's impacts and more credible evidence is needed to guide policymakers in the state to reevaluate the reverse transfer program's efficacy (Odle & Russell, 2022). This study represents but a small fraction of the data needed to contribute to the overall future of the program, influence policymakers, and contribute to positive social change in the state.

Review of the Literature

I found that an applicable genre would be writing a position paper with policy recommendations to be published and shared broadly. As this new transfer landscape changes, policymakers need to recognize these new realities (Katsinas et al., 2019). It is also important to examine how the reverse credit transfer (RCT) program has operated by encouraging state and local entities to perform a program review of RCT. To guide the project and focus the literature review, I used several electronic resources and databases within the Walden University Library, such as ProQuest, Eric Educational, EBSCO, Google, and Google Scholar. The following keywords were used: *reverse articulation, reverse credit transfer, degree attainment, reverse transfer, transfer, policy, program review,* and *vertical transfer.* In addition, I referenced scholarly articles, peer-reviewed

publications, research journals, official state, local, and federal reports, and publications within the last ten years.

Policy Recommendations Grounded in Theory

Taylor and Giani (2019) highlighted the need for future qualitative research to better understand student perceptions of the associate degree earned through reverse credit transfer. They pointed out the need to understand how earning an associate degree influences continued enrollment and completing a Baccalaureate degree. Scholars have often categorized research into two types: basic and applied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). They defined basic research as simply adding to the general knowledge on the subject without regard for its immediate application. In contrast, applied research seeks outcomes that can be immediately applied to decisions and improvements for immediate and practical application. The lack of qualitative research (Cortes-Lopez & Taylor, 2020; Taylor & Giani, 2019) and the need to impact the current reverse credit transfer policy serve as an impetus for intense review and change. My study seeks to serve both as basic and applied research.

Basic Research Groundwork

Research on reverse credit transferring is only beginning, and it remains early in its predictions to maximize associate degree attainment (Taylor & Giani, 2019). The efficacy of institutional efforts is made clearer by understanding how students move between institutions and how they earn credits (Katsinas et al., 2019). The majority of the research on reverse credit transfer to date falls into the realm of basic research, focusing on student perceptions and the value of the associate degree (Odle & Russell, 2022). This

research is important, but in order for research to be actionable Bogdan and Biklen

(2007) suggested that basic research can be used to initiate actionable research and satisfy

both interests simultaneously.

Significance for States and Institutions

There have been many studies on the efficacy of reverse credit transfer in states

such as Hawaii and Minnesota (Taylor & Giani, 2019), Tennessee (Odle & Russell,

2022), Iowa (Friedel & Friesleben, 2016), Texas (Giani et al., 2021), Illinois (Rockey et

al., 2021), and others. The few state-level qualitative studies have focused on student

perceptions and the value of an associate degree (Odle & Russell, 2022). No studies,

quantitative or qualitative, from any of the 15 states have demonstrated a causal

relationship between earning an associate degree, baccalaureate degree persistence, or

employment earnings (Odle & Russell, 2022).

States and institutions enacting policies and practices around reverse credit

transfer need to leverage quantitative and qualitative data to shape current programs and

guide the development of new programs. States have worked diligently to create these

reverse credit transfer programs as an opportunity to increase associate degree awarding

and positively impact baccalaureate degree progression. Yet, states and institutions have

done so independently of truly knowing reverse transfer participants' aspirations toward

an associate degree or how they perceive the degree (Cortez-Lopez & Taylor, 2020).

Program effectiveness is essentially narrowly focused on the number of associate degrees

awarded and not on the advantages for the participating student.

Significance for Policy and Research

Taylor and Giani (2019) and Odie and Russell (2022) agreed that this minimal understanding and dearth of credible evidence also fails to influence reverse credit transfer policies and practices. Reverse credit transfer partnerships exist in almost every state (Cortez-Lopez & Taylor, 2020; Taylor, 2017). In 2012, 12 states were developing reverse transfer programs. A year later, 15 states were rolling out programs due to their participation in the Credit When It's Due (CWID) national funding initiative supporting reverse credit transfer (Taylor & Bragg, 2015). But only six states had or had begun developing legislation or statewide initiatives. By 2018, 16 states had legislative policies, and another 23 states had statewide programs, institutional agreements, or Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) for enacting reverse credit transfer (Education Commission of the States, 2018). As these reverse transfer policies begin to catch up with their programming, few studies examined students' resulting attitudes and outcomes (Odle & Russell, 2022).

Most states have implemented reverse transfer programs, yet they are still relatively new (Cortez-Lopez & Taylor, 2020). Odle and Russell (2022) estimated 15 states to date now have reverse transfer policies. They go on to say that despite this proliferation, there is no evidence documenting the effects of these policies on students' outcomes. This dearth of credible evidence and wide gaps in our understanding of reverse credit transfer policies provides very little information for policymakers' adoption, design, and ongoing operation consideration (Odle & Russell, 2022). For these reasons,

additional research is necessary to ascertain how policies can better support student outcomes.

Immediate Applied Research

With a dearth of evidence that reverse credit transfer programs advantage students' baccalaureate degree progression, motivation, and economic gains, states and institutions need actionable data to immediately and positively impact the future of these programs (Taylor & Giani, 2019). Understanding student perceptions of an associate degree and its impact on baccalaureate degree persistence have dominated the few studies to date (Odle & Russell, 2019). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined applied research as seeking outcomes that can be immediately applied to decisions and improvements for immediate and practical application. More needs to be understood about the implications of reverse transfer credit programs on student outcomes rather than state or institutional outcomes. Odle and Russell (2019) suggested that reverse credit transfer is more about giving students the credit they are due and less about the program's minimal impact on future performance.

Program Review

In academia, many campuses, locally and nationally, find comfort in doing things as they have always done them (Eggleston, 2020). Students invest time and resources in their pursuit of degree completion. Program efficacy can be determined in several ways, yet as Vincent Tinto (2017b) espoused, students simply want to persist. Program effectiveness is determined by how it positively affects the participant. That effectiveness varies amongst participants based on their use of and perceived merits of the program.

The absence of empirical evidence related to reverse credit transfer is not a quantifiable reason to ascertain the success of a program. Instead, it illustrates a need to continually evaluate the program's success and influence (Taylor, 2017).

Absent from any reverse credit transfer (RVT) program review data is the most important success measure of all – the students. Program reviews help to inform policies and practices that influence positive outcomes (Thrill, 2019). Thrill (2019) explained that students are the audience, and they should be allowed a voice to influence the direction and enhancement of the program. Many campuses simply perform the same reviews without reassessing what it is that constitutes a meaningful product (Eggleston, 2020). Taylor and Giani (2019) not only identified a need for further study of RVT programs but noted that there is a paucity in qualitative research of these programs. The few qualitative studies to date have focused only on students' perceptions of their state's program or the value of an associate degree awarded through reverse credit transfer (Odle & Russell, 2022).

Project Description

To highlight this project's intent, a review of the problem was needed in relation to social change. The problem remains to be a paucity of research linking reverse transfer

to baccalaureate degree completion. Therefore, my basic qualitative study explored students' experiences and perceptions of the reverse credit transfer (RCT) program at the study site. Understanding students' experiences with reverse credit transfer will inform the program's efficacy and determine whether additional emphasis should be placed on promoting the reverse credit transfer program as a degree planning tool. The following sections of this position paper project include the needed resources, timeline, and roles and responsibilities for those involved for successful implementation.

Potential and Existing Resources, Support, Barriers, and Solutions

Writing a position paper is best when trying to influence someone's opinion or provide context for an opinion. It argues a position or solution to a problem (ALA, 2022). Thrill (2019) indicated that these analyses help to inform policies and practices that influence positive outcomes.

Needed resources. The position paper author could present their study findings to the study site in an effort to highlight the RCT's influence on baccalaureate degree completion. These same findings could be influential on the program's future at the state level, as well. The primary resource for determining the efficacy of the reverse transfer program is the receptiveness of the university and other key stakeholders to consider its findings. Stakeholder receptivity will be directly related to their involvement with the program and the strength of the evidence supporting the need for change (ALA, 2022).

Stakeholder support. Consideration is given to those at the study site, but also at the state system level, that can effectively evaluate findings and determine if next steps for improvement are necessary. Stakeholders in this context are senior administrators at

the study site, including the institution's point of contact administrator for the site, other

state system campuses, and key administrators at the state system level. Additional

beneficiaries are current and future prospective Reverse Transfer Program participants.

Study site senior leadership. It is very important to understand which

administrators are the best recipients of this data and who can take actionable steps,

should it be necessary. Senior leadership has the power to influence changes at the state

system level, coordinate efforts with the other system campuses, and understand the

basics of the student transfer and progression processes that would be optimal for

impacting positive social change.

Other state system campuses. Because all state system campuses utilize the

current Reverse Transfer Program, it is equally important to share findings and

recommendations with senior leadership at system campuses to effectively champion any

needed changes and promulgate awareness.

Students. The direct beneficiaries are the students using or prospectively using in

the future. Through the literature and the marketing of this program, it is understood that

it exists to keep students on track and moving towards pursuing their baccalaureate

degree and increase the number of associate degree-awarding.

Potential challenges and barriers. While presentations at professional

conferences and developing policies for local and professional entities are relatively

common, preparing a position paper with researched findings as a referenceable resource

is daunting. This uneasiness poses a challenge because it reflects the culmination of my

doctoral study and has implications for the local, state, and regional implementations of

reverse transfer. A position paper has the potential to bring both good and bad outcomes to light and directly influence the future of reverse transfer. It is important that the position paper not reflect poorly on the program or negatively impact the students, faculty, and staff at the study site and within the state university system. This reflection is especially important should it be later published in any fashion.

The primary resource for determining the efficacy of the reverse transfer program is the receptiveness of the university and other key stakeholders to its findings. This resource can also be considered a challenge. If your audience does not identify with the problem put forth or the facts assembled after reviewing the issue and facts, the purpose of the author's position will be lost. This is why understanding one's stakeholders is essential to the success of a position paper.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

Having outlined the potential and existing resources, support, barriers, and solutions, the only remaining step was implementing the project. The position paper will be first shared with the local study site. The primary agent for the reverse transfer program site is the University Registrar. The position paper demonstrated a need to modify the current program. It seems unclear if that change can be enacted at the institutional level but sharing with the institution's University Registrar would be a starting point. The University Registrar at the study site has significant influence amongst administrators at the institution and other state system campuses. If they share the same concerns and solutions, this will likely make for a stronger case for change at the state

level. At the state level, this Reverse Transfer program was implemented, and any

subsequent change would likely occur.

Table 3

Proposed Timetable for Position Paper Sharing

Dates	Preparations
1 month, Jan 1 – Feb 1	Write and tailor the position paper for its first intended audience
1 month, Feb 1 – Mar 1	University Registrar review and comment
1 month, Mar – Apr	Share the position paper, incorporating Registrar feedback, with other campus leaders
3 months, May – August	Share the position paper, with all site feedback, to other reverse transfer leaders on each of the state's university campuses and state system leadership

All input, alternative solutions, and support have been collected. The position

paper written as an artifact outlining the findings and recommended solutions has

demonstrated the need for program review and change. The next step will be to develop

and submit for peer review and eventually publish in a peer-reviewed journal. The

position paper manuscript is expected to conform to the American Psychological

Association (7th ed., 2019) rules and guidelines, with numbered pages. The abstract or

executive summary would meet the necessary constraints as identified by the journal. The

various draft stages will need to adhere to the prescribed timetable. Table 4 provides a

timeline of activities required for consideration, approval, and publication.

Table 4

Proposed Timetable for Publication

Dates	Preparations
8 months, Jan 1 – Aug 31	Write and tailor the manuscript's first draft for the intended audience
3 months, Aug 31 – Nov 30	Final Draft edits and submission
2 months, Jan – Feb	Await approval and publication

Roles and Responsibilities

I will share the position paper with various entities at the study site, other state system campuses, and the state system leadership. I will follow the proposed timetable (see Table 3) for project implementation. If agreement is shared by the first entity, the University Registrar, the position paper will be edited to include that support. At each level of review, feedback will be requested and included before sharing with the next planned entity. All shared feedback and supporting evidence will be introduced into the position paper to add to its position. Finally, I will review, edit, and prepare a cumulative position to present to the university's state system leadership for review.

<p align="center">**Project Evaluation Plan**</p>

The evaluation of this project is iterative, meaning its continuance is based on the support it gains throughout its share cycle. If the position does not garner the support of its current reader or readers at any time, its purpose will become ineffective. Each iteration of the paper must effectively argue its stance and incorporate the input of those with whom it is shared. I expect this position paper to have a strong, arguable stance

based on fact and qualitative support. The paper's efficacy will be evaluated on how much additional support it garners and how far it moves through the leadership ranks. The final success measure will be whether the paper results in actual changes to the reverse transfer program and, thus, an example of positive social change.

Project Implications

The implications of this project are to bring awareness to and summative feedback for changes in the reverse transfer program. Each respective campus engages with the reverse transfer program in its own way. This position paper will share how the program is viewed and argue for prospective changes from a single campus perspective. It may also mirror the experiences of other state system campuses. If the experiences align, the issue may grow and become indicative of a more systemic problem and the proposed solution more viable. That context and the shared experiences, while targeting the state's handling of the reverse transfer program, may also have implications for a national audience.

Project's Impact on Social Change

Social change does not have to be national. Social change within the context of this study is to effectively alter how the state's reverse transfer program currently operates by shining a light on program inefficiencies. If addressed at the state level, these inefficiencies will produce positive social change for the students who were meant to benefit from the reverse transfer program initially. This program has been in place for several years, with little to no review or assessment of its effectiveness. This project, a position paper outlining the areas this program could improve, has the potential to

drastically change how the program is perceived and benefited from by the students opting into it. Positive social change, seen first, locally, and second, throughout the state's university system, will be the final evaluation of this project's efficacy.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths

The RT program has operated autonomously over the last nine years, at the state level and study site, with no critical review or oversight. The program had not been thoroughly reviewed to determine whether it was meeting its original objectives or if alterations should be made. RT program participants revealed that earning an associate degree while pursuing their baccalaureate is more than just a source of motivation. It was viewed as a means to propel them forward, referring to the general education waiver that the study site institution grants when an associate degree is earned. General education waivers at the study site and most other state institutions allow students to satisfy their general education curriculum through earning an associate degree. This project study was grounded in Tinto's theory of departure. Tinto's theory of departure shows us that while there are defined stages, not all students are aware they are transitioning or may not experience them in the same sequence or at the same time (Tinto, 1987). Participants in this study identified many different transitional pathways but shared a central theme of motivation resulting from the RT program.

Qualitative studies, such as this one, focus on the 'how' and 'why, which allows for the collection of rich data associated and understood with an interpretive philosophy (Mattimoe et al., 2021). Timeliness of the study and position paper, as the state has begun to have initial conversations on potential improvements, is a significant strength. Current perceptions and experiences will provide a primary look into the program's performance and possible alternative approaches. The position paper will serve as a roadmap, outlining

the reverse transfer program's current value while sharing future ways to improve and strengthen the program. The state's renewed interest in expanding various transfer pathways as part of a larger initiative to grow transfer enrollments will ensure that the reverse credit transfer pathway remains a valuable tool in that endeavor.

Project Limitations

The primary limitation of this project was its focus on a single doctoral-granting institution with high research activity within the southeastern region of the United States. A secondary limitation related to this study was that the findings and proposed solutions could be lost in the myriad of other strategic initiatives outlined in the recently released ten-year strategic plan at the study site. A final limitation was related to adoption by the state's university system office. The automated approach to reverse transfer within the state's university system will need to be reevaluated. The use and adoption of this project's findings require a more involved review of the reverse transfer program across the state's university system and resources to use the findings from this study and other related studies to improve upon its impact and positively affect social change in the state.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

A position paper was written to help administrators at the study site and within the state's university system develop strategies to improve and market the RT program. Considering the length of time that this program has been running autonomously and the personnel changes locally and throughout the state's university system, the goal is to provide a better understanding of the program's objectives and increase awareness of the program's impact on students, beyond the number of associate degrees awarded. In the

data, I found themes relating to student perceptions of the program and why they became eligible, how they became aware, the benefits and value of an associate degree, if earned, and the program's impact on their baccalaureate degree progression. The central theme highlighted motivation, but not in the context that inspired the programs' initiation. Motivation, in the study, was defined as having a temporary degree or a means to negate registration in general education curriculum courses. The program's original intent was to provide motivation for completing their baccalaureate degree, but the study's findings suggested that the students planned to complete it before participating.

As discovered in this study, the central theme of motivation further supported and extended Tinto's (1987) theory of student persistence. Student participants in this study had a strong commitment to persist and, ultimately, a desire to earn a baccalaureate degree. Their perception of the reverse credit transfer program did not change their original trajectory. They simply used the possibility of earning an associate degree retroactively as a means to further support and potentially minimize obstacles in the pursuit of their baccalaureate. Tinto pointed out that prior institutional commitments, in this case the completion of a previously unawarded prior degree, can significantly influence subsequent experiences. For the students in this study, associate degree attainment was not the driving force in their pursuit of a baccalaureate, but if they were awarded an associate retroactively, it would serve as an inspiration and reduce hurdles at their current baccalaureate degree-seeking institution.

An alternative approach would be for the state university system to perform a large-scale qualitative assessment of student perceptions of the program across all

seventeen campuses. This assessment could also be expanded to address some of the themes identified in this study. Benefits or values, impact on baccalaureate degree progression, and motivations are some themes brought to light in this study. Still, they could be expanded upon in a more extensive study. An expanded study might reveal differences between campuses in the program's marketing or usage. Automating the program and singularly capturing associate degree-awarding for those participating does not adequately address or depict the program's performance. While this is an alternative approach, it is anticipated that this study will be the catalyst for initiating this alternative approach.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

RT has evolved over the years. Until 2016, reverse transfer was used to reference students moving back to their associate granting institution (Ishitani & Flood, 2018). Today, reverse credit transfer is used to identify the process by which students share their credits with their former associate granting institution while remaining enrolled and progressing at their current baccalaureate granting institution (Taylor, 2016). This study and its highlighted evolution were more than I had anticipated but have been timely in preparing me for recent state-level conversations. As I reflect on my scholarly study, I have expanded my formal research capabilities and acquired a deeper understanding of the subject matter contained in this study.

I initially started by grounding my scholarly writing in research, applying the knowledge gained, and finally producing a scholarly addition to the knowledge on reverse transfer. This doctoral study, spanning seven years, has given me a greater, more

informed understanding of reverse transfer, particularly the inner workings of the RT program at the study site and within the state university system. As such, I have been asked to share some of my findings with others in the state. The focus of this project was to share the influences of associate degree attainment on baccalaureate degree completion for reverse credit transfer students.

Professionally, I have worked in higher education for more than 27 years, spanning five colleges and universities, particularly in enrollment management roles. Over this time, I have developed and aided in the development of many different projects. Each of these projects, no matter the role played, requires a program review at some point or multiple points in the program's life cycle. Applying those experiences, the scholarly research and writing gained during this project study, and a desire to improve the experiences of participating reverse transfer students will enable me to advocate for an extensive review of the state's RT program. The knowledge gained as a result of this scholarly project study has demonstrated that I can continue to grow and push myself to new heights.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

When the evolution of RCT as we know it today came to fruition in 2013, in the state for which this study is based, the state was visionary in its adoption. Grant pursuit and awarding aided in developing an automated solution for which students benefited from shared courses and credit hours with their former community college while remaining enrolled and progressing at their baccalaureate degree-awarding institution. Program development is evolutionary and requires constant review to ensure it continues

to meet the original goals and objectives or is restructured to align with newer goals and objectives. This study and future studies are important to highlight this need.

From 2013, the program's initial start, until around 2017, when I started to settle on the subject of my project study, I helped with my institution's adoption of the Reverse Transfer program. Through this project study, I gained a better understanding of the nuances of reverse transfer and its implications for student success. As such, I am uniquely positioned to help guide the next iteration of the RT program. Since this program's implementation, it has been known as RT. During that time, Taylor (2016) coined the term reverse credit transfer, which better aligns with the objective of this program. Even now, there remains much to learn about the reverse credit transfer process, and there is very little research to guide its development (Cortes-Lopez & Taylor, 2016). Research for the future of reverse credit transfer is important, and as we evaluate its efficacy, we will continue adding to the scholarly literature and research.

Project's Impact on Social Change

The findings from this project study revealed that participating in the reverse transfer program could increase motivation and positively affect baccalaureate degree progression. Like the findings from Cortes-Lopez and Taylor (2020), students found many perceived benefits of earning an associate degree. Still, the true benefit came from its equated value manifesting as a general education waiver. Regardless of the circumstances by which students transfer to baccalaureate institutions without an associate degree, participation in the reverse transfer program provides opportunities for students to obtain an associate degree retroactively, waive general education

requirements, and improve their motivation. This study has identified several alignments with the original objectives of the state's RT program, but it has also identified several misrepresentations of its benefits. Understanding the benefits of this relatively new initiative is essential for measuring its success for the student, institution, and state and generating positive social change. This project revealed that students are motivated by their participation in the program. This deeper understanding of its influence on students' ability to complete a baccalaureate degree contributes to positive social change by informing the future direction of this program at the study site and within the state.

Implications, Applications, and Direction for Future Research

Earning an associate degree through a RCT program, like the one at the study site, influences students' completion of their baccalaureate degree. This study identified perceived, and sometimes contradictory, benefits and values of an earned associate degree and its impact on student progression. Still, it also highlighted that students were already committed to their baccalaureate degree completion path. Suppose we apply the findings within this study and pursue similar studies at other universities in the state. In that case, the implications of those findings could be used to align better the program's policies and performance with the attitudes and experiences of those participating. This study illustrated students' perceptions of earning an associate degree and its influence on baccalaureate degree completion. However, combining research across multiple institutions and states could provide further clarification and understanding of how reverse credit transfer contributes to baccalaureate degree completion. Future study of the program's efficacy at the state level is essential and is long overdue.

Conclusion

The local site for this study has had 16,525 students opt into its RT program, and 1,926 students have been awarded an associate degree through participation (State System DataMart, November 13, 2022). As I contemplated topics for my project study, the need to better understand the student experiences associated with the reverse transfer program rose to the top. A program's approach that is producing associate degree graduates where none would have existed without such a program, and it is set up and subsequently left unchanged for nine years, intrigued me. I have been the point of contact for the RT program at two institutions in the state and naively focused on the graduation rate benefits at the community college level. It was not until this project study that I began to see the need to address how we market this program and how students perceive the program when opting in. Research supported many of my findings and highlighted the disparities between what students think of the program. Initial findings helped identify a need for students to understand better what their participation means and what they can expect from their participation.

This project study sought to better understand students' experiences with the reverse credit transfer program and how the findings might inform its efficacy and determine whether an additional emphasis should be placed on promoting the program as a degree planning tool. This study also provided insights that will benefit the larger academic community as this understanding influences programs and policies and impacts students' degree and career aspirations (Cortes-Lopez & Taylor, 2020). I plan to present the position paper, a culmination of the findings, suggestions for improvement, and future

implications to the local study site. The hope is that with the study site's support, this can

be shared with other universities in the state system and become an impetus for positive

social change at the state level, where change would be most beneficial.

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Appendix A: The Project

What Do We Really Know About Student Experiences with Reverse Transfer?

Executive Summary

Nationally, reverse credit transfer is a current practice of transfer credit, whereby credit earned at a baccalaureate awarding institution is shared with a prior associate degree-granting institution for the purposes of earning an unfinished associate degree. The reverse transfer program at a doctoral-granting institution with high research activity within the southeastern region of the United States was implemented in 2013 in conjunction with several other campuses within the state university system. Since implementation, no qualitative data has been captured or analyzed about the experiences of participating students. A study was undertaken to explore students' experiences of the reverse transfer program at the institution. In this basic qualitative study, 12 reverse transfer program participants were interviewed. Interview data were analyzed, coded, and as a result, themes were developed. Understanding the benefits of this relatively new initiative is paramount to measuring its success for the student, institution, state, and generating positive social change. This paper was written to share student experiences and perceptions of the reverse transfer program and recommend marketing changes related to the program's efficacy.

Background

Reverse credit transfer (RCT) is a relatively new phenomenon on the national stage and was implemented at a doctoral-granting institution with high research activity within the southeastern region of the United States in 2013. This implementation

occurred in tandem with several other institutions within the state's university system. The state's university system used six foundation grants to develop and implement its reverse transfer program. Since its inception, the program has been known as Reverse Transfer. Reverse transfer refers to a 30-year-old definition (Lichtenberger, 2011) whereby students move from four-year institutions to public or private two-year, nonprofit, or proprietary institutions (Ishitani & Flood, 2018; Taylor & Jain, 2017; Townsend & Denver, 1999). But it is not the student that is transferring; in this case, it is their earned credit. In 2016, Taylor coined the term reverse credit transfer. This latter definition refers to the transfer of credits, not the student, from a four-year institution back to a two-year institution to confer an associate degree (Taylor, 2016). Students can continue their studies at the baccalaureate degree-awarding institution, while only their credits are shared with their former institution to earn an associate degree. Thus, throughout this paper, you will find references to the Reverse Transfer program, but the purpose or function is reverse credit transfer.

Processes and procedures for sharing this data between institutions were put into place. The most significant was that students had to opt into the program to meet Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) data protection requirements. There have been multiple attempts to incorporate reverse credit transfer allowances through federal legislation introduced by both political parties (Reverse Transfer Efficiency Act, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021). This opt-in requirement remains one of two primary requirements for participation. The second requirement is that students must not have earned an associate degree prior to transfer. If both requirements are met, semesterly data sharing occurs

when students fall between 60 and 100 credit hours earned at their current university. All these processes are automated. A hands-on review happens when the community college manually determines whether earned university credit meets degree requirements for the student's prior associate degree program of study. On the university side, the process requires zero effort. According to the state, this program has resulted in 2,161 associate degrees awarded (State System DataMart, November 17, 2021). This singular data point is where the problem lies. We have no data to understand how students interact, understand, or utilize the program. So, what do we really know about student experiences with the Reverse Transfer program?

Study Participants

Twelve students were randomly selected to participate in a basic qualitative interview to better understand student experiences with the Reverse Transfer (RT) program. These students were asked questions to validate their eligibility for participation, initial awareness, and ongoing experiences with the program. The interview protocol was validated using a pilot group of four students. These four students helped refine the protocol to ensure questions were relevant and easy to understand, but their responses were not included in the final data collection or findings. The interviews for the twelve RT program participants were scheduled and conducted through Zoom. Following the interviews, a transcription of the interview was shared to ensure data collection was accurate and interpretations aligned with the participant's thoughts.

Participant inclusion was intentionally random, but convenience sampling was used due to recruitment challenges. Convenience sampling is when participants are

selected based on availability and willingness to participate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Two former students graduated from the four-year institution and earned their associate

degree through participation in the RT. The remaining ten students were still participants

when this study was conducted. Unexpectedly, seven of the participants attended the

state's community colleges as early college students. Their primary objective was to take

courses to satisfy high school requirements and potentially graduate with a head start on

their future college degree progression. This population was not addressed or outlined in

any policy or documentation related to the RT program (State System Reverse Transfer

Videoconference, August 23, 2022).

Analysis /Findings

Initial codes were identified early in the data analysis (Figure 1). Axial coding

was used to categorize the initial codes. This data analysis gave way to a better

understanding of the participants and why they did not complete their associate prior to

transfer, how they first became aware of the Reverse Transfer Program, what they did or

did not understand about the program, and what they perceived to be the program's

impact on their baccalaureate degree completion.

Figure 1

Reverse Transfer Participant Concept Map
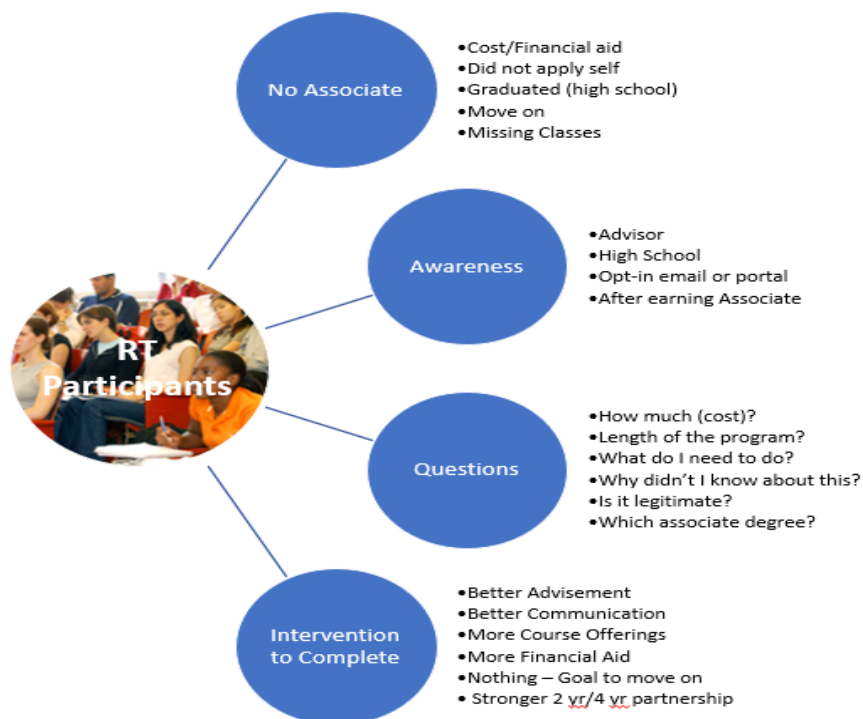
After understanding their initial encounters and experiences when introduced to the program, it was important to understand their experiences while in the program. Three distinct themes materialized during this latter stage of data analysis.

Theme 1: Value, Benefits, and Eligibility.

Participants' perceived value or benefit of an associate degree varied greatly, as demonstrated in Table 1. Some students thought of the associate degree as a way to get acclimated to collegiate-level work, while others considered it a temporary credential.

Two students saw no value in having an associate degree. The responses were indicative of participants participating in the program simply because it existed and not for the additional value earning an associate degree would bring. This became more evident as participants described their migration to the four-year institution without the associate degree. For most of the students, their transfer goals did not include earning an associate degree. They were intent on moving on to the four-year institution at the earliest possible moment. Opting into a program that has the potential to aid in the earning of an associate degree retroactively was considered acceptable by participants if it did not negatively impact their progress toward a baccalaureate degree.

Table 1

Case Study Themes and Categories

Theme	Category	Early College/ Dual Enrolled	Earned Associate	Associate Not Yet Earned
Value, Benefits, and Eligibility	General Education Waiver			X
	Job Prospects	X		X
	Lower Risk			X
	No Benefit	X		X
	Reduced Cost	X		X
	Temporary Credential	X	X	X
	Trial Run	X	X	X
	Motivation	X	X	X
Program Awareness	Questions	X	X	X
	Motivation	X	X	X
Reverse Transfer Program Impact	General Education Waiver	X	X	X
	Motivation	X	X	X

Theme 2: Program Awareness

One participant mentioned a passing conversation about reverse transfer with their high school guidance counselor. As mentioned earlier, this unexpected advice transpired due to the student's participation in an early college program. That participant felt they still were not fully prepared or understood the benefits of opting into the program after admission to the four-year institution. The remainder of the students were unfamiliar with the program until asked to opt into the program. The additional pressure associated with only having three opportunities to answer the question and their desire to push past the question, as it landed between their admission and course registration at the four-year institution, resulted in many hasty responses and unawareness of what they had opted into (Table 1). The program's design is to run in the background without transparency or contact with the participating students. As such, students knew nothing about their status in the program or how their information was being shared with the community college after opting in.

Theme 3: Reverse Transfer Program Impact

This unawareness led to the third theme and the primary research question posed in this study. Student interviews revealed that students were already motivated to obtain a baccalaureate degree. No significant change was seen when they were asked about their likelihood of completing a baccalaureate before and after participation. Motivation surfaced several times during the conversations with participating students, but in an unexpected way. Retroactively earning an associate degree motivated the students by serving as temporary credentials or waiving required general education credits (Table 1).

The four-year institution grants a general education waiver for students who have earned an associate degree at any point before or after beginning their studies there. Their motivation to complete a baccalaureate degree remained at the forefront, but this program provided them a means to shorten their time to degree and the possibility of a local employment benefit while at the four-year institution.

Literature and Research Evidence

Vincent Tinto's (1987) theory on student departure was used as the conceptual framework of this study. His theory purported that students want to persist, not necessarily to be retained and are often influenced by personal intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Tinto 2017). Those various motivations and personal experiences have implications for student departure prior to earning an associate degree (Cejda & Kaylor, 2001; Tinto, 2017). Tinto's theory of departure has not been applied directly to reverse credit transfer programs, but it can help provide a framework for understanding how students become eligible participants. Students in this study demonstrated their goal to persist in obtaining a baccalaureate degree but earning an associate degree on that journey was not viewed as a necessity for meeting that goal. Instead, it became a motivation to shorten the time to meet that goal.

There continues to be a dearth of evidence to indicate that reverse credit transfer programs advantage students' baccalaureate degree progression, motivation, and economic gains; states and institutions need actionable data to measure the impact of these programs (Taylor & Giani, 2019). This study shared conclusions throughout the literature that we do not know enough about student experiences and perceptions of

reverse transfer (Cortez-Lopez & Taylor, 2020; Taylor, 2017). This lack of understanding is demonstrated at the state level as it has not undertaken any program review since its implementation to ascertain how student experiences or perceptions have impacted the efficacy of the reverse transfer program. On a state system reverse transfer videoconference (July 27, 2021), this lack of review was discussed, and this topic is being broached as a shortfall. Routine program reviews help inform policies and practices that can influence positive outcomes (Thrill, 2019). Only a few qualitative studies have focused on the value of an associate degree awarded through reverse transfer (Odle & Russell, 2022). This study was meant to increase our understanding of those experiences and address the value reverse transfer programs currently have and how they might be strengthened.

Recommendations

All but one of the participants in this study indicated that their first knowledge of the Reverse Transfer program was either through the pop-up opt-in inquiry after admission or during advising conversations at the four-year institution. Marketing opportunities have been obsoleted for this program. Students opt into the program without understanding its actual value to participants. Motivation, one of the earliest marketed benefits of this program, was not realized in the manner initially expected. Students were already motivated to complete a baccalaureate degree. The little they do understand about the program implies that their motivation is to use it to shorten their time to degree or as a temporary credential to support their employment while in school. Determining this to be the case, it behooves the state to expand the window of access

earlier and later than the current 60-100 earned-hour window. If this were the case, students may benefit earlier, when their degree progression might experience the most benefit.

This study highlighted the lack of understanding students have about the program. There is a need for further study and review of student experiences beyond this institution. Additionally, this study revealed an audience not considered initially as beneficiaries. High school early college students are a population that typically utilizes collegiate course credits for dual application for secondary and post-secondary progression, but their associate degree attainment depends on the quality of their experience (Duncheon, 2020). More marketing must be devoted to highlighting the program's benefits at the community college level, including their early college programs, to include those students who have no interest in earning an associate degree but could benefit from its attainment later. This study confirmed that earning an associate degree is not necessarily the goal of all students. Still, in some cases and under the right conditions, it could be a means to an end for helping them complete their baccalaureate degree more quickly.

Conclusion

This study's findings highlighted a need to assess further the value of the Reverse Transfer program beyond associate degree-awarding numbers. This program has been allowed to continue, on autopilot, unchecked for almost ten years. This study should, at a minimum, be a catalyst for future studies on all campuses within the state university system. Furthermore, this study did not consider the experiences of community college

staff manually reviewing the shared credit. Future research should include how their experiences, perceptions, and potential resource needs might affect the Reverse Transfer program's future. If we genuinely want to affect social change positively, we need to take stock of student perceptions and experiences, using them to guide future program development and enhancement.

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Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Reverse Credit Transfer Program Participant

Is it okay if I record?

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to meet and discuss your participation in reverse credit transfer.

My name is Jonathan Reece, and I am a graduate student at Walden University

conducting a project study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an Educational

Doctorate. I would like to get your permission to record this interview to accurately

document your responses. If you would like to stop recording or participating in the

interview at any point during the interview, please let me know. Participation is

voluntary, and there is no negative consequence for withdrawing your participation. All

of your responses will be kept confidential. If you agree, I would like to share your

written responses with you after I have compiled, to ensure it accurately reflects your

responses. The purpose of this study is to understand student perceptions of and

experiences with the reverse transfer program and its influence on your baccalaureate

degree persistence. There are no right or wrong answers.

The first part of this interview will start with some basic questions about you. The

second part of this interview will focus on your perceptions of the reverse credit transfer

program and its influence on your baccalaureate degree progress.

Background Information of RCT Participant

1. How many higher education institutions, post-secondary, have you attended,

including those where you are currently enrolled?

2. From which community college did you most recently transfer?

3. What year (or academic level) are you classified as at your current institution?

Sample Interview with Student Participating in RCT

1. When and how were you made aware of Reverse Transfer (RT)?

    a. Prompt: What would you have wished you had known before you decided to

    participate?

2. What made you decide to transfer to this institution?

    a. Prompt: What was the reason or reasons why you did not complete your

    associate degree before transferring?

    b. Prompt: What could your community college have done to change your mind

    (*to stay and finish your Associate Degree*)?

3. What do you think are the benefits of earning an associate degree?

4. What value, if any, do you assign to an associate degree, while pursuing a

    baccalaureate degree?

5. What questions did you have when you were introduced to and contemplated

    participation in RT?

    a. Prompt: What questions did you have after opting into RT and throughout

    your participation?

6. How did you feel about the likelihood of completing your baccalaureate degree

    before you opted into the RT program?

7. How do you feel about your likelihood of completing your baccalaureate degree now

    that you are participating [participated] in the RT program?

a. <u>Prompt:</u> How did your opinion change or not change?

8. *Question for those participants who have not yet earned an associate degree through RCT:*

a. How do you think earning your associate degree through RCT will impact your baccalaureate degree completion?

Question for those participants who earned an associate degree through RCT:

b. How has earning an associate degree through RCT impacted your progression towards baccalaureate degree completion?

9. Would you recommend RT to your peers? Why or why not?

Concluding questions

10. What has not been asked that should have been?

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

If the participant discontinues the recording or participation, I will ask if they are willing to share why

Thank You and Request

Thank you for your participation in this study. To ensure the reliability of this study, would you be willing to read over and verify the accuracy of our transcripted conversation? (If yes) Can you provide me with your email account? (If no) Well, I thank you for the time you took for this interview.

What email address do you want me to send the e-Amazon Gift Card?