

2016

Adult Students' Perceptions of Transfer Services at an Historically Black University

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Kimberly Crews

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Adult Students' Perceptions of Transfer Services at an Historically Black University

by

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MA, Georgetown University, 1985

BA, University of New Mexico, 1984

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

January 2016

Abstract

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics have indicated a steady growth of students attending 3 or more institutions while pursuing a baccalaureate degree. When students transfer institutions, they may have specific needs for their new institution.

Informed by the transfer receptive culture framework, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of students who had attended 3 or more postsecondary institutions on the services they received, before and after their transfer.

Purposeful sampling yielded 9 adult students with multiple-institution attendance histories. Data were collected through semistructured instant messaging interviews. A series of messages included multiple questions and opportunities for detailed participant responses. The interview data were open coded and thematically analyzed using constant comparative methods. The results indicated that the students expected a streamlined transition process, yet most perceived the institution to have limited technical and human resources dedicated to transfer services. The resource shortage contributed to institutional barriers requiring students to expend their cultural, social, and transfer capital to complete the transfer. Recommendations for the local institution include electronic transcript delivery, automated transcript processing, transference of student data maintenance, and early degree-specific credit evaluations. The study contributes to positive social change by providing research findings to the local site on possible ways to improve services for transfer students.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my late mother, Louise Adams Crews, who attended at least three postsecondary institutions during her uncompleted baccalaureate journey. During my doctoral journey, I learned that among my close friends and family I was the anomaly, having completed my baccalaureate journey as a traditional student. As I continue my career in higher education, I hope to ease the baccalaureate pathways for those who attended community college, joined the military, married young, stopped-out to care for others, and all the others who pursued their degrees in a nontraditional fashion.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

A student graduating with a baccalaureate degree in the United States today is likely to have attained this degree through a nontraditional pathway. Traditional students attend college immediately after graduating from high school, attend one 4-year, postsecondary institution as a full-time student, and graduate in 4 to 6 years (Choy, 2002; Yang, Brown, & Brown, 2008). The majority of students do not follow the definition of traditional as they delay initial attendance, may attend more than one postsecondary institution, may not attend full-time, and may have dependents and have periods of nonattendance (Hossler et al., 2012; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012a; Peter & Cataldi, 2005; Skomsvold, Radford, & Berkner, 2011; Speight, Russian, Ross-Gordon, & Munoz, 2008). Societal and economic factors at the macro and micro levels contribute to the diverse attendance patterns of students in the 21st century. Universities with missions to serve underrepresented groups must be prepared to provide services that meet the needs of students who have nontraditional demographic characteristics and nontraditional attendance patterns.

The literature on attendance patterns in postsecondary education revealed that over half of the 2003-04 cohort of first-time college attendees who attained a baccalaureate degree in 2009 transferred at least one time with 25% attending three or more institutions (Skomsvold et al., 2011). Researchers that followed traditional-aged students for - to 8-years after high school graduation showed consistent patterns of multiple institution attendance (Adelman, 2006; Hossler et al., 2012; McCormick, 2003).

Traditional-age students may shift to the nontraditional category because of their multiple-institution attendance behavior. However, the national level descriptive data provides a limited depiction of college attendees who have returned to college after periods of dis-enrollment or for those who did not begin their postsecondary experience directly following high school (Dougherty, 2009).

The Black baccalaureate recipient is nearly three times as likely to be over age 30 than a White baccalaureate recipient in the United States (Woo, Green, & Matthews, 2013). The institutions featured in site-specific researchers that examined multiple attendance patterns were predominantly White institutions (PWI) with predominantly traditional-aged students (Brown, 2011; Kearney, Townsend, & Kearney, 1995; Nakano, 2012). Research on Black, adult students with multiple-institution experiences appears to be limited.

Students of color are more likely than White students to begin their baccalaureate experience at a community college (Woo et al., 2013). The rising cost of tuition at 4-year institutions, combined with the recent recession, has contributed to the popularity of the community college as a stop on the baccalaureate journey. Some students begin their postsecondary experience at a community college; other students transfer to the community college after experiencing academic, financial, or social challenges at a 4-year institution (Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009). Black students are more likely to stop-out or transfer due to academic or financial challenges than White students (Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009).

Because of the large number of students attending community college, numerous researchers have examined the experiences and successes of students who transfer from 2-year to 4-year institutions (Allen, Smith, & Muehleck, 2013; Crisp & Nunez, 2014; Gard, Paton, & Gosselin, 2012; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Ishitani, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2008-2009; Wang X., 2009). Black and Hispanic students are less likely to successfully transfer and attain a baccalaureate degree than White or Asian students (Handel, 2011; Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2011). To respond to this transfer challenge, the concept of the *transfer receptive culture* by Jain et al. (2011) was created to help sending and receiving institutions consider the culture and actions necessary to facilitate successful transfer. A 4-year university with a transfer receptive culture would have a university-wide commitment to provide the academic, social, and financial supports for students to transfer successfully and achieve a baccalaureate degree efficiently.

In this qualitative study, the concept of the transfer receptive culture was adopted to explore the uses and characterization of transfer services among adult students with multiple institution histories at an urban Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Like the national level attendance trends, the majority of recent graduates at the study institution attended multiple institutions. Students, faculty, and staff complained that the transfer services were outdated and did not to match the attendance experiences of most of the incoming students. The perspectives of these extremely mobile, adult students informed the discussion to propose modification of transfer services at this urban, HBCU.

Definition of the Problem

The problem at this urban HBCU is that students with multiple institution attendance histories are disadvantaged as the admissions and transfer policies and procedures were developed without consideration of their attendance histories. The majority of baccalaureate graduates are transfer students; but university officials do not have research to understand how and why transfer students matriculate to and graduate from this HBCU (Provost, personal communication, September 18, 2013). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore extremely mobile, nontraditional-aged students, that is, adults who had attended three or more postsecondary institutions, to learn how they used transfer services during their transfer process and how they characterized the services that they received relating to the transfer process. This qualitative study helped institutional agents consider student-centered transfer policies and procedures practices for students with previous postsecondary experience.

The local setting for this study was an urban, public HBCU. To ensure confidentiality, the institution is referred to as Wadlaw University (WU) throughout this doctoral study and pseudonyms are used to refer to institutional agents. Between 2009 and 2014, the number of first-time-in-college students at the university declined as these students have entered local community colleges in larger numbers. According to the community research partner, in 2013, about 45% of the new bachelor degree-seeking enrollees were transfers and 30% returning students (2013). Consequently, about 60% of the 2013 graduates attended more than one institution while working on their baccalaureate degrees (Office of the Registrar, personal communication, May 2013) with

30% of these graduates attending three or more postsecondary institutions. In 2012, over 40% of the students at WU were aged 30 and older (community research partner, personal communication, 2013).

The majority of students matriculating to and graduating from the baccalaureate program at WU were students with previous postsecondary experience. Academic advisors at WU work with many students who have already attended three or more postsecondary institutions (academic advisors, personal communications, December 5, 2013). The transfer evaluation counselor confirmed that a growing portion of new transfer students bring transcripts from three or more institutions (transcript evaluation counselor, personal communication, May 29, 2013). A former academic advisor stated that there had been some improvements in the transfer credit evaluation process in the past 5 years, but the failure of WU to invest in better systems and processes would contribute to continued student frustration (former academic advisor, personal communication, June 9, 2014).

As a HCBU, WU has a mission to provide affordable postsecondary educational opportunities to African-American and other underserved students. The recent economic recession has negatively affected HBCUs that have lower tuition than other institutions, have lower endowments, and serve students who are more likely to be low-income and financial aid recipients (Gasman, 2009). WU also has faced stagnant enrollment levels, staff cuts, and budget cuts, making it more difficult to align policies, improve the infrastructure, and adjust staffing to better address the needs of students who enter with more complex attendance histories as well as continuing to meet the needs of students

who are underprepared for the rigors of postsecondary education (Richards & Awokoya, 2012). HBCUs, such as WU, with relatively lower rates of tuition increases than PWIs (Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, & Bowman, 2010), should see increases in applicants with previous postsecondary experience as economic hardship may drive students from higher cost institutions.

WU is not the only institution that is receiving a greater numbers of transfer students. Nationally, the pathway to completion of a bachelor's degree is more complex today than in the 1970s and earlier (Adelman, 2006). Traditionally, a student would enter a 4-year institution and graduate from that same institution in 4 or 5 years. For the majority of today's bachelor's degree candidates, a transfer is now standard as over half of students who first entered a postsecondary institution in 2003-2004 and received a bachelor's degree by 2009 attended more than one institution (Skomsvold et al., 2011). Skomsvold et al. also reported that 25% of the 2003-2004 cohort, who attained a baccalaureate degree by 2009, had attended three or more institutions.

Over the past 10 years, a series of researchers using national, longitudinal data delineate the increased trend for students to attend more than one institution while working on their baccalaureate degrees (Adelman, 2006; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Hossler et al., 2012; McCormick, 2003; Skomsvold et al., 2011). The literature also included quantitative studies on multiple-institution attendance at the state or institutional level (Bach, Banks, Kinnick, Stoering, & Walleri, 2000; de los Santos, Jr. & Sutton, 2012; Johnson & Muse, 2012; Kearney et al., 1995; Sturtz, 2006). However, when using the search terms *swirling*, *transfer students*, *multiple-institution attendance*, and

variations thereof for 1990 to 2014, I found only two qualitative studies that queried extremely mobile attendees about their experiences as transfer students (Brown, 2011; Nakano, 2012). The environments featured in both research studies were large, public, research institutions with greater proportions of traditional-aged populations than WU. In the absence of studies that specifically explored the perspectives of students and environments that are similar to WU, it is currently not known if the patterns and outcomes observed in current research apply to this population. Institutional agents at WU need relevant and timely research regarding the effectiveness of their transfer services.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The local problem reflects the unique environmental context of this urban, public, mainly commuter HBCU. In many states, state-level articulation policies govern the transferability of postsecondary credits from one state institution to another (Roska & Keith, 2008). WU is unique in that it resides in a jurisdiction where no state-legislated articulation agreements are in place. While a significant segment of WU's transfer students originates from the local area, other students come from around the nation and world (community research partner, personal communication, 2013). Each semester, over 60% of incoming students have previous postsecondary credits, and more than 90% of WU students are commuters (community research partner, personal communication, 2013). These unique characteristics helped justify a case study to enable WU to understand better students' perceptions of their transfer experience to inform the

development of student-centered institutional practices that are the foundation of success and retention of a diverse student body.

Students and institutional agents throughout the university identify challenges with transfer policies and processes (academic advisors, personal communications, December 5, 2013; faculty advisor, personal communication, March 22, 2013; transcript evaluation counselor, personal communication, May 29, 2013). A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis by the WU Retention Committee identified the transfer evaluation process and internal customer service as weaknesses and the inability to change/improve and mobility/student swirl as threats (community research partner, personal communication, 2011). However, WU's enrollment procedures, transfer credit evaluation processes, and staff dedicated to servicing transfer students remain stagnant. For example, WU has only one staff member whose primary responsibility is to evaluate transfer credits. Transfer students often visit up to four institutional agents to complete the transfer credit evaluation process, which may take up to 6 months. "We are operating from an old academic policy" (director of admissions, personal communication, December 5, 2013). The academic policy manual at the institution has not been formally amended since major structural program changes in 2009, 2013, and 2014. The director of admissions felt that WU needs fluid policies to meet the changing needs of current and prospective students who are likely to matriculate with postsecondary credits from other institutions. The director of admissions also asserted that faculty members have trouble clearing students for graduation, as there is a lack of clarity about which credits are accepted (director of admissions, personal communication, December 5, 2013). A male

transfer student with credits from two other institutions shared that there were inconsistencies in the disjointed procedures to evaluate transfer credits at WU. The student stated that this experience at WU was less streamlined compared to other institutions and that successfully navigating the transfer credit evaluation process required a high level of persistence on the part of the student (male student, personal communication, December 5, 2013).

Because of the lack of clarity of the policies, institutional agents spend a great deal of time meeting students “trying to make accommodations for individuals” (faculty member, personal communication, March 22, 2013). The following statement by a faculty member summarizes the frustrations of students and institutional agents: “on a daily basis [time is spent] in a not very pleasant process of determining what students need to graduate” (faculty member, personal communication, March 22, 2013).

Academic advisors spend hours negotiating transfer credit substitutions with faculty, deans, and the one transfer credit evaluator on the campus.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Descriptive studies provide support that multiple-institution attendance is normative behavior for 21st century United States postsecondary students (Adelman, 2006; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Hossler et al., 2012; McCormick, 2003; Skomsvold, et al., 2011). Over the past 20 years, a series of researchers using data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NCS) or National Educational Longitudinal Studies (NELS) have provided national level descriptive information on the mobility and attendance patterns of postsecondary students showing that nearly 50% of 2009 baccalaureate recipients had

attended at least two postsecondary institutions (Adelman, 2006; Hossler et al., 2012; Skomsvold et al., 2011). However, qualitative studies to help postsecondary institutions understand how the changing postsecondary attendance patterns may impact local institutions are limited (Cutright, 2011; Hossler et al., 2012). A few researchers have examined multi-institutional attendance behaviors at community colleges or large, public universities with state-level transfer articulation policies (Bahr, 2009; Brown, 2011; Kearney et al., 1995; Nakano, 2012). The majority of these researchers focused on the behaviors of traditional-students in PWIs or community colleges. A case study at WU informed decisions about transfer services for the unique urban, public HBCU. In addition to the unique locality and status as an HBCU, the scarcity of applicable research on multi-institutional attendance at minority serving institutions further justified this study.

Definitions

Adult: Students aged 25 and older are classified as adults. Age 25 is the standard point of comparison between traditional-aged and adult students used by the National Center for Education Statistics and other scholars (Choy, 2002; Guidos & Dooris, 2008; Jacobs & King, 2002; Zhang, Lui, & Hagedorn, 2013).

Articulation Agreements: Formal agreements between postsecondary institutions to define courses that transfer, admission requirements, and other conditions to facilitate the migration and baccalaureate attainment of transfer students (Poisel & Joseph, 2011; Roska & Keith, 2008).

Concurrent enrollment (also known as co-enrollment, double dipping, overlapping enrollment, dual enrollment, simultaneous enrollment, and swirling):

Concurrent enrollment occurs when students take courses at more than one institution during the same semester or same year (Crisp, 2013; McCormick, 2003; Wang X., 2012; Wang & McCready, 2013).

Extremely Mobile Students: Extremely mobile students have attended three or more postsecondary institutions while pursuing their baccalaureate degree (Brown, 2011; Hossler et al., 2012; McCormick, 2003).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU): Institutions of higher education in the United States established before 1964 with the primary mission of educating Black Americans (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). These institutions serve about 16% of Black postsecondary attendees in the United States (Harmon, 2012). The Morrill Act of 1862 created the land-grant public institution, but Blacks were not permitted to attend these institutions, so the second Morrill Act in 1890 provided for HBCUs to serve the Black population, primarily in the southern states (Gasman, 2009; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003).

Instant Messaging (IM): A synchronous exchange of messages between two persons in a computer mediated system (Baron, 2013).

Lateral Transfer (also known as horizontal or parallel transfer): Lateral transfer students move from one institution to another institution of the same type (e.g. from one 4-year institution to another 4-year institution) (Bahr, 2009; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Hossler et al., 2012; Poisel & Joseph, 2011).

Multiple-institutional Attendance: For this study, multiple-institutional attendance occurs when a student has attended three or more postsecondary institutions upon while pursuing their baccalaureate degree (Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Kearney et al., 1995).

Native Student: A student who enters the postsecondary institution as a first-time in college freshman (Sturtz, 2006).

Noncontinuous Enrollment: A break of more than one semester or two quarters (not including summer terms; Adelman, 2006; Li, 2010; Wang X., 2009).

Persistence: Persistence is a student measure representing the desire, decisions, and actions taken by students to stay within postsecondary education to baccalaureate degree completion (Adelman, 2006; Berger, Ramirez, & Lyons, 2012; Hagedorn, 2012).

Receiving or Destination Institution: A postsecondary institution to which a student and credits transferred (Jain et al., 2011; Simone, 2014)

Reverse Transfer (also known as downward transfer): The process of movement from a 4-year institution to a 2-year institution (Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Hossler et al., 2012; Peter & Cataldi, 2005).

Sending or Origin Institution: The sending institution is a postsecondary institution from which the student and credits transferred (Jain et al., 2011; Simone, 2014).

Stop-Out: A student temporarily withdraws from an institution for more than one semester or two quarters (Berger, Ramirez, & Lyons, 2012).

Swirling: Swirling occurs when students move between institutions either alternately or simultaneously as they pursue their baccalaureate degree. They may not make a linear progression to a bachelor's degree (Poisel & Joseph, 2011; Sturtz, 2006).

Traditional Student: A student who matriculates to college directly after high school, attends full-time, stays at the same institution for their entire collegiate career, and graduates within 6 years (Choy, 2002; Yang et al., 2008).

Transfer: The migration from a primary postsecondary institution to another postsecondary institution, with the second becoming the primary institution (Adelman, 2006).

Transfer Receptive Culture: Postsecondary institutions with a university-wide commitment to provide the academic, social, and financial support for students to successfully transfer and achieve a baccalaureate degree efficiently (Jain et al., 2011).

Transfer Student Capital: The knowledge and skills students learn to successfully navigate the transfer process (Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston, 2010-2011).

Transient Student: A student who takes courses at institutions other than their primary institution, not as degree-seeking students, but to transfer the credits earned back to their primary institution (Brown, 2011).

Vertical Transfer (also known as forward, upward transfer, traditional transfer, vertical transfer): A vertical transfer student migrates from a 2-year to 4-year institution (Hossler et al., 2012; Peter & Cataldi, 2005) with the intent of obtaining a baccalaureate degree (Poisel & Joseph, 2011).

Significance

Social and economic forces contribute to the precedence of students following nontraditional routes to baccalaureate degree attainment. The traditional route is followed by students who enter a 4-year institution directly following high school graduation and remain at that institution in a full-time capacity until they graduate with a baccalaureate degree in 4 to 6 years without interruption (Choy, 2002; Yang, et al., 2008). Conversely, the majority of students today do not complete this traditional route as they do not attend full-time throughout their collegiate experience or attend more than one institution during their baccalaureate journey (Woo et al., 2013). Since 45% of all undergraduates in the United States attend community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013), attendance at a minimum of two postsecondary institutions is inevitable for those community college attendees who hope to attain a baccalaureate degree. Other students pursue other nontraditional pathways, such as a lateral transfer, and multiple institution attendance.

Societal changes and expectations of the labor force contribute to the need for institutions of higher education, particularly at the 4-year level, to adjust enrollment and academic practices to address the needs of greater proportions of students with previous postsecondary experience. Adults who have attended college but have not received a certificate or degree are returning to college to improve their opportunity for higher-paying jobs. Adults may be returning to college in response to policy-makers and employers demanding a better-educated United States labor force. In 2011, about 39% of the working-age population (ages 25-64) had an associate degree or higher (The Lumina

Foundation, 2013). The Lumina Foundation estimated that more than 20% of the working adult population had enrolled in college but had not completed the requirements for a credential. The Lumina Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the White House are among the leadership entities promoting greater degree-completion among Americans (Bragg & Durham, 2012). For example, the Lumina Foundation supports the goal of 60% of Americans “to hold high-quality degrees, certificates, or other postsecondary credentials” by 2025 (2013, p. 2). The rising cost of postsecondary education may lead students to attend multiple-institutions in their quest to attain a college-level credential.

Economic factors may impact postsecondary attendance patterns in several ways. First, Black students had the lowest 6-year graduation rates at 41% in 2010 (College Board, 2012) and were more likely stop-out due to financial or academic factors (Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009). Second, students who begin their postsecondary careers at private 4-year institutions often transfer to lower cost institutions due to the inability to fund the relatively higher tuition fees. Finally, tuition increases during the recession may have driven students to lower-cost institutions such as community colleges (de los Santos, Jr. & Sutton, 2012) and public, 4-year institutions such as WU.

Other economic factors affect this public HBCU whose tuition is lower than the private institutions in the same geographic region. Like other HBCUs, WU’s historic mission to support underserved and minority students, in spite of inadequate funding, has made it even more vulnerable during the recession and beyond (Gasman, 2009). Budget and staffing cuts, reductions in financial aid, along with stagnant enrollments have led to

challenges in providing services to maintain the institution's health. As the number of high school graduates entering WU has declined, recruiting transfer students and providing adequate services for those students is paramount (Marling, 2013). While WU may find it difficult to serve another group of students with specific needs, this institution must adapt to the changes in enrollment to continue to meet its mission.

To help adults complete college, institutions must have policies and procedures that respond to the societal and economic changes that have contributed to postsecondary enrollment patterns that are prevalent in the early 21st century. Sixty years ago the traditional student was an 18-22 year-old, White male who began his collegiate career at a 4-year institution, attended full-time, and completed that baccalaureate degree in 4 years. Society has changed. Women, minorities, and adults who have already been in the labor-force are attending college at higher levels than in the past. The new norm is for students to be nontraditional (Choy, 2002). With a diverse set of nontraditional students enrolled in baccalaureate programs, attendance patterns have also changed. At least one transfer, and often more than one transfer, is now typical, requiring modification of academic and student services to accommodate these transfer students to degree completion (de los Santos, Jr. & Sutton, 2012; Lord, Bjerregaard, & Hartman, 2013; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012).

Guiding/Research Question

To explore the perspectives of extremely mobile, nontraditional-aged students toward the services that they receive relating to the transfer process, the following central research question was posed:

RQ: How did extremely mobile, adult students characterize the transfer services received pre and posttransfer?

This question enabled exploration of the types of transfer services students used and whether students perceived the WU transfer and transition services, policies, and procedures to be in alignment with their previous postsecondary experience, and whether these services promoted successful transition and persistence. This research question aligned with Jain et al.'s (2011) emerging concept of "transfer receptive culture" (p. 257) and led to a set of questions about students' prior postsecondary histories, their perceptions of the clarity and usefulness of the study institution's resources for prospective transfer students, and characterization of the admissions process. The interview questions asked study participants to characterize the enrollment process, how welcoming they perceived institutional agents and students, and about the effectiveness of the transfer credit evaluation process, and new student orientation. Study participants were asked to describe their use of cultural capital during their transition and provide recommendations for the study institution to improve the transfer process. The question and the data collection strategy were informed by previous conceptual studies, quantitative research, and qualitative explorations that are summarized in the following literature review.

Review of the Literature

The first segment of this literature review establishes the conceptual framework for the study by reviewing the literature on transfer culture. In the second segment, literature is reviewed relating to the problem of multiple-institution attendance among

adults, reasons for this mobility, and transition services provided for those adults at 4-year receiving institutions. The final segment covers the search strategies used to complete the literature review.

Literature Search Strategy

To locate articles that examined the phenomenon of multiple-institution attendance, baccalaureate attainment of adult transfer students, baccalaureate attainment of students attending HBCUs, persistence of minority students attending minority serving institutions, and the characteristics of HBCUs that promote retention, several online databases were searched. At Walden University, the following databases were searched: Thoreau, ERIC, Education Research Complete, and Education from Sage. The Walden University Library was also used to search for relevant dissertations and specific articles that were cited in peer-reviewed articles and dissertations. Similar searches were also conducted at the University partner library as well as Google Scholar.

To ensure saturation was reached with regard to peer-reviewed articles on multi-institutional attendance for students pursuing baccalaureate degrees, multiple search combinations were used. The initial searches used variations of the word *swirl* (and variations such as *swirling*) with *transfer student* and *college*. These searches yielded four peer-reviewed articles when using the Thoreau database for dates 1990 to 2014, three in the ERIC database, one in Education Research, and 16 in SAGE. When the results from the SAGE search were adjusted to 2005-2014, seven relevant peer-reviewed articles were located. The second series of searches used the keywords *multiple-institutions* (and variations) with *transfer students* and *college*. The third series of

searches used various combinations of the following keywords *transfer students*, *college*, and *HBCU*. Finally, *HBCU* with *persistence* or *retention* were used. In the searches beginning with *swirl* and *multiple-institutions*, the terms *HBCU* and *adult* were also added to find more specific studies on this topic.

In addition to the peer-reviewed articles located in the searches above, reports from agencies and organizations were used in the development of the problem and literature review. As the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) sponsored the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study and the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, among others, the NCES also published reports on the outcomes revealed in these studies. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center with the Project on Academic Success at Indiana University published a series of reports on college completion, student pathways, and enrollment patterns. These reports provided the foundation of data to support the national trends on enrollment patterns that are provide the foundation for this study.

Transfer Receptive Culture Framework

The emerging concept of transfer receptive culture (TRC) was used to inform this study of adult students' usage of and characterizations of transfer services received at WU (Jain et al., 2011, p. 257). Four-year institutions with a transfer receptive culture would have a campus-wide commitment to providing resources to facilitate successful transfer and baccalaureate attainment among transfer students (Herrera & Jain, 2013; Jain et al., 2011). Theoretical concepts and ideologies that undergird the TRC include cultural capital and critical race theory (CRT) (Handel, 2011; Jain et al., 2011). The concept of

TRC was introduced by Jain et al. to describe the need for both sending and receiving institutions to provide resources for students, particularly underrepresented students, transferring from community colleges to 4-year institutions. However, the elements of TRC also respond to the needs of the growing numbers of adult students attending multiple institutions and those with nonlinear attendance patterns.

The Emergence of the Transfer Receptive Culture. The TRC was developed to address the need for postsecondary institutions to better address the transition process of the growing numbers of community college transfer students from underrepresented groups, who were unable to transfer successfully to selective, 4-year institutions in California (Jain et al., 2011). While community colleges have a mission to provide transfer services to students pursuing baccalaureate degrees, some scholars argued that the 4-year institutions make a similar commitment to receive those students (Handel, 2011). Jain et al. posited that there should be a commitment from both sending and receiving institutions to support transfer students in their baccalaureate ambitions. A 4-year university with a transfer receptive culture has a university-wide commitment to provide the academic, social, and financial supports for students to transfer successfully and achieve a baccalaureate degree efficiently (Jain et al., 2011).

The five elements of a transfer receptive culture include pre and posttransfer activities that require some collaboration between the sending and receiving institutions.

The two pretransfer actions are:

1. Making the transfer of students—particularly nontraditional, low-income, and other underrepresented students—a priority for the institution.

2. Conducting intentional outreach activities to help inform, educate, and prepare prospective transfer students about processes, programs, and procedures related to transitioning from one institution to another.
(Herrera & Jain, 2013, p. 52; Jain et al., 2011, p. 258)

The posttransfer actions are:

1. Providing financial and academic support to the transitioning students to ensure persistence and achievement.
2. Acknowledging and respecting the academic, familial, employment, and other life experiences that students bring with them to the 4-year institution.
3. Creating a system to assess and evaluate transfer-related programs and initiatives to inform and “further scholarship on transfer students.” (Jain et al., 2011, p. 258)

The concepts of cultural capital and critical race theory undergird the TRC, but originate from the disciplines of economics and law. The authors who promoted the TRC framework also promoted the use of multidisciplinary perspectives to meet the challenges in the field of education.

Cultural Capital. Capital is an asset that a person can use to accomplish a particular objective. When applied to the potential to be successful in college, cultural capital includes the experiences and backgrounds students bring to their postsecondary experience to help them attain a baccalaureate degree (Handel, 2011, p. 414). If the culture of the college experience is based on the culture that is more common in White

families, families with parents with advanced degrees, or middle- and upper-class families, then students from other cultures are likely to be less successful (Bahr, Toth, Thirolf, & Massé, 2013). Handel (2011) argued that students who lack the cultural capital for college success and begin at a community college might also lack the knowledge of the transfer process, thus presenting yet another potential barrier to baccalaureate attainment. Students who have attended multiple institutions may have acquired additional capital to help them successfully transfer and attain their baccalaureate degree.

In a TRC, the receiving institution recognizes and respects the diverse cultural capital that students bring to the institution. Laanan et al. (2010-2011) introduced the concept of transfer student capital as the knowledge and skills students learn to navigate the transfer process successfully (p. 191). Students who have attended multiple institutions will have had the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills as postsecondary students and transfer students to enable them to transfer successfully and persist at a new 4-year institution. In a research study on the “transfer racial gap,” Crisp and Nuñez (2014, p. 292) recommended additional qualitative research to better understand how students gain and use diverse forms of capital in the transfer process. Institutional agents in a transfer receptive culture would recognize the diverse social capital that students with multiple institution experience bring and help these students use that capital to help them persist and attain their baccalaureate degree (Handel, 2011). Institutional agents would also help students recognize and develop transfer student capital to improve their transfer experience and contribute to their satisfaction with and persistence at the receiving institution (Laanan et al., 2010-2011).

Critical Race Theory (CRT). While developed for use in legal studies, CRT has also been used in sociology, history, and more recently in education (Handel, 2011; Solorzano, 2001). CRT advocates argued that race continues to be a significant factor in explaining inequity and to improve education in the United States; one must understand and study the element of race and racism within all levels of education (Handel, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano, 2001). The CRT theoretical framework includes the element of social justice, which is an integral component of WU as an HBCU with a commitment to providing affordable postsecondary education to Black and other underserved residents of the community (community research partner, personal communication, 2014; Handel, 2011). Jain et al. (2011) argued that the other elements of CRT: (a) the challenge to the dominant ideology, (b) the importance of experiential knowledge, and (c) the interdisciplinary perspective are essential in the formation of a transfer receptive culture.

Critical Race Theory Applied to TRC. When Jain et al. (2011) examined the transfer success of community college students, they discovered that students of color comprised the majority of students on these campuses, but accounted for only 25% of those who transferred. If these students are to have the same economic opportunities as White students, they need the opportunity to attain a baccalaureate degree. Jain et al. argued that the ideologies of the 4-year receiving institutions dominate the decisions on accepting transfer students and that an element of race is a factor in these decisions. An institution with a transfer receptive culture would understand the social justice commitment needed, recognize the diverse life experiences of community college

prospective transfers, and use theories and ideas from other disciplines to change the culture to welcome transfer students (Jain et al., 2011). The transfer receptive culture framework has not been applied to attendance patterns beyond the community college to 4-year vertical transfer.

As the concept of a transfer receptive culture is emerging, published research articles critiquing the concept are absent. Researchers are using TRC as an explanatory element in analyses of community college to 4-year transfer studies (O'Brien, 2011; Rivas, 2012). While the majority of the citations are found in dissertations, some citations have appeared in peer-review journals (Crisp & Nunez, 2014). The other limitation to literature on the TRC is that it has only been proposed as a solution to improve community college to 4-year college transitions (Crisp & Nunez, 2014; Handel, 2011; Herrera & Jain, 2013; Jain et al., 2011). Although some of the components of the TRC, such as coordination with multiple sending institutions, are not appropriate for addressing the challenges of the growing numbers of students transferring to WU after attending multiple postsecondary institutions, most of the elements of the TRC are quite appropriate and were explored in this study.

In this study, I collected information about how adults with multiple-institution experiences utilized and characterized the receptiveness of the transfer programs, policies, procedures, and staff at WU. In alignment with the framework provided by the TRC, information was collected about the pretransfer and posttransfer experience of adults with multiple-institution experience (Jain et al., 2011). Participants in the study had diverse transfer patterns, as described in the next section, and information was

gathered to learn about the perceptions of the transfer experience for students with different transfer patterns.

Multiple Institution Attendance

This section of the literature review begins with an overview of the historical and current national level quantitative research on multiple institution attendance. The second section is an evaluation of the current research on distinctive college attendance patterns, ending with a discussion of the nonlinear patterns that have been revealed in current quantitative and qualitative research. The third area is an examination of the literature covering the perceptions of students' transfer experiences. The final section is a discussion of the dearth of research on multi-institutional attendance of nontraditional-aged students and students attending minority-serving institutions. The literature review concludes with an overview of the focus of studies examining institutional response or perceptions of institutional services for transfer and multiple-institution attendees.

Multiple Institution Attendance Trends. Since the 1980s, longitudinal studies sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) have enabled scholars to examine postsecondary behaviors of individual students. Using National Educational Longitudinal Studies (NELS) that followed students for 5 to 8 years, researchers reported an increasing trend for high school graduates in 1982, 1992, 1995, and 2003 to attend multiple institutions before attaining a bachelor's degree (Adelman, 2006; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; McCormick, 2003; Peter & Cataldi, 2005; Skomsvold et al., 2011). Skomsvold et al. revealed the propensity for nearly 50% of spring 2009 bachelor's degree recipients to attend multiple institutions while working on their baccalaureate degrees

(Skomsvold et al., 2011). Scholars from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) have confirmed the trend of multiple-institution attendance before bachelor degree attainment with one-third of all 2006 first-time college attendees transferring at least once in 5 years (Hossler et al., 2012; Shapiro et al., 2013). This series of national-level quantitative analyses provides ample evidence of multiple-institution attendance and nonlinear routes to bachelor's degree completion.

Several of the national-level researchers examined specific attendance patterns identifying at least eight distinct pathways used by students to obtain a bachelor's degree (Adelman, 2006; Hossler et al., 2012; McCormick, 2003). The patterns identified for baccalaureate seeking students included upward transfer, lateral transfer, combinations of the above patterns with reverse transfer, the broad category called swirling, and concurrent enrollment. Multiple institutional behaviors may include any of the above-mentioned patterns or combinations thereof.

Upward Transfer. Nearly half of baccalaureate-bound college students begin their postsecondary careers at a community college, making at least one transfer customary (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012b). Because of its prevalence in higher education, upward transfer is one of the most commonly examined patterns of postsecondary attendance (Bahr, 2009; Hossler et al., 2012), where a plethora of research explored the characteristics of upward transfer students' persistence to bachelor's degree (Ishitani & McKittrick, 2010; Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Nutting, 2011; Townsend & Wilson, 2008-2009; Wang, 2009; Wang, 2012). A significant body of research has also covered the actions that institutions have taken to facilitate persistence

of students who transfer from 2-year to 4-year institutions (Allen et al., 2013; Austin, 2006; Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantrell, 2011; Wang & Pilarzyk, 2009-2010; Wood & Palmer, 2013). Researchers generally found that community college transfers have lower graduation rates than native students, even when controlling for student academic and demographic characteristics (Long & Kurlaender, 2009), prompting research on the value of community college enrollment for baccalaureate seeking students (Belfield & Bailey, 2011; Townsend, 2008).

Lateral Transfer. While upward transfer is the most common transfer pattern, lateral transfer—the movement from one 2-year institution to another or from a 4-year institution to another to degree completion—is the second most common pattern (Bahr, 2009; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Li, 2010). Lateral transfer is common among both 2- and 4-year institutions, but specific research on this phenomenon is rare. Bahr (2009) discovered lateral transfer at the community college level to be quite common, particularly among younger students in California. Yang et al. (2008) also found that lateral transfer is common among students from North Carolina, perhaps because the state system facilitates that ability to transfer among community colleges. Goldrick-Rab and Pfeffer (2009) established that lateral transfer at the 4-year level is more prevalent among students in the higher socioeconomic levels. Li (2010) combined transfer characteristics with stop-out behaviors and found that periods of noncontinuous enrollment with lateral transfers reduced the likelihood of baccalaureate completion. While components of lateral transfer behaviors are touched upon in studies focused on

swirling and other multi-institutional attendance patterns, the studies that specifically address lateral transfer behaviors are scarce.

Swirling. Upward, lateral, and reverse transfers are clearly defined patterns, but other patterns, such as swirling, are more complex. In an examination of some nonlinear routes to degree completion, de los Santos and Wright (1990) first used the term *swirling* to describe the behaviors of students who enrolled in a university and community college concurrently or who attended more than one institution concurrently or serially. In an attempt to identify and clarify diverse attendance patterns, Rab (2004), in her dissertation, defined swirling as “multi-institutional attendance with discontinuous enrollment” (p. iv). Johnson and Muse (2012) also combined multi-institutional attendance and stop-out behaviors in their examination of student swirl. Adelman (2006) defined swirling as “nomadic multi-institutional behavior” (p. xxi), while Brown (2011) defined swirling as “attending a minimum of three institutions of higher education” (p. 12) before bachelor’s degree attainment. The lack of a clear definition of swirling led Goldrick-Rab and Pfeffer (2009) to caution scholars against using this term. Students who might be grouped as swirlers are not homogenous and using this label may mask significant differences in attendance behaviors and outcomes (Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Wang & McCready, 2013).

However, attendance patterns that fall under the broad category of swirling are becoming increasingly common, particularly for online students and those living in metropolitan areas with access to multiple community colleges or universities (Crisp, 2013; McCormick, 2003). Under closer inspection, many of the different types of

multiple attendance patterns that, may have been categorized as swirling, fall under the broadest definition of concurrent enrollment, which occurs when a student takes courses at two or more institutions during the same term and/or without transferring from her/his home institution (Crisp, 2013; Wang & McCready, 2013).

Concurrent Enrollment. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2011) estimated that 3.2% of students attended two or more institutions concurrently (p. 1). McCormick (2003) identified several reasons for concurrent enrollment, which occurs when a student takes supplemental courses at other institutions for one or more terms. Students may take this action to accelerate time-to-degree, add courses not available at her/his home institution, or to take courses that better fit the student's schedule (McCormick, 2003). Concurrent enrollment often takes place during the summer months (or during the winter break) and may be considered as "casual course-taking" (Hossler et al., 2012, p. 11). Wang and McCready (2013) found that concurrent enrollment provides flexibility and perhaps cost-savings for students who have strategically planned their degree program. The idea of cost savings was further substantiated by the research from the National Student Clearinghouse Research (2011), which reported that over 75% of students who were concurrently enrolled, attended public institutions. Concurrent enrollment may provide a more efficient and cost-effective pathway to baccalaureate attainment groups of students.

Other Multiple-Institution Attendance Patterns. Researchers have labeled attendance patterns of students who have attended more than two institutions. In 1995, Kearney et al. identified four patterns for students who had attended three or more

institutions with 83% of multi-transfer attendees falling into one of these patterns. The most common pattern was the 4-year to 2-year to 4-year with 33% of multiple transfer students following this pattern (Kearney et al., 1995). Peter and Cataldi (2005) prepared a descriptive report on postsecondary multiple attendance showing the incidence of multiple attendance by the level of the first institution attended (either 2-year or 4-year and/or, public, private not-for-profit, or private for-profit). Other studies included students still enrolled at a community college or included the stop-out experience in the analysis level expanding the number of multiple-institution patterns beyond the scope of the research in this paper (Bach et al., 2000; Guillermo-Wann, Hurtado, & Alvarez, 2013). The research pool was further limited by studies that included only students who transferred, excluding those who may have co-enrolled (Hossler et al., 2012).

Researchers found that attendance at more than two institutions was more common among students under age 25 than for older students (Kearney et al., 1995; Peter & Cataldi, 2005).

Mobile Students. Multiple-institution attendance is normative behavior for 21st century, United States postsecondary students. Some scholars crafted explanatory studies to discuss the characteristics of students who attend multiple institutions as they pursue their baccalaureate degrees. Scholars' studies used quantitative methods in four studies to link cognitive and socio-demographic characteristics such as GPA, race, and economic status to multiple attendance behaviors (Crisp, 2013; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Johnson & Muse, 2012; Kearney et al., 1995). Other researchers used surveys, focus groups, and interviews to determine the specific reasons for multiple-institution

attendance (Brown, 2011; Flowers, Luzynski, & Zamani-Gallaher, 2014; Gard et al., 2012; Kearney et al., 1995; Peter & Cataldi, 2005; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2008-2009).

The common findings of the characteristics of students who attended multiple-institutions included higher economic status, greater likelihood of parents with graduate school experience, higher GPA than other new enrollees, greater family support, and higher educational aspirations (Crisp, 2013; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Kearney et al., 1995). Reasons delineated for attendance at more than two institutions included residential mobility (sometimes the result of military service), academic failure at a previous institution, financial difficulty, athletic eligibility, and convenience of the location of the receiving institution (Brown, 2011; Flowers, Luzynski, & Zamani-Gallaher, 2014; Kearney et al., 1995). Together these scholars have begun to provide a more complete picture of the types of students who attend multiple institutions and the rationale for this behavior.

Adult Mobile Students. One group of students that is largely excluded from the research on multiple-institution attendance patterns is adult students aged 25 and older. The national level quantitative research fails to describe the story of degree completion among adult learners as the longitudinal studies, which have been the foundation of research on student mobility, follow students for just 8 years after high school (Adelman, 2006; Dougherty, 2009; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Skomsvold et al., 2011). Researchers, who isolated adult students, found that adult students were less likely to attend multiple institutions than younger students (Brown, 2011; Guillermo-Wann et al.,

2013; Kearney et al., 1995). Adult students who attended multiple institutions were also likely to have one or more periods of nonenrollment (Guillermo-Wann et al., 2013). Researchers that examined age as a factor in degree completion usually showed that age negatively affected the likelihood of baccalaureate completion (Li, 2010; Peter & Cataldi, 2005; Shapiro et al., 2012). Older students who transferred faced even greater risks to graduating (Dougherty, 2009; Ishitani, 2008; Shapiro et al., 2013). However, adult students who entered with more previous credits and were able to secure financial support to attend full-time were reported to have improved odds of graduating (Austin, 2006; Guidos & Dooris, 2008).

Institutional Services. A growing number of scholars are addressing institutional responses to the growing number of transfer students. Researchers focusing specifically on students attending more than two institutions have grown in the last few years. Most scholars make recommendations for a more transfer-centered culture at institutions; some scholars used qualitative methods to ask students and institutional agents about their experiences as transfer students or providers of transition services.

The body of research on multiple-institution attendance ranges from barriers, to persistence, to recommendations for specific transfer services and the revision of campus culture toward transfer students. Scholars discovered that institutional policies and practices, inability to transfer credits, uneven advising, and financial aid were some of the barriers to successful transition and persistence of transfer students (Austin, 2006; Fann, 2013; Furbeck, 2011; Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Luo, Williams, & Vieweg, 2007; Sturtz, 2006; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Wang X., 2012). These scholars and others,

recommended changes in transfer procedures and policies, financial aid, social and academic integration, and advising to improve student persistence and graduation (Carter, Coyle, & Leslie, 2011; de los Santos, Jr. & Sutton, 2012; Dennis, Calvillo, & Gonzalez, 2008; Ishitani & McKittrick, 2010; Li, 2010; Lord et al., 2013; Nutting, 2011; Roska & Keith, 2008). Recent reports provided guidance for 4-year institutions to consider these barriers and develop the “transfer-receptive culture” described in the “Conceptual Framework” section of this proposal (Herrera & Jain, 2013, p. 52; Jain et al., 2011, p. 258).

Cutright (2011) shared that descriptive studies provide statistics on transfer rates and characteristics of students who transferred, but there were few studies providing details of the transfer experience from students’ perspectives. Several researchers surveyed students on their pretransfer and posttransfer experiences, advising, and financial aid (Allen et al., 2013; Gard et al., 2012; Townsend, 1995; Wood & Palmer, 2013), where students identified these factors as barriers to transfer success. Other researchers showed that transfer students of color identified the transfer-culture of the receiving institution as factor contributing to their persistence (Crisp & Nora, 2010), in addition to citing lack of experience at the 4-year institution and integration into a primarily White environment as barriers to successful transfer and persistence (Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013).

Policies and Procedures. In response to the evidence of the growing number of students attending multiple institutions while pursuing a baccalaureate degree, scholars have recommended changes in practices and policies at 4-year institutions (de los Santos,

Jr. & Sutton, 2012; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Sturtz, 2006; Townsend, 2008). One set of the recommended policy changes is the development of articulation agreements that clarify the courses that transfer between state institutions (Sturtz, 2006). Scholars also reminded institutions that nonlinear, multiple attendance patterns are the result of complex dynamics in academic, social, and institutional forces which may be beyond the control of institutional agents (Hillman, Lum, & Hossler, 2008; Wang & Pilarzyk, 2009-2010). While there are a growing number of studies addressing the challenges of multiple-institutional attendance, most transfer studies are still focused on community college to 4-year institution transition. Some of the suggestions for changes in policies and practices may also address the challenges presented by multiple-institution attendance.

Adults with Complex Attendance Histories at HBCUs. Research addressing multiple-institutional attendance of adult students at HBCUs is nonexistent. Researchers documenting the attractiveness of HBCUs for part-time, transfer, low-income, and minority students add value to this study (Richards & Awokoya, 2012). A public, HBCU with a mission to provide affordable postsecondary education would be attractive for adults who left other institutions due to financial, academic, or social challenges (Harmon, 2012; Richards & Awokoya, 2012). Students who have been pushed from other institutions may be drawn to the “empowering, family-like environment of small classes, close-student relationships, and life without the daily racial tensions experienced off campus” (Gasman, 2009, p. 26). One recurring theme in studies on the perceptions of the institutional environment of HBCUs was the family-like environment with staff and

faculty going beyond the mission to help students persist to a baccalaureate degree (Hirt, Amelink, McFeeters, & Strayhorn, 2008; Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2010; Palmer, Maramba, & Dancy II, 2011). Other characteristics of HBCUs that are attractive to minority and other potential transfer students include small class size and supportive environments, which are especially important for students enrolled in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Perna et al., 2009).

While there is a dearth of research on multi-institutional attendance patterns for adult students at HBCUs, other works on nontraditional students may inform this discussion. Austin (2006) examined a project to provide institutional support to adult, female, community college transfer students in an urban setting and found that personalized institutional supports such as orientation, scholarships, mentoring, and holistic advising were significant in improving academic and social integration of these students. Dougherty (2009) explored the cognitive, environmental, and institutional factors associated with success of adult transfer students and identified some of the institutional and governmental policies that could be adjusted to better address the needs of returning adult students. Other researchers presented factors related to the institutional support of nontraditional aged, minority, or HBCU attendees (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Palmer et al., 2010; Spanard, 1990).

Implications

The problem at this urban HBCU is that students with multiple institution attendance histories are disadvantaged as the admissions and transfer policies and

procedures were developed without consideration of their attendance histories. Students have many reasons for attending multiple institutions, but one economic factor is the higher cost of tuition at 4-year institutions. Another factor contributing to multiple-institution attendance is poor academic performance at one or more institutions.

Goldrick-Rab and Pfeffer (2009) believed that Black students are more likely to stop out or transfer for academic or financial reasons than White students. Black baccalaureate recipients are more likely to attain degrees after age 30 than White students; at the national level, 29% of Black bachelor's degree graduates were age 30 or older compared to 12% of White students (Woo et al., 2013). At WU, 67% of the undergraduates were 25-years or older in 2012 (community research partner, 2013), and the majority are Black. A more detailed breakdown of the demographic characteristics is unavailable at this time due to unreliable and missing demographic data from the community research partner.

Institutional agents at WU must be aware of how multiple-institutional attendance contributed to the varying needs of adult students during the transfer process. Learning how extremely mobile adult students have used and characterize transfer services will help institutional agents develop practices and procedures to address the needs of students who enroll with these backgrounds. The concept of the transfer receptive culture (TRC) provides suggestions on pretransfer and posttransfer actions that WU might consider to provide more student-centered transfer services (Jain et al., 2011).

This research resulted in a position paper that recommended three student-centered actions to address the foundational barriers to transferring to WU. In providing

the three recommendations, the project helps institutional agents understand transfer services from the student perspective and appreciate the characteristics and attendance histories of transfer students. Implementation of the recommended actions will ultimately help WU increase the transfer yield rate, increase retention, and enhance customer service, all institutional goals. As more students attend multiple institutions while pursuing baccalaureate degrees, this project could help improve opportunities for postsecondary education among underrepresented and disadvantaged populations. The implications for social change, therefore, begin at the campus level, extend to the local community, and have the potential for improving the conditions for transfer students in the United States.

Summary

Nationally, the new norm in postsecondary education is for students to attend more than one postsecondary institution while pursuing their baccalaureate degree (Skomsvold et al., 2011). For those students who began college in 2003-04 and received baccalaureate degrees in 2009, 28% attended two institutions, and 25% attended three or more (Skomsvold et al., 2011). Institutional agents at WU acknowledged the growing number of students enrolling with previous postsecondary experience and asserted that policies and procedures for serving transfer students are outdated (former academic advisor, personal communication, June 9, 2014; transcript evaluation counselor, personal communication, May 29, 2013). Incoming students with transfer histories also stated that the procedures are less streamlined than at other institutions (male student, personal communication, December 5, 2013). The characteristics of WU that distinguish it from

other postsecondary institution are its status as an urban HBCU with the average student being a 32-year old transfer who commutes (community research partner, personal communication, 2013). Given the problem with transfer services and characteristics of the institution, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore extremely mobile, nontraditional-aged students—adults who have attended three or more postsecondary institutions—to learn how they used transfer services and how they characterize the services that they received relating to the transfer process.

Societal and economic changes have contributed to the growth in nontraditional patterns in postsecondary attendance. The rising cost of tuition at 4-year institutions has resulted in students going to lower cost community colleges and 4-year institutions. Black students are more likely to change colleges due to financial or academic challenges and often choose local or lower cost public institutions, such as WU, to complete their baccalaureate degrees. Lower cost public institutions also appeal to other students seeking to complete their baccalaureate degrees. However, the low tuition also influences the resources that this public HBCU is able to devote to adapting services to meet the needs of the growing numbers of transfer students with multiple-institution attendance histories.

The conceptual framework that was used to consider this question is the transfer receptive culture introduced by Jain et al. in 2011 to help 4-year institutions address the challenges of accommodating community college transfer students. While the concept is emerging and was developed for consideration of community college to 4-year transitions, the five tenants of the transfer receptive culture are appropriate for

consideration with the culture of WU and the characteristics of the incoming students. WU students are increasingly attending two-or more institutions before matriculating, a national trend that is reported in literature on this phenomenon. However, while the trend to attend more than two institutions while pursuing a baccalaureate degree is increasing, most of the research on perceptions of transfer services was conducted on community college to 4-year college transfer students. There was also limited research that addresses perceptions of adult transfer students or transfer students attending HBCUs.

To address the problem that transfer services may not adequately serve the needs of students with multiple-institution histories, data were gathered on the perceptions of these students about the transfer services that they received prior to and after their transfer to WU. As described in the methodology section that follows, I interviewed adult students with multiple-institution experience to provide evidence to inform reconsideration of the WU's transfer services. A detailed discussion of the methodology for this study is provided in the next section.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to learn how extremely mobile, nontraditional-aged students—adults who have attended three or more postsecondary institutions—used transfer services and how they characterized the services that they received relating to the transfer process. The primary research question was: How did extremely mobile, adult students characterize the transfer services received pre and posttransfer? As the research question was driven by the elements of the transfer receptive culture—one of which requires institutions understand the previous experiences of the transfer student—questions about study participants’ postsecondary histories and use of cultural capital were also included.

Qualitative research is used when a scholar wishes to understand how a person or group of persons “interprets their experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23) to address a problem (Creswell, 2013). A researcher can study the person or group by collecting a wealth of data, on site, through observations, interviews, and documents. In the United States, the qualitative tradition originates from the anthropological and sociological disciplines where field research is common (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). In the 1960s, scholars began to view education as a cultural and social environment, using qualitative research to understand the experiences of students and teachers in educational settings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative research is a tool to facilitate social change in education with a growing focus on the poor conditions in some elements of the U.S. education system (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). It is with this tradition of qualitative research

in mind that this study used qualitative research to understand the conditions in a particular higher education setting.

The philosophies of critical theory and social justice informed this qualitative research study. The goal of this study was to understand a group of students' perceptions of the conditions of the transfer services at WU. In developing the transfer receptive culture, Jain et al. (2011) used CRT to argue that students of color were disadvantaged in the transfer process. I would argue, more broadly, that students' with multiple-institution attendance histories are disadvantaged at WU as the admissions and transfer policies and procedures were developed without consideration of their attendance histories. The use of critical theory and social justice in this qualitative study contributed to the discussion on reformation of transfer services to change previous disadvantaging practices at this institution (Creswell, 2013).

Since a specific group of students at WU were the focus of this study, a case study approach was used to explore their transfer experiences. This approach provided information for institutional agents to reform transfer services to better meet the needs of students with previous postsecondary experience. The question posed for this study was: How did extremely mobile adult students characterize the transfer services received pre and post transfer? This collective, instrumental case study illuminated how students with previous postsecondary experience navigated transfer services at WU and how they characterized the transfer services at WU.

A case study is an appropriate method to gain an in-depth understanding of a real-world issue set in a particular time and space (Creswell, 2013). In this case, a specific

group of students at WU was the instrument used to provide information about the condition of transfer services (Merriam, 2009). In this environment, the case study was appropriate to explore the actions and perceptions of a group of adult students who shared the experience of having attended two or more postsecondary institutions when matriculating to WU in the 2013-2014 academic year (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These students were bounded by experience, time, and space (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2013, p. 97).

The research question in this study asked, how—one condition for selection of a case study (Yin, 2014). Another case study characteristic is that a researcher collects evidence directly from the source and uses multiple sources of data to present the in-depth description of the issue (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Case studies may include both quantitative and qualitative data collection strategies, but this study used a qualitative data collection method—interviews. Like other forms of qualitative research, the researcher was the primary data agent.

Cavanagh (n.d.) also stated that a case study is appropriate for problem-based research, while phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and narratives are more appropriate for “purpose-based” research (p.1). While this study had phenomenological aspects, the case study’s participants were bound in time and space and the product of the case study is an in-depth description. The resulting in-depth description is different from a description of the essence of the experience that would be the result of a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Grounded theory would have been appropriate if the purpose were to develop a theory; however, the purpose for this

study was to provide information for addressing a problem (Creswell, 2013). While the group in this study is part of the culture at WU, the purpose of this research was not to describe the culture of this group. Ethnography was not an appropriate research method for this study (Merriam, 2009). While case study research may contain elements of the other qualitative methods, it is the unit of analysis—or the bounded group of adult students with multiple-institution histories who matriculated to WU during the 2013-2014 academic year—that defined this case study (Merriam, 2009, p. 42). Adult students with multiple-institution histories were the informants for this qualitative study.

Participants

The participants in this study were nine adult students who enrolled at WU at age 25 or later, had transcripts from at least two other postsecondary institutions, and enrolled in the 2013-2014 academic year. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants for the study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009), a heterogeneous group of adult students who met the study criteria (Salmons, 2015). The demographic and educational characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. The sample consisted of five seniors, three juniors, and one sophomore. The study included four White males, one Black male, one mixed-race male, two Black females, and one White female. The average participant age was 33.7 years. The participants represented three of the four colleges at WU—Arts and Sciences, Business, and Science and Engineering.

Pseudonyms were used ensure participant confidentiality.

Table 1

Demographic and Educational Characteristics of Study Participants

Participant (pseudonym)	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Age-Range	School	Class
Buffalo	White	Male	35-40	Arts & Sciences	Senior
Georgia	Black	Female	30-34	Business	Junior
Georgetown	White	Male	30-34	Engineering & Applied Science	Senior
Maine	Mixed-Race	Male	30-34	Arts & Sciences	Senior
Miami	White	Male	30-34	Arts & Sciences	Junior
Minneapolis	White	Male	30-34	Business	Senior
New Jersey	Black	Female	25-29	Engineering & Applied Science	Senior
New York	Black	Male	45-49	Business	Sophomore
Utah	White	Female	30-34	Business	Junior

Students who had enrolled at WU at age 25 or later, had transcripts from at least two other postsecondary institutions, and had enrolled in the 2013-2014 academic year, served as the target population for this study. The purpose for including adults who enrolled at age 25 or later was that the average age of undergraduates at WU is age 32.6 (Community research partner, personal communication, 2013) and including this population captured the experiences that were more typical for the average student at WU. Transfer students who enrolled in the 2013-2014 school year were more likely to have participated in the full transfer transition process than those students who were in

their first semester at WU. Students with transcripts from two or more postsecondary institutions are a growing portion of undergraduates in the United States, and made-up approximately 30% of WU's baccalaureate recipients in 2013 (Office of the Registrar, personal communication, May, 2013).

While Creswell (2013) suggested case studies should include no more than "4 or 5 cases in a single study" (p. 157), the projected sample size for this study was up to 10 participants to achieve saturation, which is recommended by Merriam (2009, p. 80). In three other dissertations or research studies using qualitative methods to explore multi-institutional attendance patterns or perceptions on transfer services received, the number of participants was between 10 and 15 (Brown, 2011; Gard et al., 2012; Nakano, 2012).

The Institutional Review Boards from both WU and Walden University (IRB; approval #10-24-14-0302032) reviewed the proposed study and granted approval before data collection commenced. Upon receiving a list of the students who met the study criteria from the enrollment management office, the Provost's office sent a confidential e-mail to the qualified students inviting them to participate in the study. The e-mail (Appendix B) included details about the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of participation. Posters (Appendix C) were also displayed on bulletin boards in all of the colleges on the campus. The poster campaign was added to increase the visibility of the project as it has been noted that students do not always read their e-mail messages.

When students responded to the call for participants, they answered several questions to confirm that they were qualified to participate in the study. They were also able to ask questions about the purpose of the study, the expected length of the interview,

details about the e-mails, and procedures for the instant messaging process. Unqualified students who responded were thanked for their interest and informed that they did not meet the study requirements. While the plan was to use maximum variation sampling to select the final group of participants, the participant pool was not large enough to warrant this level of selection. However, the sample did yield students who had experienced diverse transfer patterns such as lateral, vertical, reverse, and swirling (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

When the final group of candidates was chosen, each candidate was provided a complete explanation about the purpose of the study and the methods to be used to collect data. Another strategy to help establish a relationship with the candidates was to allow each to create her/his pseudonym to be used in the final data analysis; the pseudonyms also ensure confidentiality. Providing participants with an anonymous e-mail also contributed to the development of trust and perception of confidentiality as all information exchanged in the instant messaging interview was in through an e-mail address that could not be attributed to the participant. Another method to protect the study group was to have each participant sign an informed consent form, which included information about the study, explained how data might be used, and indicated that participation was voluntary (Creswell, 2013). Before the interviews began participants were provided with guidance on using the instant messaging process and more in-depth information about the study, including information about the theoretical frameworks used, and another opportunity to decline participation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). To further respect the contributions of the participants, interview times were honored,

research criteria followed, reports used for member checking clearly show confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms, and member checking allowed adjustment of incomplete or responses (Creswell, 2013). Appreciation was provided to the participants in the form of a gift card (Creswell, 2013).

Data Collection

Instant Messaging (IM) interviews were used to collect data for this study (Appendix D). The interviews provided information to prepare an in-depth analysis of participants' perceptions of transfer services at WU (Creswell, 2013). As the semistructured interviews (Appendix D) were conducted using IM, the participants were able to take the time to reflect and share their experiences using transfer services at WU and honestly express their perceptions of the services they received. The semistructured method also provided me with the flexibility to ask appropriate follow-up and probing questions (Salmons, 2015). The collection of data from different students served as a triangulation strategy to validate the information presented (Creswell, 2012).

Instant Messaging Interviews

Using IM to conduct the interviews allowed for use of a modern technique to facilitate processing, flexible scheduling, and anonymity. Participants responded synchronously, at a designated time, without having to travel for a face-to-face interview. Prior to the scheduled interview, each participant was provided an anonymous e-mail account and password to use for the interview. Providing the anonymous e-mail accounts provided additional confidentiality as no account was could be attributed to a particular participant. The participants also received a YouTube video, which explained the process

for using GoogleChat. The participants responded to a series of questions, posted one question at a time (Oringderff, 2004; Williams, Clausen, Robertson, Peacock, & McPherson, 2012). The interview lengths ranged from 50 to 90 minutes, allowing time for probing and clarification. Upon completion of each interview, the exchange was copied from the IM feature in the GoogleChat application and edited to create a record. A reflective journal, with entries completed after each interview, allowed adjustment of some of the interview questions and ensured the use of consistent follow-up questions.

While there is an advantage of being able to observe body language and facial expressions during face-to-face interviews, the other advantages of IM interviews outweighed the disadvantages. The participants responded freely and were not biased by reacting to my facial expressions and/or the body language. I believe that participants felt free to share negative perspectives, and took some time in crafting their responses (James & Busher, 2009; Williams et al., 2012). The distance between the participants and me reduced potential negative ramifications of “power relations” (Williams et al., 2012, p. 372). There was no need to transcribe the exchange as the record of the exchange was preserved through the IM application (Oringderff, 2004). The chance of misrepresenting data due to transcription error was reduced and the time required for transcription was eliminated.

Potential disadvantages of the IM interviews were mitigated with careful planning and preparation. One potential limitation was that participants might not have access to computers or have limited keyboarding skills (Williams et al., 2012). Another limitation was the lack of detection of nonverbal communication (James & Busher, 2009; Murray &

Sixsmith, 1998). A final limitation was the ability to validate the information shared (James & Busher, 2009; Williams et al., 2012). As the participants were current students, most had access to a computer, Internet, and adequate technical capabilities to complete the survey; other students were directed to or used computers on campus for the interview. Each participant was provided with a short video to guide them in the use of IM; this video was sent with the interview e-mail address and password that participants received after agreeing to be interviewed. To mitigate the lack of nonverbal cues, participants were encouraged to use expressions, texting acronyms, and emoticons to represent emotions (Williams et al., 2012). Member checking was used to validate the information shared by the students.

One challenge of this synchronous method was that without visual clues, it was sometimes difficult for me to discern when the participant was completely finished responding. I felt compelled to respond immediately with another question and then often had to return to a previous topic to probe or request additional information. This disjointed exchange did not seem to impede the flow of the interviews. The participants seemed comfortable using the IM feature as they were generally comfortable chatting electronically even if they had never used this specific IM method before; this method is similar to texting.

A protocol was used for the interviews (Appendix D). Creswell (2012) provided examples of such protocols and recommended their use to ensure adequate attention to ethical issues, uniformity, and to “anticipate potential problems in data collection” (p. 225). The interview questions were field-tested to ensure appropriateness. Experts—an

adult transfer student, a former WU academic advisor, and a WU faculty member—reviewed the questions and provided feedback about their clarity and appropriateness for the target population. To keep track of data and emerging understandings, I developed a template for recording details about each participant and her/his interview responses. The Word template allowed me to input information about the students' attendance histories, students' perceptions of transfer services, reflections on each interview, and impressions of themes. I also used a journal to record reflect on the data collection process, adjustments to make in future interviews, and emerging themes. An Excel spreadsheet was also used to incorporate details about each participant during the review process (Yin, 2014). These methods enabled me to note recurring patterns and emerging themes.

To ensure confidentiality, all documents containing participant's identification were stored in a locked file at the study institution. In addition, the interviews were conducted on secure computers at the study institution to ensure further participant confidentiality. Each study participant was allocated a confidential e-mail to respond for the interview; passwords were changed on all e-mail addresses upon receipt of the member-checked reports. Data will be kept for 5 years upon completion of the study, after which all paper files will be shredded and electronic files on the computer deleted.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher is the data collection agent in a qualitative study, it is important to discuss the role of the researcher in the data collection process, the relationship of the researcher at the setting, and the relationship of the researcher to the participants. For this study, I, the researcher, determined the qualifications of the participants selected for the

study, interviewed the participants online, developed, themes, and reported the findings. When the research was conducted, I served as the Coordinator of the Academic Support Center and adjunct professor at the study institution. I had previously served as the interim director of academic advising and retention and as an academic advisor. However, I did not work with all transfer students and excluded any participants that had a subordinate relationship with me. My role in advising might have led to bias in development of the research questions, but also aided in the use of appropriate follow-up questions (Yin, 2014). To help mitigate researcher bias, I employed member checking and peer review.

Data Analysis

To analyze this data to address the research question on multiple-institution attendance and perceptions on transfer services, information collected during the interviews was organized into reports which were formatted to facilitate and open coding, leading to axial coding and selective coding to develop themes (Merriam, 2009). Data analysis began as soon as the initial data were collected during the interviews. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously (Merriam, 2009). As that data set was small, the data were analyzed by hand (Creswell, 2012). Constant comparative analysis was used to inductively code the information (Cavanagh, 2013) using the transfer receptive culture elements as the framework for the analysis (Jain et al., 2011). Open coding was used in the initial review of the first and subsequent interviews to create notes, memos, ideas, and suggest changes to the interview protocol (Merriam, 2009).

Upon completion of each interview, a record of the exchange was downloaded and converted into a report in a Word document. The conversion process included inserting the pseudonym for each participant reference, providing unique fonts for the interviewer questions and the participant responses, and formatting the report with wide margins and spacing for adding memos, notes, and codes. The act of converting the interview exchange into a report gave me the opportunity for an initial exploration of the data (Creswell, 2012). This process was completed over the 2-week period during which the interviews were completed. During this time, summaries of the interviews were also created and returned to the interviewees for member checking. This action yielded few revisions, but gave me the opportunity to read each report multiple times.

While reading the reports multiple times, memoing and coding continued. During memoing, I used one color ink to represent memos that referred to pretransfer processes and a different color ink to represent posttransfer processes; my observations and notes were made in a third color. I then began the open coding process to attach meaning to the lines of data by naming, describing, and categorizing the information or patterns found in the lines of text that described the participants characterization of transfer services received at WU (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). I created two tables: the first contained open codes related to pretransfer processes and services and the second table contained open codes related to posttransfer concerns. Quotes from each interview were added to the tables to show how the data were related to the codes; each participant's words were recorded in a unique color. During coding, potential themes and patterns were also noted.

The codes were then placed into a chart and organized temporally as the research question asked about the services received pre and posttransfer. The open codes were grouped into a time and process continuum, whereby axial coding was then used to organize and link the code categories (Cavanagh, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The axial coding led to a selected set of themes related to the transfer process that were used to report the results and answer the research question (Cavanagh, 2013; Merriam 2009).

The data were also examined for alternate explanations or negative cases. Yin (2014) argued that analysis should address all possible explanations that could have yielded alternated themes. Similarly, data should be examined for examples, or negative cases, that do not fit into the themes reported (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). A rich data analysis section includes a discussion of alternate explanations or negative cases to show that all of the data were included in the analysis and the perspectives of all participants were included (Yin, 2014). A discussion of the alternate explanations and negative cases is included in the data analysis section.

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to learn how extremely mobile students used and characterized transfer services at WU to inform the development of student-centered institutional practices at WU. Interviews with nine adult students with diverse attendance histories yielded a set of rich and descriptive data portraying these students' experiences as they learned about WU, applied, and transitioned to the University. Using the elements of the transfer receptive culture as the framework for the study, the research question asked how extremely mobile, adult students characterized the

transfer services received pre and posttransfer (Jain et al., 2011). Data were also collected on the participants' postsecondary histories and their use of cultural capital to facilitate their transition.

A temporal analytical framework is presented as the emerging concept of the transfer receptive culture identifies the attributes that a 4-year institution should provide to facilitate successful transfer and baccalaureate attainment of transfer students from inquiry through admission, enrollment, and degree attainment (Jain et al., 2011). An institution with a transfer receptive culture would prepare for the transition of transfer students by collecting data to understand their attendance histories and needs, provide appropriate services and resources to facilitate transition from inquiry to enrollment, and help students progress to graduation by acknowledging and complementing the experiences that transfer students bring to the receiving institution. Through examination of the semistructured research questions, and analysis using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, the following five themes emerged: (a) Incoming Expectations, (b) Transfer Experiences, (c) Institutional Barriers, (d) Institutional Support, and (e) Transfer Capital.

Presentation of Findings

The following information summarizes the findings from nine interviews conducted with adults who had attended at least two other institutions of higher education prior to enrolling at WU to learn how they used and characterized the transfer services received. The findings begin with a presentation of the collective expectations of transfer services from the extremely mobile students. The second theme is then presented to show

the postsecondary attendance histories of the study participants that informed their transfer service expectations. This foundation is followed by an outline of institutional barriers to applying and enrolling identified by the study participants. The fourth section highlights the institutional support systems acknowledged by transfer study participants. The final theme touts how the students use transfer capital to supplement the services and supports at the study institution. The section concludes with a summary of how the transfer services received at WU met the expectations of the extremely mobile transfer student participants.

Incoming Expectations

Having collectively attended 22 colleges and universities, the nine adult multiple-transfer students who participated in this research study provided a vision of the ideal transfer process. This vision was inspired by their transfer experience at WU, and their collective experiences at community colleges, private 4-year institutions, public-4-year institutions, distance-learning institutions, and other life experiences. Upon inquiring about or applying to WU, study participants envision a process where each prospective student would be assigned to an institutional agent, acting as a concierge, who would guide them through a seamless application and enrollment process. Most processes would be completed online, and, when necessary, phone, e-mail, and chat assistance would be provided by staff with excellent customer service and diversity training. Staff would understand the particular needs of transfer students, especially about transfer credits, and provide timely information and communications to allow students to make informed enrollment decisions.

One of the key pieces of decision-making information for transfer students is knowledge of how many credits will transfer to the receiving institution, and therefore, how long it will take to receive their baccalaureate degree. These extremely mobile, adult students envisioned a process that would supply a student with degree-specific transfer credit information as early as possible. Before applying, prospective students would be able to obtain an unofficial transcript evaluation. Soon after acceptance, study participants would like a degree-specific transfer credit evaluation prepared with a system that uses the most effective technology to help staff efficiently prepare evaluations to enable advisors to effectively guide transfer students in coursework to allow the student to graduate in a timely manner. The transfer credit evaluation process would be clearly outlined on the university's website and students would understand how their transcripts were reviewed and the process for appeal, if necessary.

Upon arriving to the school for advising and registration, transfer students would be warmly welcomed by the university community who understand that transfer students have different needs than first-time-in-college students. Whether through a transfer student orientation or department welcoming reception, transfer students would like to have engagements that are designed to reflect their previous postsecondary experience. Ready to resume their studies, they expect to be given the same registration advantages as other upper class students; they do not want to be treated like freshman. They eagerly anticipate the opportunity to connect with staff, faculty, and other students in their major and hope that the university would facilitate the opportunity to connect with other

transfer students, native students, academic and social organizations, faculty, department staff, and other support staff at the university.

Transfer Experiences

The postsecondary histories of extreme transfer students inform their expectations of transfer services as well as their need for specific services. One characteristic of a transfer receptive culture is to acknowledge and respect the diverse experiences that transfer students bring to their receiving institution (Herrera & Jain, 2013). This may be difficult when the classifications used to categorize students deliberately lumps them as transfer students for one semester, when in fact they may also be veterans, hold associate degrees, be student athletes, have a full-time jobs, have attended for-profit institutions, have attended college in another country, and so forth. In fact, Goldrick-Rab and Pfeffer (2009) cautioned researchers against labelling students with multiple attendance experience into a homogeneous category such as “swirling students” (p. 115) or “transfer students” as specific attendance patterns exist and characteristics are likely to be diverse. This research study confirms the heterogeneity of the sample of adult students with multiple-institution attendance histories at WU.

The study participants’ attendance patterns and related characteristics are illustrated in Table 2. One similarity in the attendance patterns of this group is that eight of the participants attended community college at some time, while the ninth participant had previously enrolled in certificate or nondegree programs. However, some attended community college directly out of high school or as part of a dual enrollment program, others began at a 4-year institution and reversed to a community college at some point

while pursuing their bachelor's degree, and others had attendance patterns that might be classified as swirling. As a result, just five of the nine participants earned an associate degree or professional certificate. Some of the participants limited attendance to the states in the metropolitan area of the study institution, while others attended institutions in up to four states and/or online. The other experiences represented by single participants include international attendance, military service, certificate program participation, and athletic scholarship. Almost all participants had periods of nonenrollment; most participants indicated that they stopped out due to suspension, to work, or for financial reasons. These diverse histories and experiences determine transfer students' needs at their destination institution as well as influence their perceptions of the transfer receptivity of WU.

Table 2

Attendance Histories of Participants

Participant	Attendance Pattern	Associate Degree	Distance Learning	Periods of Nonenrollment	Number of States
Buffalo	2-2-2-2-WU	No	No	Yes	4
Georgetown	4-2-WU	Yes	Yes	No	3
Georgia	2 ^b -4-WU	No	Yes	Yes	3
Maine	4-2-WU	Yes	Yes	Yes	3
Miami	4-4-4-4-4-2-2-2-WU	Yes	No	Yes	4
Minneapolis	2 ^a -4-WU	No	No	Yes	2
New Jersey	4-2-4-M-4-WU	No	Yes	Yes	2
New York	T-T ^c -WU	No	No	Yes	2
Utah	2-4-WU	Yes	No	Yes	2

Note. Participants are not identified to protect confidentiality. 2= Community College; 4=4-year institution; M=Military; T= Technical Program; ^aCommunity College attendance was in a dual enrollment program. ^bStudent attended community college in a different country. ^cStudent received a professional certificate.

Transfer students' processes for transferring required specific steps including: deciding to return to school after a period of nonenrollment; deciding which schools to apply to; applying to schools and receiving decisions from institutions regarding acceptance; learning which credits would transfer; and making a decision about transferring to a specific institution (Townsend, 2008). For extreme transfer students, early notification of acceptance with a degree-specific transfer credit evaluation furnishes them the information needed to compare costs, calculate time-to-degree, and make informed enrollment decisions. Before successfully enrolling for classes, study participants shared barriers that occurred while applying and enrolling. According to the

study participants, the barriers stemmed from poor communication at the receiving institution, the lack of resources for transfer credit evaluations, and uneven opportunities for orientation and other integration activities.

Institutional Barriers

Most of these experienced, adult students generally received accurate admissions information from the WU website, from institutional agents during on-site visits, and/or information from family and friends. However, many students had significant challenges communicating with institutional agents while applying and enrolling. Study participants' perceptions to these barriers were that WU had poor customer service and led them to reconsider their decision to attend WU. In spite of initial barriers, these students enrolled in WU and persisted, but encouraged the university leadership to address the application and admission and enrollment barriers.

Communication. Students in the study either completed the application online or visited the campus and worked with institutional agents to complete the application and supply the required admission materials. Students who completed the application online or had questions regarding the admissions process or their status, expressed frustration at being unable to reach institutional agents at WU to respond to their requests.

My first experience with the staff of the admissions office was not quite friendly. It was during an orientation session before the start of the fall 2013 semester and the office was beyond busy. I spent over an hour waiting in line to see someone, and the [poor] attitude of the staff at the front desk in the admissions office was apparent from the moment I walked in the door. I remember saying to myself that

day they were stressed and busy and the attitude wasn't intentional but it was still present. (Georgetown)

Utah, a business major who had applied for enrollment for fall 2013 ended up giving up on WU when she could not get the assistance necessary to complete her admissions application online.

I was all ready to go there [Nearby University] when some co-workers told me that WU was really very good and that I should give it another try by actually going to the office of admission. They said that nobody ever answers their calls or e-mails either, so I had to go down there. I did a cost-benefit analysis of the time spent [navigating WU] and high cost of Nearby University, vs WU and decided to give WU another shot. (Utah)

Minneapolis also shared his experiences trying to reach WU staff via phone:

Tried to call the school a few times, but was never able to actually speak with anyone over the phone. Everytime [sic] I called I would get a voice-mail. I left a few messages, but after that just gave up on leaving messages. I actually ended up giving up on call after probably 5 [sic] times of no answers. (Minneapolis)

In some instances students found that the technology challenges exacerbated the communications barriers. When Utah applied online and tried to access her application to make corrections, she found herself locked out of her account.

It required that I reset the password but the link didn't work, so I tried calling WU and could not get anybody to answer the phone. I also e-mailed the e-mail address

for the password lock out and never got a response. It was really frustrating at that point. (Utah)

Georgetown paid twice for delivery of transcripts from two institutions as WU staff were continually unable to verify that the documents had, in fact, been received. Utah commented that in an ideal situation the admissions process could be done online with a chat option. She shared that at one of her previous institutions “They have people for face to face, but they have some just for over the phone, e-mail and [alternate University] has chat.”

Study participants found that even when they were able to reach institutional agents in admissions on the phone or in person, they were sometimes unable to attain the information necessary to move forward with the application process. When checking on the status of his transfer credit evaluation, Georgetown was “continually told the transcripts were either received or not received depending on the day I went to the office and who was answering my question.” This required him to make multiple visits to the campus after each of the three times he ordered transcripts from his previous institutions. Georgia agreed that communications were inconsistent, stating, “even if the phone was answered the person couldn’t give me any details regarding the application.” Utah stated that the checklist provided by admission staff was great except that the residency requirements were not clearly defined: “I brought in my lease, but it was not accepted because it didn’t look official. Well, this is where I live, and that is my lease! So that was really frustrating.”

One of the first steps to matriculation is being notified of acceptance and informing the university that you plan to attend. Some of the communication challenges faced by study participants in the admissions process were continued during the matriculation stage. Several study participants were never notified that they were accepted to WU. Buffalo, who never received an acceptance letter explained, “I kept calling and asking. The[y] finally said ‘oh we have you accepted here’ after they dug through a filing cabinet.” Minneapolis submitted his application in spring 2013 and just never heard back. I had also applied to Other University at the same time, and they had responded quickly letting me know that I was accepted, so I was surprised WU was taking so long. I just kind of decided I was going to Other University, even though I wanted to go to WU since it was more affordable and closer. (Minneapolis)

Georgia also received no letter of acceptance and reported that she had to visit the university to find out that she was accepted. Transfer students would like to have early notice of acceptance so that they may learn how many transfer credits each potential institution will accept and select the institution that is the best financial, academic, social, and geographic match.

These adult students, many who were working full time and have postsecondary attendance histories that complicate admission, felt that the application and enrollment processes were not designed for or welcoming to transfer students. Georgia summarized this notion by stating,

I think Admission is the first point of contact with the university therefore it should be the most effective and efficient service provider. I know [a] few people who was [sic] discouraged by the Admissions department and resorted to other universities. Georgia

While these students had challenges in completing the admissions and enrollment processes, they did complete enrollment, usually after they visited the campus and connected with an institutional agent who helped them navigate through the admissions and/or enrollment processes. The institutional barriers resulted in participants making multiple trips to the campus, resubmitting admissions documents, delaying enrollment for one or more semesters, and filing complaints with University leaders about poor customer service.

Transfer Credit. Upon learning they have been accepted, one of the specific resources that transfer students need before transferring is a degree-specific transfer credit evaluation. The degree-specific credit evaluation affirms how many credits are accepted by the institution apply to the student's major, thereby enabling calculation of time-to degree (Ott & Cooper, 2014). A degree-specific transfer credit evaluation is even more important for students who have attended multiple and diverse institutions of higher education. Marling (2013) stated that institutions receiving transfer students "have an obligation to provide timely degree audits, preferably before enrollment so that students can make informed decisions prior to incurring significant financial expenses" (p. 84). While many institutions require students to make a deposit before receiving a transfer

credit evaluation (Ott & Cooper, 2014), WU simply requires that students confirm intent to enroll before a transfer credit evaluation is performed.

Once a WU student confirms intent to enroll, a general transfer credit evaluation is performed in the Office of Admissions. This general transfer credit evaluation lets transfer students know how many of their previous credits will be accepted by WU, however it does not inform them how many of their credits actually count toward their degree. Even so, the process of getting the general transfer credit evaluation is still a lengthy process, often taking over a month or longer after students have been accepted and confirmed their intent to enroll. The study participants noted that dearth of resources available for this process which often contributed to late or delayed registration. “The woman that reviewed them [transfer credits] said she had a stack of transfer students to evaluate. I wanted to start in summer of 2013 but then I waited until the fall of 2013” (Maine). “my transcript was still being evaluated. I had to register late for my classes” (Georgia).

I also had a terrible experience when it came to getting my transcripts evaluated. I had to pay to have them mailed to the school 3 [sic] separate time[s] because I was continually told the transcripts were either received or not received depending on the day I went to the office and who was answering my question. ...I [then] waited 2 months for a credit evaluation. (Georgetown)

Upon receiving their general transfer credit evaluation from the Office of Admission, students were then required to visit faculty advisors to determine their degree-specific credits.

Ott and Cooper argued (2014) that colleges should provide early degree-specific transfer credit evaluations prior to student enrollment for a “coherent, navigable, and transparent transfer process” (p. 24). The participants in this study described a degree-specific transfer credit evaluation process that was not clearly delineated, required students to visit multiple institutional agents, and often stretched into their second semester of attendance at WU. The [transfer credit evaluation] process took a few months to really get correct,” stated Minneapolis who summarized participants’ experiences: “I would not call the [transfer credit evaluation] process at WU user-friendly. It seemed like I had to do more leg work than I had to at Midwest U.” Miami, who had earned an Associate degree with 65 credits, was surprised that WU only accepted 52 credits. “I’m still not happy about how few credits transferred from my previous schools...I honestly believe it is a scam to get more money out of transfer students...” stated Miami who did not believe the process to be transparent.

Since WU’s extreme transfer students have attended a diverse set of institutions, they expect the services and technologies used to be similar to those received at other institutions. New Jersey, who attended Close Distance Learning University which boasts a state-of-the art transfer evaluation system providing degree-specific credit evaluations in days rather than weeks or months, attested, “ I believe the paper outline [provided by WU advisors] is so outdated and not futuristic”. Minneapolis also suggested a technological fix: “Maybe through an online program by uploading transcripts and have it identify potentially transferable credits that could be applied to the chosen major. I would have found something like this very helpful.”

Many transfer students did not realize that the initial evaluation was not degree-specific. Transfer students must take their general transfer credit evaluation to their major department representative to facilitate a degree-specific audit; they may also need to visit an agent to evaluate their general education credits.

Several study participants reported that the full degree-specific transfer credit evaluation may not have been accurately completed until their second semester at WU. Maine saw four different advisors in the program department to have major credits evaluated and to be advised before he could register. Students described a process that required them to visit three to five institutional agents with the process not being completed until their second semester at WU. For example Georgetown “was originally scheduled to start in fall 2013, but couldn’t start until spring 2014 while waiting out the transcript [evaluation] problem.” Utah also recounted errors in her evaluation: “Originally some of my...classes didn’t get classified properly so I ended up retaking a math class and a computer class.”

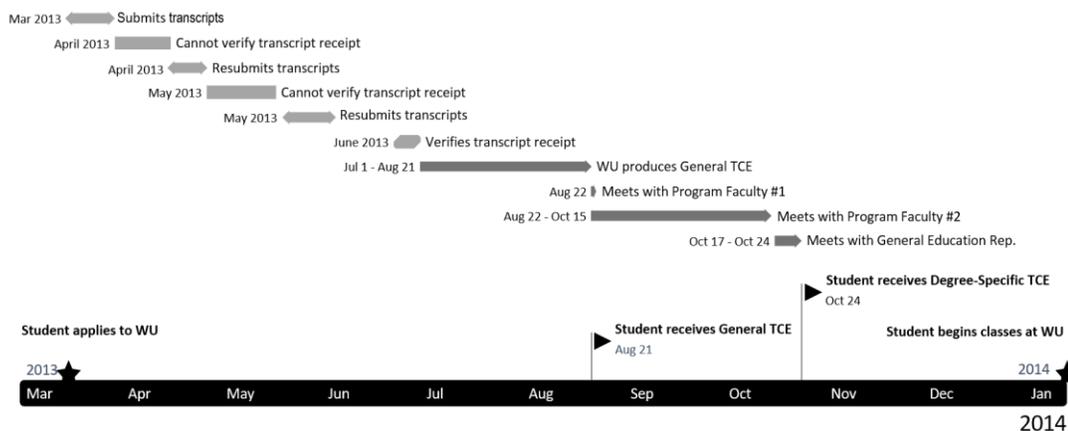


Figure 1. Timeline of the process of receiving the general and degree specific transfer credit evaluation for a WU student. Stars represent the application and enrollment dates for the student. Flags represent the date that the student received the general and degree specific transfer credit evaluation.

Figure 1 demonstrates the process that Georgetown, an Information Technology senior, experienced when applying to WU and getting his transfer credits evaluated. He applied in March 2013 and submitted transcripts from 2 postsecondary institutions. He twice went to WU and was unable to verify that the transcripts were received and twice resubmitted transcripts from two other universities. In June 2013, he verified that the transcripts had been received. When he attended Transfer Student Orientation in August he learned that his general transfer credit evaluation had not been completed. He returned to the admissions office and after a lengthy wait, consulted with Mr. Blue who completed his general transfer credit evaluation. He then visited a faculty member in the program for a degree-specific evaluation. There were differences in the course names, so the student then visited a second program faculty member who continued work on the the degree-specific evaluation components. At that point the student missed the registration period for the fall 2013. He had several meetings with the second program faculty member to complete the degree-specific evaluation. To complete the process, the student then visited the General Education Department representative for a decision regarding his general education credits. Based on the Georgetown's interview, I estimate that this process took 8 months. The student waited until the spring 2014 semester to register for classes.

Providing inefficient and "late" (Ott & Cooper, 2014) transfer credit evaluation negatively affected some students with multiple-institution histories by requiring them to spend additional funds to submit transcripts, take extra classes, or delay matriculation. In fact while some of these transfer students made no complaints about process, almost all shared elements of the process that were not completed until their second semester at

WU. Some of these challenges might have been mitigated during the transfer student orientation session, where new students have the opportunity to meet with faculty for advising and registration, but most of the study participants did not attend the orientation or did not attend the transfer-specific orientation.

Orientation. WU offers sessions of new student orientation targeted to transfer students, however most of the study participants missed the transfer-specific orientation session, which culminates with students visiting their major departments for degree-specific advising and registration. Grites (2013) stated that orientation is “perhaps the most critical transition activity for transfer students” (p. 66) as the receiving institution is able to document the differences in the new institution for incoming transfers. Yet, scheduling conflicts, lack of interest, or late enrollment kept more than half of the participants from the new transfer student orientation sessions; three students who actually participated in an orientation session found aspects of the session inadequate.

Some of the participants apparently attended a general new student orientation session, rather than one targeted for transfer students. In his negative review, Miami stated:

It just missed the mark by a country mile...The tour was overcrowded...you couldn't hear what the tour guide was saying...none of the guides were engaging...It kind of set the tone for the amount of school spirit there would be around here. (Miami)

Minneapolis found the tour helpful, but thought “that the orientation did not seem at all tailored to transfer students. It seems like they just treated us all as if we were new

students.” For these extreme transfer students, the global introduction to the WU seemed to miss the opportunity to acknowledge the experiences of these transfer students and share WUs unique culture and policies and procedures. which would be an appropriate component in a transfer receptive culture.

Georgetown, on the other hand, attended a transfer-targeted new student orientation and found the general session successful. However, he was less satisfied with the break-out sessions designed for students to meet representatives of their degree program and be advised and guided through registration. Georgetown’s major representative “was a graduate student who was new to the campus herself, and couldn’t answer questions about locations or offices, or how to get registered for class.” While students were told during the general session that they would be advised for registration based on their unofficial transcripts, the department informed students they had to wait for the transcript evaluation to be completed before they could register. Georgetown was forced to wait until the next semester to begin courses. Minneapolis had a better experience during his department visit where he met with a dean and program chair. He was provided with a degree-specific transfer credit evaluation and was able to register for classes.

The failure to engage transfer students in a transfer student orientation session is a missed opportunity for both the institution and the new student. The orientation session is a dedicated time for faculty and other university staff to engage with students and learn about their diverse histories and offers the students the opportunity to learn about the services that can directly support their social and academic needs (Ward-Roof &

Cawthon, 2004). It is also a time for the university to impart information about academic expectations, the history and culture of the university, and unique opportunities available to students (Grites, 2013; Ward Roof & Cawthon, 2004). As more than half of the study participants did not engage in this activity, the opportunity cost is immeasurable. These experienced transfer students used their education and life experiences to successfully navigate the transition process and engage with institutional agents to discover and learn about the campus resources that could facilitate their transition and persistence in spite of their absence in the transfer student orientation session.

Institutional Support

Numerous scholars (Marling, 2013; Miller, 2013; Tinto, 2012) have shown that students who bond quickly and purposefully with their new institution are more likely to persist (Handel, 2011). An institution with a transfer receptive culture has an environment that welcomes and supports transfer students to facilitate the bonding and adjustment process (Handel, 2011; Jain et al., 2011; Laanan et al., 2010-2011). This type of supportive environment is inherent in HBCUs, such as WU, designed to support and prepare underrepresented, and often underprepared students as they pursue postsecondary degrees (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Richards & Awokoya, 2012). Such elements that often distinguish HBCUs from PWIs—family-like environments, nurturing faculty and staff, small classroom sizes—also attribute to a transfer affirming culture (Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). While the study participants each identified elements of transfer services that could be improved upon, they also acknowledged

cultural elements that facilitated integration, including supportive staff, warm and family-like departments, and helpful and friendly students.

Many transfer students who visited and applied to WU appreciated the supportive staff and atmosphere. New Jersey, who had negative experiences at another HBCU declared, “It was a breath of fresh air...the staff were always professional and respectable...” New York also described positive experience stating, “My experience was amazing. I met with Ms. Lime in Admissions and she was instrumental in ensuring my application and subsequent onboarding to the university was a success.” After a challenging experience during the admissions process, Utah had eventually decided to attend other postsecondary institutions in the metropolitan area. When giving WU a second chance, she was able to connect with supportive institutional agents and students who made her feel welcome.

Actually despite the initial issues, everyone that I worked with in admissions and at the student help desk was very friendly and helpful. That set me at ease about attending. I realized, as I heard the phone ringing and not being answered that they were all just very busy. I felt very welcomed by the staff, students and faculty. (Utah)

Some study participants identified specific institutional agents in specific units who were immensely helpful in their integration to and persistence at WU. Miami, a student athlete found “everyone in the athletic department to be overwhelmingly helpful” but attributed his ideal transfer process to one specific staff member in the athletic department. “She was the presence in this institution that made you feel like the school

cared about every aspect of your life. Georgia too indicated a specific academic advisor who “is the reason I am still at WU.” Buffalo also pointed to a department chair and dean who contributed to the “family-like atmosphere”. Laanan et al. (2010-2011) suggested that the units at the receiving institution need to be cognizant of the need to provide a friendly and welcoming environment to facilitate transfer student adjustment. In addition to the welcoming and helpful environments in the academic support, department, and athletic units, students pointed to the friendliness of the students as an important contribution to their continued persistence.

Perhaps the transfer affirming culture of the students is a reflection of the dominance of transfer and returning students on the WU campus (community research partner, 2013). New Jersey, who had attended a four other postsecondary institutions and been in the military, declared, “The students were friendly and social, they made you feel at home and welcoming.” Utah, who did not attend new student orientation, reported that “everyone is so nice. I just ask if I need anything.” Miami also reported that “Students were all great and welcoming. They are all hungry for a ‘real’ college experience.” Students themselves are an element of the transfer receptive culture as student-governed organizations can create and customize programs to reflect the growing numbers of transfer students (Laanan et al. 2010-2011).

Transfer Capital

In addition to the supportive institutional agents and welcoming students, study participants found that their previous college and life experiences helped them transition to WU. They cited their knowledge of the application processes, comfort with asking

questions, ability to connect with insititutional agents, and maturity as characteristics that facilitated their transition. Those who had transferred multiple times acquired confidence as they had navigated transfers in multiple systems and overcome challenges at their previous institutions. Their previous experiences helped these study participants use multiple forms of capital—social, transfer, and cultural—to navigate their transition to WU (Bahr et al., 2013).

New York, Utah, Georgia, and New Jersey all described the social connections they used to learn the culture of WU. They felt that traveling to the WU campus to connect with insititutional agents would smooth their admission and transition process (Bahr et al., 2009). Palmer and Gasman (2008) suggested that HBCUs are rich in social capital and use social networks to achieve educational goals; study participants cited the use of social capital as instrumental in their successful transitions to WU.

I also interviewed at Same City School of Business and spoke with an Academic Advisor who said I should try WU...[at WU] I met with Ms. Lime in Admission and she was instrumental in ensuring my application and subsequent onboarding to the university was a success. (New York)

Georgia stated, “Ms. Tweed assisted me greatly. She ensured that my transcripts were evaluated and it was possible for me to start Fall 2013. “ New Jersey visited several offices and reported that “The VA [Veteran’s Affairs] rep he assured me my classes would be paid for and it was handled that day.” The use of social capital may have been learned from students’ previous postsecondary experiences’ which contributed to the development of transfer student capital.

Extreme transfer students also used their “accumulated knowledge about how to negotiate the transfer process” (Bahr et al., 2013; Laanan et al., 2010), or transfer student capital, to facilitate their transition. Minneapolis mentioned the importance of previous experience regarding transfer credit evaluation. He disclosed, “If this had been my first time transferring credits, I would have found WU’s process more difficult.” Buffalo agreed sharing that through his life experience he learned to keep “nagging” until his mission was accomplished. He concluded, “If I was a younger student, I would have given up on the process.” Georgetown concurred:

My previous experience helped me remain on top of the process. I tried to continually check in during the admission process to make sure all my documents were received and.... I tried to be very proactive when it came to working with my advisors to make sure I didn’t repeat courses that were covered by my transfer credits. (Georgetown)

Having specific transfer experience helped the study participants know when to “nag” and use social capital to accomplish the necessary tasks for to transition and enroll in WU. Other forms of capital were also essential in drivers in extreme transfer students’ successful transitions.

Cultural capital includes the experiences and backgrounds students bring to their postsecondary experience to help them attain a baccalaureate degree (Handel, 2011). In addition to previous postsecondary experience, these adult transfer students also identified work experience, life experience, and basic maturity as strategies used to cope

and persist. Utah explained that her work experience has helped make more her more tolerant:

I think I have some communication and organizational advantages. I don't get as frustrated as quickly. I also tend to look at the staff as peers and understand that they are people who are trying to do their job. (Utah)

Other adult transfer students attribute their improved decision-making skills to maturity.

New York reported that his life experiences "allowed me to form new relationships and friendships with my professors, peers, and some of the administrators to guide me in my decisions. Georgia agreed: "I feel being more mature in my decision making proces [sic] I knew exactly what courses I wanted to take and which University will be a better fit."

This study has affirmed the diverse capital that transfer students bring to WU through their varied postsecondary histories, work experiences, and life events.

Negative Case Analysis

Three discrepant cases emerged during the analysis of the interviews. Negative case analysis functions to show findings in qualitative research that do not fit the themes presented in the findings (Creswell, 2013). Merriam (2009) encouraged researchers to comb the data for alternative explanations to help mitigate bias. In two of the cases, the students had characteristics that were unique among the participant group; one was a student athlete, while the second had veteran's status. The third example is not a case, but a pattern that was not included in the analysis, housing. The information from theses cases helps to develop a fuller picture of the use of and characterization of services and needs of adult transfer students.

Unlike other study participants, Miami did not describe any particular interactions with the admissions department or with the transfer credit review process during his interview. As a student athlete, Miami's admissions and transfer credit evaluation were largely handled by the staff in the athletic department. Coaches and other staff were instrumental in ensuring that admissions documents were received and processed and that transfer credits were applied to the major. Miami did list his coaches and other athletic department staff as being "overwhelmingly helpful" and stated:

My personal journey through the transfer process was ideal. Most of that was due to one person Ms. Black. She was the presence in the institution that made you feel like the school cared about every aspect of your life.

Miami had a concierge-like experience through the registration process, as the staff in the athletic department shepherded his documents through the admissions process, made sure that key milestones were met, and continued this effort through registration, and beyond. Similar to Miami's experience, Flowers, Luzyynski, and Zamani-Gallaher (2015) found that transfer student athletes depended on a narrow on-campus support group concentrated in the athletic department.

New Jersey, a veteran who worked with the Veteran's Affairs representative to ensure that her courses would be paid for, would have appreciated more support from a concentrated source on campus. She asserted, "We need to do a better job of helping Veteran students." This student had to do additional leg-work in completing transition tasks, adding the Veteran's Affairs representative to the list of at least eight other institutional agents who assisted her through the transition process. As there was only one

veteran in the sample, there was not enough data to detect patterns in among members of this group.

A topic that was raised in different ways by three study participants and bears mention is housing or interactions with the housing staff. Miami and New York reported negative interactions with the staff in student housing. New York shared that his needs were not met by the staff in this office and that they lacked customer service skills. Both expressed that the office was not student-centered and inflexible to change. Maine, on the other hand, found housing on his own, but indicated that he had to drop out of school due to being burglarized; he indicated that he did not feel safe in the neighborhood that he chose to live in. These examples suggest that housing may be an area that staff need to consider when evaluating the services provided for transfer students; evaluation is a vital posttransfer element in a transfer receptive culture (Jain et al., 2011).

Evidence of Quality

It is important to incorporate methods and strategies to ensure accuracy and credibility at all stages of the research process. Triangulation, negative case analysis, and member checking, and peer debriefing were used to establish credibility during the data collection and analysis phases (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). In this study, triangulation occurred through the collection of information from multiple informants and member checking (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). Nine informants provided data for this study; the informants had diverse multiple-institution attendance patterns and represented different majors at WU. Member checking occurred upon completion of the interviews when participants were invited to review their responses to the interview

questions (Creswell, 2012). Each participant was sent a copy of the interview report within of the interview and was allowed one week to review the document for accuracy, amend responses, and add details that might have been left out in the initial interview; most participants made not substantive changes. Negative cases were presented and explained and alternate explanations were provided for data that did not fit into the reported themes (Creswell, 2013; Lodico et al., 2010). A peer and committee members reviewed findings and helped me evaluate the findings presented in the data analysis report (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The peer reviewed the conclusions and assumptions and provided alternate analytical and thematic perspectives (Lodico et al., 2010). The committee members assigned by Walden University also reviewed the data analysis process and recommended alternatives to the process and the presentation of the findings.

To provide other researchers with the tools to evaluate this study, additional strategies established dependability and transferability (Merriam, 2009). A detailed audit trail provided an accounting of the decisions made regarding protocols, data collection procedures, and data analysis considerations throughout the study (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). Reports of each interview were created from each interview. The thick, rich, description provided in the results section of the study included quotes and diverse perspectives to demonstrate that meaningful and honest engagement occurred during the data collection process (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). These strategies enable another researcher to replicate the study, determine transferability to

another setting, and understand the rationale for decisions made during the research process (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Conclusion

A qualitative case study was selected to explore how extremely mobile, adult students characterized the transfer services received pre and posttransfer to address the problem that students with multiple institution attendance histories are disadvantaged as the admissions and transfer policies and procedures were developed without consideration of their attendance histories. A set of semistructured questions were posed to nine participants who were selected using a purposeful, criterion-based process. To ensure the ethical treatment of the participants, each signed a consent form and was assured confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and other protective measures. Data analysis was conducted using the inductive method of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding with consideration of the elements of the transfer receptive culture framework. Accuracy and credibility were achieved through the electronic capture of the interview reports, member checking, negative case analysis, peer review, and journaling.

The purpose of this study was to learn how extremely mobile, nontraditional-aged students—adults who have attended three or more postsecondary institutions—used and characterized transfer services at WU. The primary research question, “How did extremely mobile, adult students characterize the transfer services received pre and posttransfer?” was framed from the elements of the transfer receptive culture (Jain et al., 2011). Findings were presented in the framework of the transfer receptive culture, which was modified to consider the preparation, transition, and progression actions of the

receiving institution rather than just pre and posttransfer activities (Jain et al., 2011; Collins, Navarro, & Stinard, 2011). The perceptions of the nine extremely mobile adult students were that WU staff, faculty, and students provided a helpful, friendly, and supportive environment, but the transfer services did not meet the standards of a transfer receptive culture. As defined in the introduction of the framework, a 4-year institution with a transfer receptive culture has a university-wide commitment to provide the transitional, academic, social, and financial supports for students to transfer and efficiently achieve a baccalaureate degree (Jain et al., 2011).

The students, a heterogeneous group of adults with vertical, reverse, and swirling postsecondary attendance histories at 22 different institutions in the U.S. and abroad, described the type of transfer experience they expected at WU. While anticipating a streamlined, customer-focused, and technology-driven application, enrollment, and integration process, the study participants did not perceive WU to be prepared with appropriate application methods, communication systems, and technological supports to provide a trouble-free admissions process for students with multiple-institution histories. During the transition phase leading up to and including the enrollment period, study participants described a transfer credit evaluation program that lacked human resources, transparency, and efficiency. Most of the students did not participate in orientation, an activity described by Grites (2013) as a critical transition activity (p. 66) that should be provided by the receiving institution. The adult study participants were required to supplement WU's transfer services with their accumulated capital—cultural, transfer, and social—to successfully manage their transition to WU.

An institution with a transfer receptive culture would understand the specific needs of multiple-institution transfer students who require customized and early information about programs, transfer credits, and financial support to make a decision about transferring to particular information (Townsend 2008). While study participants found WU to be conveniently located and affordable, the barriers resulting from lack of early notification of admission and degree-specific transfer credit information led some of the study participants to strongly consider enrolling in other institutions. While persisting through enrollment and beyond, the students found that the University's failure to provide an early, degree-specific transfer credit evaluation prevented them from calculating time- and cost-to degree prior to enrollment (Ott & Cooper, 2014); this information is critical for informed decision-making for transfer students with multiple attendance histories (Marling, 2013). Lack of participation in orientation, also a barrier to successful transition and progression, was a missed opportunity for both students and WU. Orientation gives the receiving institution an opportunity to clarify academic expectations and information about the institution's history and culture; it provides students with the opportunity to learn about the services available to support their social, academic, and administrative needs (Grites, 2013; Ward-Roof & Cawthon, 2004). The orientation and other transitional programs give the transfer receptive university the opportunity to acknowledge the lived experiences that students bring to their new campus and provide, and supportive services. The findings show that transfer students would like for WU to use modern technology to facilitate the admission and transfer credit evaluation processes, provide a concierge-like communication services to shepherd

students from inquiry to matriculation, and respect the life-experiences of transfer students and refrain from treating them like freshman.

In the next section, I outline the process for the formation of a white paper to address how the research findings can contribute to a set of recommendations to address the problem. The white paper includes research-based recommendations for consideration as WU considers actions to lead to a more transfer receptive culture with student-centered practices. The recommendations are designed to increase yield, increase retention, improve customer service, and ultimately, improve the reputation of WU.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of the doctoral study was to collect information about the perceptions of transfer services received by adult transfer students at WU. The study results informed the development of student-centered transfer practices at WU. Earlier in the decade, institutional agents identified weaknesses in transfer practices and policies, but the perspectives of transfer students had not been gathered to inform recommendations for changes in transfer services. The results of the qualitative research and analysis are presented with recommendations for student-centered practices to develop a more transfer receptive culture at WU in a position paper, *Crafting a Student-Centered Transfer Culture* (Appendix A). Three recommendations are presented in the position paper: (a) collect and analyze data on transfer students; (b) improve systems in the Office of Admissions to receive and process electronic transcripts; and (c) provide early, degree-specific transfer credit evaluations. Section 3 opens with the foundational elements of the project (goals, rationale, and literature review) and continues with the project description, and concludes with the project evaluation plan.

Description and Goals

The project for this study is a policy recommendation presented in the form of a position paper. A type of a white paper, a position paper is a persuasive document designed to help decision-makers and other stakeholders understand a problem and consider a particular solution (Stelzner, 2007). The problem addressed in the position paper is that students with multiple attendance histories are disadvantaged as admission

and transfer policies and practices were developed without consideration of transfer students' attendance histories. Student study participants' perceived that some of these policies and practices created institutional barriers, particularly in applying, enrolling, and progressing. Based on the study findings and with consideration of emerging themes, current research, contemporary best practices, and the goals of the study institution, three actions to create a more student-centered transfer culture are recommended for WU.

The three recommendations address institutional barriers arising from limited pretransfer resources of WU as a receiving institution. WU could provide more student-centered transfer practices by collecting and analyzing data on transfer students, improving admissions systems, and providing early degree-specific transfer credit evaluations for incoming transfer students. The adoption of more student-centered transfer practices will help WU attain the following institutional goals: (a) increase the yield rate for transfer students, (b) increase retention of transfer students, and (c) enhance customer service (community partner, personal communication, July 2015). The project goals are aligned with goals of the enrollment unit and the university's strategic plan.

Rationale

White papers are used by education associations, education policy organizations, and universities to provide higher education leaders with research-based practice and policy recommendations. Such papers may also be called background reports, thought papers, position papers, or simply reports (Hyde, n.d.; Taylor & Bragg, 2015). White papers have historically been used within government agencies to inform a diverse set of decision-makers about solutions to identified problems (Gordon & Graham, 2003). In the

modern era, the white paper is a flexible tool used by businesses, governments, and nonprofit entities to educate specific audiences about a problem, propose a research-based solution to the problem, and persuade the decision-makers to adopt a particular solution (Stelzner, 2010). The white paper prepared for this project contains information about the problem of transfer services at this unique HBCU for decision-makers at the institution, offers solutions to address the problem, and supports the solutions offered with research, emerging theories, current literature, and proven best-practices.

The emerging concept of transfer receptive culture (TRC) informs the recommendations for the project to address the deficiencies in transfer services at WU. Four-year institutions with a transfer receptive culture would have a campus-wide commitment to providing resources to facilitate successful transfer and baccalaureate attainment among transfer students (Herrera & Jain, 2013; Jain et al., 2011). The study findings identified institutional barriers to transfer students' successful and efficient transfer, enrollment, and progress at WU. While many of the institutional barriers impact the successful enrollment of all students, the purpose of the study was to understand the how students with multiple-institution histories characterized transfer services. The barriers that disproportionately affect transfer students were addressed in the position paper. Although the transfer receptive culture identifies pre and posttransfer elements, this position paper addresses the foundational barriers to transferring identified by the study participants (Jain et al., 2011). Two pretransfer actions of a transfer receptive culture call for the transfer of students to be an institutional priority with appropriate resources provided for transfer students prior to their arrival (Jain et al., 2011). The final

TRC element presented by Jain et al. is that institutions assess and evaluate transfer services and programs, an activity that cannot be accomplished without adequate foundational work. As a result, the first recommendation is for WU to collect demographic, attendance history, and performance data on transfer students to enable creation, assessment, and evaluation of programs and services. The second recommendation is for the institution to improve the technological systems in the Office of Admission to receive a higher portion of transcripts electronically and automatically process a greater portion of transcripts. The final recommendation is to provide early degree-specific transfer credit evaluations, a pretransfer activity that would enhance transfer students' transition experience.

Review of the Literature

The first section of the literature review addresses the genre of the white paper while the second section reviews the literature on the best practices for collecting data on transfer students, use of electronic transcript delivery, and transfer credit evaluation. The following search terms, and variations thereof were used to locate literature on the white paper genre: *white paper*, *position paper*, *policy paper*, *writing a white paper*, *white paper use in education*, and *white paper and transfer students*. At Walden University, the databases searched included: Thoreau, Academic Search Complete, Educational Research Complete, and ERIC. Similar searches were conducted at the university partner library as well as through Google Scholar.

White Paper Genre

The genre selected for the project is a policy recommendation, otherwise called a position paper. Gordon and Graham (2003) identified the position paper as a common form of a white paper which “explains and advocates a standard, trend, or technology” (p. 3) and discusses the rationale for the adoption of a particular position. While there are numerous definitions of a white paper, the common standards are that it is persuasive, presents a problem, includes research-based information to educate the target audience, and offers a solution in fewer than 12 pages (Gordon & Graham, 2003; Kantor, 2009; Stelzner, 2007). Although the term white paper originally referred to a government report used to provide legislators with background information, the medium has evolved for broader uses, particularly as a marketing tool (Kantor, 2009; Stelzner, 2007). Typically designated as a tool for business, white papers are commonly used in the education sector.

The literature search revealed white papers crafted for the higher education community in many formats. A Google Scholar search using *white paper* and *higher education* for the time range 2010-2015 yielded 16,900 results. Educational organizations, colleges and universities, and policy organizations routinely release white papers to discuss challenges and solutions to internal and external stakeholders. White papers about transfer students and practices have been crafted by Sienna College (Office of Institutional Research, 2014), The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Taylor & Bragg, 2015), The Institute for Higher Education Leadership Policy (Cunningham, Park, & Engle, 2014), The National Student Clearinghouse (Hossler et al., 2012), and the

American Council on Education (Lakin, Seymour, Nellum, & Crandall, 2015), among others. These selections provide ample evidence of white paper tradition among education entities at the institution, state, and national levels.

As white papers are popular as marketing tools, some communications and business scholars advocate assigning white paper projects in college courses. Such assignments can help students develop marketable skills in a variety of fields including engineering, communications, business, and higher education. Willerton (2012) paired students with clients to develop a white paper during a business communications course. Powell (2012) guided students through the development of a white paper and used a public relations rubric for grading. Both instructors shared positive student feedback on the white paper project where students developed skills in client relations, technical writing, research, and networking. Students reported adding the white paper to their portfolios and using the assignment to help secure internships and jobs (Powell, 2012; Willerton, 2012).

Both instructors recommended Stelzner's works on how to write a white paper (Powell, 2012; Willerton, 2012). Stelzner (2010) and other white paper experts agreed upon many of the common elements of the white paper. Both Stelzner and Kantor (2009) recommended that white papers not exceed 12 pages. While Stelzner recommended that writers open with an introduction, others suggested that white papers open with an executive summary (Kantor, 2009; Sakamuro, Stolley, & Hyde, 2010). Other recommended sections included: (a) background covering the problem, (b) solutions, (c) a conclusion with a call to action, (d) reference list, and (e) a cover page (Kantor, 2009).

Suggested design features include high quality graphics, use of color, bullet lists, white space, headers and page numbers, callouts, a reader-friendly layout, and publishing in a pdf format (Gordon & Graham, 2003, Kantor, 2009; Sakamuro et al., 2010; Stelzner, 2007; Stelzner, 2010). The position paper developed for this project incorporated most of the commonly recommended sections and design elements.

The final position paper is longer than the recommended standard of 12 pages. The longer format of 20 to 30 pages is consistent with sample documents written for consumption in higher education (Cunningham et al., 2014; Lakin et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2009; Office of Institutional Research, 2014). The position paper opens with a cover page and executive summary, which are common elements of academic position papers (Kantor, 2009; Stelzner, 2007). Internal pages of the position paper include background covering the problem, methodology and results of the research study, as well as recommendations to solve the problem (Sakamuro, et al., 2010; Stelzner, 2007). As recommended by Kantor (2009), the paper's conclusion reinforces the message and proposed solutions. For credibility and readability, the following features are also included: large font, color, bullet lists, white space, sidebars and callouts, tables and charts (Kantor, 2009; Stelzner, 2007; Stelzner, 2010). The header color is one of the official colors of the study institution.

Transfer Services

The second section of the literature review presents evidence from recent literature that supports the study's findings on transfer services that are presented in the position paper. The following search terms, and variations thereof, were used to locate

literature on transfer services and the transfer receptive culture: *transfer center*, *transfer student*, *transfer credit evaluation*, *transfer receptive culture*, *electronic transcripts*, and *electronic transcript delivery*. At Walden University, the databases searched included Thoreau, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Central, Sage, Ed IT Lib, Educational Research Complete, and ERIC. Similar searches were conducted at the university partner library as well as Google Scholar. Saturation of peer-reviewed literature was achieved when studies were repeatedly referenced, but this peer-reviewed literature did not satisfactorily cover the transfer service content. The academic literature was supplemented with white papers, conference presentations, and technology-based guidelines for transcript delivery and transfer credit evaluation systems.

The resulting literature review on transfer services is comprised of three sections. The first section provides an overview of literature and best practices for data collection on transfer students. The second section reviews the literature related to electronic transcript delivery history and practices. The final section provides an overview of the literature on transfer credit evaluation practices. Each section references elements of the transfer receptive culture; however literature on the emerging culture is still relatively scarce.

Data Collection. Institutions of higher education collect a wealth of data to attract students and provide appropriate support services to facilitate graduation. Scholars addressing best practices for transfer services advocated the collection of data on transfer students to respect adequately the experiences that transfer students bring to their receiving institutions and to understand their needs (College Board, 2011; Marling, 2013;

Poisel & Joseph, 2011; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). Data collection and analysis enables the receiving institution to make decisions to fulfill its mission, provide services to effectively attract and enroll transfer students, provide resources to facilitate progression, track transfer students through graduation, and evaluate programs (Fann, 2013; Fretwell, 2012; Jain et al., 2011; Miller, 2013). A common recommendation called for institutions to define transfer student to enable reliable comparison and internal consistency (Handel, 2011; Marling, 2013). The collection of demographic data were prescribed to understand the characteristics of transfer students, compare them with other students, and provide the foundation to build performance measures (Davies, Rex, & Gonzalez, 2015; Marling 2013). Performance measures are recommended to compare groups of transfer students across cohorts and to native students (Davies et al., 2015). Herrera and Jain (2013) also advised receiving institutions to collect information about transfers from the most popular feeder community colleges to determine how to expend recruitment energies.

Definitions of transfer student differ among scholars and postsecondary institutions. Varying definitions make it difficult to identify the population to receive services, measure performance of transfer students, and compare performance rates across institutions and states (Marling, 2013). Shapiro et al. (2015), in their documentation of national transfer and mobility trends, defined transfer and mobility as “any change in a student’s institution of enrollment irrespective of timing, direction, or location of the move, and regardless of whether any credits were transferred from one institution to another” (p. 6). The Department of Education conducted Longitudinal studies in 1996-2001 and 2000-2001 and used different definitions for “transfer (Peter &

Cataldi, 2005). In the first data set, a student who “left one institution to enroll in another and remained at the destination institution for at least 4 months” was considered to have transferred, while in the latter data set a transfer “attended more than one institution and reported that they did so in order to transfer” (Peter & Cataldi, 2005, p. 7). Adelman (2006) distinguished transfer and multi-institutional attendance defining transfer as “a migration that is formally recognized by systems rules, a sequential movement from a de jure status in one institution to a de jure status a second institution (or third, or fourth)” (p. 62). At Champlain College, Laporte (2015) defined a transfer student as “anyone who has attended a college or university after high school graduation” and the then migrated to Champlain. When addressing the challenges of calculating a community college to 4-year transfer rate, Handel and Williams (2012) showed how differing definitions of transfer yielded dissimilar transfer rate calculations. Handel and Williams recommended that research entities develop a universal definition of transfer that both 2- and 4-year institutions could use to assess performance (p. 61). A standard definition of transfer for 4-year institution would make comparative analysis of transfer and transfer student performance feasible.

The collection and analysis of demographic data inform the development of resources to facilitate transition and progression of transfer students. Educational organizations and transfer scholars recommended the collection of the following demographic data: gender, race/ethnicity, age, full-time/part-time status, first generation status, veteran status, employment, and Pell grant eligibility (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2014; Davies et al., 2015; Marling,

2013). This demographic information combined with information about previous postsecondary institutions attended and performance—college/school attended, credits earned at each institution, core and general education coursework completed, GPA, and associate degree attainment—is necessary to understand the population of transfer students and their unique needs (Davies, et al., 2015; Marling, 2013). Jain et al. (2011) and Marling (2013) counseled that data be centralized; however, Marling further suggested that data collection and assessment occur at both institutional and department levels (p.78). The collection of such demographic and institutional history data enables the collection of performance data.

The collection, analysis, and reporting of performance data enables 4-year institutions to make data-driven decisions regarding support services and enrollment targets (Davies et al., 2015; Miller, 2013). Davies et al. (2015) recommended that 3-year institutions compute the percentage of transfer students received from 2-year colleges and 4-year colleges, as well 2-year transferees with associate degrees, allowing comparisons among the three groups. Davies et al. also endorsed providing average GPAs of transfers to establish a baseline for comparison with native students (p. 41). Additionally, Davies et al. prescribed computation of the transfer graduation rate and transfer time-to-degree. Performance data can be used to compare transfers with other student groups as well as to develop programs to improve transfer student performance.

The development of such programs requires an understanding of the diverse histories and characteristics of transfer students. Marling (2013) asserted that upon collecting data to understand the transfer population, receiving institutions could begin to

evaluate transfer policies and practices and develop programs to serve the transfer population. Jain et al. (2011) encouraged receiving institutions to consider the diverse attendance histories and characteristics of transfer students when considering measures of success and argued that “community college students of color experience education differently, and evaluation tools need to take into account these experiences” (p. 262). The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2014) suggested that transfer service offices “develop manageable processes for gathering, interpreting, and evaluating data” (p.15) to facilitate ongoing assessment of transfer services and programs. The collection of demographic and performance data provides the foundation to develop and assess transfer services and programs and measure student success.

Electronic Transcript Exchange. An institutional barrier identified in the study was the inability of applicants to receive adequate information about whether transcripts had been received and processed. Jain et al. (2011) suggested that a pretransfer element of a receiving institution is to provide “resources that focus on the specific needs of transfer students” (p. 258). As transfer students are required to submit transcripts from all previous postsecondary institutions attended, they are disproportionately affected by outdated systems to receive transcripts, process transcripts, and inform applicants about the status of their applications. Developing technology-based improvements to transcript reception and processing would contribute to more student-centered transfer practices at WU.

The technology for electronic delivery and receipt of transcripts is available in multiple formats for use by registrar and admission offices in the United States. While

paper transcripts still accounted for the majority of transcripts being prepared and delivered in high schools, colleges and universities in 2014, growing numbers of high school and postsecondary institutions have the capacity to send and/or receive electronic transcripts (Harris, Hannah, Stones, & Marley, 2011; Kilgore, Hansen, & Hamill, 2014). The ability to utilize one of the three electronic data exchange technologies—PDF (Portable Document Format), EDI (Electronic Data Interchange), or XML (Extensible Markup Language)—is dependent upon the institution’s infrastructure and capabilities (Harris et al., 2011; Snowden et al., 2008; Taylor & Bragg, 2015). Institutions receiving electronic transcripts have calculated cost savings in processing and documented additional benefits to electronic transcript receipt (Jackson, 2014; Kilgore et al., 2014, Taylor and Bragg, 2015). Two decades of research and development on electronic transcript delivery have yielded technical and peer-reviewed literature on options, costs and benefits, and best practices for admissions offices.

The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) has tracked electronic transcript use for nearly twenty years (Harris et al., 2011; Kilgore et al., 2014). Member surveys in 2009 and 2014 showed that close to 100 percent of institutions used paper transcripts in both years, and the percentage of respondents receiving some electronic transcripts increased from 24% to about 74% (Harris et al., 2011; Kilgore et al., 2014). Among the electronic methods used, Kilgore et al. (2014) reported that PDFs had the highest receipt rate (74.1%) while the use of EDI/XML formats was lower at 31.6%. Institutions were more likely to receive than send electronic transcripts (Kilgore et al., 2014). In spite of the increased capability to receive

electronic transcripts, Kilgore et al. reported that just fewer than 15% of institutions receiving electronic transcripts use them to facilitate admissions decisions, advising, or transfer credit evaluation.

Electronic transcript technologies have evolved since the advent of the Internet. Harris et al. (2011) provided a historical overview of the development of the three types of electronic technologies used for exchanging transcripts—PDF, EDI, and EML. The PDF file, essentially a picture of the transcript, can easily be delivered via the internet, but data cannot be easily extracted and mined (Bemis, Do & Homes, 2013; Harris et al., 2014). Developed prior to universal access to the Internet in the early 1990s, EDI has limited capacity to map with institutions' Student Information System (SIS) (Bemis et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2011; Snowden et al., 2008). EML, the latest transcript exchange technology, was approved in 2004 and has a greater capacity for automated evaluation and processing (Bemis et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2011). Cost-benefit analyses for the three electronic transcript technologies, as well as tools for developing cost-benefit analyses and institutional readiness and capabilities assessments have been published (Harris et al., 2011; Snowden, et al., 2008). These tools may help institutions estimate the costs of implementation and the cost-savings associated with adoption of electronic transcript delivery and receipt.

The purpose of electronic transcript delivery is to decrease the cost and increase the speed and efficiency of transcript delivery. Kilgore et al., (2014) estimated the cost of receiving each postsecondary paper transcript at \$6.58, compared to the cost of EDI/XML at \$6.21 and \$5.26 respectively. The three methods offer secure, rapid,

electronic automated delivery, where both delivery and receipt can be acknowledged (Bemis, et al., 2013; Snowden, 2008). When integrated with institutions' SIS systems, processes formerly done manually—such as keying information from transcripts—can be automated (Jackson, 2014; Taylor & Bragg, 2015), improving accuracy, enhancing customer-service, and liberating staff for other tasks (Snowden, 2008). Scholar-practitioners suggested that automated uploading of student information could yield accessible data for course placement, degree audits and transfer articulation, advising, and admissions decision-making (Jackson, 2014; Kilgore et al., 2014). Authors forecasted a future where the receipt of electronic transcripts would be the industry standard; the transcript would be placed in an electronic portfolio, never be printed, and would be used for admissions decision-making and beyond (Harris et al., 2011; Jackson, 2014; Kilgore et al., 2014). A paperless admission process has also been envisioned for WU, but like other institutions adoption and promotion of paperless processes is still not viable.

Although adoption of electronic transcript delivery has grown and the cost benefit seems clear, electronic transcripts are used for less than half of the total transcript volume (Kilgore et al., 2014). Taylor and Bragg (2015) reported that some states have fully electronic transcript exchange systems; however these systems may be restricted to intrastate exchanges. Many institutions still need to invest in technological updates or staff training to fully utilize the electronic delivery capabilities (Taylor & Bragg, 2015). The availability of cost-effective systems will also drive use of electronic transcripts; it is critical that membership organizations continue to promote low-cost options in the public sector (Ellucian & National Student Clearinghouse, 2013). Harris et al. (2011) stated that

admissions offices should encourage students to order electronic transcripts, while Kilgore et al. (2014) prescribed studies to examine the reasons for the continued prominence of paper transcripts. Institutional and national cultural change is needed to increase the universal adoption of electronic transcript technologies.

Early Degree-Specific Transfer Credit Evaluation. One of the challenges to creating a transfer receptive culture is managing the transfer credit evaluations of increasing numbers of students, with greater numbers attending two or more prior institutions. While there is agreement that transfer students could make more informed transfer decisions with a degree-specific transfer credit evaluation, many receiving institutions are unable to provide them (Handel, 2013; Marling 2013; Ott & Cooper; 2014). Researchers showed that receiving institutions may be hampered by limited staff, insufficient technology, and organizational structure (Handel, 2013; Ott & Cooper, 2014). In spite of these limitations, transfer scholars recommended that receiving institutions are obligated to complete a degree-specific transfer credit evaluation for all transfer students before they enroll (Handel & Williams, 2012; Marling, 2013; Ott & Cooper, 2014). Handel and Williams (2012) further endorsed the preenrollment degree-specific transfer credit evaluation as a minimum standard for all receiving institutions.

Receiving institutions with a transfer receptive culture should welcome transfer students and provide the systems for efficient and streamlined admissions, enrollment, and degree completion (Handel & Williams, 2012; Jain et al., 2011). When transfer students pay for duplicate courses, delay enrollment, lose large portions of pretransfer credits, enroll in classes for which they are unprepared, or do not know how credits will

transfer until they have completed one or more semesters, they are treated unjustly (Handel, 2013; Handel & Williams, 2012; von Lehman, 2011; Attewell & Monaghan, 2015). Furbeck (2011) suggested that such obstacles stemming from the lack of timely transfer credit evaluations not only disadvantage the students but also render the receiving institution less competitive. Transfer research leaders recommended that transfer receptive institutions provide early degree-specific transfer credit evaluations, generous standards for accepting credits, and clear guidelines and procedures for accepting credits (Furbeck, 2011; Handel, 2013). Transfer students desire a transfer-friendly receiving institution that gives full credit for previous coursework and provides early detail about how their credits will apply to their chosen degree.

Many institutions desire a more transfer-friendly culture but are limited by staff, organizational structure, policies, and outdated technology. In a study on early versus late transfer credit evaluation, Ott and Cooper (2014) found that colleges providing early transfer credit evaluation reported greater student satisfaction and higher transfer yield than late institutions, which reported greater student frustration and ire. Further, Ott and Cooper recommended that the complete responsibility for degree-specific transfer credit evaluation be centralized in one unit. The units best served to provide early degree-specific transfer credit evaluation had advanced technology tools—“e.g., document imaging, transfer course databases, and audits” (p. 22)—while the late institutions had not procured or used this technology (Ott & Cooper, 2014). While Handel (2013) suggested that 4-year institutions often lack the staff to complete timely transfer credit evaluations, Ott and Cooper argued that a minimum level of staffing is optimal, but not

always necessary for providing early degree audits. Ott and Cooper noted that organizational commitment is required to implement an early transfer credit evaluation. While 4-year institutions may feel unprepared to enact such a policy, early institutions reported better customer service and higher transfer student yield (61 versus 46 percent), and may also show higher retention rates than late institutions (Ott & Cooper, 2014).

Transfer scholars agreed that providing a degree-specific credit evaluation before enrollment is a logical, student-centered practice that would contribute to a more seamless, clear, and navigable transfer practice (Handel, 2013; Handel & Williams, 2012; Ott & Cooper, 2014). As a result of interviews with transfer students and enrollment staff it was further recommended that colleges who provide late transfer credit evaluations change their transfer credit evaluation policies and processes to provide earlier degree-specific evaluations (Ott & Cooper, 2014). Failure to provide early transfer credit evaluation disadvantages transfer students by rendering them unable to accurately calculate time-to-degree, which Handel (2013) stated could vary from “one and a half to three years” (p. 8). The difference in time-to-degree could cost a transfer student thousands of dollars in tuition and other education expenses.

Literature Review Conclusion

The literature on the position paper genre demonstrates its appropriateness for presenting research-based solutions to the problem of transfer students being disadvantaged when applying, enrolling, persisting at a 4-year postsecondary institution with unique characteristics. The framework of the transfer receptive culture provides foundational guidance on the types of activities recommended for a receiving institution

to develop student-centered transfer practices. The second section of the literature review provides research- and practice-based guidance for the development of transfer practices that could lead to a more transfer receptive culture at WU. The position paper provided the format to make multiple recommendations to address the problem based on the research results, the framework of the transfer receptive culture, and current literature and best practices on transfer services.

Implementation

The culmination of the research study is the presentation of results to stakeholders to instigate action to address a problem. For this project, the position paper is the tool that will be used to inform stakeholders at the study institution of the research results and recommendations that could contribute to a more transfer-receptive culture at WU. This section outlines the resources needed, supports available, potential barriers, possible solutions to the barriers, implementation timeline, and roles and responsibilities to successfully implement the project.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The resources needed to implement this project include institutional commitment and human and capital resources. At WU, administrators, faculty, and students have been supportive of the project; however, the leadership of WU has undergone significant change since the start of the project and reporting assignments change weekly. Meetings with the associate provost, vice-president of student affairs, and the chief of operations will be scheduled to determine the schedule for position paper presentation and timing and audience of electronic distribution. Once the appropriate audiences and protocols

have been determined, presentations will be scheduled with University staff. When the meetings are scheduled, the position paper will be copied, several variations of the PowerPoint presentation will be crafted, and permission will be obtained to provide electronic distribution of the document. Commonly used electronic systems such as e-mail and Adobe Reader are required to access the position paper. Presentations will also require the development of a visual presentation using PowerPoint or similar software.

There are many existing supports for this dissemination of the position paper and implementation of recommendations. The associate provost is an advocate for data-informed decision-making and will appreciate the research-based recommendations presented in the position paper. The current provost wrote a letter of institutional support, authorizing access to students for completion of the research study. The vice-president for student affairs is committed to improving the services for transfer students and confirmed the development of a new position for transfer coordination. There is a recognized need, at the unit- and institutional-levels, for improvements in enrollment management processes and customer service. Students have a vested interest in the study-supported recommendations and university response. Alumni and city leaders, who advocate improvements to the perception of WU, may also be interested in the study and its findings. Any recommendations that contribute to improvements in yield, customer service, and the student experience are welcomed. Finally, technological updates for admissions and degree auditing have already been purchased and/or implemented, but continued work is needed to make these systems fully functional.

Potential Barriers

While the problems and solutions identified in the position paper align with the goals of the institution, the leadership of the institution has changed since approval for the research study was granted in January 2015. In April 2015, WU selected a new president, who began his term in July 2015. Since then, the organizational structure and reporting lines have changed within the institution. The presentation of the position paper is dependent upon approval of university administrators.

Secondly, there may be institutional, financial, and cultural barriers to implementing the recommendations outlined in the position paper. The collection of data on transfer students will require the dedication of staff for this function. While an important function, allocation of personnel and funding for staff must be available to complete this task. While technological systems are being updated, there are still operations that could be improved upon with the purchase of additional software and/or hardware. Also, the implementation of the new systems requires consultant and staff time as well as the time and resources to train staff across the University. When cultural norms are institutionalized, there is always resistance to change.

Most of the potential barriers can be resolved by addressing the business needs for the recommended process solutions and continuing to align the recommendations with current unit and institutional goals. The point of the position paper is to persuade institution leaders to adopt business practices that will save time and money, liberate staff to have the time to perform more mission-related tasks, and adopt practices that align with unit and institutional mission and performance goals. The recommendations are also

supported by research, best practices, and industry standards. The use of arguments to show cost-savings, time-savings, mission alignment, and customer-service enhancements should provide adequate solutions to potential barriers.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

As the administration has changed, the recognized need for improvements in customer service is escalating. While writing this section, I was asked to give a short presentation on customer service challenges and solutions to the senior cabinet on Monday, October 26; elements of the position paper were incorporated into this presentation. On October 30, I met with the vice-president of student affairs to discuss a new position on transfer services; the new role may begin as early as December 2015. Ultimately, the material in the position paper will be presented to the leaders of the enrollment management unit at a meeting at the end of the Fall 2015 semester. Meetings will also be requested with the new chief of operations at WU as the chief is promoting actions that improve customer service, student satisfaction, and student retention. I will coordinate the presentation schedule with the associate vice provost of enrollment management and the vice president of student affairs upon approval of the doctoral study from Walden University. Upon approval of the chief of operations and the vice president of student affairs, I will also request an opportunity to present the findings to students, and to faculty, through the appropriate committees and deans. At the conclusion of the position paper presentation, I will continue to work with staff in the enrollment management unit on the implementation of the recommendations. My continued work on

the implementation of the recommendations will continue regardless of my formal position at the university.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

This scholar-practitioner is responsible for presenting the study findings to the WU leadership and working as a leader and an advocate to promote the recommendations outlined in the position paper. As an interested stakeholder, I have the opportunity to work directly on the recommended solution in the department and also share the findings with the internal stakeholders—other staff, faculty, and students—within the University. Upon approval of the WU leadership, meetings will be scheduled to inform stakeholders about the research and recommendations and work will continue with Enrollment Unit leadership to secure the human and capital resources necessary to implement the position paper recommendations.

Project Evaluation

The purpose of conducting case study research and developing a resulting project is to effect change at the organizational level. Spaulding (2014) stated that the purpose of applied research is to expand the understanding of the problem or topic and to transfer that knowledge to address the problem (Caffarella, 2010). The goal-based evaluation will employ formative and summative assessment methods to assess the effectiveness of the position paper and determine if the project leads to changes in transfer services at WU.

The goals of the project were to: (a) help institutional agents at WU understand the problem of transfer services from the student perspective, (b) help institutional agents appreciate the characteristics and attendance histories of transfer students at WU, and (c)

provide recommendations for crafting student-centered transfer practices. The project goals will help attain the following institutional goals: (a) increase the yield rate for transfer students, (b) increase retention of transfer students, and (c) enhance customer service (community partner, personal communication, July 2015). The project goals are short term while the institutional goals are long term. Different measures will be used to assess short- versus long-term goal attainment.

The formative assessment actions will be conducted during the early part of the project implementation. After each presentation, a short survey will be conducted to assess whether the presentation helped improve understanding of the transfer services challenges and characteristics of transfer students. A survey will also be given transfer student attendees to assess whether they feel that the position paper adequately describes their transfer experience at WU. Selected attendees (e.g. the provost, associate provost, director of admissions, admissions staff, etc.) will be e-mailed to assess the effectiveness of the position paper. Based on these formative assessments, the position paper and presentation may be amended.

The summative evaluation activities help assess whether the applied research leads to changes in practice. In this case, observation will be used to assess whether the recommended solutions had been implemented. Secondly, some of the institutional objectives are measurable and time-bound and will be documented on a yearly basis. These objectives include the increase in the yield rate for transfer students, improvement of transfer student retention, and enhancement of customer service. The key stakeholders for this project range from city leaders to the university president, staff, and current and

prospective students. The ability of the WU to meet mission goals to improve the opportunities for postsecondary education among underrepresented group is dependent upon the development of more student-centered practices. The implications for social change, therefore, begin at the campus-level, extend to the local community and have far-reaching implications for transfer student community in the United States

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

The doctoral research study contributed to the position paper project that recommended more student-centered transfer service practices at the study institution. As the current literature demonstrated that current and prospective adult learners are likely to transfer while pursuing their baccalaureate degree, the implementation of transfer receptive practices is a critical element in the university's strategic vision. As the majority of students seeking baccalaureate degrees at the study institution arrive with previous postsecondary credits, changes in transfer services will positively impact their application, enrollment, and progression experiences. The improvement of transfer services will also have a positive impact on the faculty and staff at the study institution as they too had identified weaknesses and threats based on transfer practices, policies, and procedures. As the recommended solutions would ultimately improve the perception of the University, it increases the opportunity for the university to serve the community and improve human conditions in the community at large.

Far-Reaching

The position paper developed as a result of a case study conducted at a specific and unique institution of higher education. However, the audience of adult students with multiple-institution attendance histories has been excluded from almost all research studies located on this topic. HBCUs have also been absent in the literature on transfer students. As the trend for students to attend multiple institutions while pursuing the baccalaureate degree is a national phenomenon, the recommendations for this institution may be relevant to the broader educational community. The research results and position paper will be shared with other institutions. Also, some of the transcript sharing practices must be widely adopted to improve the national transfer experience.

Conclusion

This section described the position paper project an outgrowth of the qualitative case study on extremely mobile students' perceptions of transfer services at WU, a 4-year HBCU. The development of the position paper was informed by the themes that emerged from the study, the elements of the transfer receptive culture (Jain et al., 2011), current literature on position papers and transfer services, and best practices on transfer services. The section contains the goals for the project, the implementation plan, and the formative and summative activities that will be conducted to evaluate the project. The final component of this section included the implications for social change at the local level and beyond. These implications were informed throughout the development of the study and project and stemmed from individual and collaborative reflections that are documented in the final section.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

During this doctoral journey critical reflection, alone and with others, has been an invaluable element in my transformation to a scholar-practitioner. Mezirow (1990) asserted that reflection provides the opportunity to examine experiences and reconsider processes, conclusions, and assumptions. Feldman (2011) encouraged students to incorporate this reflection as rethinking, a practice to reconsider the processes used to accomplish a task or goal; rethinking includes reconsidering one's original goal and possibly reconstructing the goal. This process is proving useful to students taking a Freshman Orientation course at WU, and increasingly important to me as I consider the goals set at the beginning of my doctoral journey. This concluding section incorporates rethinking of the doctoral project, my growth as a scholar, project developer, practitioner, and contributor to social change. The final section considers the implications and application of the study and project and potential directions for future research.

Project Strengths

The main strength of the project is that a position paper is inherently designed to provide recommendations to address a particular problem. The problem, that is, transfer students are disadvantaged at WU, is one that had been identified by staff and faculty at the study institution, but the voices of the students themselves had not been recorded as part of the evidence. A qualitative case study illuminated some of the particular barriers to successful transition and graduation at this particular institution. The position paper captured the problem and major themes that emerged from the research and identified

recommendations to solve some of the foundational elements of the problem. The inclusion of peer-reviewed references, tried best practices, and tested technological solutions provided credibility for the recommendations to remediate the problem.

The flexibility of the position paper allowed for the presentation of multiple recommendations to improve transfer services. A multitude of processes, procedures, or policies could have been recommended as a result of the research findings; however it was appropriate to address the foundational institutional barriers first. The literature review and recommendations could be expanded to address challenges in other university units. Additional recommendations would not have to be wholly adopted or implemented simultaneously; adoption of other policies, procedures, and practices could be implemented over several years, complementing the long-term goals.

I used an emerging conceptual framework, transfer receptive culture, to ground the study and recommendations. While the newness of the concept may have limited references to successful applications in published literature, the novel concept also left room for experimentation with target groups beyond those identified in the current literature. The transfer receptive culture had not been applied widely among cohorts other than community college transfers. This findings in this study will contribute to the body of research in the limited area of multiple-institution postsecondary attendance.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

The methodology of this study, specifically the small sample size and setting at an urban, HBCU, limits its generalizability to other settings. However, the selection of extremely mobile adults filled a gap in the research and yielded in-depth information

about the transition experience of this particular group. The research will be informative for the study institution and other similar universities. To remediate the limitation of the small sample size, purposeful sampling identified a participant group representative of a growing, understudied, subpopulation among postsecondary students. The interviewees' mobility experiences were diverse and included vertical, horizontal, reverse, and swirling. Their majors were representative of the majors at the study site.

The study was also limited by my biases. As an academic advisor, I focused on the enrollment period and advising, and failed to ask questions about financial aid, housing, and other posttransfer activities. While this study provides recommendations for the enrollment unit, it is less valuable for some of the other departments at the study institution.

The study was also limited by the chosen data source: individual student interviews. Inclusion of focus groups and document analysis could have provided additional rich data. Exchanges among participants during focus groups sometimes yield richer data as the recollection of events from one participant can contribute to greater recall and sharing by other participants. The collection of data from documents, such as transcripts could have been used to verify the information shared by the study participants. As data about adult transfer students are scarce, additional data collection from multiple sources would benefit the study institution as well as the broader education community.

Scholarship

Scholars, who immerse themselves in research topic, especially as they instruct, contribute in other ways to the academy, and act as project managers, deserve great respect. In a study to learn how people define scholarship, Tolk (2012) identified 12 associated characteristics. Three of the 12 characteristics that resonate are immersion, passion, and productivity (Tolk, 2012). Scholars immerse themselves in a topic for which they have a passion and spend years or even decades conducting research on that topic or variations thereof. A new scholar quickly learns who the topic experts are as their articles appear in multiple publications, with some of the references spanning decades. It is understandable that doctoral candidates are advised to select a topic about which they are passionate; scholars immerse themselves in a topic and may conduct research on variations of that topic for decades as it is impossible to understand fully the topic with one research question and one study. A typical scholar must productively research, publish, and present, all while practicing in a full-time capacity as a faculty member or administrator. Scholars also have an ethical responsibility to share their research to contribute to social change in their institutions, the community, and the world. Scholarship is exhausting.

Project Development and Evaluation

Step one for contributing to social change is the development and dissemination of the position paper. The position paper was the rational project choice given the study results, but it was challenging to decide which recommendations to make and to craft a persuasive document. New to higher education, one perceived inadequacy is my lack of

experience in enrollment management, the focus area of the study and recommendations. As more is learned about transfer students and the possible options for providing transfer services to facilitate efficient admissions, enrollment, and graduation, the less I feel that I know. The institutional agents to whom the recommendations are targeted have much more experience than I do. It is necessary to combine experience with scholarship to be a credible leader.

A leader also learns to garner support to promote a particular position. For this project, support was gained by including the perspectives of students, faculty and staff along with the incorporation of institutional goals. The inclusion of measurable goals facilitates evaluation of the project. It is important to consider evaluation while developing the project objectives and link evaluative activities to measurable goals. My understanding of assessment in teaching, job performance, and project development has grown as a result of my doctoral coursework and the development of the project. I have learned to incorporate more purposefully both formative and summative evaluation methods in my multiple roles as employee, project developer, and instructor.

Leadership and Change

While working to create new knowledge about the area of student mobility and considering how to develop a transfer receptive culture in my study institution, I feel a great responsibility to lead change in the institution. I chose employment at the study site to be a change agent and now have a specific project to implement to begin to change one area. The dedication in the doctoral study is my promise to use work as a change agent to help ease the baccalaureate journey for those adult transfer students who attended

multiple postsecondary institutions. Social change can be accomplished locally at the study institution and in the community, on a broader level by sharing information with similar institutions, and nationally by contributing to scholarship through presenting and publishing.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

One of the most challenging aspects of conducting research is developing the research question. Students practicing inquiry at all education levels struggle in the development of a question that can be addressed with a reasonable study. We want to solve all of the problems in the world or our workplace with one research study and resulting project. In reality, the challenge of developing a research study is creating a narrow question and applying an appropriate research methodology and design to respond to the question. The development of the research question is an iterative process; the research question is framed at the beginning of the study, during the literature, and according to Cavanaugh (n.d.) may even be altered during the data collection phase. Developing practical research questions is a challenge that I regularly discuss with other scholars.

Another challenge shared with other doctoral candidates was the concept of the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework concept was never fully understood during the doctoral coursework, particularly when introduced during the research methods course. When forced to select a theoretical framework for the doctoral research study, the concept became clearer, but no less daunting. With an understudied topic, such as mobility of adult students, applicable theoretical concepts had not been applied,

therefore clear models were difficult to find. Perhaps the theoretical framework concept needs to be introduced to doctoral candidates in a more thoughtful manner.

The use of American Psychological Association (APA) style received thorough coverage throughout the coursework and in during the doctoral study phase. Walden University provided a plethora of supports through the Writing Center to help doctoral candidates plan, write, cite, and much more. The intensity of writing a doctoral study helps one hone writing skills and use of APA. I have used the skills that I continue to develop with students and colleagues in my work place and will continue to share as I grow as a writer. Walden University has an invaluable resource in the Writing Center and should continue to provide the synchronous and asynchronous systems to help students hone their writing skills.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

As an educator, I have always seen myself as a practitioner rather than a scholar. I have worked as a teacher trainer, curriculum developer, project manager, and advocate. I recently shifted my focus to higher education where I have worked as an adjunct professor, academic advisor, and served in other roles at the study university. As a scholar at Walden University, I have learned that I have a constructivist educational philosophy, enabling me to give credence to my pedagogical methods. I have also learned to use research to aid in my curricular and advising strategies. I work as a practitioner every day and will now be more qualified to combine scholarship with practice.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

Creating a successful project requires competency in a variety of skills and is not something that should be executed alone. I have reached age 53 having played team sports most of my life and have spent nearly 30 years working on as a part of teams to develop projects to educate the American public. The best projects have come as a result of teamwork and collaboration. While I consulted with, sought support from, and networked with others during this doctoral study and project, I have essentially toiled alone in my home office. This introvert misses the expertise and company of a team for project development. While the development of this project has helped me revisit the elements of an effective project: vision, goals, buy-in, and an implementation, and evaluation plan. I also recognize that my greatest achievements have come as a result of teamwork. Scholars need to collaborate. A strategic leader understands her assets and limitations and builds a project team to complement her strengths and supplement the weaknesses.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

A HBCU's mission includes providing affordable postsecondary opportunities to previously disadvantaged populations. This study highlighted the challenges for transfer students in the study institution. It is important that the university and the broader education community understand the distinct pathways of 21st- century baccalaureate seekers and make data-informed decisions to assess continuously and adjust processes and policies to meet the changing needs of students. Walden University (2013) defined positive social change "as a deliberate process of creating and applying ideas, strategies,

and actions to promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies” (p. 5). The study has contributed to the information base of the University and the position paper offers solution to improve the transfer experiences of students. Such change in this urban environment can also contribute to the growth and development of other persons and the broader community.

The study is a significant contribution to the body of literature on transfer students. Literature on multiple-institution transfer students is scarce; studies sharing adult students’ transfer experiences at HBCUs are nonexistent. It is important to act beyond completion of the doctoral study to share the results of this study with the broader education community from scholar to scholar and to publish and share the results at meetings of scholar-practitioner.

While the results of a small, qualitative case study may not be generalizable to the broader community, the study may contain information that is relevant to other institutions. As the transfer pathway is now common, it is incumbent upon scholar-practitioners, to help smooth the transition for those who seek self-actualization through higher education. Additional scholarly contributions from practitioners at HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions help provide greater opportunities for nontraditional students throughout the nation. Such contributions could also facilitate educational policy changes that give credit to postsecondary institutions that graduate large numbers of transfer students, a group not currently included in the calculation of college graduation rates.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Current students show that growing numbers of students are using nontraditional pathways to attain their baccalaureate degree. However, most of the studies follow students for 6 to 8 years after high school graduation, failing to capture the experience of students who return to school after age 25, or do not complete the baccalaureate degree within 4 to 6 years. As policy-makers, such as President Obama, and influential organizations, such as the Lumina Foundation support and promote college completion, it is incumbent upon postsecondary institutions to respond to the changing needs of students by changing practices, procedures, and policies. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the phenomena of multiple-institution attendance.

With a greater understanding of the phenomena of multiple-institution attendance, especially as it relates to adults and educational needs, the study institution may begin to make changes to facilitate the effective and efficient transfer and graduation of transfer students. It also affords institutions the opportunity to consider and apply the elements of the transfer receptive culture, especially beyond the typical community college to 4-year transfer experience. Scholars practicing at minority-serving institutions and working with other nontraditional audiences may be inspired to conduct similar research at their study sites. Moreover, further studies can include some of the posttransfer elements of the transfer receptive culture that were not illuminated in this study.

Conclusion

The culmination of the doctoral process was a research study to learn how adult transfer students characterized the transfer services received at an urban HBCU. As the

students had previously attended multiple institutions, they brought transfer capital to the transition experience, but still experienced barriers to efficient admission, enrollment, and progression. The analysis of their experiences contributed to the development of a position paper, the final element of the doctoral project. This section reflected on the process of development of the project and my transformation to scholar-practitioner.

Rethinking the study design and project genre validate these choices as rational options for exploring the problem of transfer services at WU and presenting viable solutions. Study limitations identified for this study such as sample size, generalizability, and data source, provided opportunities for additional future research. With a scholarly passion for the topic of multiple institution attendance, I will have the opportunity to immerse myself in further research on this topic and be a productive contributor to scholarship and leader of local and national social change. The norm for U.S. postsecondary students in the 21st century is to attend multiple institutions while pursuing their baccalaureate degree. I have dedicated myself to serve as a change agent to help ease the baccalaureate journey for adult transfer students who attended multiple postsecondary institutions.

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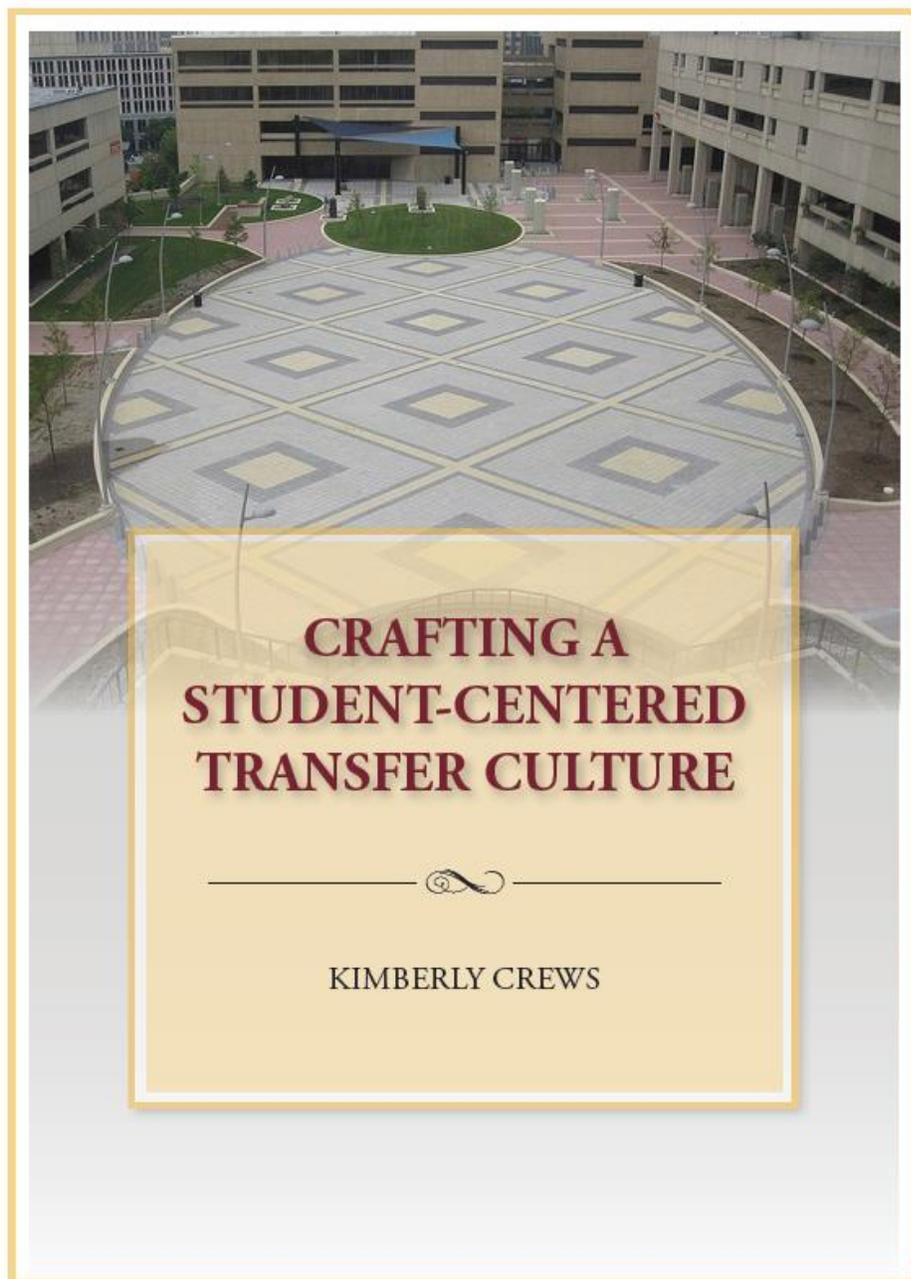
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Appendix A: The Project



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Multiple institution attendance has become the norm for 21st century baccalaureate seekers in the United States. At WU most incoming students have previously attended college. About 60% of 2013 and 2014 graduates transferred credits from other institutions. The purpose of this paper is to present the findings and recommendations of a doctoral research study of transfer student perceptions of transfer services at Wadlaw University (WU). The study was completed using a qualitative case study approach with semistructured interviews with nine adult transfer students with multiple-attendance histories. The transfer receptive culture was the theoretical framework used to ground the research question, interview questions, and findings.

The primary research question for the study: How did extremely mobile, adult students characterize transfer services received pre and posttransfer? Results showed five themes: Students' previous attendance and life histories contributed to their *incoming expectations* for transfer services; the transfer students had diverse *transfer experiences*; most identified *institutional barriers* to an efficient and effective transition to WU; students found *institutional support* from helpful staff and faculty and friendly and welcoming students; and students used *transfer capital* to successfully navigate their transition to WU.

These results along with theory, best practices, and review of the literature resulted in the following recommendations to reduce barriers to student matriculation;

1. Increase electronic transcript delivery and add capacity for automated transcript processing.
2. Collect and analyze data on transfer students.
3. Provide early degree-specific transfer credit evaluations.

THE PROBLEM

WU transfer students report barriers to matriculation:

- ❖ Inability to reach institutional agents to facilitate process
- ❖ Cannot confirm receipt of application documents
- ❖ Late receipt of degree audit
- ❖ Delayed registration (sometimes a semester or longer)

Multiple institution attendance has become the norm for 21st century baccalaureate seekers in the United States (Marling, 2013). Over one-third of U.S. students who began college in 2008 transferred during their college career and of those who transferred over 40% transferred more than once (Shapiro, Dundar, Wakhungu, Yuan, & Harrell, 2015). The transfer rate may be higher for adult students, but little data exists for students over age 25. At Wadlaw University (WU), over 60% of 2013 graduates transferred, with about 30% attending three or more institutions while pursuing their baccalaureate degree making transfer the norm at WU.

The problem at WU is that students with multiple institution attendance histories are disadvantaged as admissions and transfer policies and procedures were developed without consideration of attendance histories. The transfer evaluation counselor confirmed that a growing portion of new transfer students bring transcripts from three or more institutions (Transcript Evaluation Counselor, personal communication, May 29, 2013). Incoming students with transfer histories reported that WU's procedures are less streamlined than at other institutions.

IMPORTANCE

- ❖ At WU transferring in is the norm.
- ❖ 60-80% of WU's incoming students have postsecondary history.
- ❖ 60% of WUs 2013 graduates transferred.

Weaknesses and threats identified by WU staff in 2011:

- ❖ Internal customer service
- ❖ Transfer evaluation process
- ❖ Student mobility
- ❖ Inability to change/improve

While the number of transfer students has increased in the past 10 years, the enrollment procedures, transfer credit evaluation processes, and staff dedicated to servicing transfer students remain stagnant.

Students of color are more likely than White students to begin their baccalaureate experience at a community college making a transfer inevitable (Woo, Green, & Matthews, 2013). The rising cost of tuition at 4-year institutions has contributed to the popularity of the community college as a stop on the baccalaureate journey. Black students are more likely to stop-out or transfer due to academic or financial challenges than White students (Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009), making an Historically Black College and University (HBCU) with a commitment to providing affordable postsecondary education for disadvantaged students obligated to provide an efficient and student-centered transfer receptive culture.

TRANSFER RECEPTIVE CULTURE

The emerging concept of transfer receptive culture (TRC) informed the study and recommendations presented in this position paper. Four-year institutions with a transfer receptive culture would have a campus-wide commitment to providing resources to facilitate successful transfer and baccalaureate attainment among transfer students (Herrera & Jain, 2013; Jain et al., 2011). An institution with a TRC prepares for the transition of transfer students by collecting data to understand their attendance histories and needs, provides appropriate services and resources to facilitate transition from inquiry to enrollment, and facilitates students' progress to graduation by acknowledging and complementing the experiences that transfer students bring to the receiving institution.

The TRC was developed to address the need for postsecondary institutions to better manage the transition process of growing numbers of community college transfer students from underrepresented groups. However, 4-year institutions like WU must commit to providing the resources to receive a heterogeneous group of transfer students (Handel, 2011). While the transfer receptive culture identifies five pre and post elements for consideration by receiving institutions (Jain et al., 2011), this position paper addresses the foundational barriers to transferring identified by the study at WU. While many of the institutional barriers impact the successful enrollment of all students, the purpose of the study was to understand the how students with multiple-institution histories characterized transfer services. Therefore, those barriers that disproportionately affect transfer students are addressed in the position paper.

PURPOSE AND DESIGN

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to learn how extremely mobile, non-traditional-aged students—adults who had attended three or more postsecondary institutions—used transfer services and how they characterized the services they received relating to the transfer process. The emerging conceptual framework of the transfer receptive culture informed the primary research question:

HOW DID EXTREMELY MOBILE, ADULT STUDENTS CHARACTERIZE TRANSFER SERVICES RECEIVED PRE AND POSTTRANSFER?

Student participants also provided information about their previous postsecondary histories, use of cultural capital during the transition, and recommendations for the study institution to improve the transfer process.

Open-ended, semistructured instant messaging (Google Chat) interviews were conducted with nine students who enrolled at WU at age 25 or later, had transcripts from at least two other postsecondary institutions, and enrolled during the 2013-2014 academic year. Purposeful sampling yielded a heterogeneous group of adult students who met the study criteria. The sample consisted of five seniors, three juniors, and one sophomore. The study participants included four White males, one Black male, one mixed-race male, two Black females, and one White female. The average participant age was 33.7 years. The participants represented three of the four colleges at WU—Arts and Sciences, Business, and Science and Engineering.

All participants signed an informed consent form prior to participating in the study. The consent form described the purpose of the study, explained how the data might be used, and explicated the voluntary-nature of the study. Appreciation was provided to the participants in the form of a gift card. Member checking was used to validate the information shared by the participants and the results and data analysis were peer reviewed. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from both Wadlaw University and Walden University.

RESULTS

Each interview was downloaded from Google Chat and formatted to facilitate open coding, leading to axial coding, and finally selective coding to develop themes. The open codes were grouped into a time and process continuum, whereby axial coding was used to organize and link the categories. The temporal analytical framework identifies the attributes that a 4-year institution should provide to facilitate success transfer and baccalaureate attainment of transfer students from inquiry through admission, enrollment, and degree attainment (Jain et al., 2011) and yielded the following five themes:

incoming expectations

transfer experience

institutional barriers

institutional support

transfer capital

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INCOMING EXPECTATIONS

Having collectively attended 22 colleges and universities, participants expected to be guided through a seamless application and enrollment process by an institutional agent. They expect most processes to be completed online, and, when necessary, assistance would be provided by phone, email, or chat. Excellent customer service would be provided by institutional agents who understand the particular needs of transfer students.

“tried to call the school a few times, but was never able to actually speak with anyone over the phone.

One of the key pieces of decision-making information for transfer students is knowledge of how many credits will transfer to the receiving institution, and therefore, the ability to calculate time-to-degree. They expected to receive an unofficial transcript evaluation prior to applying and a degree-specific transfer credit evaluation soon after acceptance. The transfer credit evaluation would yield an electronically generated degree audit.

...I ended up giving up on calling after probably 5 times with no answers.”

When arriving to WU for advising and registration, transfer students would be warmly welcomed by the university community who understand the needs of transfer students. Whether through a transfer student orientation or department welcoming reception, transfer students would like to have engagements that are designed to reflect their previous postsecondary experience; They do not want to be treated like freshman.

The following themes cover the actual transfer experience at WU.

TRANSFER EXPERIENCE

The study showed that WUs transfer students are diverse (Table 1). Eight of the nine participants attended community college at some time, however some attended directly after high school, while others reversed to a community college during their baccalaureate journey; others had less linear attendance patterns. As a result, just five of the nine participants earned an associate degree. Some participants limited postsecondary attendance to the metropolitan area, while others attended institutions in other states, other countries, and/or online. Participants included a veteran, student-athlete, and certificate holder. Almost all participants had periods of nonenrollment—stopping out due to suspension, work, or financial reasons. These heterogeneous histories and experiences determined individual transfer needs and influenced students' perceptions of the transfer receptivity of WU.

Table 1: Participants Attendance Patterns

Participant	Attendance Pattern
Buffalo	2-2-2-2-WU
Georgetown	4-2-WU
Georgia	2-4-WU
Maine	4-2-WU
Miami	4-4-4-4-4-4-2-2-2-WU
Minneapolis	2-4-WU
New Jersey	4-2-4-M-4-WU
New York	T-T-WU
Utah	2-4-WU

Note: 2= Community College, 4=4-year institution;
M=Military; T=Technical Program

INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

Student participants shared barriers that occurred during the application and enrollment process. Transfer barriers stemmed from poor communication, lack of resources for transfer credit evaluation, and uneven opportunities for orientation and other integration activities.

COMMUNICATION

Students reported reaching out to WU during the application process. Whether seeking assistance in completing the application or inquiring about their status, study participants expressed frustration at being unable to reach institutional agents at WU by phone or by e-mail. Study participants found that even when they were able to reach admissions staff by phone or in person, they were unable to attain the information necessary to move forward with the application process. Particular complaints came from students calling admissions to confirm receipt of transcripts or learn whether they had been accepted.

“I was all ready to go [to the nearby university] when some coworkers told me... They said that nobody ever answers their calls or e-mails either, so I had to go down there.”

Several participants lamented that they were never notified that they had been accepted to WU. Students reported calling and asking multiple times and usually not finding out about acceptance until they visited the campus in person. Some study participants reported that they had planned to enroll at other universities due to the challenges in the admissions process or because they were not informed that they were accepted.

Many students only completed the application and/or enrollment process after visiting the campus and connecting with an institutional agent who helped them navigate through the admissions and/or enrollment process. The communication challenges

resulted in participants making multiple trips to the campus, resubmitting admissions documents, delaying enrollment for one or more semesters, and filing complaints with University leaders about poor customer service.

“I know a few people who were discouraged by the Admissions department and resorted to other universities.”

TRANSFER CREDIT

The degree-specific transfer credit evaluation affirms how many credits are accepted by the institution and apply to the student’s major, thereby enabling a student to calculate time-to-degree (Ott & Cooper, 2014). A timely degree-specific transfer credit evaluation is critically important for students who have attended multiple and diverse institutions of higher education.

“was originally scheduled to start in fall 2013, but couldn’t start until spring 2014 while waiting out the transcript [evaluation] problem.”

Once a WU student confirms intent to enroll, a general transfer credit evaluation is performed in the Office of Admission. This evaluation informs transfer students how many of their previous credits will be accepted by WU; however it does not inform them how many of their credits actually count toward their degree. The process of getting the general transfer credit evaluation is lengthy, often taking over a month after students have confirmed their intent to enroll. Upon receiving their general transfer credit evaluation from the Office of Admission, students, are then required to visit multiple faculty advisors to determine their degree-specific credits.

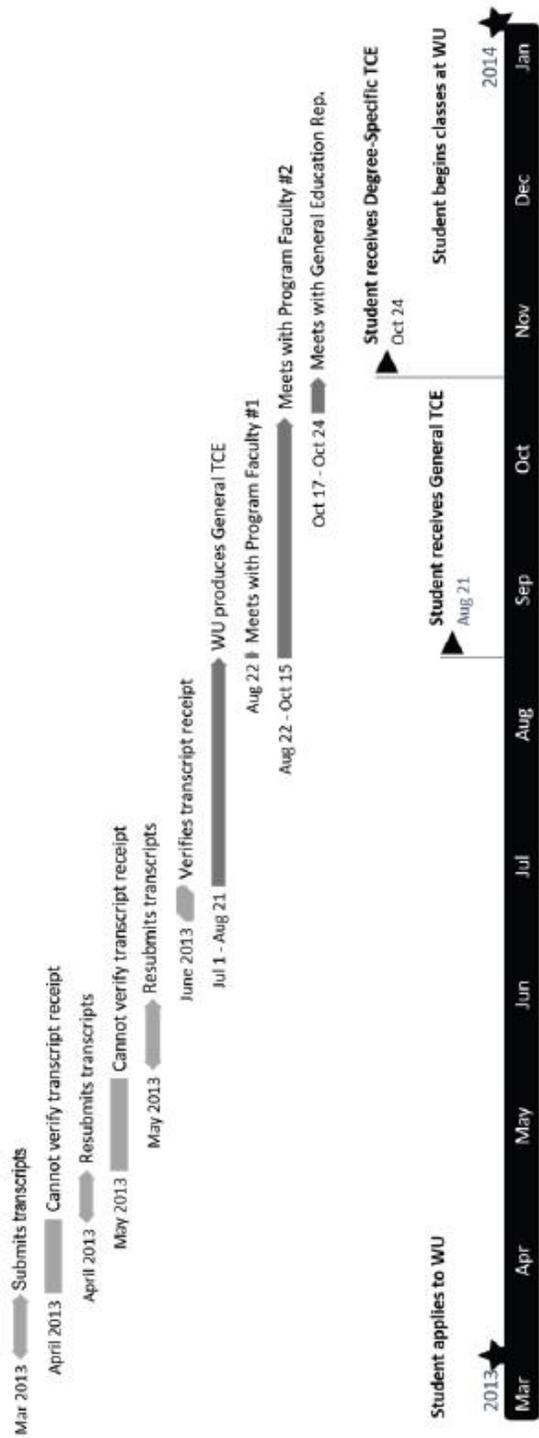
Figure 1 demonstrates the process that a transfer student experienced when applying to WU and getting transfer credits evaluated. After applying and resubmitting sets of transcripts multiple times, he was unable to register for the fall 2013 semester because he did not receive a degree-specific transfer credit evaluation. He sat out the semester and met with multiple faculty members to finalize the degree-specific transfer evaluation. He applied to WU in spring 2013 and did not enroll in courses until spring 2014.

Several study participants reported that the full degree-specific transfer credit evaluation may not have been accurately completed until their second semester at WU.

Students described a process that required them to visit three to five institutional agents. The delays in attaining a degree-specific transfer credit evaluation led to late registration, students taking unnecessary courses, and sometimes delaying enrollment for one or more semesters.

“I would not call the [transfer credit evaluation] process at WU user-friendly. It seemed like I had to do more legwork than I had to at Midwest U.”

Figure 1. Approximation of Transfer Credit Evaluation Timeline for Student



ORIENTATION

WU offers sessions of new student orientation targeted to transfer students. However most of the study participants missed the

transfer-specific orientation session, which negates its value. Orientation for transfers culminates with students visiting their major department for degree-specific advising and course registration. Grites (2013) stated that orientation is “perhaps the most critical transition activity for transfer students” as the receiving institution is able to document the differences in and expectations of the new institution for incoming transfers. Yet, scheduling conflicts, lack of interest, or late enrollment prevented more than half of the study participants from attending new student orientation sessions.

Those who did attend found aspects of the session inadequate. Some students attended a general orientation session and bemoaned being treated like freshman. Others experienced insufficient information and advising when attending the break-out sessions hosted by their major departments. Finally, other participants found the information shared in the general session to conflict with the information shared in the department.

The failure to engage transfer students in a transfer student orientation is a missed opportunity for both the institution and the new student. Orientation is a dedicated time for faculty and university staff to engage with students and learn about their diverse histories and offers students the opportunity to learn about the services that can directly support their social and academic needs (Ward-Roof & Cawthon, 2004). As more than half of the study participants did not engage in this activity, the opportunity cost is immeasurable.

“[Orientation] just missed the mark by a country mile.”

“The representative our department sent was a graduate student who was new and couldn’t answer questions.”

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Students who bond quickly and purposefully with their new institution are more likely to persist (Handel, 2011). An institution with a

transfer receptive culture has an environment that welcomes and supports transfer students to facilitate the bonding and adjustment process (Handel, 2011; Jain et al., 2011; Laanan et al., 2010-2011). The attributes inherent in HBCUs, such as WU—family-like environments, nurturing faculty and staff, small classroom sizes—designed to support and prepare underrepresented, and often underprepared students, also contribute to a transfer affirming culture (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Richards & Awokoya, 2012). Study participants acknowledged cultural elements that facilitated integration,

including supportive staff, warm and family-like departments, and helpful and friendly students.

“She was the presence in this institution that made you feel like the school cared about every aspect of your life.”

“The students were friendly and social; they made you feel at home and welcoming.”

TRANSFER CAPITAL

In addition to the supportive institutional agents and welcoming students, study participants found that their previous college and life experiences helped them transition to WU.

Participants cited their knowledge of the application processes, comfort with asking questions, ability to connect with institutional agents, and maturity as characteristics that facilitated their transition. Students who had transferred multiple times acquired confidence as they had navigated transfers in multiple systems and overcome challenges at their previous institutions. Previous experiences helped students use multiple forms of capital—social, transfer, and cultural—to navigate their transition to WU.

“If I were a younger student, I would have given up in the process.”

“My previous experience helped me remain on top of the process. I tried to continually check in during the admission process to make sure all my documents were received and... I tried to be very proactive when it came to working with my advisers to make sure I didn't repeat courses that were covered by my transfer credits.”

RECOMMENDATION #1

INCREASE ELECTRONIC TRANSCRIPT DELIVERY AND ADD CAPACITY FOR AUTOMATED TRANSCRIPT PROCESSING

With the increasing mobility of students, the need for efficient and secure exchange of student transcripts is paramount (Ellucian and National Student Clearinghouse, 2013). One of the institutional barriers to applying was the inability of applicants to learn whether their transcripts had been received and the status of their applications. Customer satisfaction and efficiency would improve if WU were able to:

- a) Increase the percentage of transcripts received electronically;
- b) Provide automated confirmation of transcript receipt; and
- c) Add the capability to automatically process electronically received transcripts.



The technology for electronic delivery and receipt of transcripts has been available for two decades. Yet, paper transcripts accounted for the majority of transcripts prepared and delivered in high schools and postsecondary institutions in 2014 (Kilgore, Hansen, & Hamill, 2014). However growing numbers of high school and postsecondary

Estimated Cost per Transcript by Type

Paper	\$6.58
EDI	\$6.21
EML	\$5.26

Source: Kilgore et al., 2014

institutions have the capacity to send and/or receive electronic transcripts (Harris et al., 2011; Kilgore et al., 2014).

Kilgore et al. (2014) reported that institutions were more likely to receive than send electronic transcripts, but most institutions have not adapted systems to automate processing. Of the three types of electronic technologies used for exchanging transcripts—PDF (Portable Document Format), EDI (Electronic Data Exchange), and EML (Extensible Markup Language)—EML, the latest transcript exchange technology has the greatest capacity for automated evaluation and processing (Bemis et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2011). Banner and Recruiter, systems used by the Office of Recruitment and Admissions have the capacity to accept and process EML transcripts, but additional modules may be needed, with the add-ons requiring additional investments in commitment, technology, and human capital. The transition to electronic reception and processing should be facilitated by the development of Ellucian eTranscripts, an interface that enables the real-time exchange of transcripts for institutions participating in the National Clearinghouse's transcript ordering service (Ellucian & National Student Clearinghouse, 2013). As WU uses Banner (an Ellucian product) and is a member of the National Student Clearinghouse, the partnership between Ellucian® and the National Student Clearinghouse should facilitate the transition to greater electronic transcript receipt.

RECOMMENDATION #2

COLLECT AND ANALYZE DATA ON TRANSFER STUDENTS

The study's findings confirmed the heterogeneity of transfer students at WU, substantiating the need to collect data to understand the characteristics of the transfer population, respect their diverse experiences, and provide services that complement their cultural capital. Transfer student data and analysis will enable WU to make data-informed decisions to fulfill its mission, provide services to effectively attract and enroll transfer students, provide resources to facilitate student progress, track students through graduation, and evaluate programs (Fann, 2013; Fretwell, 2012; Jain et al., 2013; Miller, 2013). WU does not currently have data in place to understand how and why transfer students matriculate to and graduate from this HBCU (Provost, personal communication, September 18, 2013). When WU begins to collect and analyze data on transfer students, it can more thoughtfully assess transfer policies and practices, measure program effectiveness, and develop new programs (Marling, 2013).

One of the first challenges for WU is to develop an institutional definition of *transfer* to allow consistent measurement over time and across units and enable comparison or performance across the institution, state, and nation (Handel, 2011; Marling, 2013). The collection of demographic data will enable WU to understand the characteristics of transfer students and provide the foundation for comparison with other student cohorts and for developing performance measures. The collection and analysis of performance data will enable WU to make data-informed decisions regarding enrollment targets and support services, and; report the performance of transfer students, and compare performance across cohorts, (Davies et al., 2015; Miller, 2013). Table 2 portrays some of the transfer data recommended by transfer scholars.

Table 2: Transfer Data Variables

DEMOGRAPHIC	ACADEMIC HISTORY	PERFORMANCE
Demographic	Academic history	Performance
Gender	Sending institution(s)	Retention rates
Race/ethnicity	# of hours transferred	Graduation rates
First generation status	Core courses completed	Mean number of years to graduation
Pell grant eligibility	General education courses completed	Satisfactory academic progress
Age	Associate degree earned	Probation
FT/PT status	Transfer GPA	
Employment status	Intended major	
Veteran status	Ratio of credits taken to credits accepted	
Socioeconomic status		

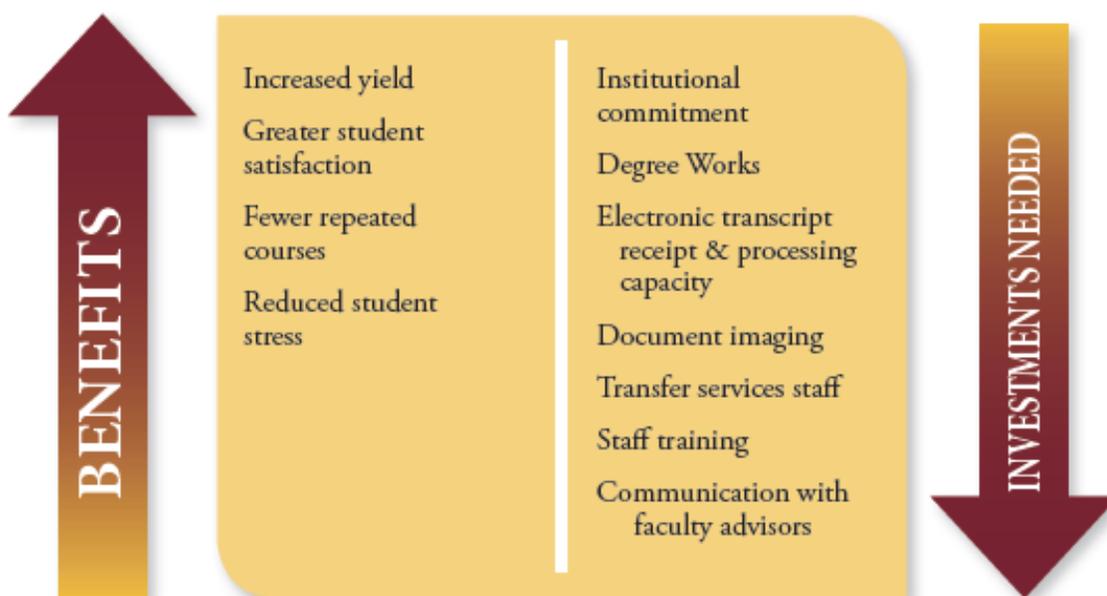
Sources: Culver, 2012; Davies, et al., 2015; Jain et al., 2011; Marling, 2013; Miller, 2013

Transfer scholars advocate data collection and assessment at department and institutional levels, but recommend the main responsibility for data collection on transfer students reside in one unit (Jain et al., 2011; Marling 2013).

RECOMMENDATION #3

PROVIDE EARLY DEGREE-SPECIFIC CREDIT EVALUATIONS

Transfer scholars suggest that a pre-enrollment degree-specific transfer credit evaluation should be the minimum standard for all receiving institutions (Handel & Williams, 2012). One of the greatest challenges to creating a transfer receptive culture is managing transfer credit evaluations (TCE) for increasing numbers of students, especially as more attend three or more institutions before graduating. When students do not receive a timely TCE, they often pay for duplicate courses, delay enrollment, lose unexpected pretransfer credits, enroll for classes for which they are unprepared, cannot calculate time-to-graduation, and are unsatisfied customers (Handel & Williams, 2012; Marling, 2013; Ott & Cooper, 2014). Obstacles stemming from lack of timely transfer credit evaluation not only disadvantage transfer students, but also render the receiving institution less competitive (Furbeck, 2011). Transfer students deserve a transfer receptive institution that gives maximum credit for previous coursework and provides early degree-specific audits to enable them to make informed decisions about major selection and calculate time-to-degree.



CONCLUSIONS

Attendance histories of WU students mirror those of students across the nation; the majority of graduates have credits from other institutions, with an increasing number arriving with credits from two or more postsecondary institutions. Study participants identified barriers to matriculation; many of the barriers were also identified as weaknesses or threats by WU staff. The recommendations in this paper reduce barriers to transfer student matriculation by filling gaps in fundamental enrollment processes.

- ❖ Increase electronic transcript receipt.
- ❖ Add capability for automated transcript processing.
- ❖ Provide early degree-specific transfer credit evaluations.
- ❖ Collect and analyze data on transfer students.

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Appendix B: Recruitment E-mail Text

Subject: Participate in a Research Study on Transfer Students

Hello WU Transfer Student:

I am interested in learning about your journey to attain your bachelor's degree. You are part of a growing group of students who have attended three or more postsecondary institutions, and I would like to know more about your experience transitioning to the Wadlaw University (WU), so that I can help facilitate the process for other students like you. I am conducting interviews, using Google Chat, with adult students who have attended at least two other colleges or universities in addition to WU. You are eligible to participate in the study if you:

Enrolled in WU when you were age 25 or older;

Submitted transcripts with at least 12 credits from at least two other postsecondary institutions;

and Enrolled in WU in fall 2013 or spring 2014.

The project would help institutional agents at WU develop student-centered policies and procedures to help facilitate efficient transition and graduation of transfer students. As this study will contribute to the growing body of research on students who have attended multiple institutions, the data from the study will also be used in future journal articles or conference presentations. Your confidentiality will be ensured as a participant in the study.

If you are eligible and interested in participating, you be asked to participate in an interview using Google Chat. This interview will take approximately two hours and will be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time. As a token of appreciation, you will **receive a modest gift card from Amazon.com** upon the completion of your interview. You will not be identified as a study participant and your responses will be completely confidential.

If you would like to participate, please contact me via e-mail at transferstudentresearch@gmail.com or reach me by phone at [REDACTED] via text or phone call. If you choose not to participate, simply do not respond to this e-mail.

Thank You,

Kimberly Crews

[REDACTED]

Walden University Doctoral Candidate in Higher Education and Adult Learning

This study is being conducted by Kimberly Crews as part of her doctoral Research project at Walden University. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Boards of both Walden University (10-24-14-0302022) and Wadlaw University (691489-1).

Appendix C: Recruitment Poster

Transfer Students

Participate in a Research Study

I am searching for transfer students to participate in a research study investigating the transition experiences of students with multiple-institution histories at the Wadlaw University (WU).

I am conducting interviews (using Google Chat) with adult students who have attended at least two other colleges or universities in addition to WU.

Eligibility to Participate

- Enrolled in WU when at age 25 or older;
- Submitted transcripts from at least two other post-secondary institutions; and
- Enrolled in WU in fall 2013 or spring 2014.

This interview will take approximately two hours and will be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time. You will not be identified as a study participant and your responses will be completely confidential. **Each participant will receive a modest token of appreciation upon completion of the interview.**

Interested and Eligible? Please contact:

Kimberly Crews

[REDACTED]

This study is being conducted by Kimberly Crews as part of her doctoral Research project at Walden University. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Boards of both Walden University (10-24-14-0302022) and Wadlaw University (691489-1).

Appendix D: E-mail Interview Protocol

Name: _____ Pseudonym _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Introduction Script

Good [Morning/Afternoon/Evening],

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this e-mail interview today. Please take your time to respond to the questions in as much detail as you can recall. As you will need to type your responses, this interview may take up to 2 hours. I will ask you a series of questions about your experience as a student with a history of attendance at multiple postsecondary institutions and focus specifically on your experience transitioning to WU. Your interview will help staff and faculty at WU consider actions to improve the transfer culture at WU.

Once you indicate that you are ready to proceed, I will send you the first question. When I receive your response, I may send another question to clarify your response. I also may ask a probing question to encourage you to expand upon your response. Then I will ask you the next question. When all questions have been answered the interview will end. To make the interview as authentic as possible, I encourage you to insert emoticons (e.g. ☺ and ☻), texting symbols, and other expressions to represent your emotions. All of your responses will be kept confidential, so please feel free to answer the questions completely and honestly. However, if you ever feel uncomfortable answering a question, please indicate that you would like to skip the question.

After our e-mail interview is complete, I will prepare a report of the e-mail exchange. About a week after the interview, I will send you a copy of the report. I ask that you review the report and make sure that I accurately documented our exchange and consider whether your responses were complete and correct. You will then have a chance to amend your responses and return the report to me via e-mail.

As stated in the consent form that you acknowledged, participation in the interview is completely voluntary. If you would like to take a break and complete the interview at another time, return to a previous question, or stop the interview, please let me know. There are no negative consequences if you decide that you want to stop at any time. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Establishing a Pseudonym

As established in the consent form, your identity will not be revealed in this study. I would like you to select an alias by which you would like to be identified in the study. Can you please select a city, state, country, or other geographic name that you would like to use to identify yourself?

Great, [Insert Alias], let's begin the interview.

I am using the concept of the "transfer receptive culture" to frame the questions that you are about to answer. If WU had a transfer receptive culture it would mean that WU would have pretransfer and posttransfer activities to make your transfer experience efficient and to make you feel welcome. As you consider and respond to the questions, please think about the culture of WU and whether it is receptive to transfer students.

Background on multiple-institution attendance:

Tell the story of your journey to pursue your bachelor's degree.

- What other colleges and/or universities did you attend?
- When did you attend each?
- What circumstances led you to attend and transfer from (or leave) each institution?

Questions about pretransfer information and experiences at WU:

- From what sources did you get information about transfer policies and procedures at WU prior to applying to WU? Probes: The WU website? Staff/faculty at WU? Advisors at your previous institution?
- Did you find the transfer policies and procedures at UDC to be clearly articulated? Please explain.

Questions about posttransfer experiences at WU:

- What was it like for you when you applied to and began attending WU? How welcoming did you find the staff, faculty, administrators, and other students?
- Which staff and faculty members at WU did you speak with or meet with to help you through the transition process?
- Were any staff or faculty members particularly helpful?
- Were there staff members that were not helpful?
- Did you attend New Student Orientation? Why or Why not?
 - a. Was the New Student orientation session that you attended targeted to transfer students?
 - b. How did the New Student Orientation help your transition to WU?

- Tell me about your experience getting your transfer credits evaluated at WU:
 - a. How long did it take?
 - b. Which staff and faculty members were involved in this process?
 - c. Was the process efficient and effective?
- How did your previous experiences transferring (or as a college student) help you when you transferred to WU?

Concluding questions:

- Can you envision an ideal transfer process at WU? What would it look like?
- Are there any other comments or thoughts you would like to share before we end the interview?

Conclusion Script:

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your responses will be used help WU faculty, staff, and administrators develop more student-centered transfer services. I will e-mail you a report of this interview in one week. Please review the report and let me know if I missed or misrepresented any part of our exchange. Please also feel free to change or amend your responses if you have remembered any new information or need to clarify any points. I will send you a reminder message three days after sending out the report. I will send your gift card upon the receipt of your approved interview report or one week after sending out the report.