

The Community College Transfer Student and Articulation Services in Selected Florida Public Universities: Myths and Realities

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Higher education is currently at a premium in the United States. Many experts, including most prominently, President Barack Obama, view a baccalaureate prepared workforce as critical to the nation's economic recovery and long-term financial security. Yet, colleges and universities across the country are responding to shrinking budgets and tightening the student loan market and a growing applicant pool by increasing admission requirements and limiting access to highly sought after, overcrowded baccalaureate programs.

Public community colleges in the U.S. have historically provided access to a higher level of education for diverse student populations through open door admissions. Public universities have served as gatekeepers, maintaining the standards of baccalaureate and graduate study through competitive admissions. Recognized as workforce engines of the U.S. economy, community colleges appeal to non-traditional students as an accessible, affordable, and relevant route to post-secondary education. Community colleges provide multiple routes to baccalaureate education including articulation agreements with four-year institutions, community college/university campus partnerships, and recently, stand alone baccalaureate degrees (Floyd, 2006).

Some states such as California, Florida, and Texas are responding to the demand for access by authorizing community colleges to begin conferring baccalaureates that address statewide workforce needs (Call, 1997; Cook, 2000; Floyd, 2006; Floyd, Skolnik, & Walker, 2005). Still, the number of Associate of Arts (AA) graduates who seek the baccalaureate through transfer to a four-year college or university is expected to continue to grow dramatically. As four-year institutions configure future student services, the demographics, enrollment patterns, and individual needs of community college transfer students must be considered.

The research reported here examined a single cohort of community college transfer students and their first-time-in-college (FTIC) counterparts at three Florida public universities. The purpose of this investigation was to uncover similarities

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and differences between two distinct groups of students who entered upper division study at the same point in time and to better understand their baccalaureate journeys. In addition to a six-year retrospective examination of demographic data and academic progress, transfer student support services and programming at each of the three universities were explored through document review, site visits, and semi-structured interviews with campus administrators. This article presents empirical evidence that separates some of the myths from the realities of the transfer student baccalaureate experience. Because the study is delimited to students at three Florida universities, caution must be exercised in generalizing to other institutions in Florida and elsewhere. Still, the findings and conclusions should be of interest to all college and university professionals who are committed to supporting the success of community college graduates who pursue the baccalaureate.

Design of the Study

The present study employed a concurrent mixed methods design to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2006) described concurrent methods designs as the use of qualitative and quantitative strands “independently to answer exploratory and confirmatory questions” (p. 20). Following the typology of Teddlie and Tashakkori (Figure 1), quantitative data and qualitative data were gathered simultaneously and analyzed independently with each data set providing a rich context that enhanced overall interpretability of the findings.

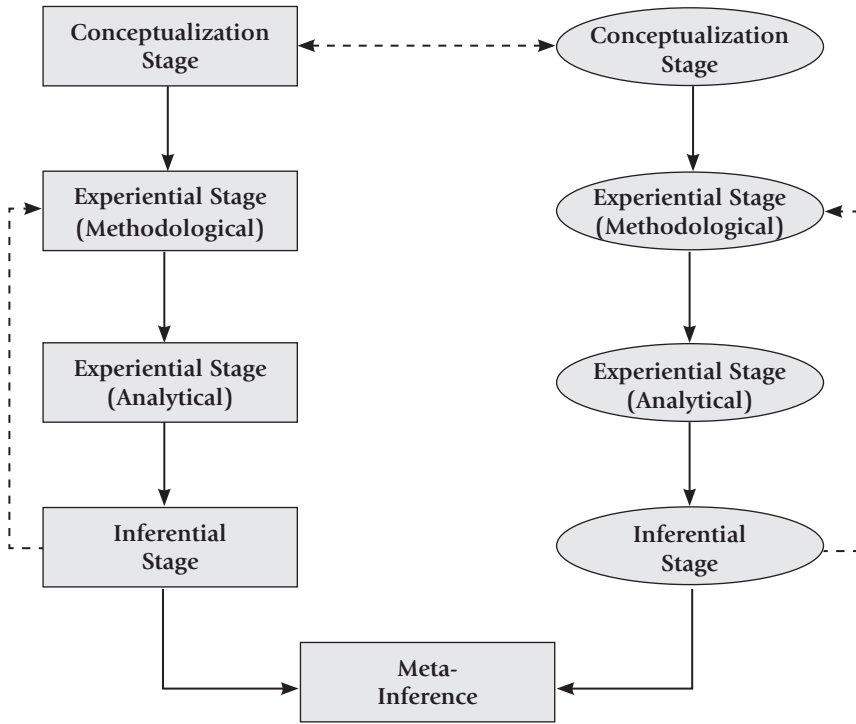
Context and Student Sample

This research was part of a larger study that examined the continued viability of Florida’s 2 + 2 policy, the success and persistence of community college transfer students, and the perceived effects of state governance decentralization on baccalaureate articulation at three selected institutions in Florida (Falconetti, 2007; Falconetti, 2009). Three regional comprehensive SUS institutions in Florida were selected because of their original status as upper level institutions designed specifically to serve community college graduates and other junior level transfer students: Florida Atlantic University (FAU), University of North Florida (UNF), and University of West Florida (UWF). Each of these upper level universities received legislative approval to expand their respective mission to admit a lower division of freshmen and sophomores in the late 1980s.

The student participants for this study were AA degree transfers from Florida’s public community colleges and FTIC students from the three selected universities ($n = 2,612$). The sample of student records was drawn from the population of fall 2001 registrants who were classified as juniors, possessing 60 to 70 credit hours. The research sample was obtained from the State University System Student Data Course File using stratified sampling. The research sample was further stratified into two sub-groups: graduates and dropouts.

FIGURE 1

Concurrent mixed methods design (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2006).



Data Analysis

Demographic Profile. Descriptive statistics were computed to examine group demographics, (e.g., student classification, status, age, ethnicity, and gender). The reporting of the demographic variables of age, student ethnicity, and gender are consistent with those utilized throughout the record keeping of Florida’s State University System (SUS). A demographic profile for the total sample ($n = 2,612$) of community college transfer and FTIC students is presented in Table 1. Descriptive data were aggregated to identify the characteristics of the total sample ($n = 2,612$) of community college transfer and FTIC students by sub-groups of graduates ($n = 1,823$) and dropouts ($n = 644$). The 145 students not accounted for in graduates and dropouts were still enrolled at the end of the six-year period.

TABLE 1

Profile of Total Sample

Demographics	Frequency (Percentage)		
	<u>CC Transfer</u>	<u>Native (FTIC)</u>	<u>Total</u>
Student Classification	1,738 (66.5)	874 (33.5)	2,612 (100.0)
Student Status			
Continued Enrollment	107 (4.1)	38 (1.5)	145 (5.6)
Dropouts	480 (18.4)	164 (6.3)	644 (24.7)
Graduates	1,151 (44.1)	672 (25.7)	1,823 (69.8)
Totals	1,738 (66.6)	874 (33.5)	2,612 (100.1)
Age			
16–17	4 (.2)	0	4 (.2)
18–24	1,124 (43.0)	746 (28.6)	1,870 (71.6)
25–30	318 (12.2)	70 (2.7)	388 (14.9)
31–40	193 (7.4)	44 (1.7)	237 (9.1)
41–50	86 (3.3)	11 (.4)	97 (3.7)
51–65	11 (.4)	3 (.1)	14 (.5)
66–76	2 (.1)	0	2 (.1)
Totals	1,738 (66.6)	874 (33.5)	2,612 (100.1)
Ethnicity			
Asian or Pacific Islander	73 (2.8)	63 (2.4)	136 (5.2)
Black (not of Hispanic origin)	206 (7.9)	95 (3.6)	301 (11.5)
Hispanic	153 (5.9)	75 (2.9)	228 (8.8)
American Indian/Alaskan Native	13 (.5)	3 (.1)	16 (.6)
Non-Resident Alien	53 (2.0)	22 (.8)	75 (2.8)
White (not of Hispanic Origin)	1,222 (46.8)	612 (23.4)	1,834 (70.2)
No Indication/Not Reported	18 (.7)	4 (.2)	22 (.9)
Totals	1,738 (66.6)	874 (33.4)	2,612 (100.0)
Gender			
Female	1,116 (42.7)	533 (20.4)	1,649 (63.1)
Male	622 (23.8)	341 (13.1)	963 (36.9)
Totals	1,738 (66.5)	874 (33.5)	2,612 (100.0)

Note. $n = 2,612$. Descriptive data represents the frequency and percent of students within the total sample. Total percentages may vary slightly and may exceed 100% due to rounding errors.

Academic Progress. The statistical technique of binary logistic regression was the method selected for analyzing academic progress. Logistic regression analysis examined the contributions of the different predictor variables to the probability of community college transfer and FTIC student's academic success and persistence at FAU, UNF, and UWF. The difference question proposed for the study and analyzed using binary logistic regression analysis was:

Is there a statistically significant ($p = .05$) difference in the academic success and persistence of community college transfer students and FTIC (native) students who are seeking baccalaureate degrees in Florida's State University System?

Six selected factors that represent academic success and timely completion for community college and FTIC student graduates were: (a) changes in major, (b) cumulative semesters completed to graduate, (c) final GPA, (d) number of 1000 and 2000 level hours taken at the senior institution, (e) number of breaks in continuous enrollment (stop out), and (f) total semesters enrolled. The five operational variables selected for community college transfer and FTIC student dropouts were: (a) changes in major, (b) cumulative semesters completed to graduate, (c) final GPA, (d) number of 1000 and 2000 level hours completed, and (e) total semesters enrolled.

Transfer Student Services and Programming. The second phase of this study employed qualitative techniques to explore the structure and function of articulation and transfer student services, and overall awareness of transfer students on the campuses. The qualitative analysis began with a review of public documents that provided historical and background information about FAU, UNF, and UWF. Fetterman (1989) described the research of social organizations as guided by the structure, or social configurations, of the organization and the function, or "patterns of social relations," amongst individuals. Document review was followed by site visits to FAU, UNF, and UWF to investigate the campus visibility of transfer students, the administrative structure of transfer student services, and the cultural nuances embedded within these services.

Semi-structured interviews and follow-up telephone conversations were conducted with 15 selected administrators. The participants consisted of a top-level academic affairs administrator, a top-level student affairs administrator, the student ombudsman, the articulation officer, and a previous articulation officer from each of the three institutions ($n = 15$). A transfer student service profile was created through the review of documents and site visits and was corroborated with the information gathered in the interviews.

Findings

Demographic Profile

The total sample ($n = 2,612$) consisted of 1,738 (66.5%) community college transfer students and 874 (33.5%) FTIC students across FAU, UNF, and UWF. Community college transfer students represented the majority of the total sample, tripling the size of the junior class. Community college transfer students also represented the majority of junior students enrolled at each institution [FAU (68.2%, $f = 774$), UNF (60.6%, $f = 535$), and UWF (72.2%, $f = 429$)]. Among the three institutions, UWF enrolled the largest proportion of community college transfer students as compared to FTIC students, and UNF enrolled the smallest.

In describing the history of the SUS of Florida, Stonecipher (1994) noted the establishment of FAU, UNF, and UWF as upper level institutions built on the strengths of the public junior and community colleges. The original mission of FAU, UNF, and UWF was to provide a viable route to the baccalaureate in regions that did not previously contain four-year institutions. Given the historical premise on which FAU, UNF, and UWF were built, it is not surprising that the total student sample ($n = 2,612$) consisted of more community college transfer students than FTIC. In 2006 the South Florida Sun-Sentinel reported that the majority of FAU's student population of 25,000 students transferred from community colleges or other institutions ("FAU FTIC Program," 2006). FTIC students accounted for only 25% of the student body. The article also mentioned an increased effort by FAU administrators to recruit FTIC students and to develop additional programs that focus on the first-year-experience ("FAU FTIC Program," 2006). In fact, a majority of the 15 current and past administrators interviewed in Phase II of the present study identified their institution's primary focus as serving traditional or FTIC students.

At the national level community college students represent higher percentages of underrepresented, non-traditional, low-income, and lower performing students than FTIC students of four-year institutions (Anderson, Alfonso, & Sun, 2006; Beebe, 2007; Blumenthal, 2002; Cabrera, Burkum, & LaNasa, 2005; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 1994; Freeman, 2007; Grubb, 1991; Jamolo, 2001; Levin, 2001; McClenney, 2004; Oudenhoven, 2002; Roueche, Baker, Omahaboy, & Mullins, 1987; West, 1993; Williams, 2002). McClenney (2006) reported, "community colleges enroll almost half of the students in the U.S. undergraduate education, and they also serve disproportionately high numbers of low-income, first generation, and minority students" (p. 47). The results of the demographic profile for the research sample ($n = 2,612$) in the present study were consistent with the assertions of McClenney (2006) and others that community college students are diverse along the intersecting dimensions of age and ethnicity (Beebe, 2007; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 2001; Levin, 2001; West, 1993; Williams, 2002;). The demographic profiles of the subsamples of community college transfer and FTIC students across FAU, UNF, and UWF were similar and

congruent with the national data in that community college transfers accounted for a greater degree of student diversity than FTIC students.

The mean age of the research sample was 24. The largest percentage of students (71.6%, $f = 1,823$) was in the 18 to 24 age group. Students 18 to 24 years of age represented 85% of the sample of FTIC students and 65% of the community college transfers. These findings correspond with the literature regarding the traditional age range of FTIC students (Choy, 2002) and the increasing number of community college students who fall into the traditional age range of 18 to 24. In 2005, the U.S. Department of Education reported that 42% of public community college students who enrolled in course credit between the years of 1998 and 2000 were under the age of 22 (Evelyn, 2005). The findings of the present study indicated that even though 65% of community college transfers were of a more traditional age (18 to 24 years of age), transfers were more diverse in age than their FTIC counterparts. The 25 to 75 age range accounted for 35% ($f = 610$) of community college transfer students and only 15% ($f = 128$) of FTIC students. Transfer students outnumbered FTIC by approximately 2:1 in the research sample. These findings underscore the literature that emphasizes the degree to which transfer students bring diversity to university campuses. These findings are fairly consistent with those of Palezesi and Bower (2006) who reported that an increasing number of students between the ages of 40 and 60 (i.e., baby boomers) were matriculating in community college course work.

The ethnic profile indicated that the most prevalent ethnicity for the subsamples of community college transfer and FTIC students across campuses was White, not of Hispanic origin, representing 70%, respectively (Table 1). Community college transfer students also accounted for a greater percentage of students who were Hispanic and non-White as compared to FTIC students. Levin (2001) and Roueche, Baker III, and Rose (1989) explained that the diverse nature of community college students has prompted community colleges across the country to pay considerable attention to multiculturalism and diversity. "With large numbers of minority students in the United States and increasing numbers of students who are immigrants or second-generation immigrants in both countries attending community colleges, practices and structures were modified to meet their needs" (Levin, 2001, p. 163). It follows that the four-year institution to which these students transfer should be equally sensitive to providing specialized services that might be needed by these students.

The Pappas Report, commissioned by Florida's Board of Governors (BOG), related the expected demographic changes in Florida to the future expansion and stratification of the SUS (Florida Board of Governors, 2007). A particular concern of the report was the potential impact of changes in age distribution and ethnic composition on the rate of higher educational enrollment growth. According to the report, the population group of 18 to 24 will experience a 1% decline between the years of 2004 and 2015, and the 65 plus age group will experience an increase of 3%. By 2018, Hispanics will represent the majority of students, and Whites will represent the minority. The Pappas Report further surmised,

The demographic shifts could also signal that even higher proportions of students will choose the community college as their entry point to higher education. Minority and poor students (often for financial and/or academic support reasons) are disproportionately represented in community colleges. As Florida already has a larger than national average percentage of its students in two-year colleges (53% vs. 45%), this shift has additional public policy implications (Florida Board of Governors, 2007, p. 4).

Academic Progress

Logistic regression subsample of graduates. Logistic regression was used to investigate academic progress for the subsample of graduates through the research question:

Is there a difference in the academic success and persistence of community college transfer and FTIC (native) student graduates of FAU, UNE, and UWF?

This analysis yielded a statistically significant ($p < .001$) difference in the academic success and persistence of community college transfer and FTIC student graduates. The -2 Log likelihood (-2LL) was 2,116.2 and was statistically significant with a χ^2 of 283.7 ($df = 6, n = 1,823$). Variable logit coefficients (beta weights) for the analysis are presented in Table 2. Total semesters enrolled ($\beta = .370$) and final GPA ($\beta = .252$) were the variables most highly weighted in the logistic regression equation. The estimated odds ratio [$\text{Exp}(\beta)$] indicated that community college transfer student graduates completed more semesters and graduated with higher grade point averages than FTIC students. Specifically, the model results indicated that a one unit increase in the number of semesters enrolled and in final GPA increased the odds that graduates were community college transfer students by the factors of 1.45 and 1.29, respectively.

The academic success and persistence factors of breaks in continuous enrollment ($\beta = .179$), cumulative semester hours completed ($\beta = -.025$), and number of 1000 and 2000 level hours completed ($\beta = -.066$) were not as highly weighted in the logistic regression equation as total semesters enrolled ($\beta = .370$) and final GPA ($\beta = .252$). However, the factors of breaks in continuous enrollment ($p < .01$), cumulative semester hours completed ($p < .001$), and number of 1000 and 2000 level hours completed ($p < .001$) were statistically significant. The estimated odds ratio [$\text{Exp}(\beta)$] for these three factors indicated that: (a) community college transfer student graduates broke their continuous enrollment fewer times than FTIC student graduates, (b) community college transfer students graduated with fewer cumulative semester hours than FTIC students, and (c) community college transfer students graduated with fewer lower level hours than FTIC students. Specifically, these results indicated that a one unit increase in the number of breaks in continuous enrollment increased the odds that graduates were community college transfer students by a factor of 1.20. For a one unit increase in cumulative semester hours completed and the number of 1000

TABLE 2

Variable Coefficients of Graduates

Step 1	β	S.E.	Wald	<i>df</i>	Sig.	Exp(β)
Total Semesters Enrolled	.370	.041	81.55	1	.000	1.45
Final GPA	.252	.087	8.46	1	.004	1.29
Breaks in Enrollment	.179	.069	6.82	1	.009	1.20
Changes in Major	-.100	.093	1.15	1	.284	.90
1000/2000 Level Courses	-.066	.006	112.64	1	.000	.94
Cumulative Semester Hours	-.025	.003	53.64	1	.000	.98
Constant	1.29	.472	7.46	1	.006	3.63

Note. $n = 1,823$. Independent variables are ordered by magnitude of logit coefficients.

and 2000 level hours completed, the odds that graduates were community college transfer students decreased by the factors of .94 and .98, respectively. The academic success and persistence factor, changes in major, was not statistically significant ($p = .284$), indicating that there was not a significant difference in the number of times community college graduates changed their majors as compared to FTIC graduates.

Logistic regression subsample of dropouts. Logistic Regression was used to investigate academic progress for the subsample of dropouts through the research question:

Is there a difference in the academic success and persistence of community college transfer and FTIC (native) student dropouts at FAU, UNE, and UWF?

This analysis yielded a statistically significant ($p < .001$) difference in the academic success and persistence of community college transfer and FTIC student dropouts. The -2 Log likelihood-ratio (-2LL) was 641.93 and was statistically significant with a χ^2 of 88.88 ($df = 5, n = 644$). Variable logit coefficients (beta weights) for the analysis are presented in Table 3. Total semesters enrolled ($\beta = .442$) was the independent variable most highly weighted in the logistic regression equation. As indicated by the estimated odds ratio [Exp (β)], community college transfer students dropped out of their academic degree programs with fewer total semesters than FTIC students. Specifically, the model results indicated that a one unit increase in the number of semesters enrolled increased the odds that the dropouts were community college transfer students

by a factor of 1.56.

The academic success and persistence factors of cumulative semester hours completed ($\beta = -.040$) and number of 1000 and 2000 level hours completed ($\beta = -.050$) were not as highly weighted in the logistic regression equation as total semesters enrolled ($\beta = .442$). However, the factors of cumulative semester hours completed ($p < .001$) and the number of 1000 and 2000 level hours completed ($p < .001$) were statistically significant. The estimated odds ratio [$\text{Exp}(\beta)$] for these three factors indicated that community college transfer students dropped out of their academic degree programs with fewer cumulative semester hours and lower level semester hours than their FTIC counterparts. The academic success and persistence factors of changes in major ($p = .439$) and final GPA ($p = .138$) were not statistically significant, indicating that there were not significant differences in the number of major changes and final GPAs of community college transfer students as compared to FTIC students.

TABLE 3

Variable Coefficients of Dropouts

Step 1	β	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(β)
Total Semesters Enrolled	.442	.078	31.84	1	.000	1.56
Changes in Major	-.180	.233	.60	1	.439	.84
Final GPA	-.164	.110	2.20	1	.138	.85
1000/2000 Level Courses	-.050	.010	23.14	1	.000	.95
Cumulative Semester Hours	-.040	.006	43.80	1	.000	.96
Constant	4.611	.555	69.04	1	.000	100.63

Note. $n = 644$. Independent variables are ordered by magnitude of logit coefficients.

The findings of the binary logistic regression analysis indicate that community college transfer students perform academically just as well or better than their FTIC counterparts. These findings contradict those of a legislative audit report (Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability [OPPAGA], 2002) that indicated the majority of AA students who transferred to state universities between 1997 and 1999 completed lower division courses upon entering the SUS. The findings also contradict the studies of Cohen and Brawer (1982) and West (1993), which yielded lower grade point averages for community college transfer students in comparison to FTICs.

Transfer Student Support Services

The transfer student support service profile that emerged from the review of documents, site visits, and corroborating administrator interviews is presented in Table 4. Institution names have been replaced with letters A, B, and C to maintain confidentiality of the interview participants. The responses of administrators from Institution A were most distinct, as all four administrators spoke of a lack of awareness of existing transfer student services. "I am not aware that there is any equivalent center or discreet service specifically targeted toward them [transfer students]..." Another administrator mentioned his concern for community college students during their transfer to the university. "I think the transfer students are largely neglected in this array of services. And so I think there is really a lot more we can do to think about programs specifically designed for the transition of the transfer students."

TABLE 4

Profile of Transfer Student Services Available at Institutions A, B, and C

Service/Program	Institutions		
	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>
Campus Articulation Days		X	X
Greek Life, Targeted Recruitment			X
Orientation		X	X
Phi Theta Kappa			X
Recruitment	X	X	X
Scholarships	X	X	X
Workshops/Seminars			X

Note: X indicates the service or program offered to transfer students at the respective institution. The findings, as included this profile, were corroborated with institutional documents, interview findings, and follow-up communication with select participants. For purposes of confidentiality, 2 + 2 partnership campuses and university baccalaureates offered on community college campuses were not included. These findings are presented in Figure 6, data from the review of public documents.

Among the programs described by the 12 participants, transfer student orientation was referenced most. More than half of the administrators from institutions A and B mentioned that transfer student orientation was a service provided by student affairs and was open to all transfer students. One administrator from Institution C noted that transfer student orientation is offered on every 2 + 2 partnership campus. The articulation officer from Institution A explained that an on-site orientation program for community college transfers was being developed in collaboration with the community colleges. Currently no transfer student orientations exist at Institution A. Orientation programs specifically designed to address the transition needs of community college transfers do not exist on the campuses of institutions A or B.

Of the three institutions, only one had an organization for transfer students. This national leadership honor society, Phi Theta Kappa, exists on many university campuses as an alumni chapter. Administrators at institution C explained the heightened level of motivation expressed by community college transfers when recognized as honors students of this national society. The previous articulation officer from Institution C discussed the past involvement of the prior transfer student office with the Phi Theta Kappa alumni chapter.

The administration of the transfer student office advised the university's Phi Theta Kappa students. Many Phi Theta Kappa students were very involved in the honor society at the community college and were happy to find out that they [community college transfer students] were at a university that had more options for student activities for the honor society. "We [transfer student office administrators] went to the community colleges to award the students Phi Theta Kappa scholarships during the honors' program. There is only one other university in the state of Florida that has an active alumni association for Phi Theta Kappa."

Three administrators from Institution C mentioned a transfer student fair during which prospective and current transfer students visited campus to review additional information about academic affairs and student affairs related programs. None of the 12 administrators on the three campuses knew of additional programs, clubs, or organizations for transfer students on their respective campuses. On this issue, one administrator added,

Besides transfer student orientation, all services provided to transfer students are the same as the services provided to native students. For example, Welcome Week is not only for freshman. The university is welcoming all new students. However, Welcome Week does not have programs designed for transfer students. The primary population is undergraduate. The biggest gap is with graduate students. Transfer students are not really distinguished. Students are distinguished per level [freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate].

Among the 15 administrators, 11 stated that they did not recognize any faculty members who were designated as representatives for transfer students. The most common phrases used by the 11 participants to describe whether faculty represented transfer students were, "I don't really know," "I have never heard that

we have," and "I'm a little unsure. I don't think we have faculty members that do that [represent transfer students]". Recognizing the importance of faculty involvement in the recruitment and retention of community college students, one administrator expressed, "I think that is something that has to be discussed with the deans for each college and then within that college examine some of the programs we have."

Another administrator noted the degree to which faculty is involved in the articulation of academic programs between community colleges and universities as key to the transferability of course work and to fostering student retention. Communication of changes in academic programs between the university and the community college would inevitably ease the transfer process for students. "It is probably the weakest area on any campus I would say. I think we took a big step in that regard when we set up articulation meetings...." Participants from Institutions B and C reported a high level of faculty interaction during campus articulation days. Most participants noted that, with the exception of articulation days, faculty members who were involved in recruiting transfer students served as university volunteers and did so in addition to their daily job responsibilities.

The results of the examination of transfer student services at the three campuses yielded a decreased institutional emphasis on community college transfer students and the need to supplement current FTIC programs with transfer student services. These findings correspond with the literature regarding the importance of university pre- and post-matriculation services for transfer students (Davies & Kraky, 2000; Glennen, 1995; Tinto, 1993). Proponents of engaging students through academic and student support programs and services (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Witt, 2005; McClenney, 2006; Tinto, 2007) emphasize the need to create a culture of evidence in which student success is at the core of the institutional mission.

The Transfer Process

Interview respondents not only discussed the structure of transfer student services, but also provided a rich description of the cultural nuances of the transfer process on their respective campuses. One campus administrator commented insightfully on the adjustment process a community college transfer student undergoes upon the transition to the university:

I think they [community college students] are used to much more individual support. I have had students even say, "well, at...I could just walk into the Dean's office and bring this problem to him...." Whereas here [university] students often speak about an enormous bureaucracy, policy, and procedures that are quite complex, not well publicized, and seem unfair.... So, apparently, they are getting a lot more direct personal attention and guidance at the community college.

Two administrators provided specific examples of difficulties encountered by transfer students at the university because of differences in policies among public community colleges and universities in Florida. They also noted the differences in policies for students with disabilities. Describing some of the difficulties experienced by students with disabilities during the transfer process, one of the administrators offered this example,

The rules are a little bit looser at the community college with regard to who is actually disabled and can receive services. Here [university] it is much more rigid, and there are more requirements to become eligible than at the community college.

Another administrator provided an example:

Many times they [students with disabilities] will come in because of grade issues, and I think that our grading standard is a little bit tougher than when they are in the community college. It's the switch from high school to community college and then they experience a transition again from the community to the university.

Most of the 15 participants expressed that upon the matriculation of community college transfers at the four-year institution, no specific attempts were made to communicate directly to transfer students. One participant noted: "I think once they [transfer students] get here, they really become meshed with all the other students unless that student has some kind of strong connection to a club or something like that." To this end, another participant explained,

After that [matriculation] they [community college students] are treated like a native student. I think everybody understands that our lifeline is the transfer student, and I believe all of our students will be treated equally with respect and with the intent of getting them connected and getting them involved... I think that would be a common philosophy on campus.

These findings correspond with the literature that highlights the process students undergo when transferring between institutions. Of the many constructs and frameworks that attempt to shed light on the subject of college transition, the themes of psychological, environmental, and climate adjustments are most noted. The psychological adjustment process of a transfer student is referred to as *transitional trauma*, or "the level of alienation a student experiences when unfamiliar with norms, values, and expectations at the 4-year institution" (Laanan, 2001, p. 9). The influence of a new educational environment and the cultural climate in which students interact are additional factors faced by the student during this period of acclimation. Lanaan explained that "campus climate encompasses student interactions across race and ethnicity, perceptions of the climate for intergroup relations (racial and ethnic tension), experiences of overt

discrimination, and the ethnic and racial diversity of the student body" (p. 10).

Transfer students have been noted to experience *transfer shock*. Transfer shock is a term that characterizes the temporary dip in a transfer students' grade point average (GPA) during their first or second semester at a four-year institution (Cjeda & Kaylor, 1997). In defining transfer shock as "the cognitive outcome of transfer students' adjustment," GPA is generally emphasized as the sole measurement tool for indicating a student's acclimation to the newly selected environment (Laanan, 2000, p. 3). Diaz's (1992) research on transfer shock found that across 62 studies, 79% of the students experienced transfer shock, making their GPA one half of a grade point less than they received at their respective community colleges. According to 60% of the studies, students eventually recovered from transfer shock. This post transfer shock increase in GPA is coined as *transfer ecstasy*. Baldwin (1994) and Graham and Hughes (1994) reported that community college transfer students experienced failure rates between 18% and 22% at the conclusion of their first semester of course work at the four-year institution.

Discussion

The findings of this study support a number of significant conclusions. First, analyses provided detail regarding continuing compliance with the statewide articulation agreement and the provision of transfer student services on campuses of three Florida institutions (i.e., FAU, UNE, and UWF) that were originally established to serve community college transfers and other junior and senior level transfers. Consistent with the historical premise on which these institutions were founded, community college transfers represented the majority of students at each institution. The demographic profiles developed for the research sample ($n = 2,612$) indicated that community college transfer students accounted for greater percentages of age and ethnic diversity than FTIC students, representing increasingly high percentages of non-traditional students. The age demographics also support the assertion that increasing numbers of high school graduates are taking the 2 + 2 route to a baccalaureate, as the majority of students in the transfer group were in the 18 to 24 sub-group.

The findings of binary logistic regression analysis indicated that community college students broke continuous enrollment fewer times, and graduated with higher grade point averages and fewer lower level hours. This contradicts the myth, which is prevalent on university campuses, that community college transfers are generally less academically prepared than their FTIC counterparts. The reality at the three institutions studied is that community college transfer students save the state money by taking fewer lower division courses as juniors and seniors and maintain greater enrollment stability from term to term during their matriculation.

The fact that community college transfer students of the research sample dropped out with fewer total semester hours than their FTIC counterparts is disturbing in juxtaposition to the finding that few student services are focused on the needs of transfer students at these universities. It would appear that *transfer shock* is a reality on these Florida campuses and needs to be addressed. Although

the academic progress of transfer students during their first semester of enrollment at the university was not examined in this study, it is recommended that academic and student service personnel consider the phenomena of transfer shock along with the adjustments experienced by community college students prior to and during transfer to a university.

The findings of this study are supported in the professional literature. The symbiotic relationship between articulation, transfer, and life-long learning was defined by Kintzer (1996) as the vital strength of education systems that support students as agents of their own education. Student transfer success is increased when services at the sending and receiving institutions consist of student-centered and reliable programs (Derby & Smith, 2004; Just & Adams, 1997; Kintzer, 1996). Ignash and Townsend (2000) conducted a national study of statewide articulation agreements to examine the effectiveness of such agreements when accompanied by transfer student services. Ignash and Townsend queried executive directors of state higher education and community college agencies in 43 states to learn that these officials agree that statewide articulation agreements, when combined with transfer programs, enhanced the rates of student transfer at the state level. Transfer services reported most frequently by the respondents were academic advisement, enrollment services, financial aid, orientation services, and transcript evaluation (Ignash & Townsend, 2000).

The extent to which sending and receiving institutions support transfer students through specialized services reflects the institution's commitment to recognize and value transfer student needs. "There is every reason to believe that specially tailored programs will enhance the likelihood that [transfer students] will finish their degrees in the institutions to which they transfer" (Tinto, 1993, p. 190). Student support services and programs, (e.g., orientation programs, financial aid assistance, articulation services, and admission assistance), designed specifically to support the student during this time of transition have a significant effect on student motivation, involvement, and retention (Glennen, 1995; Davies & Kratky, 2000; Tinto, 1993). In particular, effective orientation programs provide new students with the opportunity to begin developing the all-important relationships with student service personnel, university staff, and faculty (Burns, Gaw, & Robinson, 1996). While the student support services vary per institution, a commonality exists in the belief that retention is linked to the services tailored to the needs of diverse student populations.

As 21st century economic and workforce demands dictate the need for a higher level of education, it is of utmost importance for community colleges and universities to ensure the effectiveness of articulation agreements; and specifically, for universities to initiate, expand, or continue specialized academic and student support services for community college transfers.

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