The Role of Academic Advisors in the Development of Transfer Student Capital

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The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between pre-transfer advising and the development of transfer student capital (TSC) for students who have transferred from community college to a four-year university. Using TSC as a framework, this qualitative case study seeks to identify the roles that pre-transfer advisors at community colleges and universities have in students' transfer processes. In this study, we find that advisors can play a critical role in building students' TSC and supporting students' self-efficacy. We also find that students indicate that advisors sometimes provide conflicting information or that advising can often be inaccessible to students, which can lead to self-advising. Implications and recommendations are discussed.

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Introduction

Community colleges are a pivotal gateway into higher education (Wyner, Deane, Jenkins & Fink, 2016). In 2015 to 2016, 49 percent of students who completed a baccalaureate degree attended a community college at least once within the previous ten years (National Student Clearinghouse, 2017). Despite the promise of the community college pathway, not all students are able to successfully transfer and earn a bachelor's degree (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). While 75 percent of first-year, first-time community college students aim to complete a baccalaureate degree, only one-quarter of these students go on to transfer and only 14 percent complete a bachelor's degree (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011; Jenkins & Fink, 2016).

Pre-transfer partnerships and pre-transfer advising between public, four-year universities and community colleges are expanding strategies used to support students through the transfer pipeline (Wyner et al., 2016). While some research finds these strategies to be useful for helping transfer students adjust to their new campus, little research details the specific impact of these pre-transfer programs and services on transfer student outcomes (Bers, Filkins, & McLaughlin, 2001; Davies & Dickmann, 1998; Hood, Hunt, & Haeffele, 2009; Miller, 2013). Given this gap in the literature, this study seeks to better understand the relationship between pre-transfer advising and the development of transfer student capital (TSC) for students who have transferred from community college to a four-year university. TSC can be defined as the knowledge that students accumulate and use to navigate the transfer process (Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston, 2010). With this concept in mind, our study seeks to identify the role that academic advisors play in facilitating the development of TSC for community college transfer students.

Literature Review

In order to develop the context for this study, our literature review begins by introducing TSC. We then transition to discuss how TSC relates to academic advising as well as the role of pre-transfer advising. TSC developed from Becker's (1962) human capital theory and Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory. These theories explained the impact of education on an individual's overall quality of life and advantages based on membership in a particular group. TSC, as defined by Laanan and associates (2010), refers to the knowledge students accumulate at two-year colleges in order to negotiate the transfer process to a four-year university. In their work, Laanan et al. described how a student's understanding of credit-transfer agreements, requirements for admission to a particular major, and course prerequisites comprised TSC. Unlike past scholars who have labeled the transfer student adjustment process as an experience of "transfer shock"* (Hills, 1965;

* The term "transfer shock" refers to the idea that transfer students may generally earn lower average grades immediately after transfer than they earned at their previous institution (Hills, 1965; Nolan and Hall, 1978; Webb, 1971; Williams, 1973).

Nolan & Hall, 1978; Webb, 1971; Williams, 1973), TSC moved away from viewing transfer students simply through a deficit model. Rather, Laanan's (2007) model posited that the more TSC a student possesses the more likely they will be to successfully transfer.

Transfer Student Capital and Academic Advising

In Laanan et al.'s (2010) study of the experiences of transfer students, the researchers sought to understand the extent to which the academic and social transfer adjustment of students was predicted by TSC. The authors developed a hypothetical predictive model measuring TSC through four composite variables: academic counseling experiences, perceptions of the transfer process, experiences with faculty at community college, and learning and study skills acquired at community college. The data demonstrated that both academic counseling experiences and learning and study skills acquired at community college were statistically significant to academic transfer adjustment. For example, certain academic counseling experiences negatively influenced academic adjustment. Given this finding, Laanan et al. (2010) postulated, "It might be that the transfer students did not receive accurate or adequate information regarding transferring from their community colleges" (p. 191). Lack of adequate information could be due, in part, to limited resources.

Some institutions, particularly community colleges, have limited advising resources (Ellis, 2013). Ellis (2013) highlighted that, when there are not enough advisors to support student needs, students may be required to visit multiple advising offices. This process can be frustrating for students and can lead to confusion. Studies have found that community colleges with a lack of proper advising can act as a barrier to successful transfer (Davies & Dickmann, 1998; Laanan et al., 2010). Students who felt that advising was inadequate often felt the advising was too general and not tailored to their specific major of interest (Gard, Paton, & Gosselin, 2012).

Recently, Wang, Lee, and Prevost (2017) extended the notion of TSC by examining the support students had for transferring, usage of multiple types of transfer services, transfer-oriented interactions with friends and family, and acquisition of transfer information through online and print materials. These researchers referred to their extended notion as aspirational momentum or students' clear definition of and sustained commitment to their educational goals. Wang et al. (2017) argued that "building and maintaining aspirational momentum is a key precursor to community college students' transfer access, as it allows students to stay on the appropriate pathway and make meaningful progress toward eventually gaining access to 4-year institutions" (p. 314).

Through their research, Wang et al. (2017) found that utilizing transfer services was the only factor that was statistically significant in increasing aspirational momentum for students. The researchers purported that other factors—such as support, encouragement, and financial backing—were helpful in the transfer process but could not actually put the student on a path to successful transfer. Therefore, the authors suggested that acquiring transfer information formally through institutional transfer services was crucial because the services were more likely to have accurate information regarding the transfer process.

The Role of Pre-Transfer Advisors

While Laanan and colleagues (2010) have suggested that advising can influence the development of TSC, other literature discussing *why* advising is critical for the community college transfer population has been surprisingly limited (Allen, Smith, & Muehleck, 2014; Flaga, 2006; Webb, Dantzler, & Hardy, 2015). Of the existing literature, pre-transfer advising is a prominent theme (Davies & Dickmann, 1998; Hood et al., 2009; Miller, 2013) and can be defined as formal advising with a college counselor or informal advising, usually by meeting with faculty members about transfer (Davies & Dickmann, 1998). Pre-transfer advising often focuses on helping students to plan a course of study that will eventually result in the successful transfer of credits to a four-year college or university (Davies & Dickmann, 1998). It is important to note that pre-transfer advising can take place at both the two-year and the four-year institution (Newhouse & McNamara, 1982). Articulation guides, which often disseminate information about transfer articulation policies, are very useful pre-transfer tools that can help students navigate the transfer process (Dawson & Dell, 1997; Newhouse & McNamara, 1982). Dawson and Dell (1997) emphasized, however, that transfer guides are not useful if they are not successfully shared with students. Therefore, the role of pre-transfer

advisors is critical in order to disseminate this information and guide students in their process.

Specifically, the literature illustrated that pre-transfer advisors can often be a positive influence by acting as "institutional agents" for students during the transfer process (Allen et al., 2014; Dowd, Pak, & Bensimon, 2013). The term "institutional agent" originated from Stanton-Salazar (2011), who defined an institutional agent as "an individual who occupies one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high-status and authority" (p. 1067). In this paper, institutional agents denote a faculty or staff member at a two-year or four-year institution who have the capacity and the commitment to provide resources, support, and opportunities to transfer students and aspiring transfer students.

Past research found that institutional agents can provide support to students at two-year and four-year institutions. For example, in a narrative analysis of the experiences of Latinx transfer students, Bensimon and Dowd (2009) described the role that institutional agents play in helping students to successfully transfer. Their study investigated what factors led students to select a transfer institution. The authors found that students who successfully transferred to selective institutions had strong social networks and institutional agents who provided the students with broad levels of support, such as providing important information about the transfer process and encouragement to apply (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009). Allen and associates (2014) similarly described how advisors provided information to students regarding policies, deadlines, and registration. Further, community college advisors helped students develop skills such as planning, problem solving, and decision making (Allen et al., 2014; Flaga, 2006).

Other research has covered theories and best practices for advising as it relates to college students (Crookston, 1972; Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1982; Grites, 2013). However, literature looking specifically at transfer students is still a new area of research. Rather than focusing specifically on the impact of pre-transfer academic advising, scholars have investigated the role of institutional agents and the process of pre-transfer planning. While both institutional agents and pre-transfer planning provide insight into the transfer student experience, these two areas leave out critical information about the broader role that academic advisors play when working with students. The literature also does not acknowledge how students interact with and internalize the information shared by their academic advisors. Our study seeks to fill the gaps in the literature by identifying the connection between academic advisors and TSC.

Conceptual Framework

In order to address our research question and inform our methodology, we utilized Laanan et al.'s (2010) theory of TSC as well as Moser's (2014) and Lukszo and Hayes' (2019) development of Laanan et al.'s work. In her research, Moser retained three elements of Laanan et al.'s theory: academic counseling experiences, learning and study skills at the community college, and informal contact with faculty at the community college. Moser's work then added three elements to the understanding of TSC: formal collaboration with faculty at the community college, financial knowledge, and motivation and self-efficacy. Moser found that TSC related to the success rates of transfer students, which were measured using GPA, coping skills, and satisfaction once enrolled at the four-year institution. Lukszo and Hayes (2019) focused on what influenced students acquiring TSC. They specifically considered high school staff, community college advisors/faculty, four-year advisors/faculty, peers, and family members. These theories guide our work by providing a framework for understanding TSC as well as the potential role that advisors may play in helping community college transfer students develop TSC.

Methods

Our study addresses the following research question:

RQ1. What role do community college and university advisors play in facilitating the acquisition of TSC for two-year community college students?

In order to explore this question, we utilized a qualitative case study. The methodology for our study is described in the next section.

In order to understand the role that community college and university advisors play in facilitating the acquisition of TSC, we analyzed data from a descriptive case study from a large, public university, which we have given the pseudonym: State University (SU). Case study methods investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world setting (Yin, 2014). We chose to utilize case study methods because our study aims to explore

transfer students' pre-transfer and post-transfer experiences and examine the impact on their adjustment.

Case study methodology is particularly relevant given the contextual nature of this study. According to Merriam (1998), "the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in the delimiting of the object of study, the case" (p. 27). The author goes on to explain that, in order to be a case, the phenomenon must be intrinsically bounded. The boundary for this research is SU and in-state community colleges.

Case Description

SU is a research-intensive institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, which annually enrolls almost 30,000 undergraduate students. SU was selected as our primary research site for several reasons. First, SU is its state's flagship university and admits one of the largest populations of community college transfer students in the state. Additionally, SU maintains two programs related to community college transfer students: The Guaranteed Transfer Admission Program (GTAP) (a pseudonym) and Pre-Transfer Advising (PTA) office. GTAP is a program offered through select community colleges that provides eligible students guaranteed admission if they successfully complete their fundamental English and math courses,[†] maintain a 3.0 GPA, and earn 30 credits at the community college. The program also allows students to enroll in courses at SU prior to their matriculation for a discounted rate. In the PTA office, there are pre-transfer advisors who help students with general education planning, give advice on associate degree completion, and provide information about the university admission process.

There are 16 community colleges within the state. Of those 16 schools, seven participate in GTAP. For the purposes of this study, students who transferred from any of these seven schools were eligible to participate. Therefore, our sample of students came from a variety of schools and experienced unique academic advising structures.

Data Collection

Data for this study are derived from three sources: interviews with students who transferred from a community college to SU, observations of pre-transfer appointments between students and pre-transfer advisors at SU, and a review of documents from local community colleges, SU, and the state. The inclusion of these various sources of data is a critical component of case study, as it serves to triangulate our findings (Yin, 2014). All interviews were completed between spring 2016 and spring 2017. Observations and document collection were completed during early-fall 2016.

Interviews. We conducted semi-structured, in-person interviews with 17 transfer students from in-state community colleges. Invitations to participate were sent to community college transfer students through university departments with high numbers of enrolled transfer students. Interested students filled out a brief participation form. The pseudonyms of participants as well as gender, race/ethnicity, and major are noted in Table 1.

An interview protocol was developed, piloted with three students, and revised accordingly. The final interview protocol included 12 open-ended questions with several sub-questions. Questions were designed with our TSC conceptual framework in mind (Laanan et al., 2010; Lukszo & Hayes, 2019; Moser, 2014), including questions that addressed students' background, resources they used to acquire information about transferring, and students' intentions and expectations about transfer. Examples of questions include: *When you started thinking about transferring, what resources did you use to plan your transfer process? How did you find out about these resources? Did you talk to anyone about transferring, either to get advice or guidance or just to talk about your ideas?* We conducted all interviews in-person, audio-recorded each interview with consent from the participants, and transcribed the interviews verbatim. Interviews lasted 30-50 minutes. Following each interview, we engaged in analytic memo-ing to capture early themes and to identify questions that emerged from the interviews (Saldaña, 2016).

Observations. We conducted eight observations of advising meetings between in-state community college transfer students and pre-transfer advisors at SU to better understand the type of information provided during these meetings and the nature of these interactions. The students who participated in the observations were separate from our interview participants and were in various stages of the transfer process. For all but one student, it was their first meeting with a pre-transfer advisor at SU. We used an observation protocol derived from the TSC conceptual framework (Laanan et al., 2010; Lukszo & Hayes, 2019; Moser, 2014) to specifically investigate pre-transfer experiences. For instance, the protocol

Table 1. Student interview participants

Name	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Major
Shuly	Male	Asian/Pacific Islander	Computer Science
Alan	Male	White	Business
Don	Male	White	Undecided
Rose	Female	Hispanic or Latino	Psychology and Education
Dwight	Male	NA	Computer Science
Jane	Female	White	Secondary Education
Kathy	Female	Black or African American	Economics
Allie	Female	White	Undecided
Monique	Female	Black or African American	Undecided
Olivia	Female	White	Math and Secondary Education
Sarah	Female	White	Nutritional Science
Mariam	Female	Asian/Pacific Islander	Art Education
Sunnitha	Female	Other	Computer Science
Castro	Male	Black or African American	Business
Sophia	Female	White	Psychology
Tina	Female	White	Bioengineering
Owen	Male	White	Undecided

included space to denote information about transfer courses, academic tips, or resources that the advisor provided during pre-transfer advising. As noted by both Laanan et al. (2010) and Moser (2014), academic counseling experiences are a critical component in the development of TSC.

Documents. Lastly, we gathered relevant documents that were available for use by both students and advisors. All documents reviewed for this study were used during observations or mentioned by students during interviews. For example, the pre-transfer advising staff at SU utilized structured advising handouts during observations that included information about transfer credits, course evaluations, and university admission. Other documents analyzed for this project included websites and online resources mentioned by students during interviews. All of the websites and online resources reviewed were maintained by the state higher education office or by university transfer offices and transfer student groups.

Data Analysis

We used both inductive and deductive coding techniques for data analysis (Yin, 2014). First, we completed pilot coding on interview transcripts using deductive codes developed from our TSC conceptual framework. Examples of codes included Background, Community College Experiences, and Pre-Transfer Resources (e.g., financial knowledge, 2-year counseling; 4-year counseling, informal faculty interactions). This pilot coding allowed us to refine our codebook to ensure our codes were sufficiently expansive, but also helped improve inter-rater reliability. Then, we coded inductively using descriptive codes to identify other key concepts, resulting in a codebook containing 47 codes (Saldaña, 2016). Each interview transcript was coded by two independent researchers to ensure that reliable coding was completed. If any coding discrepancies were found, a third researcher was available to resolve discrepancies; no discrepancies were discovered during data analysis. We reviewed the codes within and across sources of data to identify similarities and differences. This categorical aggregation technique was used to derive our study's findings (Stake, 1995).

Establishing Trustworthiness

We used several techniques to ensure trustworthiness of findings. First, we shared interview transcripts with participants to ensure information was accurate and complete. Second, by using rich, thick descriptions of the case and those observed and interviewed, readers of our findings will be able to better discern the transferability of our conclusions to other locations (Creswell, 2013). Third, Yin (2014) indicates that data triangulation is a critical component to establishing the validity of case studies. Glesne (2016) explains how case study research calls for multiple methods and multiple sources for collecting data. Interviews, observations, and

document analysis provided the opportunity to represent many dimensions of reality to deepen understanding and find consistent themes. Using multiple sources of data allowed us to compare data derived from interviews with data from the observations and documents.

Findings

Findings from our study illustrate that academic advisors do play a role in facilitating the development of TSC for community college transfer students. However, in reviewing the data, we found that advisors also play a particularly critical role in supporting the development of self-efficacy and student expectations. In the sections below, we focus on the role that advisors play in supporting students in these three areas.

Our findings also suggest, however, that not all advising experiences are positive. Some of our participants expressed limitations to academic advising. Specifically, students spoke about a lack of comprehensive advising and the need for self-advising. The second section of our findings addresses these limitations in an effort to provide a full picture of the role that advisors play in the development of TSC and the overall transfer process.

The Role of Advising on Facilitating TSC and Other Student Outcomes

In analyzing the data from this study, we found that academic advisors can contribute to the development of TSC and have a positive impact on other student outcomes. Specifically, advisors were able to provide students with knowledge and tools to navigate the transfer process, develop self-efficacy, and set realistic expectations about the transfer process and the four-year institution.

TSC. As institutional agents, academic advisors are a source of capital for transfer students, as they are able to provide students with the tools necessary to navigate the transfer process. Many students interviewed indicated that one of the most useful tools provided to them by their academic advisor was a clear plan for transfer.

For instance, Mariam indicated that her advisor helped her to create a plan that would allow her to navigate directly to the four-year school:

> My advisor at the community college was a great help. She created an entire plan for me from the start. Which classes I would have to take at [community college]. There were specific classes I would need for the honors program. She also helped me with what classes would transfer and which ones wouldn't.

By outlining which classes would and would not transfer, Mariam's academic advisor helped Mariam to understand the importance of organization when planning for the transfer process. Mariam went on to indicate that her advisor helped her to create a full timeline that allowed her to manage her own deadlines. During several observations, pre-transfer advisors at SU answered students' questions about what classes to take at their community college that would transfer to the university and make the most of their time at community college. Thus, advisors played a critical role in helping students identify their course pathway.

Rose similarly shared that her academic advisor helped her to learn more about the tools that could aid in her transfer planning. Rose explained:

> In the beginning, I had to have help, because I wasn't sure how to [plan for transfer] online. [My advisor] chose the classes for me. There is a worksheet, and basically, it's like if you know what to transfer, it's just like general transfer studies, you have to fulfill these requirements. So, I took classes that I thought were the core classes.

By working with Rose at the beginning, her academic advisor was able to provide her with the tools—or capital—to later navigate the transfer process on her own.

Other students benefited because their advisors provided them with learning opportunities in the form of courses, programs, or tangible resources. For example, Sophia was invited to participate in a scholarship program. Sophia explained that her advisors suggested that she participate in a scholarship program at the two-year institution. Through this experience, Sophia was able to meet with the president of the community college, who provided her with transfer advice. Similarly, Don's advisor recommended that he take a one-credit class that helped prepare students for the transfer process. Don shared that this class exposed him to many different transfer resources:

> They had this counselor who was also a professor tell us what a four-year college would expect from us when we transfer. After I told them my major, I kind of worked together with a counselor to work on a two-year plan so I would have my 60 credits and what I needed for my associate's degree to transfer.

By connecting Don with the transfer class, Don's advisor provided him with TSC that he used to plan his transfer coursework.

Observations also supported the assertion that advisors can provide critical TSC that is tailored to students' interests and goals. During a pre-transfer advising session at SU, one student indicated concerns about financing her education, so a pre-transfer advisor informed the student about a scholarship opportunity and encouraged her to apply. In another session, the advisor informed one student of a program where students could take a course at the university before they were admitted and explained that this would be beneficial for her particular major. Thus, these advisors provided key, customizable information that the students would use to navigate the transfer process and help finance their education.

Self-Efficacy. Moser (2014) made the connection between TSC and self-efficacy in her study, which sought to expand on Laanan et al.'s (2010) initial framework. The term self-efficacy is a psychological construct that arose from Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory posits that knowledge acquisition may be related to the observation of others within a social context and that individuals are motivated through self-efficacy and self-regulation (Usher, 2009). According to Bandura (1989), self-efficacy can be defined as individuals' beliefs about capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to accomplish a task or activity.

Bandura (1994) indicated that people who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to succeed are more likely to have high levels of perceived self-efficacy. Sunnitha's experience provided one example of this outcome. Originally, Sunnitha struggled with math, but she was later able to master the content because of the motivation and guidance provided to her by an academic advisor at her community college. According to Sunnitha, she did not do well when she took the math placement exam at the community college. Therefore, her advisor told her about a self-paced course that she could take prior to enrolling in the next level of math. Sunnitha shared that her advisor was an essential figure in her transfer process:

> She really helped in preparing me for success basically. She really encouraged me. "You can do this; you're doing really well. You're doing better than a lot of people." She was really encouraging [with] like what I was doing. She—I think she boosted my confidence. I had the potential to come here.

Sunnitha's advisor provided a pathway to success by guiding her through the developmental math course that allowed for mastery of the content and laid the foundation for proficiency in future coursework. In this way, the advisor contributed to Sunnitha's TSC by sharing information about supplemental math preparation and helped to strengthen Sunnitha's self-efficacy in her ability to perform well academically at the community college and SU.

Other advisors helped students to think through their organization and action as it related to academic planning and scheduling. Sophia indicated that she had a very strong relationship with her advisor and that, through ongoing conversations, her advisor was able to help her better understand what academic plan and schedule would work best for her. Specifically, Sophia explained how the advisor engaged in a reflective conversation about her strengths and weaknesses to plan a schedule that would appropriately balance more difficult courses across semesters, rather than bundled together in one semester. Her advisor provided her with guidance to develop her own understanding of how her strengths and weaknesses should impact an academic plan.

Expectations. Laanan et al. (2010) identified perceptions of the transfer process as a component of TSC. Our findings suggest that advisors played a role in working with students to develop realistic expectations about the transfer process and the four-year institution. When describing his work with the pre-transfer advisor at the four-year institution, Alan explained that they talked about both positive and negative outcomes when transferring: "the [Pre-Transfer] advisor talked about not getting into the business school and they made it seem hard to get into the business school." This conversation was replicated in observations as well, when during several pre-transfer advising sessions,

advisors explained the competitiveness of business school admissions and encouraged the students to consider alternative majors in case they were not admitted into that program. By allowing students to understand the reality of the application process, advisors can create expectations early on that will allow students to better plan for their transfer.

Part of setting expectations for students was providing direct advice that could empower students to navigate the transfer process. Rose shared, "So I met with her and I was like honest about where I was headed and stuff about life. She was really helpful. She helped me set up my schedule. She was like, 'If you want to go to [that four-year institution], you're going to need to see what the requirements are at the school of psychology,' like the classes you should take. So I was like, ok, I did that. I took a lot of psychology classes at [community college]. And then I was like, ok, this is good, I'm on the right track."

Similarly, Castro shared that his advisor was the "kind of person who is always telling you that it's not going to be easy but you got to do it. You got to do what you can to achieve your goals. Be focused and do your best." Advisors often share with students the challenges that they should expect in order to prepare them for the reality of what they need to do in order to be successful down the road.

Limitations to Advising

While many students have positive experiences with advisors, our analysis of the data reveals some ways in which academic advising may fail to contribute to the development of TSC and can have a negative impact on student outcomes. In particular, students identified a lack of comprehensive advising, the need for self-advising, and a lack of access to advisors.

Lack of Comprehensive Advising. Over the past few decades, scholars and practitioners have come to view developmental academic advising as the most effective way to foster students' academic, personal, and career goals (Crookston, 1972; Ender et al., 1982; Grites, 2013; O'Banion, 1972). In developmental advising, advisors view their students holistically and engage in more teaching and learning as compared to traditional, prescriptive advising (Crookston, 1972). In particular, Grites (2013) argued that comprehensive advisors have knowledge of the institutional and community resources and opportunities available to students and coordinate a variety of experiences. We found that some students felt unsupported by community college and four-year advisors who did not have knowledge that would have helped the students to achieve their goals.

In our interviews, students expressed frustration when community college advisors provided incomplete or limited information about a four-year transfer destination. Sarah, for example, explained how the advisor at her community college demonstrated how to use an online articulation database for the state to see if and how credits transfer. However, Sarah said, "That's about it though, they didn't really know much about [four-year institution name]." Similarly, Shuly felt that meeting with a community college advisor was not helpful. Shuly indicated that, while his advisor was nice, it did not seem like she comprehended the requirements for transfer: "[I] don't think that she understood." For Olivia, at least, the community college advisor encouraged her to make an appointment with an advisor at her transfer destination so that her questions could be answered more fully and accurately. Unfortunately, some students were unaware that pre-transfer advising services even existed at the four-year institution.

Upon transferring to SU, some students reported that they did not have adequate knowledge—or capital—to navigate the new institution and felt that their expectations did not align with reality. For example, Sunnitha left her orientation program feeling discouraged. She felt like she did not receive assistance in selecting classes, which was a difficult process for her to figure out on her own. Sunnitha observed that not all advisors had the same information, saying "I would ask something and they would ask like three other advisors and all tell me something different. So, it was all very confusing." This experience reflects the research of Allen and colleagues (2014), which found that post-transfer students face challenges navigating their new environment and expect higher quality advising than they receive. Sarah was hoping that the four-year institution would have "someone like maybe an advisor just for transfer students to kind of say, oh, you need this? Like here, you can go here. Or just someone to kind of show you the way." At his transfer destination, Castro was expecting to find a person or group of people dedicated to transfer students since they are transitioning to a new environment. However, Castro's actual experience did not meet these expectations. Castro explained,

"Nobody's going to help you. You have to help yourself." Castro went on to share that this realization disheartened him. He understood "that there are so many students that they can't just focus on one group of students, but, if we had a person or people we could talk to when we have an issue or problem, that would be nice." These are just a few examples of students who were not able to access adequate advising that aligned with their expectations. Due to a lack of comprehensive advising, other students chose to self-advise.

Self-Advising. Students who participated in self-advising frequently relied on institutional websites and online databases to learn more about the transfer process. In Alan's opinion, community college advisors did not help him to plan his future steps. Since advising is not always mandatory, particularly at community colleges, students may register for courses without even consulting an advisor (Carlstrom & Miller, 2013). Owen felt like he was on his own as well. He shared:

> The [four-year institution] is having to sort of deal with incoming transfer students from different backgrounds. And, I think a lot of time those backgrounds come from a lack of formal advising, a lack of career development, career - I pretty much just chose something on my own and coached myself through it and for better or worse it's taken me a long time to get here and maybe it wasn't the right thing.

In reviewing documents, we found one tool that could be useful in self-advising: a state-level planning tool. In this tool, students can identify their community college and a prospective 4-year university to see what courses would transfer. The tool also provides recommended transfer pathways for students to follow. However, this tool, and others like it, may not always be self-explanatory or easy to use. For example, during observations, when pre-transfer advisors would walk students through how to use the tools; some students admitted that they had tried to use the tools on their own but appreciated the further explanation that the advisors provided.

Students also face inaccurate information as another challenge during self-advising. Alan discussed utilizing the online articulation database for the state but found the information to be out of date since not all of the classes listed even existed anymore. Sunnitha similarly noted issues with a four-year institution's website. Sunnitha explained:

> The information about the math placement test says it's optional for transfer students although it's highly recommended. So, I didn't do it because it was recommended. You know it's optional, I could be doing other stuff I had to do. But, it turns out it was required for computer science majors. But, it didn't say that anywhere. So, that really set me back [. . .] I didn't study for it. I have to wait to pick classes until I took that. So, I think it would be helpful if they said it was required instead of highly recommended. 'Cause oh uh actually a lot of people had the same problem. They didn't take it because they didn't think it was required.

As evidenced by these interview responses, self-advising can be isolating, lead to inaccurate information at the two-year and four-year institutions, and cause delayed degree completion.

Other students may prefer to be in contact with an academic advisor, rather than self-advise, but find that their advisors are not accessible. Sophia mentioned how time consuming it can be to utilize advising, particularly for students who commute great distances or have other commitments during the hours in which the advising services are offered. This observation was made mainly due to the in-person nature of advising. While some advisors are available via phone, in-person meetings were the model referenced most frequently by our participants.

Unfortunately, this barrier means that students may have trouble gaining access to potential institutional agents. As Stanton-Salazar (2011) explained, advisors can be institutional agents for students by providing resources, support, and opportunities. Students who can only rely on electronic resources may be at a disadvantage. In addition, Moser (2014) argued that interactions with college personnel, such as academic advisors, "promote the development of capital and give students an advantage as they move into a four-year education environment" (p. 55-56). Students suggested that having more accessible and efficient advising appointments might make seeking advising simpler.

Scope of Study

Findings from this study are limited by our scope in three main ways. First, our findings are limited to the student perspective. Second, our access to documents was limited. Third, our findings are generalized given that our research did not investigate how our students' experiences differed by characteristics such as race, ethnicity, or gender, for example.

Our data focus exclusively on the student perspective and do not take into consideration the perspectives of both faculty and staff at the two-year and four-year institutions. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that students may be sharing a narrow view of their own experience and may not take into account the larger structural issues that may limit advisors' abilities. For example, research has indicated that community college advisors often wear many hats (Hirt, 2006). In addition to advising students, many of them are full-time faculty members and are responsible for coordinating administrative programs (Milem, Berger, & Dey, 2000; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). These responsibilities may greatly impact the quality of advising and could provide insight into the limitations that students experience. Future research should seek to understand the experiences of faculty and staff in order to better understand the possible structural barriers that exist.

Access to documents is another limitation to this study. In seeking to triangulate our data, we analyzed documents such as pre-transfer advising handouts, websites, and articulation databases. However, we did not look at student transcripts. Given that we were seeking to understand the students' perception of their transfer experience, these documents were not key to addressing our research questions. However, information about associate degree completion and credit loss, for example, could have provided deeper insight into our study and is something to consider in future search.

Another limitation of this study is that it does not differentiate the experiences of subgroups of transfer students. We did not disaggregate our findings based on the students' self-reported demographic information such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity. It is important to acknowledge that students may experience the transfer process differently depending on these characteristics as well as parental level of education, number of undergraduate credits completed, and intended major.

Despite these limitations, we do feel that our findings provide insight into the role that academic advisors play in the transfer process for students. Qualitative studies are not designed to provide a definitive understanding of an experience but, rather, are designed to provide an in-depth narrative description of a phenomenon. The scope of our study was designed to look specifically at our study participants in an effort to inform our understanding of advising and transfer student experiences.

Discussion

Study findings suggest academic advising can positively and negatively influence transfer student outcomes. Further, the role of advisors and their impact is much broader than the existing literature portrays. The findings from this study provide new insights into the ways in which students accumulate knowledge, skills, and tools from their advisors. Further, while our study does support Laanan et al. (2010) and Moser's (2014) conceptualization of TSC, it further illuminates the role of advisors in providing transfer students with a sense of self-efficacy and in setting expectations. On the other hand, our findings also reveal areas in which a lack of comprehensive advising and the need to self-advise can limit opportunities for transfer students to accumulate TSC.

Advising to Develop TSC

The structure of advising approaches can impact a student's experience. Advisors that teach the "whole-student" help them to learn more about their strengths and weaknesses and develop pathways to success (Melander, 2005, p. 86). Advisors who do not engage in learning-centered advising approaches may simply tell a student which course to enroll in rather than teach the student how to take ownership of and responsibly to make those types of decisions. In addition, Melander (2005) notes that "when organizational responsibilities for whole-student development are separately maintained by student and academic affairs, the advisor may have difficulty identifying and understanding all the curricular elements necessary to provide quality advising" (p. 86). Some students in this study indicated that they were required to visit multiple advisors and a variety of offices to navigate the transfer process. This siloed approach to advising can be challenging for students, especially as they are just learning to navigate a new campus. King (2011)

argues that "all units must work collaboratively to facilitate student success. The silo approach, which still exists on many campuses, with its clear division between academic and student affairs, does not promote a culture of student success" (para. 6). The lack of integration between structures involved in the transfer process can negatively impact transfer students.

Self-Efficacy

Research from Moser (2014), Barnett (2010), and Lukszo and Hayes (2019) suggests that relationships established at the community college may enhance students' self-efficacy. Our findings expand on this past research to show how advisors, specifically, can play a role in providing students with self-efficacy for the transfer process. This is critical, as self-efficacy can help motivate students as they navigate transferring and can also support students' persistence once enrolled at the four-year institution. The term self-efficacy is context specific and refers to a singular task (Bandura, 1994). Therefore, in this discussion, it is important to acknowledge that we are looking at self-efficacy in the context of transfer.

Self-efficacy for transfer students is a new and somewhat understudied area of research. Through her research looking at TSC, Moser (2014) found that collaboration and informal contact with faculty at the community college as well as motivation and self-efficacy significantly impacted student achievement. Moser's (2014) work highlighted the positive role that self-efficacy can have for transfer students. Other studies have looked at the role of self-efficacy in supporting transfer for students in science, math, technology, and engineering (STEM) fields (Wang & Lee, 2019). However, few other studies have sought to identify a direct connection between self-efficacy and the transfer student experience. Findings from this study suggest that more work needs to be done in order to fully unpack the role of self-efficacy in the transfer process.

Expectations

Additionally, it is important to further consider the role that advisors play in shaping students' expectations of the four-year institution. Oftentimes, students set unrealistic expectations of what their experience at the four-year school may look like. For example, students may mistakenly assume that a traditional institution may offer classes in non-traditional formats (e.g. online or evening classes). These assumptions are often misguided and can lead to a negative experience and academic stress for students. Students from this study highlighted the positive role that advisors played in developing realistic expectations of the four-year school.

Implications for Practice

Findings from this study provide implications for advisors at both two-year and four-year institutions. These implications focus on strategies for improving advising structures as well as strategies for facilitating the development of TSC among students.

Implications for Two-Year Colleges

Advisors at community colleges can improve—or, at the very least, better negotiate—the structure of advising by establishing and maintaining strong lines of communication. First, professional and faculty advisors at the institution can share information and updates with each other in a timely manner to ensure that they provide their students with accurate details. Second, pre-transfer advising services can be offered in many formats, not just in-person. Advisors can allow for phone and virtual advising sessions in order to be as accessible as possible. In addition, transfer advisors can visit popular four-year transfer destinations to better understand what the campus feels like and gather information directly from the experts in order to provide their students with more resources.

Students choose to enroll in community college for a variety of reasons. Many are motivated by financial and/or geographic convenience (Somers et al., 2006). However, research has suggested that many students enroll in community college because they do not believe in their academic ability to succeed at a four-year institution (Somers et al., 2006). As institutional agents, academic advisors can help reframe students' perspectives of their academic ability, building students' self-efficacy to succeed both at the community college and the 4-year institution level. As Sunnitha explained when discussing her struggle with the math placement exam, her advisor was able to reframe her experience into a positive light so that Sunnitha was able to master the math content and gain a sense of motivation in her coursework. Motivation and self-efficacy are sources of TSC that Sunnitha, like other students, can carry with them as they navigate the transfer

process from a two-year to four-year school. Therefore, when considering the role of TSC, community colleges may want to think about how to develop advisors' strategies and abilities to build students' self-efficacy for transfer. Self-efficacy is just one source of TSC; however, in focusing specifically on the development of self-efficacy, advisors can further help students take ownership of their transfer process.

Implications for Four-Year Colleges and Universities

Advisors at four-year institutions can make efforts to prioritize the needs of transfer students. At some institutions, it may make sense to have centralized advising resources and advisor liaisons to specific departments. Having advisor liaisons that work with local community colleges could also insure that information is consistent and up-to-date. It is important for four-year advisors to be accessible for prospective students who are trying to determine when and where to transfer, particularly as they are trying to determine how courses may transfer differently to various institutions.

Four-year advisors also have the ability to facilitate the development of TSC among students. In particular, four-year advisors should consider the role that TSC plays in making transfer students uniquely experienced and adept at navigating the college experience overall. Indeed, the transfer process is incredibly complex. By successfully transitioning from one institution to the next, students acquire a sense of capital and "know-how" that, in many ways, sets them apart from native freshmen. Advisors can help students to identify this "know-how" (i.e. capital) and utilize that as a tool which can help students as they continue to navigate complex challenges.

Implications for Research

Findings from our study also suggest implications for research. One unique finding of this study is that advisors help students develop self-efficacy for transfer. As we have explained, self-efficacy is a context-specific construct. While scholars have written about the relationship between self-efficacy and school-related outcomes (Usher, 2009) as well as made connections between self-efficacy and transfer students in STEM fields (Wang & Lee, 2019), there has yet to be a clear connection made between self-efficacy and transfer (see exception Moser, 2014). Our study suggests that advisors can foster the belief that a student could successfully transfer and complete a bachelor's degree. While not entirely surprising, this finding indicates a need to consider how advisors can best support the development of self-efficacy in transfer students.

Further, as noted above, one limitation of this study is that it excludes the perspectives of community college and four-year administrators (e.g., advisors, mid-level managers). Future research on this topic should include administrators as a source of data. These data will not only add an important viewpoint on transfer student support but will also be an essential source of data triangulation.

Future research could also incorporate the perspectives of students who transfer from one four-year institution to another. Given the bounded nature of our case study, students were following similar transfer pathways within a single state context. For this reason, while student experiences differed slightly, the tools utilized to transfer were all similar. Future studies could examine the experiences of students transitioning from a four-year institution, addressing gaps in the literature and providing a broader understanding of the transfer experience. Specifically, this research could further explore the impact of varied advising structures at four-year schools that have different advising models. Further, this research would provide insight into student experiences within institutions whose mission is not focused on transfer. Current research indicates that the transfer pipeline is diversifying to include a variety of transfer pathways (e.g. two-year to two-year, four-year to four-year, four-year to two-year) (Taylor & Jain, 2017). Therefore, future research should consider these varying pathways.

Additionally, our study specifically focused on students who transferred successfully. One direction of future research could be to study the experiences of prospective transfer students that ultimately do not transfer. This may provide better understanding of how TSC may fail some students in the transfer process.

Finally, our work did not compare the articulation and transfer pathways within the state where SU resides to other articulation agreements across the nation. Future research should consider cross-state comparisons in order to consider best practices for higher education institutions. Specifically, case studies looking at successful articulation systems and individual programs may help to provide useful tools for academic advisors that can lead to the further support of transfer students.

Conclusion

The community college pathway is a popular but leaking pipeline (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011; Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Despite the progress that has been made to support transfer students, barriers still exist for students seeking to transfer from two-year to four-year institutions (Laanan et al., 2010). Our research asserts that academic advisors can play a critical role in helping students navigate and overcome these barriers. However, advisors cannot do this work alone. It is important for institutional leaders and administrators to acknowledge the benefits of comprehensive advising and support the work that academic advisors are doing to meet student needs. Academic advisors serve as institutional agents for transfer students and can provide students with sources of TSC, including self-efficacy and realistic expectations about the four-year college experience. These resources can support students' academic performance, better the transfer process, and may cause students to persist to graduation.

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