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Faculty Matter: A Case Study Of Rural Community College Faculty Involvement In Vertical Transfer

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FACULTY MATTER:
A CASE STUDY OF RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY INVOLVEMENT IN
VERTICAL TRANSFER

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Jingjing Liu

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to community college faculty who serve transfer students to go boldly and achieve educational aspirations. Also, I dedicate this dissertation to all the participants who contributed their time and effort to support my completion. It has been a valuable experience. Many thanks!

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The dissertation process is like an endeavor to walk through a tunnel that takes both courage and challenge. When I look back on my journey, I am so grateful for the people who have provided me with guidance, support, and kindness. They all have my deepest gratitude.

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Additionally, I would like to thank the research site. As an international student who received education in a strict system, I am extremely impressed by the transfer students' pathways from community colleges to 4-year universities. The campus visit to the research site allowed me to have an authentic experience to know a rural community college and the local 4-year schools. I want to express my sincere appreciation to the students, faculty, staff, and leaders at the research site who were invaluable supporters of my research. Thank you for all your contributions.

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Education is an ongoing journey. I have been more than fortunate to have people who light my way and build my momentum. All their dedications inspire me to hold gratitude for what I have learned, put effort into the next journey, and embrace new chapters in my life.

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Abstract

The community college has one of its missions to provide access for students who intend to transfer to a 4-year university using a vertical transfer pathway. As potential advocates for students in the transfer process, faculty who work in community colleges need to recognize the importance of supporting transfer students and help to improve the transfer pathways. Yet, little is known about the role faculty have in promoting transfer. The purpose of this dissertation study was to investigate the role of community college faculty in the vertical transfer process. The study addressed two research questions: How do community college faculty perceive their role in the transfer process? and How do community college faculty interact with potential vertical transfer students? A case study of a rural community college in Virginia with a high percentage of its students transferring and a dedicated transfer center served as the research site. Data analysis used the theoretical framework of momentum. Faculty perceived their role as a connector for transfer students and interacted with aspiring transfer students both in and outside the classroom. The community college faculty worked with content area faculty at the local 4-year schools and collaborated with the college's transfer center to inform students of transfer resources. In particular, a faculty member was highlighted as a role model in advocating vertical transfer and bridging academics and advising. This advocacy role helps extend the understanding of the momentum theory. The study contributes to new insights into faculty's essential role in building transfer students' momentum toward a successful transfer and showcasing rural community college faculty involvement in vertical transfer to inspire higher education institutions to engage faculty in achieving institutional transfer mission, supporting transfer students, and fostering more equitable transfer pathways.

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VERTICAL TRANSFER

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the United States, community colleges have a significant role in serving multiple missions from open admissions policies that attract diverse students, to workforce training and retraining, and community development (Cohen et al., 2013). Community colleges, formerly called junior colleges, expand access to populations who want to pursue higher education (Darby-Hudgens, 2012). As open-door comprehensive higher education institutions, community colleges offer access not only to students who seek a 2-year postsecondary education but also to those who intend to transfer to 4-year institutions to seek a bachelor's degree (Cohen et al., 2013). Traditionally, transfer students move between and among different types of higher education institutions, especially from a 2-year community college to a 4-year campus (Miller & Hillis, 2006). The vertical transfer pathway in which students transfer from a 2-year to a 4-year college is a critical function of the American higher education system (Taylor & Jain, 2017). Among all transfer students, more than half are in the vertical transfer pathway (Causey et al., 2020).

The global pandemic that began in 2020 brought unprecedented and long-term challenges for transfer enrollment. The newest report shows that from 2020 to 2022, the enrollment of transfer students in higher education declined by 13.5% (a total loss of 296,200 transfer students) (Causey et al., 2022). Vertical transfer experienced a 9.7% decline, while reverse transfer (students transferring from 4-year to 2-year institutions) and lateral transfer (students moving between 2-year institutions or between 4-year institutions) decreased by 18.0% and 15.5%, respectively (Causey et al., 2022). The global pandemic negatively affected students' transfer

plans and caused losses of students with initial aspirations to enroll in 4-year institutions for achieving bachelor's degrees.

Along with the impact of the global pandemic, college enrollments are experiencing a decrease (Carrasco, 2022). Given declining high school graduation rates and the fact that high school graduates are increasingly opting not to go straight to college (Carrasco, 2022), 4-year institutions are increasingly relying on transfer students to augment enrollment (Lederman, 2020). In turn, community colleges will need to continue collaborating with 4-year institutions to help transfer-intending students achieve their goals of completing bachelor's degrees. The competition for student enrollment heightens the need to understand the students' transfer process and community college's transfer function.

The literature on the community college transfer function highlights three main areas. One area is the transfer pathway and transfer student experience, which covers the process of transfer and the perceptions of students regarding their experience (Chrystal et al., 2013; Davies & Casey, 1999; Flaga, 2006; Gard et al., 2012; Hlinka, 2017; Hlinka et al., 2015; Laanan, 2001; Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020). State transfer policy governs and regulates transfer and articulation at the state level (Carlsen & Gangeness, 2020; Taylor & Jain, 2017). How institutions implement policies and help students make sense of policy signals influence students' transfer outcomes (Schudde et al., 2021). A second area reviewed in the literature is transfer challenges resulting from the existing transfer equity gap among different racial and ethical groups and White students, which especially affects underserved student groups (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Crisp et al., 2020; Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012; Taylor & Jain, 2017). Transfer students also face barriers that influence their transfer aspiration (Bragg, 2020; Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Handel, 2013; Wang 2021; Wang et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2016). The third area of

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literature includes transfer partnerships between community colleges and universities that intend to create effective transfer practices and support students' transfer (Amey et al., 2010; Bragg, 2020; Fink & Jenkins, 2017; Kisker, 2007; Yeh & Wetzstein, 2020). Researchers have used hybrid approaches to study these various aspects of the transfer process, including both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data to inform understanding of these aspects of the transfer.

In community colleges, faculty members serve as a potential and crucial transfer agent whose voices are often absent from the literature (Rabinowitz et al., 2022; Taylor & Jain, 2017). Faculty members have a positive influence on serving to mitigate some of the barriers students face, can help to build partnerships with peers at university transfer receiving departments, and can assist students in understanding transfer-related policies. Understanding more about faculty roles is an area requiring further study. Although previous transfer research documented the complexity of the transfer process, more research is needed to expand educators' understanding of the influence of faculty involvement in students' transfer process and how the role of faculty members may contribute to building students' momentum toward a successful transfer (Wang, 2020).

As community college faculty take responsibility to teach and assist students, their interaction with students is closely related to students' college experiences and educational outcomes. For example, community college students who have strong academic advising and faculty engagement are more likely to transfer successfully (Jaschik, 2020). Students transferring from a community college to a university and who make progress toward completing the baccalaureate degrees result in a successful transfer outcome (Ellis, 2013). Moreover, Wang and colleagues (2020) found that when transfer students gain exposure to and potentially receive

support from faculty and advisors at baccalaureate institutions, they may be better prepared for the upward transfer process. The positive relationships with community college faculty and advising staff benefit transfer students with support and encouragement in achieving their educational goals (Fay et al., 2022). Exploring the involvement of community college faculty in supporting transfer is important to advance transfer research and deepen the understanding of transfer students' experience in community college.

Statement of the Problem

During 2020-2022, community college enrollment dropped by 827,000 students due in part to the pandemic and in part to the downward trajectory of enrollments in community colleges since 2014 (Gardner, 2022). The enrollment decline disrupted the vertical transfer pathway (Causey et al., 2022). Since students in the vertical transfer pathway represent an ideal route for student progression from the institutional perspective (Taylor & Jain, 2017), the loss of students at community colleges urges their institutional leaders to take an action and bolster enrollment. As well, the vertical transfer pathway enables transfer-intending students to move to 4-year institutions, which can contribute to increasing the number of students who complete bachelor's degrees and become professionals in the workforce who earn higher wages. Carnevale and Cheah (2018) suggested that graduates with a bachelor's degree earned almost twice as much as graduates with a high school diploma. More attention is needed to maximize the transfer function of community colleges, especially in seeking ways to support students who intend to transfer.

Despite the positive outcomes for vertical transfer, Wang (2020) found that transfer-aspiring students only occasionally made use of campus resources such as transfer advising, transfer credit assistance, and published transfer information. The lack of usage of these campus

resources emphasizes the role faculty can have in providing students with transfer information and in directing students to campus resources. Finnegan (2019) indicated that faculty were "a vital source of information" (p. 70) for students at community colleges. For example, some faculty members included college resource links in their course syllabuses and connected students with various services on campus (Finnegan, 2019). These small actions can bring change for transfer students who feel on their own in the transfer journey. Faculty members have a critical role in enhancing the success of transfer students (Wang et al., 2021), yet little is known about how faculty members perceive their role in the process.

In addition, students are experiencing transfer barriers that affect their aspirations and attainment in higher education. National data show that only 23% of those initially aspiring to transfer to a university after attending a community college end up transferring within 5 years (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011). The reality that not all transfer-intending students successfully achieve their educational goals of transferring into 4-year institutions for a bachelor's degree occurs due to a range of existing barriers in students' transfer process. As equity has become an indispensable component to discuss transfer (Hartman, 2022), there is an increasing need to support transfer success for all and promote educational equity. Wang et al. (2021) suggested that interactions transfer students have both in and out of the classroom with faculty members provide deep insights about transfer students' experiences. This recent research highlights a call for faculty action to bridge the transfer gap among diverse student groups and help students achieve their educational aspirations.

Moreover, existing transfer policies vary among states, with some states using state policies to establish broad scale articulation agreements that "serve to negotiate the requirements for students' movement from institution to institution and support the transfer intent" (Anderson

et al., 2006, p. 263). At least 36 states have policies and statewide guaranteed transfer of associate degree agreements defined (Francies & Anderson, 2020). Although state policies are pivotal to supporting and facilitating transfer, institutional policy implementation also has a key role in achieving the target goals (Wang, 2020). Students in the transfer pathways need to adopt and combine policy signals from institutions (Schudde et al., 2021). How students make sense of state transfer policy affects their transfer process.

Community college faculty members have the potential to influence students' understanding of transfer policy and can help facilitate students' transfer process. Even though several recent studies recommend the involvement of faculty to promote effective transfer and articulation (Fink & Jenkins, 2017; Rabinowitz et al., 2022; Schudde et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020; Yeh & Wetzstein, 2020), little is known about how community college faculty support students in their transfer process. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the role of community college faculty in the transfer process, with particular attention on the vertical transfer pathway. Moreover, rural community colleges provide important value and flexible higher education opportunities for rural communities (Rush-Marlowe, 2021). Comprising more than half of all the American community colleges, rural community colleges with limited resources often have pressure "to support local economics, to increase completion rates, and to meet enrollment targets in regions with declining populations" (Eddy et al., 2019, p. 51). The resource issues facing rural community colleges challenge campus leaders to address students' different needs (Eddy, 2007), especially for faculty at rural community colleges who not only focus on teaching but also take on additional responsibilities for supporting student success (Finnegan, 2019). Among these responsibilities, less is known about how faculty engage

in transfer work in rural areas, and thus a rural community college was selected as a case site for this study to investigate the role of faculty in supporting transfer students.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed Wang's (2017) model of momentum for community college student success (see Figure 1) as a theoretical framework. Based on a comprehensive examination of the academic momentum literature related to community college student outcomes, Wang (2017) proposed a new holistic theoretical model of momentum for community college student success that situates students' momentum with their course-tracking trajectories and their experiences within courses and frames the cultivation of students' attitudes and beliefs as a core part of building momentum. Wang (2017) viewed a student's momentum as consisting of both "internal and external forces" (p. 262) that drive students' progress in achieving their goals. Here, faculty members can provide an external force to help student momentum in transfer.

Wang's (2017) momentum model included three main domains of momentum: curricular, classroom teaching and learning, and students' motivational attributes and beliefs. Along with the three main domains, the model contains counter-momentum friction that emerges from "individual, structural, and institutional barriers facing community college students" (Wang, 2017, p. 287). These counterforce items can challenge the positive momentum built in the three areas. Additionally, "carry-over momentum reflects students' prior experiences and backgrounds in the academic, social, and motivational contexts" (Wang, 2017, p. 289). Students' carry-over momentum before their enrollment at community colleges and other forces resulting from students' work or life responsibilities also have influences on their transfer experiences.

Wang (2017) underlined that the development of her momentum model was in response to the uniqueness of community colleges and their student body. Community colleges have a

mission to open access to every student who wants to have the opportunity to attend college as these institutions offer multiple programs covering transfer, vocation, remedy, and academic (Twombly & Townsend, 2008). Though all positive features of community colleges, the many choices available to student transfers also bring challenges as students work to locate clear educational paths to achieve their educational goals (Wang, 2017). Meanwhile, community colleges serve a diverse student body, including an increasing number of historically marginalized students (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2022; Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Jain et al., 2020; Jenkins & Fink, 2015). These students often lack adequate knowledge and preparation for college-level work when they enter community colleges (Meza, 2019; Wang, 2021). Classroom settings significantly help students to "progress into and through college-level work successfully" (Wang, 2017, p. 282). Faculty are central actors in students' classroom experiences.

When community college transfer students navigate their transfer pathways and move to 4-year institutions, they often come across internal and external forces that "collectively build their momentum toward a given educational outcome, or cause friction that reduces momentum" (Wang, 2017, p. 262). During this challenging time, the involvement of faculty in transfer work can cultivate a more welcoming culture for transfer students on campus (Adams, 2021). In the classrooms, faculty members interact with transfer students through teaching and learning activities. Outside the classrooms, faculty members can contribute to promoting community college-university transfer partnership and to delivering transfer policy information directly to students that provides support for students going through the transfer process (Kisker, 2007; Schudde et al. 2021; Wang, 2020). Both formal in-class collaboration and informal out-of-class communication promote community college student-faculty relationship that has a long influence

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on students' achievement when they study at universities (Moser, 2013). Understanding more about the work of faculty members in supporting transfer students is valuable for motivating students in transfer navigation and education attainment.

The model of momentum for community college student success accounts for the momentum of community college students and potential friction that counters students' motivation. As community college faculty members are transfer agents (Dowd et al., 2018; Fay et al., 2022; Pak et al., 2006; Taylor & Jain, 2017), this study focuses on faculty's perspective of their role in transfer work. The model provides a good framework for the investigation of how faculty members help to build transfer students' momentum or to reduce friction on counteracting transfer students' momentum toward transferring to 4-year institutions successfully (Figure 1).

Figure 1

A Model of Momentum for Community College Student Success
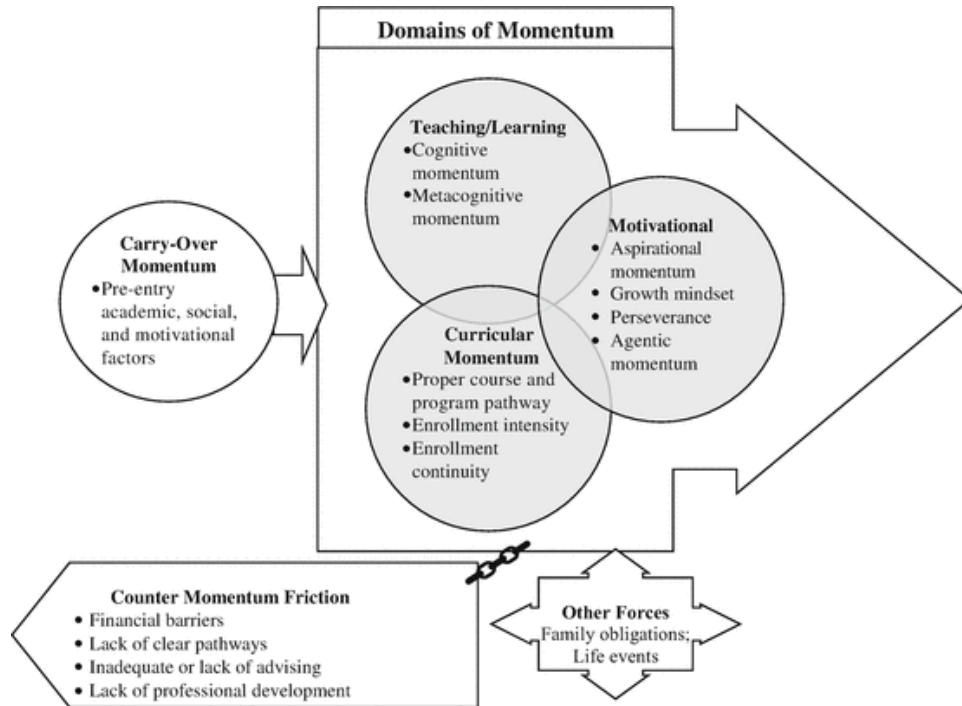
Note. From "Toward a Holistic Theoretical Model of Momentum for Community College Student Success" by X. Wang, In M. B. Paulsen (Eds), Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research (pp. 259-308), 2017, Springer, Copyright 2017 by Springer International Publishing AG. Reprinted with permission.

Research Questions

I developed the research questions for the study using the model of momentum as a theoretical framework. The following research questions guided this study:

1. In a rural community college with a high student transfer rate, how do faculty perceive their role in the transfer process?

   a. How do they foster partnerships with 4-year programs that assist students with navigating transfer?

   b. How do they partner with the college's transfer center to support student transfer?

2. In a rural community college with a high student transfer rate, how do faculty interact with potential vertical transfer students?

  a. What interactions occur in the classroom that promote transfer?

  b. What interactions occur outside the classroom that promote transfer?

Methods Summary

An exploratory case study within single-case design (Yin, 2018) was used to explore the role of community college faculty in supporting the transfer process. In particular, the study focused on the vertical transfer pathway that includes students moving from 2-year community colleges to 4-year universities. A case study provides an opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding of a single case within a real-life setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A rural community college in Virginia served as the research site given the college's high percentage of student transfers. In particular, the selected college has a dedicated transfer center, which provides institutional support for students. Data collection involved multiple sources such as surveys, interviews, direct observations, and documentation. This case study sought to address the research questions noted above and to advance the understanding of the faculty's role in the transfer process for boosting students' momentum toward their success in transferring to 4-year institutions. Data analysis began during data collection and included analysis of the survey, coding of interview data, and analysis of documents and observation notes.

Literature Review Summary

The literature reviewed for this study includes several salient areas of research related to the transfer process, transfer challenges, and transfer partnerships with a particular focus on the vertical transfer pathway. Transfer students are prominent subpopulations in community colleges, which has brought attention to their experiences in fulfilling the mission of community

colleges. As noted, transfer gaps and transfer barriers negatively affect transfer students'

experiences (Taylor & Jain, 2017; Wang, 2021). Faculty, however, can play a crucial role in

supporting transfer students and helping them to build momentum as they interact frequently

with students (Adams, 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Faculty members serve as sources of support

who can support transfer students by infusing information about transfer into their classes,

showing a commitment to quality education, and their teaching expertise (Chrystal et al., 2013;

Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Wang, 2020). More research is needed to investigate faculty members'

role in facilitating the transfer process and to address the gap in the existing literature regarding

helping students to successfully transfer to 4-year institutions.

Significance of the Study

The case study examines the role of community college faculty in supporting transfer

students in the vertical pathways. As students in the transfer pipeline depend heavily on the

articulation agreements and transfer policies among institutions, campus leaders and faculty

members in transfer programs need to understand better how to improve the transfer function of

community colleges. The value of this study deepens the understanding of how faculty members

perceive their role and influence on community college students' transfer experiences. Given the

changing higher education landscape, external factors such as the declining enrollment at both 2-

and 4-year institutions, the questioning of the need for a college degree, and the increasing

interest of 4-year institutions in community college transfer students, the need for retention of

transfer students and the essential role of community college faculty in the transfer process is

paramount. Recently, researchers appealed to raising faculty's awareness and increasing their

knowledge about transfer to better serve transfer students in colleges and universities

(Rabinowitz et al., 2022). The findings of the study add to the knowledge about community

college faculty involvement in transfer work through the leveraging of faculty roles to support student momentum toward successful transfer and surface how faculty members understand transfer articulation policies and what they see as their role in executing these policies on campus.

Definitions of Terms

The following list includes terms used in this dissertation. Definitions are provided for each term and notation occurs when terms are used interchangeably.

- articulation agreements: Documents that reflect the agreed upon practices and policies emerging from the negotiations between 2-year and 4-year colleges at the academic program or institutional level to facilitate transfer process (Anderson et al., 2006).

- community college: "Any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree. That definition includes the comprehensive two-year college as well as many technical institutes, both public and private" (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 5). Community colleges may also offer the option of a baccalaureate degree for place-bound students (Bemmel et al., 2008). In this study, community college stands for a 2-year nonprofit publicly funded institution.

- community college faculty: Community college faculty include both full-time and part-time community college professoriate that focus on teaching students at the 2-year level (Twombly & Townsend, 2008).

- exploratory case study: "A case study whose purpose is to identify the research questions or procedures to be used in a subsequent research study, which might or might not be a case study" (Yin, 2018, p. 287).

- involvement: The investment from individual physical and psychosocial energy occurs continuously and has both qualitative (e.g., commitment or action) and quantitative (e.g., hours spent) features (Astin, 1984). In the study, involvement refers to community college faculty's perception of their role in supporting transfer students and engaging with transfer work at their colleges.

- junior college: Created in the 1900s, a 2-year college offered general education, vocational training, and university preparatory courses. "During the 1950s and 1960s, the term junior college was applied more often to the lower-division branches of private universities and to two-year colleges supported by churches or organized independently" (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 4).

- lateral transfer: Students transferring between community colleges take a lateral transfer path (Bahr, 2009).

- rural: Any population, housing, or territory that is not in an urban area is rural (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-a).

- rural community college: An open-door, open access higher education institution that serves the people who reside in rural America (Rural Community College Alliance, n.d.).

- transfer student: Students move between different types of higher education institutions, especially from a 2-year community college to a 4-year campus (Miller & Hillis, 2006).

- urban area: Urban areas consists of two types of geographies: (a) "Urbanized Areas" have a population of 50,000 or more; (b) "Urban Clusters" have a population of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-b).

- vertical transfer: Students who begin at a 2-year and transfer to a 4-year with or without an associate's degree (Townsend, 2001).

Summary

This chapter provided a context for the study that focused on exploring the role of community college faculty in supporting students who aspire to transfer from community colleges to 4-year universities. Wang's (2017) model of momentum for community college student success serves as the theoretical framework to investigate the impact of faculty on transfer students. The study addresses two research questions: How do community college faculty perceive their role in the transfer process? and How do community college faculty interact with potential vertical transfer students? An exploratory case study methodology (Yin, 2018) guides this research, using a selected rural community college in Virginia as the research site. The literature around transfer highlights the role faculty can have in the transfer process (Rabinowitz et al., 2022; Schudde et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020), yet scant study of faculty perceptions of their roles has occurred. This study is significant because it focused on investigating community college faculty's role in the transfer process. In Chapter 2, I examine the literature building the foundation of knowledge for the study and argue how this study helps fill the gap in the existing literature.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic that started in spring 2020 brought changes and adjustments for many post-secondary learners (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). During the pandemic years of 2020 to 2022, the number of students transferring to 4-year institutions decreased by 9.7% (Causey et al., 2022). Many students canceled or postponed their transfer plans and did not enter 4-year institutions to continue their education. The pandemic interrupted students' mobility from community colleges to 4-year institutions, which motivated leaders to revisit ways to support the critical function of the vertical pathway in higher education. The vertical pathway in which students transfer from a 2-year to 4-year college has represented an ideal route from the institutional perspective (Taylor & Jain, 2017) because vertical transfer options greatly expand the nation's postsecondary capacity and offer a critical avenue for many underserved students who aspire to achieve bachelor's degrees (Jenkins & Fink, 2015). Historically, transfer represented a central mission of community colleges and highlights one of the important contributions of community colleges in the U.S. higher education system.

In community colleges, faculty significantly affect students' learning outcomes (Lundberg, 2014; Wang, 2020; Wickersham & Wang, 2022). A recent study emphasizes that "college faculty—whether they are adjunct instructors or full-time, teaching general education or courses for the major—have a unique role to play in supporting transfer students" (Wang et al., 2021, p. 3). Given this reality, there is an increased need for community college leaders to understand more about the role faculty play in supporting transfer students. To respond to this

need, this dissertation explored the role of community college faculty in transfer efforts. Two specific questions guided this study:

1. How do community college faculty perceive their role in the transfer process?

2.   How do community college faculty interact with potential vertical transfer students?

The purpose of the literature review was to investigate the existing sources of research on transfer, particularly focusing on the vertical transfer pathway, and on faculty roles. Centering on this purpose, I summarize below three primary dimensions of faculty members' involvement in transfer: (a) the historic transfer process, (b) transfer challenges, and (c) transfer partnerships.

Historic Transfer Process and Faculty Role

Compared with traditional college students who follow a continuous path through higher education, transfer students have a different educational journey because of attending two or more institutions prior to graduation, and this pathway shapes their experiences. Traditionally, vertical transfer students begin in a junior or community college and then move to a 4-year university to complete a bachelor's degree (Miller & Hillis, 2006). In the American higher education system, "the open-access comprehensive community college is a uniquely American invention" (Beach, 2011, p. 1). Since its establishment in 1901, community colleges have had a central mission to support transfer (Townsend, 2001). "The earliest community college generally focused on liberal arts education with an underlying goal of transferring students to four-year institutions of higher education" (Jurgens, 2010, p. 253). Over time, community colleges have evolved based on external context and student needs. In particular, the mission of community colleges has shifted from a focus on pre-baccalaureate education as a junior college to now including multiple goals, such as career training and offering select baccalaureates (Beach, 2011). As a higher education institution with a mission to offer access to all students, a primary

function of community college is transfer (Cohen et al., 2013).

From the beginning of community colleges over 120 years ago with the founding of Joliet Junior College, community colleges represent an inclusive higher education institution, "as collectively they already serve the most diverse student populations in the nation" (Eddy & Kirby, 2020, p. 226). According to the AACC's 2022 report, in Fall 2022, community colleges enrolled 39% of all U.S. undergraduates. By gender, community colleges enrolled 60% women and 40% men in 2022. Among enrolled students at community colleges, 44% are White, 27% are Hispanic, 12% are Black, and 7% are Asian/Pacific Islanders. Additionally, in community colleges, 29% of students are the first generation in their family to attend college, 20% of the students have disabilities, 15% of students are single parents, 8% of students are non-US citizens, and 4% of students are veterans. These data highlight the level of diverse student enrollment in community colleges, which provides an opportunity for expanding diversity in 4-year institutions via transfer. Ultimately, transfer options enable many historically underrepresented students to obtain educational opportunities and have a route to achieving a bachelor's degree.

The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV, n.d.-a) database on transfer data shows that during the year 2019-2020, a total of 13,062 students transferred from a 2-year college to a 4-year institution. Among these students, nearly 45% were students of color, and more than 80% of transfer students entered public 4-year institutions (SCHEV, n.d.-a). Compared with lateral transfer (students transfer between community colleges; Bahr, 2009) and reverse transfer (students transfer from 4-year institutions to community colleges; Townsend & Dever, 1999), students who first enroll at the community college and intend to achieve a bachelor's degree are the transfer students of focus for this study.

Transfer Pathways

In community colleges, students experience complex transfer pathways. Taylor and Jain (2017) listed eight different transfer patterns and terms that were commonly used in the existing literature, including: "vertical transfer; lateral transfer; reverse transfer; reverse credit transfer; swirlers and alternating enrollees; concurrent enrollees, co-enrollment, double-dipping, simultaneous enrollees; dual credit, dual enrollment; and transient" (p. 276). My research study focused on vertical transfer, which is defined as students beginning at a 2-year community college and transferring to a 4-year university with or without an associate degree (Townsend, 2001). As a century-old mechanism, a transfer pathway provides an opportunity for community college students to earn baccalaureate degrees at 4-year institutions (Handel & Williams, 2012). A vertical transfer pathway provides an important role in American higher education because it potentially contributes to increasing the number of students who complete bachelor's degrees and become professionals in the workforce.

The open-access community college serves a large share of historically marginalized students and offers an important avenue for their mobility to 4-year institutions (Dawson et al., 2021). Transfer students, especially historically minoritized groups, often lack proper information and knowledge for college transition, which negatively affects their academic performance. Clark (1960) identified the term cooling out as a process that occurs in community colleges that discourages underprepared students from achieving their initial educational goals of obtaining a bachelor's degree in a 4-year institution. Juxtaposed to the notion of cooling out is Rosenbaum et al.'s (2007) concept of warming up, which encourages educators to raise students' aspirations and educational outcomes. Although Beach (2011) presented statistical evidence showing the dominance of warming up over cooling out in community college educational

practice, cooling out still exists in some community colleges especially in community colleges with fewer resources and money. Wang (2020) critiqued Clark's (1960) cooling out process and explored "whether and how upward transfer, as a key measure of two-year college student success, fit into the larger scheme of students' lives and their own definitions of success" (p. 108). She suggested that some students viewed a successful transfer as a life accomplishment. However, the harsh reality is that not all community college students with an intent to transfer to 4-year universities successfully achieve their initial educational goals. Students often have different experiences when they are in the vertical pathway.

Transfer Student Experience

As a subpopulation on a 4-year campus, transfer students have a unique experience that is affected by their educational journey. Davies and Casey (1999) conducted seven focus groups with a total of 42 transfer students who transferred from public community colleges to a 4-year university and investigated their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward the transfer process. Two key themes were discussed in the study. The first theme centered on students' classroom experiences in their community colleges and 4-year university including the amount of individual attention they received, the amount of students' interaction with faculty and staff, the quality of students' learning experiences, and the difficulty of coursework. The second theme focused on students' campus life including finances, networking, and services. Regarding the classroom experiences, transfer students showed higher satisfaction with their experiences in individual attention, teaching-learning interaction, and coursework performance at their community colleges than at a 4-year university. Transfer students viewed the quality of community college teaching as a contributor for helping them transfer and noted that the positive experience also contributed to their higher education journey (Davies & Casey, 1999).

When sharing about campus life in the 4-year university, transfer students noted that they lacked support for searching specific information about registration and advising (Davies & Casey, 1999). Support at the system level is necessary for transfer students to move from community colleges, move into a 4-year university, and successfully move out of a 4-year university. Davies and Casey (1999) recommended professional training for faculty and staff in both community colleges and 4-year universities and for faculty exchanges between institutions to improve systemic support and to help transfer students get familiar with different institutional cultures.

With the purpose of exploring transfer students' experiences, Jackson (2013) studied a group of seven African American female transfer students in STEM fields who had moved from community colleges to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The case study used an HBCU as a research site and collecting data from photos and face-to-face interviews. In the findings, Jackson (2013) indicated that students' experiences at both their community colleges and the selected HBCU jointly impacted their persistence and success. The "consistent information" (p. 262) regarding academic and transfer requirements students received from their community colleges and the HBCU helped students navigate their transfer pathways. The communication between faculty members in community colleges and universities could facilitate an avenue for transfer students to obtain information consistently and prepare them for studying in a more rigorous academic environment in a 4-year institution (Jackson, 2013). Since many minority groups valued community colleges as an entrance to higher education, Jackson (2013) emphasized that faculty had a vital role in enhancing community college students' learning experiences through educating students to be aware of the course rigor and academic requirements in 4-year institutions. Community college faculty should advise transfer students to

increase interaction with faculty in the 4-year universities earlier before transfer and form a relationship to support students with a smooth transition into 4-year institutions (Jackson, 2013). In the discussion of future research, Jackson (2013) suggested that more studies were needed to include the perspectives of faculty and staff in promoting the success of transfer students in different types of institutions.

Transfer Shock. The differences in culture between community colleges and 4-year universities affect transfer students' learning and campus experiences. Laanan (2001) explored the transfer student adjustment resulting from the institutional differences in his review of the literature. The 2-year community colleges and 4-year universities have distinct characteristics in institutional location, size, academic requirements, and campus activities, which makes transfer students experience "transfer shock" (Hills, 1965, p. 201). Transfer shock is a phenomenon in which students experience a drop in their academic performance (i.e., Grade Point Average [GPA]) in the first or second semester after transferring to the 4-year institution (Hills, 1965). To recover from transfer shock and continue to stay in the 4-year institutions, students must adjust and adapt to their new learning environment.

In general, "transfer students are likely to experience a complex adjustment process, academically, socially, and psychologically, because of the environmental differences between two- and 4-year institutions" (Laanan, 2001, p. 11). Laanan (2001) highlighted the role of faculty as a critical structural attribute in both the community colleges and 4-year universities to support students' academic adjustment. Moreover, Laanan (2001) suggested that understanding the extent of faculty-student interactions and how much time students met with faculty out of class was important for institutions of higher education to facilitate transfer students' academic adjustment. To understand more about the faculty role in community colleges, the Community

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College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE), an online census survey developed in response to demand from the community college field, captures the information from faculty's perspectives on their interactions with students both in and out of the classroom (Center for Community College Student Engagement, n.d.).

Using a qualitative research design, Flaga (2006) focused on transfer student transition from community colleges to 4-year universities during their first semester when transfer shock occurs. In this study, she interviewed 35 community college transfer students and explored the "the nature of transition for community college transfer students during their first semester at a large, four-year university" (p. 5) and the change these students experienced in the first and second semester after they transferred into the 4-year university. Addressing three campus environments including the academic environment, social environment, and physical environment, Flaga (2006) studied the dimensions of students' transition in "learning resources, connecting, familiarity, negotiating, and integrating" (p. 5). In the first dimension, learning resources included various tools used by students to gain information about the academic system and campus environment and comprised of three types: formal learning resources, informal learning resources, and initiative learning resources (Flaga, 2006). Faculty members are an important component of the university. They are formal learning resources for students. In the second dimension, connecting refers to the relationship that students build with people in the academic, social, and physical environments. Faculty members' hours for meeting with students and the interaction in classes provide opportunities for students to connect academically (Flaga, 2006). Familiarity is the third dimension in which students learn about their campus environment and assimilate the information they gather. In the fourth dimension, negotiating is a process in that students begin to align their behavior and surroundings with their success in academic,

social, and physical environments. Flaga (2006) suggested that the "classroom can be an important place for students' social transition" (p. 8). Students build relationships with fellow students through conversations in and out of classes. Faculty members need to pay attention to the value of a classroom and increase opportunities to bring students together for facilitating peer relationships in the classroom. Integrating is the fifth dimension which means "a developmental change resulting from the students' relation to the three environments" (p. 8). Flaga viewed faculty-student interaction both in and out of the classroom as a necessary element in the academic environment. The formal and informal conversations and communications between faculty and transfer students not only increased transfer students' learning resources and academic connections, but also helped transfer students adapt to their new learning environment, adjust their behavior, and build their identity (Flaga, 2006). These findings align with Kuh's (2009) research that found that a boost in students' engagement leads to students' positive educational outcomes.

Several studies also center on transfer students' perceptions of college transition. Through interviewing 22 traditional-age students who transferred from a 2-year community college to a 4-year institution, Chrystal et al. (2013) collected qualitative data on the transfer process and explored the reasons why students decided to start at the community college, the transfer process's mechanics, and academic and social integration. The authors pointed out that community college faculty members were a resource that students most frequently mentioned regarding their transfer process.

Chrystal and colleagues (2013) found that as the transfer of credits and the time required to complete a bachelor's degree were students' primary concerns, the access to accurate and adequate information is necessary for facilitating students' transfer process. Community college

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faculty have a positive role in connecting students to transfer information and resources. Although students primarily focus on academic transition, their social transition is another important consideration (Chrystal et al., 2013). The transfer students that have an on-campus living experience and have good connections with faculty described a sense of belonging to their colleges, which helped them adapt to the new institutions after their transfer (Chrystal et al., 2013). A sense of belonging in the classroom or on campus impacts students' persistence and success at college (Strayhorn, 2018). The interactions between transfer students and faculty in and out of classrooms contribute to students' social integration.

Transfer Students at Rural Community Colleges. Because of the limited access to resources, students in rural community colleges need unique support for their academic and social integration to have a successful transfer. Hlinka and his colleagues' (2015) qualitative study examined factors influencing rural community college students' decision-making process in their progress toward achieving a bachelor's degree. The authors focused on three transition points: (a) how high school seniors decided to attend a community college with an intention to complete a bachelor's degree, (b) how community college students decided to persist at the community college for pursuing their transfer goals, and (c) how community college students selected a specific transfer 4-year institution. They interviewed students, administrators, staff, and faculty from the selected high schools and a community college. Regarding transfer students in community college, faculty members reported that they "recognized the importance of helping students feel comfortable, nurtured, and as though they matter to the college" (Hlinka et al., 2015, p. 7). Students also mentioned that their faculty's advice to pursue a bachelor's degree was a key influence on their decisions to continue postsecondary education. Good relationships with college faculty members can help transfer students have a supportive social network and improve

their confidence in transferring into 4-year institutions (Hlinka et al., 2015). I selected a rural community college as a case and explored how faculty members support transfer students.

With the same focus on students in rural community colleges, Hlinka (2017) collected qualitative data from 13 one-on-one college student interviews, four group interviews with a total of 11 college faculty members, and three group interviews with a total of 10 college administrators and staff members. This researcher investigated "what phenomena serve as barriers and as sources of encouragement affecting decision making about retention from the point of entry to the point of transfer in pursuit of a bachelor's degree" (Hlinka, 2017, p. 145). Both faculty and students reported that the resources acquired through formal and informal student-faculty conversations could provide guidance for students to put education as a top priority and persist in a transfer process (Hlinka, 2017). Moreover, Maliszewski Lukszo and Hayes (2020) explored sources of transfer student capital by employing a case study design with data sources from 17 transfer student interviews, eight transfer meeting observations, and a review of relevant documents. The study addressed two research questions: "What sources of transfer student capital (TSC) appear to be the most useful to community college transfer students in preparing to transfer? [and] How do community college transfer students acquire and use TSC to navigate the transfer process?" (Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020, p. 32). Concerning supportive sources in preparing for transferring, students reported that faculty offered influential information and tangible resources (such as recommendation letters for students' college applications) for them to navigate transfer process (Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020). A key theme Maliszewski Lukszo and Hayes' (2020) found was that the encouragement and support from community college faculty contributed to building up transfer students' self-efficacy and increasing students' confidence on a successful transfer. A practical

implication is that community colleges could develop and implement professional workshops or training specially aimed at enhancing faculty members' abilities to provide encouragement and support for transfer students (Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020).

Compared to community colleges in urban and suburban areas, rural community colleges often confront challenges due to scarce funds, insufficient personnel, and limited facilities (Thornton, 2019). Supporting students' learning in rural community colleges given their limited resources is a challenging issue for all faculty members. Finnegan (2019) interviewed nine faculty members from rural community colleges in Virginia and presented faculty's stories on serving students with rural backgrounds. Centering on "student experiences and faculty life" (Finnegan, 2019, p. 64), faculty shared their perspectives on supporting students in and out of classrooms. Because students in rural community colleges often lack academic preparation, college knowledge, transportation, technology, and living supplies (such as medicine, food, housing, and finance), faculty not only take responsibility for teaching but also have various roles in their support of students (Finnegan, 2019).

For many students, faculty have become their "main, and perhaps only contact at rural community college" to get to know the important information and resources on campus (Finnegan, 2019, p. 70). Regarding their advising role to students on academic and career choices, Finnegan (2019) suggested that faculty become involved in working on developing guided pathways (Bailey et al., 2015), while faculty still need to increase their knowledge on advising students to select courses and specific professional training to enhance advising skills. Additionally, among the nine faculty who participated in the study, half of them had experiences as a student at a community college (Finnegan, 2019). This prior learning experience helps equip faculty with on-the-ground knowledge of navigating the community college and they can serve

as a source of inspiration for students. Finnegan (2019) highlighted the significant role of faculty in serving students at rural community colleges and urged college leaders to work with faculty to "identify students" needs and connect them with the right provider at the right time" (p. 70). My study further explored the role of faculty in supporting transfer students and engaging with transfer work to promote transfer.

State Transfer Policy

State transfer policies are a crucial factor in governing and regulating transfer and articulation agreements given the lack of a federal approach to transfer. Legislating pathways between the community college and university sectors can improve transfer when alignment occurs for curricula and degree pathways (Carlsen & Gangeness, 2020). The purpose of state transfer policies is to create strong transfer pathways, help students have smooth articulation in the state postsecondary education system, and improve transfer students' outcomes. In Virginia, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) makes the policy on college transfer with the intention to improve efficiency in the transfer process and enhance collaboration among Virginia's higher education institutions (SCHEV, 2016). The state policy serves to guide students as they access all levels of higher education in Virginia's 2-year and 4-year institutions.

Virginia Community College System. The Virginia Community College System (VCCS) is the only higher education system in the state (VCCS, n.d.-a). In 1966, Governor Mill E. Godwin created the VCCS, which started with two community colleges and five area technical schools (VCCS, n.d.-a). Currently, VCCS comprises 23 community colleges (in 40 locations), which are led by 23 presidents under the direction of the Chancellor and the State Board of Community Colleges (VCCS, n.d.-a). To advise the Chancellor and the State Board of

Community Colleges on the related policy issues, VCCS's administration has organized various advisory committees including the Chancellor's Faculty Advisory Committee that consists of teaching faculty representatives from each community college (VCCS, n.d.-a).

In Virginia, the State Committee on Transfer is comprised of representatives from 2-year colleges and public and private 4-year institutions, and this group implements and monitors transfer-related policies (SCHEV, n.d.-b). One of the State Committee on Transfer's responsibilities is to identify transfer issues and make recommendations to SCHEV and the VCCS on transfer policies (SCHEV, n.d.-b). The list of State Committee on Transfer members includes individuals in the positions of transfer coordinator, counselor, dean, vice president, and provost. As community college faculty members play an important role in ensuring the academic quality of the curriculum and negotiating statewide articulation agreements (Boswell, 2004; Gabbard et al., 2006; Yeh & Wetzstein, 2020), it is necessary for campus leaders to understand how community college faculty who serve on the committee use the network to communicate with other faculty and staff representatives in VCCS and the State Committee on Transfer, and how community college faculty can provide their input for improving transfer-related policies. The work of guided pathways starting in 2014 required collaborative efforts between community colleges and 4-year institutions to promote a more seamless and efficient transfer (VCCS, 2021). The state policy on college transfer describes the phenomenon that transferring from 2-year community colleges to 4-year institutions within the state has become "a popular means for obtaining a bachelor's degree" (SCHEV, 2016, p. 1). It includes the statement that "transfer is a shared responsibility among all of Virginia's public institutions" (SCHEV, 2016, p. 1). Specifically, the state policy on college transfer provides guidelines for 2-year community colleges and 4-year institutions to employ to support transfer. Regarding courses, community

colleges are responsible for creating courses that are equivalent to those offered at 4-year institutions. Meanwhile, 4-year institutions are responsible for recognizing those courses that are equivalent to the community college offerings (SCHEV, 2016). In addition, the state policy on college transfer advises all public, 4-year institutions to offer transfer information in a manner that is easily available and clearly communicated to transfer students, faculty, and counselors (SCHEV, 2016). The recent state policy further underlines the importance of effectively implementing pathways and routinely gathering transfer information to support the success of transfer students (SCHEV, 2022). The state policies on college transfer highlight institutional collaboration and accessible transfer information. Yet, the extent to which monitors transfer information and the implementation in both community colleges and 4-year institutions and evaluates the quality of the transfer information accessible to transfer students remain unclear. Given that state policy has long shaped the community college's transfer function (Taylor & Jain, 2017), further research is needed to examine how community college faculty view the transfer process and if they see transfer as a shared responsibility with 4-year institutions. Moreover, it is important to understand how faculty members communicate with 4-year institutions to facilitate students' transfer process and connect students to available transfer information.

Transfer Virginia Initiative. The *Transfer Virginia* initiative began in 2018 to further support transfer in the commonwealth. According to a recent presentation from *Transfer Virginia*, there are a total of 20,000 students in the Commonwealth who declare intent to transfer, yet only 2,827 students (14%) transferred to a 4-year institution within 3 years of starting out at the community college (P. Parker, personal communication, November 5, 2021). To support students in successfully transferring to 4-year institutions and completing their degrees, the State

Council of Higher Education for Virginia has approved a series of new policies since 2018. The new transfer policies include a policy for dual enrollment transferability, a policy on passport classes (the passport is a set of courses that are transferable and satisfy lower-division general education requirements at participating Virginia public institutions of higher education), and a uniform certificate of general studies programs, guidelines for the development of transfer agreements, and guidelines for the development of pathway maps (P. Parker, personal communication, November 5, 2021). To increase students' knowledge about transfer pathways and help students explore transfer opportunities, *Transfer Virginia* improved a web portal and made the portal online in November 2021 (Butterworth, 2022). The *Transfer Virginia* portal has rapid development as a tool for students to access transfer resources and promote collaboration between community colleges and 4-year universities. Up to April 2023, more than 60 Virginia higher education institutions participated in the *Transfer Virginia* portal, which included 23 community colleges in VCCS, one junior college, and private and public 4-year institutions (Crenshaw & Hutchison, 2023). The transfer policies intend to benefit students to work through the process of planning and transferring into 4-year institutions successfully. Further understanding is needed of how community college faculty play a role in working with transfer offices and facilitating these initiatives to support transfer students.

  Transfer Policy Adoption. Higher education institutions have a vital role in implementing state policies (Wang, 2020). Community college students in the vertical pathways receive policy signals from their institutions and need to understand, adopt, and combine the variety of policy signals to successfully guide their educational decisions (Schudde et al., 2021). How students make sense of state transfer policy affects their transfer outcomes.

With a focus on examining how community college students interpret state transfer policies and how their interpretations influence their subsequent behavior, Schudde et al. (2021) used sense-making theory as a framework and collected longitudinal qualitative data over three years using interviews as a data source. Of transfer-intending participating students, 80% reported they acquired information on the related transfer policies from at least one community college agent, including their advisors and faculty (Schudde et al., 2021). Some of the students preferred to receive transfer information directly from faculty members in their academic programs, whereas the majority (86%) chose to seek out online transfer information on institutional websites (Schudde et al., 2021). Although community college students acquired policy signals from multiple sources, they often relied on themselves to understand the policy by seeking out published information online. Given that student-faculty engagement influences students' desire for academic persistence (Eddy & Kirby, 2020), it is unknown how faculty members deliver messages about transfer policies when they interact with students in and out of classrooms. Schudde et al. (2021) suggested that community college faculty members have a positive role in ensuring students' understanding of transferable coursework and reducing the transfer gap for underserved student groups, in particular racial minority students and low-income students. Concerning the importance of faculty's role in transfer articulation, Wang (2020) advocated the institutions to redefine faculty's role and responsibilities in transfer efforts. My research study could help fill the gap about how the involvement of faculty helped community college students in the transfer process.

Transfer Challenges and Faculty Role

Students experience a complex transfer process and face challenges when they move from a community college to a 4-year institution. These challenges may discourage them from

transferring successfully and meeting their educational attainment goals. Not all transfer

students' expectations are met. There is still a gap between their aspirations and the realization in

transfer.

Transfer Gap

In the vertical transfer pathway, the difference between the percentage of transfer-

aspiring students and the percentage of students who actually transfer is called a transfer gap

(Taylor & Jain, 2017). For example, Jenkins and Fink (2015) analyzed student transfer rates and

graduate rates using data on National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and National

Student Clearinghouse. They found that at community colleges 80% of students had an intention

to obtain a bachelor's degree and that within 5 years, 25% of students transferred to a 4-year

institution, whereas only 17% of students completed a bachelor's degree within 6 years of

transferring. These data mirror a reality that many community college transfer students do not

achieve their educational attainment goals. Wang (2020) employed a mixed methods approach

and followed 1,670 2-year community college STEM students on their educational transfer

journey to 4-year institutions (Fall 2014–Fall 2018). Over the course of 4 years, despite the fact

that most of the students in her study aspired to transfer when they started at community

colleges, only 40% transferred to 4-year institutions, while 38% were taking a break to leave the

community colleges with no credentials, 13% of students were detoured to various institutions

and programs for transferring to 4-year institutions, and 9% deferred their transfer goals (Wang,

2020). Although transfer-aspiring students may have similar motivations to transfer into 4-year

institutions and continue their education, they experience different "momentum trajectories"

(Wang, 2020, p. 24). Momentum trajectories demonstrate "interim outcomes" (Wang, 2020, p.

121) and paths students take when navigating their transfer process.

Along with the difference between transfer students' aspirations and attainment, a disparity exists in vertical transfer among students based on race and ethnicity. Martinez-Wenzl and Marquez (2012) examined students' educational pipelines to and from 51 community colleges in Southern California and assessed vertical transfer rates. They reported that among 13 community colleges with the lowest 6-year transfer rates (the average was 28%), 85% of colleges had a majority of students from underrepresented backgrounds (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012). Compared with these institutions, "community colleges with the highest transfer rates are majority White or majority White/Asian" (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012, p. 7). Notably, both Asian (60%) and White (51%) students had higher transfer rates compared to the average (49%; Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012). These data show a significant transfer gap between the underrepresented minority and White/Asian groups. In the nation, California was the first state to have a statewide community college system, which emerged from the 1960 Master Plan emerged with an assumption of providing open access to all California students to higher education (Beach, 2011). Despite student access to college, Martinez-Wenzl and Marquez (2012) found the existence of a "racial transfer rate gap" (p. 4) that highlights inequities in the vertical transfer process that continuously affect minority students' transfer outcomes.

To further understand the racial transfer gap, Crisp and Nuñez (2014) used a national sample that comprised 1,360 transfer-intending students who began at a community college in the 2003-2004 academic year and examined the transfer rates of White students and Underrepresented Minority students. They reported that 45% of White students successfully transferred into 4-year institutions, while only 31% African American and Latino students achieved successful transfer (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014). Here too in this research, a racial transfer gap existed between White students and Underrepresented Minority students. Crisp and Nuñez

(2014) indicated that the academic integration (such as interacting with faculty out of the classroom) was a significant predictor for the White students' transfer, but not the Underrepresented Minority students. This finding shows a need to identify the factors related to the White and Underrepresented Minority students' transfer and the role of community college faculty in assisting both student groups in transferring, which my research study explored.

With a purpose of investigating racial transfer gap (i.e., among White, Asian American, Latinx, African American) and inequities in the students' transfer experiences, Crisp et al. (2020) used data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study and included a national sample of students. The sample had a total of 18,320 students who wanted to get a bachelor's degree or higher and who identified as White, Asian American, Hispanic or Latino, or African American. These students were first-time entering colleges or universities in the US during the academic year of 2011-2012 (Crisp et al., 2020).

Crisp and colleagues (2020) found that among students who first began at a community college with an intention to earn a bachelor's degree, 67% of White students and 70% of Asian American students were like to transfer into a 4-year institution within 3 years. Correspondingly, 60% of African American students and 59% of Latinx students were more likely than other student groups to choose the lateral transfer pathway and move to another 2-year community college within three years versus to a 4-year institution (Crisp et al., 2020). Moreover, the findings showed that 50% of Latinx students and 55% of African American students experienced a high reverse transfer rate from a 4-year institution to a 2-year community college than other racial or ethnic student groups (Crisp et al., 2020). Compared with White students and the Asian American students who were in vertical transfer and moving to 4-year institutions, African American and Latinx were experiencing lateral transfer and reverse transfer and experienced a

longer time in achieving a degree. Although all students in the study had goals of earning bachelor's degrees when they first entered the colleges or universities, a racial transfer gap was identified in vertical transfer and degree completion (Crisp et al., 2020).

According to Jenkins and Fink (2015), an increase in the vertical transfer rate from 25% to 30% could add 46,000 bachelor's degrees to the nation. As an increasingly diverse group of college students seek the opportunity to transfer, many of whom are students of color, first-generation, and low-income, they face increased odds of not completing their bachelor's education and this attrition rate contributes to lagging college completion rates in community colleges (Bragg, 2017). Thus, identifying transfer barriers in the vertical transfer process is crucial to bridge the transfer gap and bring more equitable transfer outcomes for students across all racial or ethical groups.

Transfer Barriers

When community college students are on the transfer pathways toward 4-year universities, they face barriers that impede their ability to transfer and achieve their educational goals. Although open-access community colleges provide pathways for students who begin at community colleges and desire to move to 4-year institutions, the transfer process is complex. Handel (2013) addressed the importance of the vertical transfer pathway for increasing bachelor's degree completion and described the complex transfer process facing students. The varying transfer admission requirements across 4-year institutions, the arbitrary credit transfer, and inconsistent articulation agreements between community colleges and 4-year institutions negatively affected students' transfer (Handel, 2013). By reviewing the vertical transfer literature, Crisp and Nuñez (2014) further summarized the factors that influenced vertical transfer. These factors included socio-demographic (socioeconomic status, financial aid support),

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precollege, environmental pull factors (family responsibility, work commitment, part-time enrollment), degree expectations, and individual college experiences. Understanding these barriers helped in the coding of the data collected for my study.

Moreover, Taylor and Jain (2017) examined previous research on transfer pathways and outlined three critical dimensions that affected students' vertical transfer: "credit loss, inadequate articulation, and structural and institutional barriers" (p. 277). When students move from a community college to a 4-year institution, they often lose some earned college credits because not all their community college course credits can be transferred into their bachelor's degree programs. The requirements of their transfer destination university dictate the number of credits that transfer. During the transfer process, students may also swirl across institutions and experience a complex learning journey. "Students may start out at one college, transfer to another, take summer courses at yet another, stop out of college for a time, and reenroll later" (Eddy & Kirby, 2020, p. 168). They often spend more money taking courses repeatedly and more time attending college to complete a degree. The loss of credit is the first dimension that shows the ineffective transfer pathways that creates a barrier in the transfer process (Taylor & Jain, 2017).

Students' credit loss is also related to inadequate articulation, which is "the second dimension of ineffective transfer pathways" (Taylor & Jain, 2017, p. 278). Articulation agreements are negotiations between 2-year and 4-year institutions at the academic program or institutional level to facilitate the transfer process (Anderson et al., 2006). As a measure of formal guarantee, articulation agreements create a transfer guide to help students know how their credits will be transferred or accepted by the 4-year institutions. However, articulation policies and practices differ among states. For example, the Education Commission of the States reported

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a comparison of all 50 states' transfer and articulation policies and found that 36 (72%) states had statewide guaranteed transfer of an associate degree agreements, but 14 (28%) stated did not have these agreements in place (Francies & Anderson, 2020). Articulation policies "guarantee students who are awarded an associate degree before transfer to a 4-year institution can transfer all of their credits to the 4-year institution and enter at the junior-standing level" (Francies & Anderson, 2020, para. 1). The benefit of the policy is that students do not need to complete any additional general education courses when they enter a 4-year institution (Francies & Anderson, 2020). In states without the statewide transfer agreements, students' credit transfer rests on institutional agreements, which gives institutions the discretion to set requirements for degree programs (Taylor & Jain, 2017). Transfer students in these states may be required to take further general education courses for their bachelor's degrees. Students will make more effort to achieve degree completion than students in the states with the guaranteed transfer agreements. My study explored what, if anything, faculty members tell potential transfer students about the articulation agreements in place for the intended 4-year institution for transfer.

Despite 72% of states having state-wide articulation agreements, structural and institutional barriers negatively affect students' transfer outcomes (Taylor & Jain, 2017). The structural and institutional barriers comprise in part the gaps in course articulation among institutions. The ineffective transfer occurs due to inadequate information, advising, and support services, fewer efforts involving faculty in community college and university partnerships, different expectations between students' previous institution and their transfer institution, and institutional culture and ideology (Taylor & Jain, 2017). Given the existing structural and institutional barriers, Taylor and Jain (2017) suggested that more research would be needed to include perspectives from "transfer agents" (p. 287) and collect their feedback about building a

smooth pathway for transfer students. As faculty members are critical transfer agents in community colleges, they can offer new insight into facilitating the transfer process. My study findings provided descriptions regarding how community college faculty got involved in the vertical transfer process.

With a focus on the vertical transfer pathway, Wang (2021) proposed a list of 10 main barriers that transfer students experience and overcome. The barriers contained curricular complexity, cafeteria-style advising, scarcity in major-to-major articulation, narrow access to articulated/transferrable courses, inconsistent transfer information and support, lack of financial support for transfer, credit loss, transfer shock, transfer stigma, and social isolation. Wang (2021) suggested that transfer was not merely a responsibility taken by individual students who intended to enter a baccalaureate institution and instead also require that "transfer supporters and advocates" (p. 1) need to rethink their responsibilities for a smoother transition. The list could work as a resource for these supporters to know structural barriers, develop strategies, and help transfer students navigate their educational journey. By highlighting faculty's important role in supporting transfer students, Wang and her colleagues (2021) created a guide titled *Supporting Transfer Student Success: Five Key Faulty Practices*. This document offers research-informed practices for mainly 4-year institutional faculty to reflect on how they can contribute to breaking down transfer barriers on campus and supporting transfer students through their teaching, research, and services. An assumption here is that the university faculty actually know who the transfer students are in their classes. Identification of transfer students in all classes must be provided to faculty members for them to build in practices that reduce transfer barriers.

Guided Pathways

To support transfer student success and provide them with structured transfer pathways, Bailey et al. (2015) presented a guided pathways framework that advocated for a redesign of institutional policies, programs, and student services to promote students' academic progress and degree completion in community colleges. The guided pathways framework centers on improvements in four major areas in practice, including how to help students plan their educational path, get on their path, stay on their path, and ensure students are learning (Jenkins et al., 2018). Using the guided pathways framework, several community colleges in the nation launched initiatives to reform institutional transfer practices. The Center for Community College Student Engagement's 2020 report shows that as of Fall 2019, more than 300 community colleges among the nations' 1044 community colleges employed the guided pathways framework to help improve students' experiences in and out of the classrooms. Jenkins et al. (2018) argue that the practices used in the guided pathways programs improve students' educational outcomes. When students enter specific programs at a community college earlier in their time on campus, they are more likely to transfer to a 4-year institution or have degree completion (Amour, 2020).

Notably, the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2020) report included faculty data collected in the Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement survey, with responses from 7,534 faculty members working in 73 community colleges. The Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement survey includes 10 items on guided pathways. The survey findings showed that 45% of faculty knew very little to nothing about guided pathways, 88% of faculty had somewhat or never been involved in guided pathways at their colleges, and 42% of faculty had little knowledge of whether the work of guided pathways could

improve students' academic persistence and degree completion (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2020). Considering guided pathways programs intend to facilitate more effective transfer pathways for students in the community colleges and that faculty members can contribute to improving transfer practice (Community College Research Center, 2021), campus leaders should engage faculty in implementing the related programs and increasing faculty awareness of the work of guided pathways.

Guided pathways inform community colleges efforts to streamline students' educational journey and to help them achieve their educational goals. Transfer students who move from community colleges to 4-year institutions often feel that they are "on their own" (Wang, 2020, p. 43) in navigating transfer process. Although community colleges provide transfer student services, Wang (2020) found that transfer-aspiring students only occasionally made use of campus resources such as transfer advising, transfer credit assistance, and published transfer information. Faculty play a salient role in connecting students with campus resources. A small change can enhance students' campus experience. For example, Finnegan (2019) found that faculty included resource links in their course syllabi that led students to use these resources. Thus, equipping faculty with the knowledge of guided pathways will benefit students to receive more support when they navigate the transfer process. Further research is needed to understand how faculty make efforts to ensure transfer students' success upon transferring and how faculty collaborate with campus staff and administrators in the work of guided pathways for promoting vertical transfer, and my research intended to help fill this gap.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented challenges for students on their educational trajectories to transfer. According to a recent report, among nearly 8,000 community

college students intended to transfer but had not yet made it to 4-year university, 40% students indicated that the global pandemic impacted their transfer plan (Brohawn et al., 2021). During the pandemic, community colleges and 4-year universities adjusted institutional policies and practices on transfer requirements. However, 68% of transfer students were not aware of changes made by their community college, and 75% of transfer students were not familiar with changes made by their prospective university (Brohawn et al., 2021). The lack of sharing information with students and timely communication has negatively impacted students' transfer progress to 4-year universities.

From 2021 to 2022, the vertical transfer rate declined by 9.7% compared to 2019-2020 (Causey et al., 2022). The loss of transfer students worsened undergraduate enrollment at 4-year universities. Since the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect higher education, community colleges, and 4-year universities should strengthen transfer partnerships to stay solvent during this crisis (Amour, 2020). My study included questions to inquire about how community college faculty adjusted teaching strategies to improve students learning and how they connected students to campus resources and helped students get through the global pandemic.

Transfer Partnerships and Faculty Role

Because of challenges in navigating the transfer process, transfer students often need guidance on clarifying pathways to meet their end goals. To address their needs and pave an efficient transfer pathway, community colleges and 4-year institutions build partnerships and seek collaborations to identify transfer gaps and remove transfer barriers. The outcome of helping more transfer students obtain bachelor's degrees is essential not only for community colleges and universities, but also for employers seeking qualified applicants.

Dating back to 2009 when President Obama announced the American Graduation

Initiative with the goal of boosting the number of community college graduates by 5 million in

the next decade (The White House, 2009), national attention was placed on the role of

community colleges in increasing the nation's educational attainment levels. In his remarks, the

president mentioned that community colleges at the time enrolled more than half of all students,

with students seeking to earn an associate degree or to transfer to a 4-year institution to earn a

bachelor's degree (The White House, 2009). This presentation highlighted the importance of

community colleges in moving the nation toward meeting the nation's degree completion

agenda. In the same year, Lumina Foundation (2009) proposed their Big Goal: "to increase the

percentage of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials from the longstanding rate of

39 percent to 60 percent by the year 2025" (p. 1). Both the American Graduation Initiative and

the Lumina Foundation's Big Goal were ambitious educational attainment objectives. However,

10 years later, data show that the progress of getting more students through college is behind the

original schedule (Marcus, 2019). The declining number of traditional-aged college students

enrolling in college leaves 4-year universities with gaps in enrollments (Amour, 2020). The 2021

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center report shows a 2.6% loss for 18-20 college-age

students and a 3.3% loss for 21-24 college-age students in undergraduate enrollment (Causey et

al., 2021). This shortfall serves as a motivation for 4-year universities to work with community

college transfer students to fill the gaps and improve access to adult students for bachelor's

degrees. In turn, community colleges need to work with 4-year universities to facilitate students'

transfer from 2-year to 4-year institutions and help more transfer-aspiring students achieve

bachelor's degrees. Building strong and sustaining transfer partnerships can enhance students'

transfer and baccalaureate attainment (Kisker, 2007), which supports the goals set by the American Graduation Initiative and Lumina Foundation.

Community College—University Transfer Partnerships

In this dissertation study, transfer partnership refers to an arrangement "between associates-sending and baccalaureates-receiving institutions that share a common goal of improving policies and processes so that transfer students can achieve their desired goal of a bachelor's degree" (Bragg et al., 2020, p. 5). Previous researchers examined the practices of community college - university transfer partnerships in supporting transfer student success and the significance of engaging faculty in building the transfer partnerships. Kisker (2007) employed a qualitative method and network embeddedness theory in her study to investigate the processes of creating and sustaining community college-university transfer partnerships. She described the challenges inherent in partnership management and governance, the importance of involving faculty in transfer-partnership programs and activities, and the future utility of community college-university transfer partnerships (Kisker, 2007). By conducting 13 one-on-one, semi-structured interviews than included two university administrators and 11 faculty members and administrators in community colleges, Kisker (2007) argued that community college-university transfer partnerships would help "create a seamless transition from secondary school through the baccalaureate" (p. 297). Regarding the importance of faculty in transfer efforts, Kisker (2007) pointed out that community college faculty had "a key role in sustaining and institutionalizing transfer activities" (p. 294) on campus. Given the collaborative nature of transfer partnerships, Kisker (2007) suggested that faculty involvement was the key constituent group to include in the design and implementation of transfer partnerships programs could decrease resistance from partnership participants and might thus help colleges to fulfill transfer

partnership goals. Furthermore, she recommended that future studies were needed to explore how community college faculty perceive a transfer partnership program and how they collaborate with other participants in transfer partnerships (Kisker, 2007). My research intended to help fill this research gap and included faculty's perspectives on how they engaged with transfer partnership work.

Through presenting a model of partnership development, Amey et al. (2010) highlighted the role of social and organizational capital in the formation of partnership capital, which contributed to the long-term success of collaborative efforts. These researchers suggested that knowing which community college faculty members and student services professionals to bring together when developing partnerships to facilitate student transitions across educational levels was a challenge (Amey et al., 2010). What remains unknown is how community college faculty contribute to sustaining long-term success of collaborative efforts and to developing the working relationships needed to support transfer.

The involvement of faculty in transfer partnerships has an important role in helping students follow a successful transfer pathway and navigate the transfer process. Not only is the role of community college faculty important in supporting transfer-aspiring students, so too is the role 4-year university faculty have in building a positive environment for transfer-aspiring students. Drawing upon longitudinal survey data with a sample of 1,170 community college students who intended to transfer to a 4-year institution, Wang et al. (2020) revealed that a positive relationship between early exposure to 4-year programs and to the transfer process helped students gain exposure to and potentially receive support from faculty and advisors at baccalaureate institutions. This early exposure can better prepare community college students for the vertical transfer process. The high-quality interaction with faculty in community colleges and

4-year universities helps increase transfer students' knowledge and self-confidence and smooth out the vertical transfer process (Wang et al., 2020). Wang and colleagues (2020) suggested that community colleges should take steps toward maximizing transfer students' exposure to baccalaureate faculty and advisors. My research used a case study method and explored how community college faculty at one rural community college facilitated such steps and reinforced the effective partnerships between community colleges and 4-year universities.

High-Performing Transfer Partnerships

In a qualitative study focused on understanding what makes community college - university transfer partnerships highly effective in positive student outcomes to transfer to a 4-year university and earn a bachelor's degree, Fink and Jenkins (2017) identified a set of essential transfer practices. In the study, they proposed a series of strategies including making transfer a priority, creating clear programmatic pathways with aligned high-quality instruction, and providing tailored transfer advising and support from students' entry at a community college to a bachelor's degree. Drawing from interviews and focus groups with more than 350 faculty, staff, and transfer students in 14 institutions including six community colleges and eight 4-year universities, the researchers found that community college faculty had a focus on how to ensure rigorous courses to better prepare students to meet the academic expectations of 4-year university-level instruction (Fink & Jenkins, 2017). Additionally, community college leaders invited 4-year university faculty to serve as program review committees for programs aimed at transfer, which enhanced communication channels for community colleges to get feedback and input to update program maps and streamline the curricular transfer pathway (Fink & Jenkins, 2017). The collaboration between community college faculty and 4-year university faculty contributes to helping students to develop "major-specific pathways" (Fink & Jenkins, 2017, p.

302). It is still unknown how community college faculty members build and reinforce relationships with partners in 4-year universities that assist students with navigating transfer.

With the same focus on high-performing transfer partnerships, Yeh and Wetzstein (2020) selected seven community college-university partnerships for site visits and conducted 231 interviews with faculty, transfer students, administrators, and student support staff across the seven institutional pairs that had at least 300 community college students who successfully transferred to a 4-year university. One pair consists of a community college and a 4-year university. The researchers identified high-performing community college and 4-year university pairs by using a logistic regression model in which "the odds ratio of transfer students having graduated or still being enrolled was higher than the average odds ratio for graduation or retention of transfer students in other pairs in their state" (Yeh & Wetzstein, 2020, p. 23). They primarily explored how individuals described transfer partnerships and what they identified as the most successful aspects in institutional transfer partnerships. The findings indicated that participants viewed transfer partnerships as an "intentional and sustained investment in multiple collaborative practices, including strategic planning, equal commitment to a balance of power, and shared goals" (Yeh & Wetzstein, 2020, p. 25).

By illustrating institutional transfer partnerships practices, Yeh and Wetzstein (2020) included community college faculty as an important component in sustaining transfer partnerships through an intentional agreement to work with partners toward a common goal of promoting student transfer to a 4-year university. Faculty's involvement in department meetings regarding curriculum alignment, academic program review, and articulation demonstrated faculty's support in transfer and willingness to situate them in the partnerships (Yeh & Wetzstein, 2020). In community colleges, faculty and administrators hold value to "put the

student first" (Yeh & Wetzstein, 2020, p. 32) in the decision-making process, which drives faculty work with campus administrators to improve students' educational outcomes. The participants in the study reported how community college faculty and administrators used shared data to inform institutional decisions about transfer policy and curriculum and work together to generate solutions to remove transfer barriers (Yeh & Wetzstein, 2020). The researchers highlighted the function of transfer partnerships in creating a more seamless transfer experience and improving transfer students' academic persistence and degree completion. Moreover, they suggested that transfer partnership is not static but rather a developmental process that changes continuously over time (Yeh & Wetzstein, 2020).

The implementation of guided pathways responds to the need for streamlining students' educational paths (Bailey et al., 2015). It helps students clarify educational goals and calls for joint efforts among faculty and staff on campus. Future inquiry could examine how community college faculty collaborate with campus administrators to support transfer students and sustain transfer partnerships. In addition, Ran and Sanders (2019) underlined that more than half of community college courses are taught by part-time faculty. Previous research indicated a negative association with community college students' likelihood of transferring to a 4-year university when their exposure to part-time faculty increased (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009; Xu, 2019). Further research could explore the engagement of community college part-time faculty in transfer partnerships and their perceptions on vertical transfer. My research included full-time faculty and part-time faculty.

The studies on high-performing transfer partnerships manifest that community colleges and 4-year universities need to work together to "coordinate, collaborate, and partner" (Bragg, 2020, p. 15) to ensure a more smooth and equitable transfer pathway for students from a

community college to a 4-year university and enhance students' degree attainment. These studies underscore that community college faculty's deep level engagement in transfer partnerships contributes to institutional partnership practices. My research examined how full-time and part-time community college faculty perceived their role in transfer partnerships, and if their engagement in transfer programs and activities had similar or different influences on students' transfer process.

Summary

This chapter reviewed and summarized several salient pieces of literature related to the transfer process, transfer challenges, and transfer partnerships, with a particular focus on the vertical transfer pathway. Based on the literature review, there are several central points of information that informed my research study. First, students who begin at community colleges and aspire to earn a bachelor's degree are the dominant population at community college (Jenkins & Fink, 2016; Schudde et al., 2021), and this focus informs the mission of community college. Faculty members who work in community colleges need to recognize the role they play in supporting transfer students.

Second, the existing transfer gap and inequities in the transfer process discourage students' transfer, especially for historically marginalized student groups (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Crisp et al., 2020; Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012; Taylor & Jain, 2017). Transfer students who navigate their transfer process alone needed a "help line" (Wang, 2020, p. 119) to support them as they deal with challenges in the transfer pathways and move toward transferring into 4-year institutions. There is a need to develop strong community college and university partnerships in which faculty members are tapped to help support transfer students and to help reduce the transfer gap among historically marginalized communities.

Third, state transfer policies dictate how the transfer process and collaboration among higher education institutions occurs. How institutions implement policies and help students make sense of policy signals influence students' transfer outcomes (Schudde et al., 2021). Faculty members have the potential to promote students' understanding of transfer policy and to facilitate students' transfer process. Several recent studies recommend the involvement of faculty to promote effective transfer and articulation (Fink & Jenkins, 2017; Schudde et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020; Yeh & Wetzstein, 2020).

Considering community college faculty's role as a transfer agent and the absence of their voices from the literature (Rabinowitz et al., 2022; Taylor & Jain, 2017), this dissertation examined community college faculty's involvement in vertical transfer. As faculty members have direct interaction with transfer students, this dissertation investigated faculty's experiences interacting with transfer students in and out of classrooms. Additionally, it is still unknown how community college faculty perceive their role in transfer partnership with 4-year institutions and how they assist students in understanding state transfer policies and facilitate institutional policy implementation. The literature helped inform the data collected on faculty members' perceptions of their role in fostering partnerships with 4-year institutions and working with campus transfer resources offices. Researchers have used qualitative methods to understand people's experiences and interpret their meanings within a specific context (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and this study followed suit. Chapter 3 explains the rationale of the research method for addressing research questions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In the American education system, community colleges play an important role in offering access to higher education, especially for diverse students. For example, the nation's community colleges enroll more than 50% of students of color (AACC, 2022). This enrollment helps in diversification efforts at 4-year institutions as these universities hope to count on transfer students aspiring to achieve bachelors' degrees. Transfer enrollment helps to fill gaps in enrollment declines in universities that have resulted from the declining number of traditional-aged college students (Amour, 2020), and the vertical transfer pathway represents one type of student pathway to obtaining a baccalaureate degree. A 2022 report (Causey et al., 2022) showed that the vertical transfer pathway declined by 9.7% during the COVID pandemic years, which highlights the need to determine what supports the community college's transfer function for students who aspire to obtain a bachelor's degree. The literature review in Chapter 2 presents significant research on the transfer process, challenges, and partnerships. Although scholars view institutional faculty members as transfer agents (Dowd et al., 2018; Fay et al., 2022; Pak et al., 2006; Taylor & Jain, 2017), the role of institutional faculty members' role in transfer work remains underexplored.

Within this context of transfer, the purpose of the study was to explore the role of community college faculty in the transfer process with a focus on the vertical transfer pathway, which is one of the core missions of community colleges (Cohen et al., 2013). This chapter delineates the research design and justifies the use of a qualitative exploratory case study using a

single-case design. Following the introduction of the research design and rationale for using this design, the chapter provides a discussion of participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis as well as the explanation of strategies to establish trustworthiness, delimitations, and limitations of the study and the role of a researcher in qualitative research.

The literature examined in Chapter 2 is primarily qualitative research. The use of qualitative methods helps to understand and explain the meaning of a social phenomenon and the experience people have in the world (Merriam, 1998). The purpose of my study was to investigate the role of community college faculty in the transfer process, with particular attention on the vertical transfer pathway. A qualitative method was appropriate because I explored the vertical transfer phenomenon from the community college faculty's perspectives in a real-life context. There is scant attention to community college faculty roles in the transfer, which underscores the need to understand better the experiences of faculty through their own words and experiences. I wanted to inquire about how community college faculty members engage with transfer work and how they support students in the vertical transfer pathway. To address my inquiry, fill the gap in existing literature, and raise attention to the faculty's role in transfer work, the following research questions guided the study:

1. In a rural community college with a high student transfer rate, how do faculty perceive their role in the transfer process?
   a. How do they foster partnerships with 4-year programs that assist students with navigating transfer?
   b. How do they partner with the college's transfer center to support student transfer?

2. In a rural community college with a high student transfer rate, how do faculty interact with potential vertical transfer students?

    a. What interactions occur in the classroom that promote transfer?

    b. What interactions occur outside the classroom that promote transfer?

Research Design

To address the research questions, I used an exploratory case study with a single-case design. The sampling totaled of 12 participants, including five full-time faculty members, four part-time faculty members, and three senior transfer leaders at the research site. I collected data from multiple sources including documents, an online survey, interviews, and direct observations.

The research questions in qualitative research reflect the identified phenomenon of interest and direct the course of the research (Ryan et al., 2007). The research questions for this study highlight a focus on the role faculty members have in transfer in a rural community college with a high student transfer rate. The central research questions are formed by "how" questions that focus on faculty's perspectives on their role in the vertical transfer process and interaction with transfer students. In the study, I interpreted the identified phenomenon of interest based on the collection of the qualitative data from core participants' (faculty) perspectives, not mine (Merriam, 1998). My study followed all three of Yin's conditions for choosing a case study design, thus a case study design as an appropriate research design to fit my research questions. Below are the three conditions (Yin, 2018):

1. The form of research questions are how or why questions.

2. The researcher has little or no control over behavioral events.

3. The researcher's focus is a contemporary (as opposed to entirely historical)

   phenomenon. (p. 2)

Exploratory Case Study

Yin (2018) defined a case study as "an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 15). There are three types of case study: exploratory case study, descriptive case study, and explanatory case study (Yin, 2018). Each type of case study is applicable to a unique purpose and includes different questions. Exploratory case study has the purpose to "identify the research questions or procedures to be used in subsequent research study, which might or might not be a case study" (Yin, 2018, p. 287). A descriptive case study is used to "describe a phenomenon (the 'case') in its real-world context" (Yin, 2018, p. 287). The purpose of an explanatory case study is to "explain how or why some condition came to be" (Yin, 2018, p. 287). The forms of research questions guide the choice of case study design; namely, the inquiry of how and what questions are exploratory, while how and why questions tend to descriptive or explanatory.

Based on the understanding of case study definition and the types of case study, my study aligns with an exploratory case study. This choice highlights the lack of existing research on the topic of faculty roles in transfer and will serve as the basis for subsequent research based on the findings. The focus of my study was the faculty's role in the vertical transfer process, which is a contemporary phenomenon. A case is built on a "bounded system" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96), and the boundaries for my case by role (faculty's lived perspectives) and place (a rural community college with a high transfer rate). I explored how faculty perceive their role in the vertical transfer process and how faculty interact with potential vertical transfer students. My

research sub-questions include "what" questions (Yin, 2018, p. 10) about faculty-transfer student interactions. The findings of the study may help inform subsequent quantitative studies to explain the relationship among variables (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Single-Case

I opted for a single-case design because "the single-case can represent the critical test of a significant theory" (Yin, 2018, p. 49). Through collecting data on faculty members in a rural community college with a high student transfer rate, I wished to contribute to "knowledge and theory building by confirming, challenging, or extending the theory" (Yin, 2018, p. 49). Additionally, my decision to use a single-case results from the other rationales such as uniqueness, area served, revealing, and a certain period (Yin, 2018). The research site of the single case is in a rural Virginia community college (area served) with a high student transfer rate (uniqueness). I looked at community college faculty members (revealing case) during the period of the academic semester (a certain period) to gain an in-depth and extensive information of faculty's role in vertical transfer process.

The single-case study design is categorized into holistic (single unit of analysis) design and embedded (multiple units of analysis) design (Yin, 2018). In the exploratory case study, my unit of analysis was the faculty member at a rural community college with a high transfer student rate. A single-case study may involve more than one level of analytical units (Yin, 2018). In community colleges, part-time faculty teach more than half the courses (Ran & Sanders, 2019). Given the two factors, I used the subunits of analysis comprising full-time faculty groups and part-time faculty groups. In addition to the subunits, I also collected data from senior transfer leaders of the selected rural community college to fully explore the role of community college faculty in vertical transfer process. Because triangulation helps establish trustworthiness in a case

study (Yin, 2018), I used multiple sources (e.g., interviews, observations, documents) to collect data and assure the accuracy of the study.

I used Wang's (2017) model of momentum for community college student success as the theoretical framework for the study. The model highlights key domains and forms of momentum for community college student success. Using this model, I investigated how community college faculty members build students' momentum or reduce the friction of countering students' momentum toward a successful transfer.

Interpretive Framework

I opted for an interpretive framework to guide this qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interpretive framework's paradigm comprises postpositivism, social constructivism, transformation, and postmodern perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because social constructivism leads researchers to investigate the views of participants in the situation where they work and live (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I relied on a social constructivist approach to explore the community college faculty's role in the vertical transfer process.

Underlying an interpretive framework is a specific philosophical assumption. The epistemological assumption is "how reality is known" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35). With this assumption, qualitative researchers collect evidence from participants' views and understand the participants' experiences in their fields (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because faculty's lived perspectives emerge from their disciplinary fields, I probed how this background influences how faculty members make sense of the vertical transfer process. A guiding social constructivist epistemological belief is that "reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35). A social constructivist approach guided my study as it helped in the development of the research questions, and defined

a case bounded by time (real-life contemporary context) and space (the selected rural community college) to "get as close as possible to the participants being studied" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). My inquiry centered on the participants' perspectives on the role of community college faculty in supporting the vertical transfer process and transfer students. The participants' lived experiences in the selected community college shaped their perspectives, which comprised the data of this study.

Study Participants

Yin (2018) defined a participant as "a person from whom case study data are collected, usually through interviews" (p. 287). My study centers on community college faculty members from whom I collected data based on their views of the transfer process. Additionally, I collected data from interviews of senior transfer leaders in the community college to provide supplementary information for me to understand the faculty's experiences in engaging with transfer work. Since a real-world context is an important characteristic of a case study (Yin, 2018), I selected a research site in which the participants (community college faculty and senior transfer leaders) work and live. Moreover, because I used an exploratory case study within a single-case design (Yin, 2018), I needed to clarify the uniqueness of the research site to provide a strong argument for justifying the selection.

Site Selection

My research questions focus on the exploration of faculty's perspectives on their role in the vertical transfer process. As I was interested in understanding the vertical transfer at a local level, I narrowed the focus to the Commonwealth of Virginia where I (as a researcher) study and live. My location in Virginia provides me with more depth of knowledge of the context in which students and faculty go to college and work. I understand the larger landscape of assumptions of

college going behavior as a result too. The bounded system helps researchers identify a site from the existing numerous sites (Merriam, 1998). In Virginia, the VCCS has 23 community colleges in the system (VCCS, n.d.-a). I view the VCCS as the underlying boundary for site selection. Given the focus of the study on the vertical transfer pathway, I established the next boundary layer based on the community college's transfer rate and transfer students' outcomes. The location of the community college is the third layer. Among 23 community colleges in Virginia, 14 colleges (more than 60%) are rural community colleges (The Virginia Foundation for Community College Education, 2020). I selected a rural community college that aligned with my research questions and serves the purpose of the study. "Bounding the case" (Yin, 2018, p. 31) within the three layers, I chose American Community College (ACC; pseudonym) as a research site for this study.

By reviewing the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia transfer dataset (SCHEV, n.d.-a), I compared ACC's data with the 9 Urban Community Colleges (UCCs) and 13 Rural Community Colleges (RCCs) in the VCCS during the academic year 2019-2020. The 23 VCCS community colleges are in Table 1, which presents a full list of the data comparison.

Table 1

Virginia Community College Transfers Comparison

Community College (pseudonym)	No. of Transfers to 4-year Institutions 2019-2020	Annual FTE Enrollment 2019-2020	% of Students Transferring 2019-2020	Transfers' First Year Retention 2018-2019	Transfers' 4-year Degree Completion 2016-2017
UCC 1	5,158	30,478	16.92%	82%	68%
UCC 2	1,808	12,569	14.38%	75%	51%
UCC 3	705	4,684	15.05%	72%	59%
UCC 4	688	5,483	12.55%	77%	61%
UCC 5	671	5,532	12.13%	77%	60%
UCC 6	663	4,443	14.92%	75%	65%
UCC 7	521	3,542	14.71%	74%	68%
UCC 8	374	2,783	13.44%	82%	65%
UCC 9	221	2,264	9.76%	73%	59%
RCC 1	444	3,944	11.26%	79%	69%
RCC 2	303	2,648	11.44%	77%	66%
RCC 3	132	2,001	6.60%	65%	49%
RCC 4	134	1,616	8.29%	62%	61%
RCC 5	117	1,659	7.05%	75%	62%
RCC 6	105	1,774	5.92%	63%	55%
RCC 7	88	1,644	5.35%	57%	61%
RCC 8	76	1,454	5.23%	70%	72%
RCC 9	44	603	7.30%	76%	58%
RCC 10	65	1,522	4.27%	61%	54%
RCC 11	58	776	7.47%	65%	39%
RCC 12	37	374	9.89%	50%	36%
RCC 13	128	1,531	8.36%	60%	60%
ACC	337	2,267	14.86%	73%	70%

Note. The data in this table are taken from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). FTE = Full-Time Equivalent. UCC = Urban Community College. RCC = Rural Community College. ACC = American Community College (a pseudonym of this study's research site).

From the Table 1, I determined that ACC has the highest 4-year degree completion rate for transfer students relative to the nine UCCs. Furthermore, when comparing ACC to the other 13 RCCs, I found that ACC has the highest percentage of student transferring and the second highest rate among rural colleges for transfer student completion. Although ACC is a small rural

community college with an annual student enrollment of approximately 2,260, it has outstanding

transfer outcomes (transfer rate, retention rate, and 4-year degree completion rate) relative to the

other 22 community colleges in Virginia. This characteristic of ACC provided a good context to

explore the faculty's role in vertical transfer process as well as the potential contributions of

faculty in supporting students transferring from ACC to 4-year universities. Additionally, ACC

has a transfer center that provides services and advisement for transfer students aspiring to get a

bachelor's degree in a 4-year university. Having a transfer center is not unique in a community

college. However, the staff of the transfer center of ACC works closely with 4-year programs

throughout the whole process of students' transfer. This characteristic directly addresses my

research questions about the partnership with 4-year programs and community college faculty's

role in collaborating with transfer center to support transfer students. The ACC's outstanding

transfer outcomes and a dedicated transfer center establish the ACC's uniqueness are the reasons

I selected ACC as the research site for the study.

Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty

ACC is the research site in which the study's participants work and it serves as a hub for

the community. In this single-case design, I used multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2018). The

purpose of the study was to explore the community college faculty's role in the vertical transfer

process. The first-level unit of analysis was all the faculty who have responsibilities for teaching

and assisting students in their academic learning at ACC as a whole case. The two subunits

include full-time faculty members and part-time faculty members. To select faculty as

participants in my study, I developed a short online survey using Qualtrics software to obtain a

broad descriptive profile of the faculty's involvement in vertical transfer at ACC. The survey

included six demographic items and six items relevant to faculty support of transfer students.

The latter items were developed using factors highlighted in the literature review. See Appendix A for a copy of the faculty survey. After receiving the approval of Research Review Committee at ACC, the gatekeeper sent the survey link to ACC faculty members via an internal campus portal. See Appendix B for a copy of the email text sent with the survey link to all faculty at ACC. The recruitment emails included the description of the study's purpose and the criteria for participation.

After the initial invitation to fill out the survey, I requested the gatekeepers to send two reminders to the participants. When the email invitation was sent out at the end of November 2022, considering winter break and the preparation for the spring semester, the gatekeeper sent the reminder email to full-time faculty in the middle of January 2023. The email to part-time faculty was sent at the end of January 2023. I started receiving survey responses at the beginning of December 2022 and closed the survey in the middle of February 2023. I was the only person with access to the online survey responses. I used the survey to select faculty participants to interview from those that volunteered. For the faculty who participated in the individual interviews, I gave each faculty participant a $50 Amazon gift card as an incentive for promoting recruitment.

Senior Transfer Leaders

The senior transfer leaders at ACC comprised the third subunit of participants. The data from senior transfer leaders at ACC provided supplementary information for me to understand the faculty's role in the vertical transfer process. The senior transfer leader participants consisted of the Director of the Transfer Center, the Coordinator of Academic Advising, and the Dean of Student Services, and all three were invited to participate in this study. The gatekeeper sent a recruitment email to each leader at the beginning of December 2022. Appendix C contains a

copy of the email text that was sent to transfer center leaders at ACC. To attract the interest of the senior transfer leaders in the study, I also gave a $50 Amazon gift card to each participant as a recruitment incentive.

Sample Size

When I recruited participants, I considered the sample size. Yin (2018) suggested that a large number of sample cases is not logical in a case study as the intention of this empirical method is to assess "both the phenomenon of interest and its context" (p. 56). Creswell and Poth (2018) proposed that the number of participants may range "from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15" (p. 76) and include members who have experienced the phenomenon. ACC is a small 2-year community college (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.) and during Fall 2021 employed a total of 164 faculty members (65 full-time and 99 part-time; NCES, n.d.). I interviewed both full-time and part-time faculty members.

As an exploratory case study within a single-case design (Yin, 2018), I had multiple units of analysis with both full-time and part-time faculty as the core subunits and the transfer center staff as an "intermediary" subunit (Yin, 2018, p. 52). After taking into consideration these factors, I decided to recruit a total of 10-12 participants including these three groups (4-5 full-time faculty members, 3-4 part-time faculty members, and the 3 senior transfer leaders), which is within the suggested proposed range for a case study sample (3 to 15; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Merriam (1998) recommended that a researcher could offer a tentative, approximate number of units to be included, acknowledging that this could be adjusted in the course of the investigation. The number of potential participants on campus helped me make adjustments during the process of gathering information and to achieve data saturation, which is obtained when the information on the phenomenon is fully developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection

A highlighted strength in conducting a case study is that researchers can use different sources of evidence to collect data because triangulating data is important (Yin, 2018). Triangulation can "provide corroborating evidence for validating the accuracy of their study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 328). In this study, I wanted to explore the role of community college faculty in vertical transfer process. Centering on the purpose of the study, I used multiple sources of evidence: documentation, a survey, interviews, and direct observations (Yin, 2018).

Documentation

I collected "documentary information" as the first source of evidence in the case study (Yin, 2018, p. 113). Because a higher education institution often has various documents, my first step was determining where to find useful materials (Merriam, 1998). Centering on my research questions, I reviewed ACC's mission statement, strategic plan, history, administration, transfer advising, and the introduction of the transfer center on ACC's website which helped me get familiar with the college before I visited. Meanwhile, I looked over the transfer documents on the State Department of Education website that provide meaningful information regarding the faculty's responsibilities and roles in transfer policies and practices. Since these documents are accessible to the public, I started collecting these documents early in the data collection phase.

Then, in the process of interviews, three faculty participants shared me with a short list of first-class questions that they used to get to know students and initiate communications with students early in the classrooms. The senior transfer leaders showed me the previous monthly newsletter that included the announcements of transfer events in the local 4-year universities nearby ACC. They used the newsletter to give an example of how they delivered transfer resources to faculty and students. Across my observations of the curriculum committee meeting

and transfer training on campus, with the gatekeeper's approval, I collected a curriculum committee minute, a transfer training attendee list, a link to transfer training videos, and a joint transfer report between ACC and a local public 4-year university. The documents reviewed were a source of data triangulation to corroborate and augment the evidence gathered in interviews and during observations (Yin, 2018). I used the documents to describe the case context and confirm findings that emerged from interviews and observations.

Survey

The purpose of using an online survey was to select faculty participants for the following one-on-one interviews. I relied on the online survey responses to purposefully select the faculty members as participants for the study. There was a total of 15 items in the survey including three faculty demographic items (gender, race, and ethnicity); three characteristic items (academic rank, years of teaching experience, and academic department); six items relevant to faculty's interaction with transfer students, services for promoting transfer, and perception of their positive role in supporting transfer students; and the remaining two items asking about participants' willingness to the interviews. The selection criteria were related to the faculty's professional experiences of serving transfer students in and out of the classroom, their perception of the faculty's positive role in the transfer process, and their willingness of participating in the follow-up interviews. I used "purposeful sampling" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 100) to select the faculty members showing high interaction with transfer students in and out of the classroom. I also used the survey responses to select among full-time and part-time faculty roles.

Interview

Interview data from the ACC faculty constituted the primary source of data in this study, whereas the responses of the senior transfer leaders helped supplement and corroborate

information to understand better faculty members' roles in the vertical transfer process. For a case study, interviews as a data collection method are crucial sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). Considering the factors of faculty and leaders' availability, I used "shorter case study interviews" (Yin, 2018, p. 119), with each interview lasting approximately one hour. This time format allowed an in-depth individual conversation with each consenting ACC faculty member and senior transfer leader. As noted above, I recruited nine ACC faculty members (five full-time and four part-time) and three senior transfer leaders for the 1-hour one-to-one interviews. I interviewed all three who were leaders in charge of transfer advising. Two leaders participated in an online Zoom meeting. One leader participated in an in-person meeting when I was at ACC. Faculty could also participate in the interview either in an online Zoom meeting (seven opted for this option) or in an in-person meeting (two opted for this option) when I visited ACC. Interview were only voice recorded regardless of the interview format. Participants signed an informed consent form (see Appendix D and Appendix E) indicating they would participate in the study and that they consented to the recording of the interview.

I used specific questions in the interview protocol that focused on the purpose of the study. Because a pilot interview helps researchers refine questions in the interview and assess the credibility of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I conducted pilot interviews with two faculty members and two staff members who work at other Virginia community colleges. After the pilot interviews, I made minor modifications to the interview protocol based on their feedback such as the protocol format adjustment and the specification of warm-up questions.

The interviews with core participants (faculty members) helped address their experiences in interacting with transfers both in and out of the classrooms and how faculty members perceive their roles in students' transfer pathways from 2-year community colleges to 4-year universities.

Wang's (2017) model of momentum for community college student success highlighted the key domains and forms of momentum concerning curricular, classroom teaching and learning, and students' motivational attributes and beliefs. Additionally, this model includes counter momentum fiction and students' carry-over momentum (Wang, 2017). Wang's model provided a theoretical framework to investigate how faculty contribute to building transfer students' momentum or reducing friction countering transfer students' momentum toward a successful transfer.

In this study, I used Wang's (2017) model to develop an interview protocol. See Appendix F for a copy of the faculty interview protocol and Appendix G for a copy of transfer center leaders interview protocol. The general questions queried faculty's perception of transfer students, their strategies for helping transfer students as well as factors impacting their efforts and intentions towards supporting vertical transfer at ACC. The interview questions for transfer center leaders related to the faculty's efforts in collaborating with the ACC transfer center and facilitating transfer partnerships between ACC and 4-year universities. I built a crosswalk table to connect the interview protocol questions with the research questions and the literature (see Appendix H). The timeline for conducting interviews followed the schedule of sending online surveys for recruiting faculty members. Beginning in December 2022, I scheduled interview times with the selected faculty members and began conducting individual interviews. I concluded my interviews with faculty in February 2023. I completed interviews with the ACC senior transfer leaders in January 2023.

Direct Observation

Participants' responses to the interview questions derived from their work and lived experiences at ACC and took place in the real-world setting of ACC. This premise brings an

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opportunity to use direct observations as a source of evidence (Yin, 2018). Observations can inform "a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated" (Merriam, 1998, p. 111). In this case study, I centered on the phenomenon of how faculty engage with transfer work and support students in vertical transfer pathways. By conducting direct observations at ACC, I could understand better the influence of the campus environment on faculty's perspectives on their role in the vertical transfer process.

During the process of direct observations, I collected "open-ended, firsthand information" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 214). As I sought to understand the core participants' (full-time faculty and part-time faculty) experiences working for the transfer process at ACC, I looked in particular for opportunities to observe the transfer center, transfer activities, and faculty involvement in transfer work. Because observations can involve both formal and informal information-gathering activities (Yin, 2018), my role was an observer. Before visiting ACC, I communicated with the gatekeepers, asked for information about the dates of transfer activities, and scheduled a time to conduct direct observations. As a "nonparticipant observer" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 215), I did not get involved in formal or informal activities that the core participants engaged with on campus during my visit to ACC.

Because I used an exploratory case study within a single-case design (Yin, 2018), the ACC campus was the "physical setting" (Merriam, 1998, p. 97) that I observed. In particular, the transfer center at ACC was central to my observation. Among students who transferred from ACC to 4-year public and private institutions during the 2019-2020 academic year, more than 40% enrolled in a public university nearby (SCHEV, n.d.-a). Given this reality, I searched the ACC website for the transfer admission event. With the approval of the gatekeeper, I visited ACC in January 2023 when ACC held the onsite transfer admission day on campus.

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Additionally, I heard from the gatekeeper about an ACC campus-wide transfer training in February 2023 (and received her approval to attend), which was a good opportunity to observe the faculty's involvement in the *Transfer Virginia* initiative and their work in transfer partnerships. In sum, I visited ACC twice and observed four formal transfer activities: An on-site transfer student admission event (2 hours) at the transfer center, a 1-hour transfer advising meeting at the transfer center, a 2-hour in-person transfer training for faculty and staff on campus, and a 1-hour curriculum committee meeting on campus. Meanwhile, I walked near the transfer center to conduct an informal observation of campus members.

I recorded the information from my observation using "descriptive field notes and reflective field notes" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 217). In my case study, I noted descriptions of the ACC's transfer-related meetings involving faculty members (such as what discussions faculty participated in and what suggestions they provided for promoting transfer work) and the transfer center's physical environment in descriptive field notes. These notes also contained my reflection on the formal and informal activities that occurred during and after my visit. To record detailed notes, I employed an "observational protocol" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 168) as a tool. Wang's (2017) model of momentum for community college student success provided me a theoretical framework for building observation questions. I used a template proposed by Creswell and Poth (2018) to design the observational protocol and to record "both descriptive and reflective notes" (p. 171). See Appendix I for a copy of the observational protocol. After I completed observations on formal meetings, I shared my appreciation to the attendees in the meetings and clearly told them how I intended to use the data in the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). After my informal observations on transfer center, I also shared my appreciation to the leader at transfer center.

Data Analysis

Concurrent with data collection, I began data analysis with part of the documentation review prior to my campus visit and conducting interviews. Further analysis occurred during the campus visit and was recorded in my field notes. Finally, as I conducted the interviews, I began noting common themes emerging and used these to inform the formal analysis conducted.

Documentation Analysis

To address the research questions regarding faculty's role in vertical transfer process, I gathered official documents published on the ACC website and the state department of education websites. During the interviews and observations, I also collected transfer-related materials shared by participants. The official documents on the websites are formal and accessible sources of evidence for communicating information with the public. Given that "content analysis is a systematic procedure for describing the content of communications" (Merriam, 1998, p. 123), I used content analysis (Merriam, 1998) to generate data and interpret the meaning of the documents. First, I read through the documents to get a sense of the tone used and what was said about the transfer process. Second, I coded the documents based on a list of priori codes from the literature review (Appendix J). Finally, I looked at the coding holistically to determine emerging themes and to note how language around transfer was used.

Survey Analysis

To review the survey responses, I used descriptive statistics to summarize the overall trends or tendencies of the data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). I conducted a survey of all faculty ($N = 164$) and received 40 complete responses from 19 full-time faculty members and 21 part-time faculty members. The whole survey response rate was 24.4%. The full-time faculty's survey response rate was 29.2%, while the part-time faculty's survey response rate was 21.2%.

Among these responses, 22 participants (10 full-time faculty members and 12 part-time faculty members) indicated a willingness to take part in an individual interview.

In the preliminary review, I examined all survey items and looked at frequency distributions for categorical information on the number of occurrences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The frequency distribution highlighted how often faculty members who responded to the survey interact with transfer students in and outside the classroom and how important faculty believe their role in supporting transfer students at their community colleges. I used the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS 23) to conduct all statistical analyses. In the final review, I selected the faculty members who showed interest to participate in the follow-up interviews and demonstrated a high engagement in transfer services and compiled names into a potential participant list. I then sorted this list by full-time and part-time faculty roles. Because more faculty volunteered and met the prior criteria, I used years of teaching, disciplinary area, and demographic variables to achieve more diversity in the sample. For example, I recruited a faculty member who identified as multiracial to include minority faculty's voices about serving underrepresented students and exposure to diversity. Another example was the selection of the part-time faculty member. Due to having three senior transfer leaders in the interviews, I excluded the part-time faculty participants who reported both administration and teaching roles and selected part-time faculty participants who only took responsibility for teaching at ACC.

After final review of survey responses, I selected nine faculty participants for the interviews; five were full-time faculty members and four were part-time faculty members. Considering the role staff members have in providing supplemental information that supports transfer students, I selected three senior transfer leaders by searching for their job titles on the

research site website and recruited them under the assistance of the gatekeeper. In total, I conducted 12 individual interviews and built a profile of interview participants.

Interview Analysis

The responses of participants to interviews generated the primary type of data used in my case study. The interview participants included nine faculty members and three staff members. The data analysis process of the interviews occurred using a spiral in which I moved from data collection, managing data, reading and memoing, describing and classifying, interpreting, and finally representing and visualizing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interview data were recorded with consent and the recordings were transcribed and coded to capture key concepts and patterns. Coding is a crucial step for interpreting the data with the involvement of making sense of the data and the lessons learned (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I conducted the initial data analysis using a coding scheme developed from my literature review. Based on my research questions about "what" and "how," I used the In Vivo coding and Values coding (Saldaña, 2016) in the first cycle of coding to understand participants' perspectives and the language they used in their living place (a rural community college). I used qualitative software (Dedoose) to categorize the data. See Appendix J for a listing of priori codes. New codes also emerged from the data, such as informal transfer advising, office hours, and referring students to other offices. In the second cycle of coding, I used pattern coding to summarize and organize similar codes (Saldaña, 2016). I built a coding sheet at this stage (Appendix K).

Direct Observation Analysis

Because I conducted an exploratory case study within a single-case design (Yin, 2018), the selected research site (ACC) was the work field that I observed. The descriptive field notes and reflective field notes from observing formal and informal activities at ACC comprised the

data in the study. I visited ACC as a non-participant observer and kept a record of notes in the

form of "unstructured text data and pictures taken during observations" (Creswell & Guetterman,

2019, p. 214). I recorded my initial observations on campus and kept detailed notes of my

observations in order to have a "thick and rich" description (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 168). I

coded my observation notes using the list of priori codes used in interviews to develop

"categories or themes" (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). During direct observations, I followed the

guideline of the ACC's gatekeepers and protected the confidentiality of the institution and

participants involving in the formal and informal activities (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Analytic Strategy and Technique

In a case study, when researchers analyze data, they need a strategy to guide the process

(Yin, 2018). Given the exploratory nature of my case study, I sought to identify distinguishing

characteristics for "developing ideas for further study" (Yin, 2018, p. 179) rather than providing

a conclusion. I employed Wang's (2017) model of momentum for community college student

success as the theoretical framework to explore the community college faculty's role in the

vertical transfer pathway. As community college faculty members are transfer agents (Dowd et

al., 2018; Fay et al., 2022; Pak et al., 2006; Taylor & Jain, 2017), my assumption was that

community college faculty who engaged with transfer work can either build students'

momentum or reduce friction on counteracting students' momentum toward transferring to 4-

year institutions. The theoretical framework of momentum guided my data collection and

analysis of documentation, survey, interviews, and direct observations.

Apart from using a theoretical orientation, I used Dedoose as a tool to code and

categorize qualitative data and help me locate categories or themes and aggregate codes. After I

derived the initial data by coding interviews transcripts, direct observations notes, and

documents, I "construct(ed) categories or themes that capture some recurring pattern" (Merriam, 1998, p. 179) and determined several major themes.

Trustworthiness

The findings of the qualitative study research need to be accurate to build trustworthiness (Merriam, 1998). Trustworthiness is an essential concern to assess a study's quality and value. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) to establish trustworthiness for qualitative research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the following session, I discuss the strategies I used to meet each criterion and ensure the accuracy of the findings.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the truth of the study's findings that present the perceptions and experiences of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In my exploratory case study, the central phenomenon was the faculty's role in an American rural community college (ACC) with a high transfer rate. I promoted credibility by triangulating multiple data sources, such as the document review, the survey, the interviews, and direct observations. Given that member checking and participant's feedback are techniques to corroborate the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I invited participants to examine the initial interview data and provide their feedback to confirm the account is complete and accurate. This process resulted in little feedback as participants seldom sent back their views after the completion of interviews. Then, I engaged two colleagues who were familiar with the vertical transfer process in Virginia community colleges to serve as peer reviewers (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to give feedback and comments on the findings. Both colleagues signed a peer review confidentiality agreement (Appendix L) and completed coding the transcript using the coding sheet. I read through the peer reviewers' coded transcript,

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revisited my codes, and reflected on the data analysis process. For example, one peer reviewer added a note about how a faculty participant spoke about her role in helping transfer students to figure out transferable courses. The peer reviewer questioned whether advisors should take responsibility for this work. Another peer reviewer inserted a code about the faculty's role in advising transfer students. The feedback of the peer reviewers inspired me to dig into the role of faculty and their relationship with advisors, which informed the subsequent coding about faculty's role in bridging academics and advising.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree that the study's findings may have applicability in other contexts or populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The main research questions in my study were formed by "how" (Yin, 2018, p. 45) questions, which help address how others may find utility in applying the findings to their own situations. Additionally, a single-case design has the advantage of contributing to the theory and entailing subsequent inquiry (Yin, 2018). I used Wang's (2017) model of momentum for community college student success as a theoretical framework. The findings of my study can help inform future research in investigating the important role of faculty in supporting vertical transfer. The characteristic of a single-case design improves the transferability of the study. Moreover, using different sources of data (documentation, surveys, interviews, and observations) allowed for the "thick description" of the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 256), which provided detailed accounts of the context (community college faculty's role in vertical transfer). The thick description establishes the transferability of the study to be applicable to other situations (faculty in colleges and universities who work with transfer students).

Dependability

Dependability is the consistency of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which refers to reliability that researchers can replicate the study by following the description of procedures (Yin, 2018). To achieve dependability, I built interview and observational protocols developed from the literature to guide the interviews and observations. Additionally, during data collection, I explained in detail how I selected the faculty members and transfer leaders for interviews, why I observed the transfer meetings at ACC, and what documents I gathered. I took notes and reflected on the data collection process and my position as a researcher to help form an audit trail. The notes, together with data from interviews, direct observations, and documents, comprise "a case study database" (Yin, 2018, p. 130). Developing a case study database helped me clarify the details, built the transparency of my study, and addressed dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree that the study's findings speak for participants' responses not the researcher's biases, perspectives, and interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve confirmability, I kept an alignment between the research questions and findings, clarified the decision-making in data collection, and employed multiple methods of analyzing data to strengthen the links from research questions to results. The logical flow from research questions to protocols to findings is like "a chain of evidence" (Yin, 2018, p. 44) that shows my path taken to get to the findings. I also wrote down my experiences, thoughts, and feelings in a reflexivity journal to help clarify my bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The reflexivity journal documented how I reflected on the research process and honestly conveyed my thoughts, backgrounds, and biases (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017), which helped establish confirmability. Moreover, in reporting the

study's findings, I included participants' quotes to exemplify how I derived the findings from the data to demonstrate the study's confirmability (Cope, 2014).

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations of the study include: (a) The study was delimited to a single case site; (b) The study only focused only on the selected faculty members' perspectives on the transfer pathway from community college to university. It excluded other transfer agents such as students and counselors in community colleges; (c) Participants' responses in the individual interviews were confined to their personal experience and knowledge regarding the community college transfer. Another delimitation was the range of documents reviewed, as they were limited to internal campus documents and state policy documents regarding transfer.

The first limitation of the study was the access and the availability of internal and external resources I could access and the length of time I had to complete the study. Another limitation was that convenience sampling in Virginia that was used in recruiting participants, which "a researcher cannot say with confidence that the individuals are representative of the population" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 143). The third limitation was that there may be researcher bias in collecting data from multiple methods and interpreting the qualitative results despite my attempts to bracket my biases. I attempted to limit bias by documenting my thoughts in reflexive journals to write what I did and the decisions that occurred during the research process to improve confirmability and remove biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Researcher as Instrument Statement

By using a case study within a single-case design (Yin, 2018), I conducted data collection and analysis in the survey, documentation, interviews, and direct observations. Because the qualitative approach allows a researcher to collect data in a natural setting, analyze data, and

establish patterns or themes to interpret the meanings people bring to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018), my educational and work experiences impacted my position as a researcher. The beliefs and values on the important role of faculty built my assumptions that community college faculty who had a positive interaction with transfer students both in and out of the classroom can facilitate a smooth pathway for students from community colleges to universities. Faculty transfer efforts contributed to improving students' momentum or reducing friction in countering students' momentum toward transferring to 4-year institutions. Based on the literature review, I thought that 4-year institutions exercised more power than community colleges because they were the receiving schools in the vertical transfer process. Faculty and staff in 4-year institutions had a more powerful voice in building curriculum and making decisions on transfer admission. Community college faculty and staff needed to initiate communications with 4-year institutions.

Within a community college, full-time faculty paid more attention to the vertical transfer pathways than part-time faculty because of their position and commitment to teaching and professional services. Full-time faculty should hold a common sense of the important role in supporting transfer students toward a successful transfer since vertical transfer was a primary function of the community college. They should have more interactions with transfer students in the classrooms than out of the classrooms resulting from their busy schedules. Part-time faculty might only center on their teaching in the classroom and experience less involvement in serving transfer partnerships and communicating with the transfer center.

As qualitative research is interpretive research, I need to make sense of the findings (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). To guard against researcher bias, I used several strategies including triangulation of multiple data sources, seeking participants' feedback to check the accuracy of my interpretations, and invited two colleagues with knowledge of community

college vertical transfer pathways to review my findings in order to establish the quality and rigor of case study findings. The feedback of peer reviewers helped me confirm the logic of coding and develop further coding. In the study, I wanted to inquire about the community college faculty's role in the vertical transfer process. The full-time and part-time faculty members at the selected community college were the core participants. I bracketed myself without discussing my experiences to capture the voices of faculty members and center on their perspectives. Bracketing is a strategy to help me to minimize the bias brought by my prior knowledge and to focus on participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Another is the reflexive journal proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a strategy for auditing research and removing biases. I used reflexive journals to document the research process when I conducted data collection and analysis.

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research, how researchers ethically conduct data collection and disseminate findings is a primary concern (Merriam, 1998). I submitted to the William & Mary Human Subjects Committee for review and approval to conduct this study. After I obtained permission to conduct the research, I received approval from the ACC's gatekeepers to use their campus for the case study. I affixed a statement about the informed consent to the online survey and the gatekeepers sent the survey link to all ACC's faculty members via the email portal. After I selected the nine faculty participants for the interviews, I sent another informed consent form to these participants for scheduling individual interviews. I also received consent from the three leaders at the ACC's transfer center prior to the interviews. The informed consent form clearly stated the voluntary participation in the study, the purpose of the study, procedures, privacy, and confidentiality.

During data collection and analysis, I assigned pseudonyms to participants that were used during the entire process of the study to protect participants' identities. The transcribed interviews, observational notes, and reflective notes from the interviews were organized into files under participants' pseudonyms in electronic formats. I was the only person who interacted with participants and knew their true identities of the participants. I collected responses from the online survey and the transfer documents from ACC websites and the state department of education websites and saved these documents into files. The analytical data from the survey and document review were used as descriptive data. All data for this study were stored in password-protected files on my personal computer, which is also password-protected. All data were de-identified before analysis and publication to protect privacy and confidentiality. After the completion of all data collection and analysis, I did not contact participants. When the study is made public, I will delete all stored data. I paid special attention to disseminating the findings using pseudonyms to mask participants' identities.

Summary

The study explored community college faculty's role in supporting transfer students in the vertical pathway. This chapter describes the rationale of the research design, research site selection, the targeted population and sample, data collection, and analysis. Moreover, the chapter explains the trustworthiness, the study's delimitations and limitations, researcher as an instrument statement, and ethical consideration. The significance of the study is to contribute to the existing literature related to the involvement of community college faculty in the transfer process. The results of this study offer insights for both community colleges and universities' leaders to recognize the critical role of community college faculty in facilitating the vertical transfer pathways. In Chapter 4, I provide a detailed case description of the research site context.

CHAPTER 4: CASE DESCRIPTION

With the purpose of exploring the community college faculty's role in supporting transfer students in vertical pathways, I used a single-case study design and selected a rural community college in Virginia as the research site. The guiding research questions were:

1. In a rural community college with a high student transfer rate, how do faculty perceive their role in the transfer process? and

2. In a rural community college with a high student transfer rate, how do faculty interact with potential vertical transfer students?

To address the research questions, I collected data from documents, an online survey, interviews, and observations. In this chapter, I provide a detailed description of the research site context and faculty body.

Research Site Context

In a case study, the context is related to the setting which can be conceptualized either in a broad way or a narrow way (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To introduce the research site, I first broadly present background information on the research site including its history, location, organization, and culture. Then, I narrowly detail the transfer center, transfer-related events that I observed, and the faculty body at the research site. In this study, the research site was named the American Community College (ACC), which was an institutional pseudonym.

A Quaint Community Setting

Nestled in a rural location, ACC was founded in the 1960s to provide educational opportunities and training to citizens in surrounding communities. At the time of its founding and into today, residents did not have access nearby to affordable college options. After more than 50 years, ACC has grown into a public 2-year higher education institution that provides comprehensive certificate and associate degree programs, workforce development training, and continuing education courses with a commitment to the institutional mission to meet the educational needs of the region. Overseen by the VCCS, ACC is part of a network comprising 23 community colleges in Virginia (VCCS, n.d.-a).

Given the remote location of ACC, people have multiple options to commute or travel to the college. People outside the region can either use public transportation (such as flights, trains, and buses) or drive a car to get to campus. For example, during my first 3-day visit in January 2023, I arrived to the region by air. The airport near ACC is tiny, with only small regional flights available. My flight arrived at dusk. Stepping out of the airport, I was greeted by a cold and refreshing breeze. I took in a view of scenery and enjoyed seeing the winter sunset. A few stars had come out and twinkled in the sky. Everything seemed so quiet and peaceful in this rural part of Virginia. I had a feeling of familiarity and a sense of homecoming as my hometown is located in a similar setting. The intimate feeling touched my heart and intrigued me to see what the ACC looked like.

ACC Campus. The next day, I visited ACC and had a chance to look around the campus. In the daytime, the view was beautiful and pristine. ACC is located near a highway exit, and its small-scale campus is encircled by a lot of trees, which connects the campus community to nature. Due to the snow in the early morning, the campus was on a delayed opening set for noon.

Faculty and staff had already started to work, and some students were on campus when I arrived. My first stop was the ACC Student Center building. Upon entering the building, I asked the staff at the front desk where the transfer center was located. From the front desk, I could see the Academic Advising offices. I saw a few students who sat on the sofa chairs and waited for their appointments with advisors. The front desk staff person was friendly and showed me the direction to the transfer center. Following his guidance, I exited the Student Center building and noticed several other nearby. Between each building, there was a corridor walkway that gave a feeling of connection to the campus. Each building had a letter of the alphabet as a designated outdoor sign. I had a deep impression of the corridor walkway.

Along a corridor walkway, I found the building where the transfer center is located and met with the leader. The transfer center was holding an on-site transfer student admission event. The leader was busy coordinating the event, answering students' questions, and assisting students to talk with the enrollment staff from a 4-year public university that was close to ACC. On my visit to campus, I was grateful that the transfer center leader provided me with a driving tour of the region and to the 4-year universities neighboring ACC.

ACC Neighborhood. One of the nearby universities is a 4-year, high-research activity, large-scale, public university (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.). The drive time from ACC to this university is approximately 20 mins. The transfer center leader provided me a tour of the campus. During an off-work hour in winter, the traffic near the campus was congested, with only a few students walking or riding a bike around the university campus. An interesting scene was the food delivery robots that ran automatically on the campus delivering food to students in different dorms. The presence of the Starship food delivery robots started in 2020 with the purpose to serve students on campus and keep social distancing through

contactless delivery. The robots reflected the university's adjustment during the pandemic and showcases the university's concern about students. This delivery service was maintained post-pandemic and is highlighted in admission materials to introduce it to prospective students and their families.

Another 4-year university was housed in the same town. This university is a 4-year, small, highly residential, private not-for-profit university (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.). Given the hour of the tour, I did not see as much of this campus. However, the transfer center leader told me about the culture of the university and about the student transfer process. The city in which the two universities are located was noted for its status as a livable college town based on the attractiveness of the city and student accessibility to higher education options.

On another visit to ACC, the transfer center leader gave me a tour of yet another university located nearby the ACC campus. This 4-year university is a small, highly residential, private, not-for-profit university with a liberal arts focus (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.). Driving through the campus, I saw historical buildings situated around the campus. These buildings representing the history of the institution reminded me of my doctoral university, William & Mary, whose campus also contains numerous historic buildings.

With the advice from the ACC transfer center leader, I chose to take a train to ACC during my second one-day visit in February. The change of transportation brought me an opportunity to get to know more about an additional 4-year university neighboring ACC. This university is located at the city housing the train stop, which is a 20-minute drive from ACC. The university is a small, highly residential, private, not-for-profit university (Carnegie Classification

of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.). Students attending ACC have several viable and diverse options for transfer that are all located within commuting distance from the community college.

ACC Transfer. During my two visits to ACC, I got to know more about the main 4-year universities neighboring ACC. The easy commuting distance of 20 minutes or less to one of these universities provided good options for students seeking to transfer. To help support students attending ACC and the nearby transfer-receiving universities, the college provides shuttle services and bus station stops on campus. ACC students can use the free bus transportation to go to the cities in which the 4-year universities are located. For ACC students who intend to transfer to a 4-year university, the close distance to the 4-year universities in their backyard is a benefit. ACC maintains a tight connection and collaboration with the transfer universities to serve students and achieve its institutional goals.

The close distance between ACC and the four universities supports the college's high transfer achievements. SCHEV data for 2019-2020 (SCHEV, n.d.-a) showed 70.9% of ACC students transferred to public 4-year institutions. More than half of these transfer students enrolled in the larger university nearby ACC. Another 29.1% transferred to the private, non-profit, 4-year institutions. The vast majority of students transferring from ACC opt to attend the large public university in the local place. The transfer data suggest that the close distance between ACC and this university helps support student choice, as does the lower tuition cost relative the nearby private universities. Nonetheless, ACC serves as a prominent feeder school for the nearby private universities. Understanding more about the role ACC faculty have in facilitating vertical transfer and partnering with 4-year universities can help know the leverage of these relationships on student transfer choice.

ACC Organization. ACC is located in a rural area of Virginia. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2021), in 2020, the total population was less than 3,000. Most citizens are White residents (82.8%), with the largest minority population comprised of Hispanic or Latino (13.5%) residents. The employment rate of 70.5% is above the employment rate of Virginia (60.3%). Nearly 66.2% of the population aged 25 years or older do not possess a bachelor's degree or higher for their education attainment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021) compared to 58.2% in Virginia. The region around ACC is predominantly White and has a low college going culture.

ACC provides educational services for students from three counties and three cities. The data from the National Center for Education Statistics showed that in 2021, ACC served a total of 3,386 students comprising 956 full-time students and 2,430 part-time students, with 43% of students receiving financial aid. The demographics of the student body show that students attending are primarily White students (67%), with Hispanic students (13%) accounting for a larger percentage than students from other racial groups, such as Black or African American students (6%) and Asian students (2%). Among the student population at ACC, nearly 61.6% of students are women and 24% of the students aged 25 and over. Nontraditional college students usually have different needs in academic learning and campus experience compared to traditional college students. The students' demographics at ACC mirror the general population demographics of the area in which ACC is located. Since ACC is a rural community college serving a mix of nontraditional and traditional student groups, it has a unique opportunity to educate diverse students and benefit the local area.

ACC organizational chart presents its internal structure of administration and leadership. The Office of the President is at the top of the hierarchy and represents the primary level of the organization. In the second level, there were five parallel administrative offices: Director, Public

Relations; Executive Director, Development; Director, Human Resources; Office of the Vice

President Finance and Administration; and Office of the Vice President, Instruction and Student

Services. Under each administrative office was the third level that mainly included

administrative and instructional staff. Academic Affairs and Student Services were also at the

third level. ACC is a small-size community college with a total staff of fewer than 320 (NCES,

n.d.). Its top-down organizational structure with three key levels clearly shows the hierarchical

order of the administrative positions, the reporting lines, and the function of the administrative

offices.

As a public 2-year community college, ACC finance sources rely on the government and

the state. In the fiscal year 2021, the tuition and fees accounted for 20% of the ACC finance,

while 23% of the budget came from government grants and contracts and 36% from state

appropriations (NCES, n.d.). To maintain a close relationship with the government, the ACC

College Board is comprised of representatives from the counties and cities in region. On the state

level, ACC is a member of 23 Community Colleges in VCCS, whose governing body is the State

Board of Community College (VCCS, n.d.-b). The Chancellor is the head of the VCCS who

supervises the 23 Community Colleges Presidents and provides leadership for strategic planning

(VCCS, n.d.-b). Due to this association, ACC's policy-making and implementation are guided by

VCCS. The President of ACC plays a significant role in working with the College Board and the

VCCS to secure a stable financial source as well as creating a climate to motivate the campus

community to achieve organizational goals.

By reviewing ACC's strategic plan on the website, I found that communication was listed

as one of the key strategies. It indicated that ACC emphasizes the role of communication in

directing organizational success. The President of ACC has worked on campus for more than 30

years, serving the college as president for one-third of their tenure on campus. This long-term and successful leadership reflects a good match between the leader's characteristics and organizational conditions (Bess & Dee, 2008). Since college President usually has their own leadership framework (Eddy & Kirby, 2020), their leadership can impact how organizational members communicate with each other.

During one of my visits to ACC, I had an opportunity to meet the President in a transfer training and to join a lunch with the ACC President, staff, and faculty. The conversation between the ACC President, staff, and faculty was pleasant and family-like. The ACC President seemed a good listener, respected the suggestions provided by staff and faculty, and facilitated a connection between staff and faculty, especially to encourage their joint efforts in supporting transfer. In addition to their administrative role, the President also teaches courses as a part-time faculty. Surprisingly, I received a response from the President to my online survey in their role as a part-time faculty.

ACC Culture. In celebrating ACC's recognition of "Great Colleges to Work For" by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the President proclaimed in their website statement that ACC has an atmosphere of caring that pervades the institution and enriches the relationship ACC members has as colleagues and friends. My conversation with ACC employees resonated with and supported the President's statement. The employees appreciated ACC's friendly and welcoming atmosphere and the high levels of cooperation and communication that exist on campus. Led by the President, ACC has been consistently named to the list of "Great Colleges to Work For" for more than 10 years (ModernThink, n.d.). The President's statement and employee's comments present ACC's culture as one that encourages effective collaboration and a place that builds supportive relationships among members. The national recognition highlights

the overall satisfied experiences of faculty and staff who work and live at ACC. The stable

culture and the members' job satisfaction help ACC adapt to the rural environment, integrate

external and internal resources, identify with organizational goals, and commit to serving

students in the local area.

Transfer Center as a Hub

For ACC students, the transfer center is a place where they seek advice, information, and

guidance related to transfer to other higher education institutions. Due to my study centering on

vertical transfer, I only include in this section a description of how the transfer center served

students who aspired to transfer to 4-year universities. During my two visits to ACC, the transfer

center was the place where I spent the most time. The building housing transfer center was a

first-floor building. When I entered the building, I saw a long hallway with doors into rooms on

both sides. At the end of the hallway, there was a door where people could go into another

building through a corridor walkway. In the building, I could see both classrooms and faculty

offices. Each classroom or office had a sign with the building's alphabet letter, a 3-digit number,

and a room name. The signage helped me to locate the transfer center, which was a suite of

offices comprising two rooms on one side and two rooms on another side. Among the four

rooms, the bigger one was the transfer center leader's office. The other three rooms were spaces

for visiting transfer advisors or admission staff from the 4-year universities to meet with

students. There was a narrow center place between two wings of offices.

At the entrance of the transfer center, there was a wooden bench and a small round table

with a table lamp on top, which provided for students or visitors to have a short rest. On the wall

of the aisle, there were some 4-year university brochures. Outside the transfer center, there were

also sitting areas along the hallway. The wall on each side of the hallway was decorated with

bulletin boards that hosted postings of flyers from Virginia's 4-year universities. I could easily

find the school flags of ACC's neighbors, the one public 4-year university and the three private

universities, as well school information from another two of Virginia 4-year universities (one

large university and one on the same side of the state as ACC—both of which are not in

commuting range of ACC). Under each bulletin board, there were plastic document holders for

advertising materials like institutional brochures, academic program introductions, and

institutional admission staff's contact information. The close-knit design of the transfer center

exhibits the epitome of the ACC's organizational characteristic as a small college. The

informational decoration of the transfer center displays its function in transfer advice and

relation-building with other higher education institutions, in particular with the 4-year

universities in the region. The ACC transfer center plays a central role in serving diverse

stakeholders inside and outside the college.

Evolving Services. ACC opened the transfer center in 2012 with the intention to offer

students access to transfer advisors from four local colleges. Underlying this initiative was

Achieve 2015, a 6-year strategic plan launched by VCCS in 2009 that called the 23 community

colleges in the system into action with a specific focus on improving Access, Affordability,

Student Success, Workforce, and Resources for addressing the unmet needs in higher education

and workforce training in Virginia (VCCS, 2011). One key goal that VCCS hoped to meet was to

increase the number of students graduating, transferring, or completing a workforce credential by

50%, including to increase students' success from underserved populations by 75% (VCCS,

2011).

     Achieve 2015 brought positive results in increasing transfer. The data on the trends in

transfer (SCHEV, n.d.-c) presented a 5.2% increase of students transferring from VCCS to

public 4-year institutions during 2012 to 2015. Guided by *Achieve 2015*, ACC's transfer center took on the responsibility of promoting ACC students to transfer into 4-year universities. The data on the trends in transfer (SCHEV, n.d.-c) showed that ACC had a 7.7% increase of students who transferred into public 4-year institutions during 2012 to 2015, which was higher than the rate of the VCCS. Although facing the educational disruption caused by the pandemic, in the academic year 2019-2020, ACC had a 14.86% transfer rate that was the highest among the 13 rural community colleges in Virginia (Table 1). Since its inception over 10 years, ACC's transfer center committed to providing transfer support services and being a primary space for students to meet with transfer advisors from 4-year universities in Virginia. The center provides transfer programs system-wide in VCCS system-wide for both public and private institutions and the American Public University System, a private for-profit large 4-year university system that offers online programs (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.).

ACC's website homepage highlights transfer programs using the heading "Your Savings Start Here" with two columns "Transfer Savings" and "Transfer Agreements." A student holding an "I Got In" card was featured with the background of the 4-year university's school flag and pictures. When introducing ACC students to transfer programs to 4-year schools, the website uses a more personal language which differed from the formal tone of a public website. It includes an ended question "What will you do with your savings?". The short introduction on the homepage suggests that ACC prioritizes the financial concerns transfer students have as they contemplate continuing their education in 4-year schools. The cost savings to students because they start out at the community college also serve to attract applicants to the ACC with the argument that starting out at a community college is a sound financial decision.

ACC's transfer services target vertical transfer with the nearby public 4-year university as a distinctive transfer partner. An introduction to the transfer center is also included on the Advising webpage under the link of Student Services. This design matches the ACC's organizational structure. The Office of the Vice President, Instruction and Student Services supervises the Dean, Student Services, who in turn supervises the Enrollment Services, Student Services, Registrar, Admissions and Records, Career Services, Disability Services, Advising Center, and the transfer center. The leader of the transfer center is the only full-time staff and as the head of the center, reports to the Dean of Student Services. Because of this structure, the leader of the transfer center works closely with advisors and connects transfer students to campus services.

The close relationship between the transfer center and other offices is formed not only through professional work but also the building location. At the hallway outside the transfer center, there are classrooms and faculty offices. When I visited the transfer center, I met several professors who stopped by the center and talked with the leader. Students and visiting advisors were the main groups who often came to the center. Nearby the transfer center was the Math Tutoring Center. A few students were meeting with their instructors. A line of tables with computers was located outside the Math tutoring center. Students could log in to the computer using their ACC student accounts, which provided them access to technology and the Internet.

Walking outside the building housing the transfer center there was another building in which the Center for Academic Vision and Excellence was located. The Center opened in 2012, the same year as the transfer center. Its aim is to improve face-to-face connections with ACC students to keep them engaged academically. During the COVID-19 pandemic, The Center for Academic Vision and Excellence added a new space for students who needed to attend online

classes or meetings. Remote teaching during the pandemic changed the way faculty communicated with students as they used multiple communication tools such as emails, messages, and online Zoom sessions. The space serves as a resource and remains available to support students in the post pandemic.

During my visit, the transfer center leader showed me around the academic and student services offices in different buildings on campus. I was impressed by the leader's familiarity with each office and her enthusiasm for communicating with people. The transfer center is like a hub that helps network ACC students, faculty, and staff as well as partner with visiting advisors from 4-year universities. The function of the transfer center requires the leader to have the capability to serve as a liaison to reach in and out of the college. The leader's leadership style exemplifies her skills and abilities in promoting transfer.

Transfer Center Leader. During my time at the transfer center, I had an opportunity to observe the leader's daily work. Her approach to implementing plans and communicating with people mirrors the behavioral characteristics of a servant leader and aligns with ACC's culture. A servant leader puts the needs of others first, empathizes with people, and helps people grow by providing strong support (Northouse, 2018). My first impression of the leader's servant leadership came from the messages I received before arriving at ACC. Due to the snowy weather, ACC had a delayed opening on the day I planned to visit. In the early morning at 4:30 a.m., I received the leader's messages about the notice. She kindly reminded me to be safe. Reading her messages, I could feel a sense of caring even if I was merely a visitor to ACC. When I arrived at the transfer center, I met with the leader and briefly introduced my 3-day visit plan. Knowing that I did not have transportation to commute to ACC from my lodging site, the leader quickly drafted a schedule with a clear itinerary for transportation to and from the college.

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She identified a campus member to serve as a driver for me while at ACC, selected which advising offices I should visit, and which transfer meetings I could attend with the approval of the gatekeeper. Then she sent the schedule to the gatekeeper, the senior advisors, and the Dean of Student Services. I witnessed her effective problem solving and organizational skills in prioritizing tasks. These behaviors also demonstrated her strength as a servant leader in communication and human skills of being sensitive to people's needs and wellbeing. Her behavior also reflected the ACC's caring and collaborative culture.

In the following days, the care exuded by the transfer center leader and her colleagues continued to make me feel welcomed. Meanwhile, I directly experienced how the leader handled daily work, coordinated transfer activities, and demonstrated efficiency through contact within and outside the college. With the leader's help and the gatekeeper's approval, I observed a transfer admission event and a transfer advising meeting in the transfer center. I also observed a transfer training and a curriculum committee meeting on campus. By attending these transfer-related activities, I had a further understanding of the functions of the transfer center in serving transfer students and giving them exposure to 4-year universities neighboring ACC. The leader's servant leadership and ACC's caring and collaborative culture incubate the ACC's transfer efforts involving faculty members.

Transfer Admission. As transfer students aspire to enter 4-year universities for bachelor's degrees, their biggest dream is for a successful admission decision. To smooth the admission process and help transfer students save money and time, the ACC transfer center partners specifically with the nearby public university and holds an On-site Admission Day event for the university every fall and spring semester. In the event, the university's transfer admission representatives are on campus to meet with students who wish to apply to the university. During

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my first visit to ACC, I attended this event, experienced how a transfer student was enrolled, and saw first-hand the celebration of these transfer students who got an offer of admission. Due to a weather delayed opening of the campus, the On-site Admission Day started at noon. When I arrived at the transfer center, I saw that several students were sitting on the wooden bench and waiting for their appointments with the university admission staff. Each office of the transfer center had one university admission staff and one student talking about application materials. There was a total of four university admission staff members. Among them, one was the university transfer advising coordinator. And one staff had both administrator and faculty positions at the university. The other two staff were admission counselors.

The transfer center leader introduced me to the staff and students and allowed me to join a conversation with a university admission counselor and a transfer student. Being a nonparticipant observer, I quietly listened to their conversation and made notes to keep a record of my observations. The transfer student was an adult female student who studied in three different community colleges for several years but had not finished any degree because of the overwhelming changes in her life. When she gave her bulky transcripts to the admission counselor, I was shocked by her educational journey. Her struggling experiences reminded me of the recent research about the description of transfer students with detoured and deferred trajectories (Wang, 2020). After discussing her intended major and reviewing her coursework, the admission counselor told the student that she could be enrolled in the university for the fall 2023 semester. Meanwhile, he suggested the student improved her GPA for a few courses in the spring semester. Then, he gave the student a postcard with the slogan "I got in!" Suddenly, the student began to cry with emotion over her admission decision. The scene filled with tears and cheers deeply touched me and inspired me by seeing firsthand the power of the transfer process

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on students. A smooth transfer pathway from a community college to a 4-year university really matters for students' educational attainment and self-actualization.

During the On-site Admission Day, 22 ACC transfer students took part in the event. Among them, 12 students were enrolled at the university for the Fall 2023 semester and were eligible for an application fee waiver. Several students who were not admitted could still receive a contract listing the courses that they needed to improve in order to be enrolled at the university in the future. Through the admission event, I did not see the appearance of any ACC faculty. However, at the end of the event, two professors in the Math Tutoring Center came over, chatted with the transfer center leader, and asked about admission day. The transfer center leader told me that ACC had held the admission event for 10 years, and she indicated that this event was her best-loved experience because of seeing students succeed. The transfer partnership between ACC and the 4-year university started far earlier than the formal admission event. In 2000, ACC became the first community college in the Commonwealth of Virginia to sign a Guaranteed Admissions Agreement with the nearby 4-year university. During this more than 20-year partnership, both institutions have benefitted from the increase in vertical transfer and the enrollment of undergraduate students at their institutions. The win-win situation profoundly impacts the routine they have in place to guide transfer students.

Transfer Advising. On the homepage of "Transfer Advising," ACC highlights the "On-site Admission Day" in the "Transfer Support Opportunities" column and uses the bullet points "when," "where," "what to bring," and "what to expect" to introduce the event and set up expectations for students so they get the most out of the event. When I clicked "Transfer Guides," I could see a list of 35 4-year universities that have built transfer programs with ACC. Six universities have Guaranteed Admissions Agreements with ACC. Reviewing each link to the

six universities, I found that the transfer guides were more major-specific with the course requirements and credits in the universities that ACC sends the most transfer students. In particular, the nearby public 4-year university provided academic advising guides by major for ACC transfer students. The guide for each major included the courses and credits from the first to the fourth semester and the advising notes, which can help students quickly locate their majors and understand the program requirements at the university. Compared to four other Virginia community colleges with Guaranteed Admission to the university, the guide for ACC transfer advising lists the most detailed information. The "Transfer Advising" on ACC and 4-year university websites show that they prioritize the ACC transfer pathway, put effort into offering a clear advising guide on transferable coursework, and collaborate to increase the transfer students' chance of acceptance.

The advising meetings between ACC advisors and transfer students reflect their priority on this popular transfer pathway and the usefulness of the advising guides on their websites. Advising at ACC is major-specific, with each advisor supporting a targeted caseload. The transfer center leader not only operates the center but also serves as an advisor for students in business and science majors. Specifically, she is the primary contact transfer advisor listed on the ACC website. When I stayed at the transfer center, the leader had an advising appointment with a transfer student and offered me an opportunity to observe the meeting. A young male student came to meet with the leader and asked for advice on plans. He was looking to transfer into a physics major at two universities in Virginia or to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The leader reviewed his coursework, credits, and GPA, and advised the student to pay attention to the application deadlines of these 4-year schools. She guided the student to browse the "Transfer Guides" on the ACC and university websites and let him know how to send his

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transcripts. Moreover, the leader mentioned that the nearby 4-year university had scholarships

for physics majors and encouraged the student to contact his professors for recommendation

letters earlier. She could also help him to reach out to professors. When the student asked about

transferring to MIT, the leader suggested the student search the university website because ACC

had little connection with this university as it is located out-of-state. Obviously, the leader was

extremely knowledgeable about the application and financial resources at the universities in

Virginia. At the end of the meeting, she empowered the student to be confident about the

application and reminded the student of the application fee waiver if he planned to apply to the

nearby 4-year university. I sensed that the student was clearer about his transfer plan as he

intended to go to a school near his home and hoped to have financial support.

The transfer advising meeting reflected the advisors' value in addressing students' time

and finance concerns in navigating the application process. She wanted to guide students toward

a more promising transfer and connect them to the local schools. The strong partnership with the

nearby university provided the transfer leader with history of prior successful transfers and an

ability to understand a wider knowledge base about the services and scholarships the university

provides to transfer students. Besides serving transfer students, the transfer center holds campus-

wide activities and invites faculty to join the activities and learn about transfer support services.

Transfer Training. In early February, I went to ACC again and attended their transfer

training, which was a professional development activity on campus. It was the first time in 2023

that ACC held a transfer-related activity networking with leaders, staff, and faculty. The VCCS

Director of Transfer and *Transfer Virginia* Portal Manager were the invited speakers. The

transfer center leader planned and coordinated the campus-wide training. It lasted two hours and

consisted of the *Transfer Virginia* Portal Manager's introduction of a portal overview on transfer

advising guides and general transfer guide (GAA)'s in the first hour and the *Transfer Virginia*

Director's presentation on *Transfer Virginia* overview in the second hour. From the list of

attendance shared by the transfer center leader, I found 41 attendees were at the event including

the ACC President, Academic Deans, Dean of Students, Advisors, Coordinators, faculty, and

ACC's local 4-year university partners. There were 12 ACC faculty attendees (nine full-time

professors and three adjunct professors) whose academic programs were Liberal Arts or STEM

fields. The faculty members who did not attend the in-person training could also have access to

the training recordings sent by the transfer center leader.

The training aimed to help the ACC campus community to keep updated on the *Transfer*

Virginia's recent work on developing an interactive portal to provide advisors and students with

information about 2-year to 4-year institutions in Virginia (Transfer Virginia Administrative Site,

n.d.). Meanwhile, this training was intended to strengthen the collaborative relationship between

ACC, local 4-year university partners, and *Transfer Virginia* in building common curricula and

facilitating a seamless transfer to 4-year institutions. During the training, I noticed that a

professor played an active role in clarifying how to use the portal in advising ACC transfer

students and how to align course-building with ACC's capacity. The professor raised questions

to guest speakers and linked their presentations to the practical situation at ACC. She was the

only professor who spoke up with the audience and raised their attention to some details in the

presentations. She appeared like an expert with transfer-related knowledge on both the advisor

and faculty sides.

In the following leadership lunch, I joined the professor's conversation with the *Transfer*

Virginia Director and Portal Manager, the ACC President, the Academic Deans, and the transfer

center leader. The *Transfer Virginia* Director expressed her impression of the working

relationship between the ACC professor and the transfer center leader. The professor was a full-time faculty in STEM fields but also served as a *Transfer Virginia* faculty liaison. Because of these responsibilities, she had an important influencing role in helping faculty members to understand *Transfer Virginia* initiatives and VCCS transfer policies and assisting the transfer center leader with communicating transfer programs to faculty members. As teaching and curriculum development are the core activities for community college faculty, they are directly involved in decision-making and serving on department and college level committees (Bee & Dee, 2008). Being a member of the curriculum committee at ACC, the professor's unique role leads to increasing faculty members' knowledge about vertical transfer and advancing their understanding of transfer advising in practice.

Curriculum Committee. Every month, ACC holds a regular curriculum committee meeting chaired by an associate professor to discuss academic program changes, course revisions, curriculum status and updates, and possible new curricula for the academic year. Under the approval of the gatekeeper, I attended a one-hour hybrid curriculum committee meeting on campus. A total of 26 attendees were at the curriculum committee meeting. They included the Vice President of Instruction & Student Services, Deans of Academic Affairs, Associate Deans, Dean of Student Services, the Head Librarian, Advisors, Coordinators, the leader of the transfer center, and faculty members. Among the 13 faculty members who participated in the meeting, 12 were full-time professors and one was an adjunct professor with a teaching role at ACC. Even though some administrative staff also teach students as part-time faculty at ACC, I did not count them in a group of 13 faculty attendees.

During the meeting, the committee discussed transfer degrees and *Transfer Virginia's* new framework for transfer programs. The curriculum committee led the discussion to make a

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motion on moving forward with the Associate of Science and Associate of Arts degrees. The

leader of the transfer center specified her motion in degree programs: Associate of Arts in

Liberal Arts, Associate of Science in General Studies, and additional Associate of Science

degrees in Science, Business, Engineering, Education, Computer Science, Information

Technology, and Health Sciences. The Vice President emphasized having a faculty member

manage and assess each program. Then, the curriculum committee chair invited committee

members to offer their opinions. I noticed that professors raised questions with a focus on their

departments or teaching fields. Specifically, they sought clarification on the transfer pathways

from the faculty liaison serving the *Transfer Virginia* initiative. This faculty leader responded to

faculty's questions related to her teaching fields in STEM, but also other fields such as business

administration and education. Her knowledge, experience, and position empowered her to have a

strong voice in the curriculum committee meeting and address faculty's concerns. The Vice

President agreed with the professor's suggestions on the curriculum review. In the process of

discussion, Academic Deans, Associate Deans, and full-time professors asked questions, while

the advisors and adjunct professors were quiet.

By observing a monthly curriculum committee meeting, I could see how the committee

sought to keep updated on *Transfer Virginia*'s work and align it with ACC's curricula to

facilitate the ease of transfer. Faculty on the curriculum committee were significant actors in

directing how ACC builds its curricula and transfer pathways. The 13 faculty attendees

represented the majors that serve a large part of transfer students. Having an overview of the

faculty population and academic programs at ACC leads to an understanding of the participants

in the study.

Faculty Body

Data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (NCES, n.d.) showed

that in Fall 2021, ACC had a total of 312 staff. The faculty responsible for teaching courses

consisted of 65 full-time members (33 were women) and 99 part-time members (42 were

women). These 164 faculty members were categorized as instructional staff and included in a

total of 312 staff. Among the 164 faculty members, nearly 92.3% are full-time and 81.8% of the

part-time members taught exclusively credit courses. Regarding race and ethnicity, the White

faculty group was the majority with approximately 93.8% full-time members and 96.0% part-

time members. Other minority faculty came from groups of Black or African American, Asian,

and two or more races. The data of the faculty population at ACC reflect the demographic

characteristic of the population in the region.

As a 2-year community college, ACC offers an associate degree as the highest level of

degree (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.). In 2021-2022, 25

degree options were the most popular. These academic programs included Liberal Studies,

Criminal Justice, Engineering, Computer and Information Sciences, Biological and Physical

Sciences, Health Technology, Business Administration, Management, Accounting, and Nursing.

When I checked through ACC's academic majors on the State Council of Higher Education for

Virginia website and the notes from my observation of the curriculum committee meeting, I

could find that these majors were covered in the committees' discussion on Associate of Science

pathways and Associate of Arts pathways.

As noted above, the nearby public university is the largest receiver school of ACC

transfer students. The two schools collaborated and developed a joint institution Transfer Report.

By reviewing the report for 2021-2022, I found a list of the top 10 degrees earned by ACC

transfer students who graduated from the university. The top 10 degrees included: Nursing, Health Sciences, Computer Sciences, Management, Psychology, Social Work, Computer Information Systems, Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies, History, and Marketing. The 10 top degrees ACC transfer students received at the university match the popular associate degrees awarded at ACC, indicating the strong intentionality in the transfer preparation process. The ACC faculty teaching subjects in the popular academic programs not only serve students for their graduation with an associate degree but also prepare transfer students for junior study at 4-year universities. Faculty perspectives on their role in supporting transfer students are meaningful for this study because the teaching faculty in these programs tend to have more transfer students in their classrooms compared to other non-degree programs. A brief sketch of ACC faculty demographics and academic programs serving a large part of transfer students gave me background information about the faculty body. As ACC is a small college with a total of 164 faculty members (NCES, n.d.), some academic programs only have one or two faculty members. Based on the purpose of protecting the ACC faculty's identity, I divided ACC academic programs into three broad categories (Liberal Arts, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics [STEM], and Professional Majors) when I reviewed faculty participants' responses in the survey.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the research site context based on my observations and document review. ACC's location, foundation, organization, and culture shape its distinct characteristics as a rural community college in Virginia. The descriptions of a transfer advising meeting, an on-site admission event, a campus-wide transfer training, and a monthly curriculum committee meeting demonstrate details about how ACC's transfer center exerts functions in

helping transfer students access local 4-year schools, strengthening transfer partnerships, and

advancing faculty's knowledge about transfer services. In addition, I described the ACC's

faculty body. The ACC contextual information and a review of the faculty body underlay how I

interpret participants' perceptions of the faculty's role in supporting transfer students in the

vertical transfer pathways. I provide a detail of the findings in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

In this chapter, I provide a profile of the participants of my study, including both survey participants and interview participants. I discuss the procedure used to select faculty participants for the individual interviews from the total list of volunteers and include demographic details on this group. Following the profile of the participants, I provide a comprehensive presentation of findings derived from multiple data sources. The findings revealed five themes. The first theme describes the vertical transfer pathways at the case site. The second theme reviews participants' perspectives on teaching and learning at their rural community college. The third theme reviews how faculty engaged in transfer partnerships with 4-year programs. The fourth theme describes a faculty role model. The fifth theme highlights the faculty member's expectations of professional development on transfer. Each theme includes data from participant interviews, the survey, documents, and observations. These themes center on the purpose of the study to explore the role of community college faculty in vertical transfer.

Profile of Participants

In this study, participants were divided into two groups: survey participants and interview participants. The purpose of the survey was to assess the role faculty members felt they played in the vertical transfer process, and based on these findings, to select participants for individual interviews. All full-time and part-time faculty at ACC received a copy of the survey. A total of 40 faculty completed the survey; 19 were full-time faculty, and 21 were part-time faculty. The survey response rate was 24.4%. The full-time faculty's survey response rate was 29.2%, while the part-time faculty's survey response rate was 21.2%. Among the 40 survey respondents, 22

(10 full-time faculty and 12 part-time faculty) indicated a willingness to participate in an individual interview. After evaluating these 22 faculty's survey responses with criteria such as their report to identify transfer students, interaction with transfer students, and academic programs, I selected nine interview participants and described details (See page 112). In addition, I recruited three ACC senior transfer leaders as interview participants. In Figure 2, I outline the participant groups.

Figure 2

A Procedure of Scaling Participants
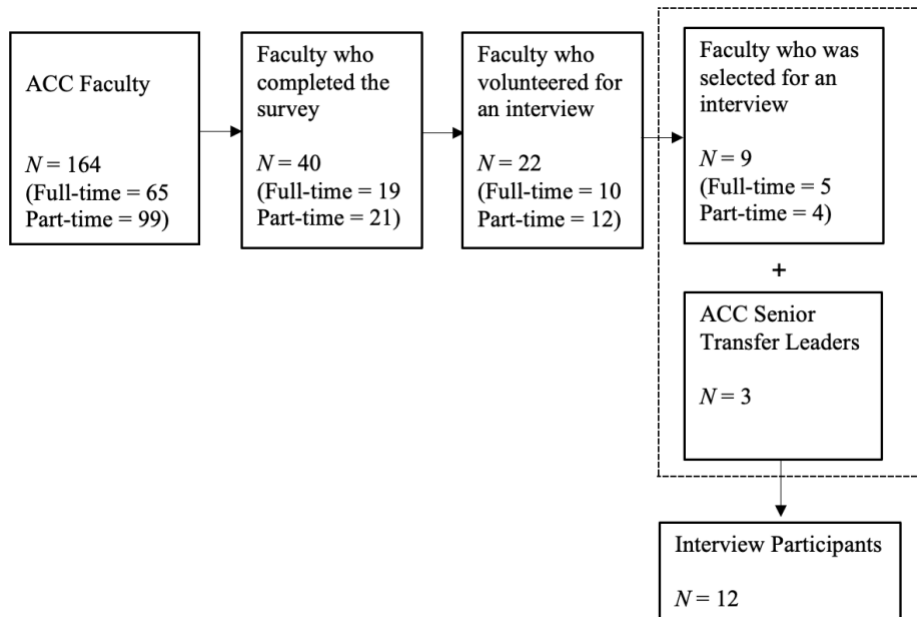
Note. ACC = American Community College (a pseudonym of this study's research site).

Survey Participants

The online survey (see Appendix A) consisted of 12 questions with six demographic questions and six questions relevant to the faculty's interaction with transfer students. Based on the survey responses, I presented the characteristics of faculty participants from three groups: (a) faculty participants who completed the survey, (b) faculty participants who volunteered for an interview, and (c) faculty participants who were selected for an interview. To protect faculty identity at ACC, I categorized the academic programs into Liberal Arts, STEM, and Professional Majors and identified factors influencing student persistence at ACC (such as transportation, student development course, and academic support course). Table 2 provides details on the 40 faculty participants who completed the survey.

Table 2

Characteristics of Faculty Participants who Completed the Survey

Survey Question	Characteristic	Q4. Faculty Current Position			
		Full-time		Part-time	
		n	*%*	*n*	*%*
Q1. Gender	Woman	8	42	15	71
	Man	11	58	6	29
Q2. Race	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	0
	Asian	1	5	1	5
	Black or African American	1	5	0	0
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0
	White	16	85	19	90
	Multiple Races	1	5	0	0
	Prefer not to disclose	0	0	1	5
Q3. Ethnicity	Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	1	5	0	0
	Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	18	95	21	100

Survey Question	Characteristic	Q4. Faculty Current Position			
		Full-time		Part-time	
		n	*%*	*n*	*%*
Q5. Teaching	Less than 5 years	3	16	10	48
Years	5-10 years	7	37	5	24
	10-20 years	9	47	3	14
	Longer than 20 years	0	0	3	14
Q6. Academic	Liberal Arts	4	21	10	48
Program	STEM	13	68	9	43
	Professional majors	2	11	2	9
Q7. Identify	Yes	17	90	19	91
transfer students in	No	2	10	2	9
your class					
Q8. How often do	Often - once a week	16	84	17	81
you interact with	Sometimes - once a month	2	11	1	5
transfer students in	Rarely - once a semester	1	5	0	0
class	Never	0	0	1	5
	N/A	0	0	2	9
Q10. How much	Never	1	5	6	29
time do you interact	Once a week or more	7	37	7	33
with transfer	Once a month	5	26	3	14
students outside	Once a semester	4	21	4	19
class	N/A	2	11	1	5

Note. $N = 40$ (19 full-time faculty participants and 21 part-time faculty participants). *n* is the faculty participant number.

The survey data in the Table 2 highlighted that more than half of the faculty survey participants were women. Regarding race/ethnicity identity, nearly 88% of these faculty members identified as White, while 5% of faculty participants identified as Asian, 2.5% of faculty participants identified as Black or African American, and 2.5% of faculty participants identified as Multiple Races. The demographic data reflect the characteristic of ACC as a Predominately White college. Comparing participants' teaching years and their academic programs, 47.4% of full-time faculty participants served ACC for 10 to 20 years, while 47.6% of

part-time faculty participants taught at ACC for fewer than 5 years. The academic programs of full-time faculty participants were more clustered in STEM majors than part-time faculty participants. Nearly 90% of full-time and part-time faculty participants could identify transfer students at ACC. The majority of faculty interacted with them often in class (more than 80%), and about 1 in 3 faculty interacted with students outside of class once a week. A scant 5% of full-time faculty never interacted with students outside of class, whereas 29% of part-time faculty did not have outside of class interactions. Overall, full-time faculty participants had a higher level of interactions with students both in and out of classrooms.

Table 3 provides a summary of the 22 faculty members who volunteered to be part of the research study. The gender and race/ethnicity remain similar to the faculty group listed in Table 2. 50% of faculty participants were women. White faculty participants were the majority. More than half of full-time faculty participants worked in STEM programs, while more than half of part-time faculty participants worked in Liberal Arts programs. Compared to the characteristics of faculty who completed the survey (Table 2), this group of faculty volunteers (Table 3) had higher levels of awareness of their transfer students in class. Both full-time and part-time faculty in this group experienced higher interactions with transfer students both inside and outside of classes.

Table 3

Characteristics of Faculty Participants who Volunteered for an Interview

Survey Question	Characteristic	Q4. Faculty Current Position			
		Full-time		Part-time	
		n	*%*	*n*	*%*
Q1. Gender	Woman	3	30	8	67
	Man	7	70	4	33

Survey Question	Characteristic	Q4. Faculty Current Position			
		Full-time		Part-time	
		n	*%*	*n*	*%*
Q2. Race	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	0
	Asian	1	10	0	0
	Black or African American	0	0	0	0
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0
	White	8	80	12	100
	Multiple Races	1	10	0	0
	Prefer not to disclose	0	0	0	0
Q3. Ethnicity	Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	1	10	0	0
	Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	9	90	12	100
Q5. Teaching Years	Less than 5 years	2	20	4	33
	5-10 years	3	30	2	17
	10-20 years	5	50	3	25
	Longer than 20 years	0	0	3	25
Q6. Academic Program	Liberal Arts	3	30	7	58
	STEM	6	60	3	25
	Professional majors	1	10	2	17
Q7. Identify transfer students in your class	Yes	9	90	11	92
	No	1	10	1	8
Q8. How often do you interact with transfer students in class	Often - once a week	9	90	10	83
	Sometimes - once a month	0	0	0	0
	Rarely - once a semester	1	10	0	0
	Never	0	0	0	0
	N/A	0	0	2	17
Q10. How much time do you interact with transfer students outside class	Never	0	0	3	25
	Once a week or more	4	40	6	50
	Once a month	2	20	2	17
	Once a semester	3	30	1	8
	N/A	1	10	0	0

Note. *N* = 22 (10 full-time faculty participants and 12 part-time faculty participants). *n* is the faculty participant number.

Based on reviewing the survey responses in Table 3, I used the following criteria to select the nine final interview participants from 22 participants who volunteered. First, I excluded 2 faculty participants who could not identify transfer students in their classes. I also excluded 6 faculty participants who reported no or low interaction with transfer students in and outside of the class. Secondly, I excluded three faculty participants who reported part-time teaching and full-time administrative positions. In this study, I only focused on faculty participants who took primary responsibility for teaching at ACC. Thirdly, some faculty participants taught non-credit courses that did not count toward students' GPA, such as academic support courses and student development courses. Given that course credits were a requirement for transfer students to apply for the academic programs in the 4-year schools, I excluded three faculty participants who taught non-credit courses by checking the information they provided in the survey about their academic programs. Finally, I took diversity into consideration and specifically included one full-time faculty participant who identified as a multiracial faculty member at ACC.

Table 4 provides further information on the interview participants selected as part of the faculty selection process. More than half of the faculty participants were women. Most faculty participants were White. These characteristics were constantly similar to the faculty groups listed in Table 2 and Table 3. Of note, the nine selected faculty participants covered the academic program categories with an average number in Liberal Arts and STEM. Compared to the faculty group who completed the survey and the faculty group who volunteered for an interview, each faculty participant in the selected faculty group could identify their transfer students in classes and had a higher interaction frequency with their transfer students in and outside of class.

Table 4

Characteristics of Faculty Participants who Were Selected for an Interview

Survey Question	Characteristic	Q4. Faculty Current Position			
		Full-time		Part-time	
		n	*%*	*n*	*%*
Q1. Gender	Woman	3	60	3	75
	Man	2	40	1	25
Q2. Race	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	0
	Asian	0	0	0	0
	Black or African American	0	0	0	0
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0
	White	4	80	4	100
	Multiple Races	1	20	0	0
	Prefer not to disclose	0	0	0	0
Q3. Ethnicity	Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	1	20	0	0
	Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	4	80	4	100
Q5. Teaching Years	Less than 5 years	0	0	3	75
	5-10 years	1	20	1	25
	10-20 years	4	80	0	0
	Longer than 20 years	0	0	0	0
Q6. Academic Program	Liberal Arts	3	60	2	50
	STEM	2	40	2	50
	Professional majors	0	0	0	0
Q7. Identify transfer students in your class	Yes	5	100	4	100
	No	0	0	0	0
Q8. How often do you interact with transfer students in class	Often - once a week	5	100	4	100
	Sometimes - once a month	0	0	0	0
	Rarely - once a semester	0	0	0	0
	Never	0	0	0	0
	N/A	0	0	0	0

Survey Question	Characteristic	Q4. Faculty Current Position			
		Full-time		Part-time	
		n	*%*	*n*	*%*
Q10. How much	Never	0	0	0	0
time do you	Once a week or more	3	60	1	25
interact with	Once a month	1	20	2	50
transfer students	Once a semester	1	20	1	25
outside class	N/A	0	0	0	0

Note. *N* = 9 (5 full-time faculty participants and 4 part-time faculty participants). *n* is the faculty participant number.

A comparison of faculty's perception of their role in supporting transfer students shows the differences between all 40 faculty survey respondents, the 22 faculty who volunteered for interviews, and the 9 faculty participants ultimately selected (Table 5). In analyzing these data, I found that all three groups had a high number of faculty participants who agreed with the important role of community college faculty in supporting transfer students. However, compared to full-time faculty participants, part-time faculty participants reported a greater level of agreement about the role community college faculty have in supporting transfer students. This result suggests that ACC faculty share a sense of the important role they serve for transfer students who aspire to enter 4-year universities. Although most part-time faculty participants worked at ACC for fewer years than full-time faculty participants, they were aware of their important role in serving transfer students toward educational attainment.

Table 5

Comparison of Faculty Perception of Their Role in Supporting Transfer Students

Faculty Group	Q12. To what degree do you think it is important for community college faculty to have an active role in supporting transfer students?									
	Extremely important		Important		Moderately Important		Slightly Important		Not Important	
	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Faculty completed the survey (*N = 40*)	48	52	42	29	5	14	5	5	0	0
Faculty volunteers *(N = 22)*	50	59	40	33	10	8	0	0	0	0
Selected Faculty *(N = 9)*	40	50	60	50	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note. FT = Full-time. PT = Part-time.

Interview Participants

I had a total of 12 participants for the one-hour individual interview, including 9 faculty participants and 3 senior transfer leaders. I combined the key demographics of participants and listed them in Table 6. To protect the participants' identities, I used pseudonyms. The interview with each faculty participant comprised one warm-up question and 12 formal questions (Appendix F). The interview with each senior transfer leader contained one warm-up question and eight formal questions (Appendix G). The transcripts from 12 interviews were the main data sources to identify five themes and emerge important subthemes as findings.

Table 6

Demographics of Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Racial Identity	Position	Service Years
Professor FT-A	Female	White	Full-time faculty in Liberal Arts	10-20
Professor FT-B	Female	Multiple Races	Full-time faculty in Liberal Arts	5-10
Professor FT-C	Male	White	Full-time faculty in Liberal Arts	10-20
Professor FT-D	Female	White	Full-time faculty in STEM	10-20
Professor FT-E	Male	White	Full-time faculty in STEM	10-20
Professor PT-A	Female	White	Part-time faculty in Liberal Arts	Less than 5
Professor PT-B	Male	White	Part-time faculty in Liberal Arts	Less than 5
Professor PT-C	Female	White	Part-time faculty in STEM	5-10
Professor PT-D	Female	White	Part-time faculty in STEM	Less than 5
Leader-A	Female	White	Dean of Student Services	10-20
Leader-B	Female	White	Transfer Center Director	10-20
Leader-C	Female	White	Academic Advising Coordinator	5-10

Vertical Transfer Pathways at a Rural Community College

As an open access higher education institution, community colleges have transfer as a

primary function (Cohen et al., 2013). In this study, interview participants worked at ACC

ranging from fewer than 5 years to longer than 10 years. During the interviews, all participants

understood the community college's function of open access for all students with the goal of

preparing students for moving forward to transfer or to a career. The first theme describes the

vertical transfer pathways at a rural community college. It comprises five subthemes that

highlight the faculty's strong commitment to the community college mission, knowledge about

vertical transfer and the local 4-year schools, advising with transfer students, professional work

for the initiatives of *Transfer Virginia,* and perception of the faculty's role in connecting transfer

students to campus and community resources. The first theme throws light on interpreting

faculty's intention behind their services for teaching, advising, and mentoring transfer students in

and outside classrooms.

Committing to Institutional Mission

As a rural community college, ACC aims to meet the educational needs of the local

region. Faculty take responsibility for teaching and educating students at ACC. The participants

expressed their commitment to the institutional mission. Professor FT-E said: "The people that

come to community college are perhaps not as well prepared for college as people who are

accepted to a 4-year school because we have open admission." He described the community

college as "the place to learn," which is "our mission." Regarding transfer students at ACC, the

professor remarked: "Our mission is to prepare them to be successful juniors."

Professor FT-B stated her commitment to ACC's mission of educating students. She

highlighted the importance of diversity, which may be linked to her own lived minority status.

The professor mentioned: "We have a mission to educate our students that have been born and

raised in the valley. When they come to us for an education, this may be the only opportunity

they have access to learning about diversity." She regarded the "support piece" as "a key for

college success," especially for transfer students who had prior entry experiences as first-

generation and low-income groups.

Echoing students' exposure to diversity at ACC, professor PT-B commented: "What I've

really liked about the community college model is the classrooms are very diverse. You get

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different ages and different racial backgrounds or ethnic backgrounds. And it's especially true in the valley." He emphasized "a support network" that was crucial for students' transfer aspirations, in particular for first-generation and low-income students. The participants' commitment to the mission of the community college directs their identity-building as faculty members at ACC and supports their desire to serve a diverse student body and acknowledge transfer students as a prominent subpopulation on campus.

Knowing About Vertical Transfer Pathways

During the interviews with each faculty participant, I started with a warm-up question and asked if they had worked with transfer students in the past. All nine faculty participants described their experiences with transfer students and knowing their desire to transfer to a 4-year institution. They did not use the term vertical transfer in their responses, which is an academic term to define the transfer pathway that students who begin at a 2-year and transfer to a 4-year with or without an associate's degree (Townsend, 2001). However, all faculty participants spoke to the vertical transfer goals of the transfer students in their classes and these students' desire to obtain a bachelor's degree.

Professor PT-A described in detail how she helped transfer students get to know the 4-year institutions in class. She said:

> I ask the question, who's interested in transferring and where are they interested in transferring? I give them information that I know about the local places and stay connected. For example, because we do have a fair number of locals, I will make sure if there are open houses or visits, students don't get any absentee for it.

Actively sharing information about how students can connect with 4-year university staff to learn more about the transfer process often occurred in classroom spaces. Professor FT-C described similar experiences about knowing the transfer students in his class. He stated:

> I ask every student if they are a transfer student and I asked them where they planned to transfer to and even if they don't know where they'd like to maybe transfer to, and I record all that information and try to make sure I know exactly what their plans were. I would say 90% of all my students identify themselves as transfer students.

The high identification of interest in transfer was echoed by the transfer center leaders who were interviewed. Leader-A said: "We are in the middle of some great 4-year schools. Students are really focusing on transferring, so they come to us and transfer to one of them." The transfer mission at ACC was well known to area students.

The faculty participants' responses in the interviews fit their responses in survey questions asking if they could identify transfer students in their classes and how often they interacted with transfer students in class. All faculty participants in the interviews reported their capability to identify transfer students and confirmed they had once-a-week interactions with transfer students in class. This evidence suggested that faculty participants at ACC had a clear comprehension of students' intended plans from ACC to a 4-year school and viewed their plans of educational attainment as possible, although they did not apply the academic language of vertical transfer pathways to describe the process. Because ACC had local 4-year schools as neighbors, faculty participants knew these schools and attempted to help transfer students get information when they communicated with their students in class.

Informal Faculty Transfer Advising

Since faculty participants shared that most students they taught were transfer students, they could meet with transfer students in their classes to share information about the transfer process. It was a common situation that students asked faculty questions about transferring to a 4-year institution. However, knowing transfer students' educational plans did not mean the faculty members had professional knowledge to guide students in vertical transfer pathways because of the various barriers facing transfer students. At ACC, transfer students often make appointments with advisors who receive professional training and maintain knowledge about transfer requirements, articulation agreements, and policies. Full-time faculty and part-time faculty are not required to be advisors. When I asked faculty participants to describe the type of transfer advising at ACC, they were aware of the advisors in Academic Advising Office or Transfer center as an official type of transfer advising. Faculty participants viewed their advising for transfer students as an informal communication of advising information.

Professor FT-B noted: "ACC relies heavily on the advising team. So, professors don't do in-depth advising. We normally refer them back to advisors." Regarding faculty advisors at ACC, the professor added: "So, we don't really have what's called faculty advisors. Faculty can play the role of mentors. But if we do advise, it's going to be more on the concentration level." The professor gave an example to further explain how she advised transfer students as an instructor teaching language course. She said: "If I have a student that's interested in concentrating on languages, then I'll do advising. I'll get them in touch with the local language departments at 4-year schools. So that's the extent that I've done in a faculty capacity."

Providing advice on the specific needs of the discipline in transfer was how faculty participants noted their role in advising. Professor FT-D mentioned how faculty advised transfer

students related to an academic curriculum. She noted: "So formally we might say that we don't have faculty advisors. Informally, we do have some faculty advisors. In other words, there are faculty that advising seeks out to answer curricular questions." Because she had long-term experience serving transfer students by teaching students and developing student orientation courses, she commented: "I work informally as an advisor for a lot." Correspondingly, the part-time professors described the type of advising at ACC and shared the faculty advising with transfer students informally. Professor PT-C stated: "ACC doesn't really have faculty advisors in the way that four institutions do. We have academic advisors whose job is basically to advise students." She narrated a scenario to advise transfer students and refer them to advisors. She said:

> The faculty will advise if a student asks, but it's not an official relationship. It's not an official position. Professors don't always know the answer. Most professors try to find the answer and have something to give the student, but the tendency is to say, there's a better person to ask. Go here.

When I asked senior transfer leaders about faculty mentorship with transfer students, they confirmed the information the professors shared. Leader-C said: "As far as I know, there's no official mentoring program. I do know that some of the supportive faculty will meet with students one-on-one to talk about their transfer." She commented on the meeting between faculty and transfer students: "It's very casual."

The responses of full-time and part-time professors and senior transfer leaders present that most often, faculty referred transfer students to academic advisors for addressing their transfer-related questions and issues. My observation of a transfer advising meeting between a transfer advisor and a transfer student matched the description participants provided. The transfer

advisor guided students to prepare their applications and helped make clear the next steps. At ACC, the faculty did not take the responsibility to advise transfer students. However, when transfer students had questions about the courses or academic programs if these were in the faculty's teaching fields, the faculty would advise transfer students because they were often the experts of their programs. The advising normally happened in informal meetings or conversations between the faculty and transfer students in and out of classrooms.

Involvement in **Transfer Virginia** *Initiative*

Faculty at higher education institutions hold crucial authority in decision-making for curriculum (Bess & Dee, 2008). In addition to addressing transfer students' curriculum questions, ACC full-time faculty participants introduced their work with partners in 4-year institutions in building common curricula to facilitate the vertical transfer. Professor FT-C described his close work with 4-year partners to make sure the courses align with the 4-year schools for transfer easily.

Building common curricula across the Commonwealth is directed by *Transfer Virginia,* which is a collaboration among SCHEV, VCCS, and Virginia's colleges and universities to provide students with transparency in college transfer across the Commonwealth (Transfer Virginia, n.d.). As a statewide legislative initiative, *Transfer Virginia* promotes the joint efforts of 2-year and 4-year institutional faculty members. Professor FT-D viewed the *Transfer Virginia* initiative as "awesome" because "what it's doing at the state level is putting people at the 4 years and the 2 years together in a room to talk content." She emphasized the importance of faculty's engagement in this initiative: "I am glad that *Transfer Virginia* is forcing more faculty to actually have a better understanding of the transfer process and actually pay attention to the curriculum, which is a big picture." Because of knowing vertical transfer was a complex process, the

professor noted: "Some faculty don't necessarily understand the whole curriculum is a big picture." She perceived a significant role of *Transfer Virginia* in increasing faculty's knowledge in "fixing curriculum alignment" for supporting transfer students.

Professor FT-E further described the process of collaboration between community college faculty and 4-year faculty in building common curricula with a focus on their specific disciplines. He said:

> The whole *Transfer Virginia* was working with other faculty. We started writing courses and that was all at the VCCS level. So, like I was on three different committees, and we were writing courses. There were three or four people from the 23 schools. Then that broadened to all the faculty at VCCS in each discipline. And then those written proposals for courses went to 4-year faculty. We had big Zoom meetings, and people said, "No, but you really need to do this or that's not important." Then we went back and did some modifications.

Leader-B also mentioned the faculty's work for *Transfer Virginia.* She noted: "If the faculty is involved, it's because of their connection with *Transfer Virginia*. They're reviewing the courses or coming up with the core curriculum and they're engaged on that end of it." Regarding experience working with faculty members in supporting transfer students, Leader-A expressed that some faculty members were "really amazing." She shared: "Some faculty members keep up with the *Transfer Virginia* initiatives and are really focused on ensuring that we are adapting our curriculum to meet these transfer initiatives." Moreover, she introduced how faculty contributed to working with partners in 4-year institutions. She said: "The VCCS has involved faculty in that kind of higher level where they're looking at both objectives and transferability. So, all our faculty are placed in that process. It is specifically in their content area." The involvement of

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faculty members in the process of mapping out the transfer pathways between the community colleges in Virginia and the 4-year universities helped increase shared knowledge about transfer.

During interviews, I noticed that the five full-time professors and three senior transfer leaders talked in an informed way about *Transfer Virginia* and the faculty's involvement in the common curricula. However, the four part-time professors did not mention this information. This analysis suggested that full-time professors and senior transfer leaders were well-informed about *Transfer Virginia* and the related initiatives given their involvement in the process, whereas this level of involvement and hence knowledge base was not shared with part-time faculty members.

When I reviewed my observation notes from the ACC curriculum committee meeting, I discovered that the five full-time faculty participants in my study served on the curriculum committee and participated in decision-making on transfer-oriented programs. The regular meetings kept the faculty committee posted on transfer policies at the state level. Meanwhile, the faculty committee represented experts in their disciplines and engaged themselves in the *Transfer Virginia* initiatives. It was a coincidence that the selected full-time faculty participants served on the curriculum committee because the selection criteria in this study centered on faculty's interaction with transfer students and their support for transfer students not on their involvement with *Transfer Virginia*. Faculty who had a membership with the curriculum committee reported a high interaction with transfer students and provided their support for transfer students in and out of classrooms. What is more, they worked closely with content area faculty in 4-year institutions at the state level. During the observation of the ACC curriculum committee meeting, I could also see the active participation of full-time faculty and their attention to *Transfer Virginia*'s updates on transfer programs. Compared to full-time faculty, part-time faculty seldom attended a curriculum committee meeting or participated in *Transfer*

Virginia initiatives. However, part-time faculty still reported a high interaction with transfer students and noted that they focused mainly on teaching at ACC.

Perceiving Themselves as a Connector

When I invited faculty participants to describe how they perceived community college faculty's roles and responsibilities in promoting transfer, they all talked about their perception of faculty as a connector for transfer students with resources not only on campus but also in 4-year institutions. Professor PT-A shared her perception:

> Your role is like you are, because so many students are assumed to be going someplace else, my role is to find out where they're going and how I can help them make what they're doing meaningful and connected to our class in some way.

She further illuminated her role in supporting transfer students. She said: "I would say my role is to know what they want to do and connect the content of the course appropriately." With the same passion to support students, Professor PT-C stated:

> In my view, the faculty's role is to act as a mentor to encourage students to consider it as an option and encourage students to ask for advice. When a student has a specific question or expresses a more particular interest, a faculty is able to connect them to the people who can actually help them.

She gave an example to help a transfer student connect to the transfer advisor. She said:

> If a student comes to me and they've got a question about the transfer process, I send them over to the transfer advisor. I usually use emails. I'll email the person, I'll add the student as a cc and I'll be like, "This student has this question. I've copied them. Can you take care of the student?" So, I act as a connector.

The forms of faculty interactions with students involved both in-class and out-of-class occurrences. Full-time faculty also shared their experiences as a connector to inform transfer students about resources. During class, Professor FT-B communicated with transfer students and connected them to advisors. She said: "What I do is I make that announcement and say, "Please keep in mind what your 4-year school is, and then come to me after class," and then I connect them to the transfer advisor or the advisor at a local 4-year university." Additionally, she said: "I've also connected them with faculty members at 4-year institutions especially the ones who are wanting to concentrate in a language program." The professor also used emails for the connection. She commented on the process:

> I think that's the advantage of having a small community college. We are encouraged to collaborate a lot, with either department or even former employees. I email often whenever a student comes in. I connect new students to the people who can help them if I cannot.

Because the nearby comprehensive public 4-year university is the prime receiver school for ACC transfer students, Professor FT-C mentioned his role in connecting students with this university. He noted: "I connect them with the connections that I have at the local 4-year university cause most of my students are transferring to the university." The professor talked about his work with faculty members at the university in aligning the first-year classes with the university's classes to help ease the student process of transferring from ACC to the 4-year university. Moreover, the professor emphasized the responsibilities of community college faculty in promoting transfer. He noted:

> It should be a very big part of our job because like I said, 90% of the students that I teach are planning to transfer, and so I need to help them in as many ways as I possibly can.

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And I think all of us as faculty should be helping to make that process clear. Making sure students know where the transfer office is, being willing to take the time to answer their questions, specifically if we know the answer, identifying the questions that we don't exactly know the accurate information, but knowing where to send the students either to the transfer office or to the academic advisor.

Serving as a connecting point between the community college and the 4-year university provided a bridge for the students, and the faculty participants took advantage of class time when the students were on campus to share information. The perceptions of faculty participants on their role in promoting transfer reflected that they took responsibility for connecting transfer students to campus resources and local 4-year schools. They recognized their active role in supporting transfer students. Faculty participants' descriptions matched their responses to the survey question about the importance of community college faculty's active role in supporting transfer students (see Table 5). The perceptions directly guided the way faculty taught students, addressed students' challenges, and improved students' academic learning.

Teaching and Learning at a Rural Community College

The second theme centered on the ACC faculty's pedagogy for teaching and learning. The four subthemes included how faculty participants understood transfer students, what approach they used to mentor transfer students in and out of the classroom, how they adjusted their teaching strategies to meet transfer students' needs, and how they helped transfer students get through COVID-19. Given the college was a community college in a rural area, the faculty participants' descriptions for teaching and learning reflected that they aligned their services with ACC's mission and committed to supporting students to achieve their aspirations for transfer.

Understanding Transfer Students on Campus

   All the faculty participants spoke about their communication with transfer students in the classroom at an early stage of the semester. They often initiated the conversation in their first class. Because transfer students were a majority in their class, faculty participants understood the challenges facing transfer students in academic learning and the impact of students' pre-entry experiences on their transfer aspirations.

   First Class Communication. In the interviews, faculty participants mentioned that they started to get to know their students early in the semester. Professor FT-A shared her first class conversation to know about her students:

> On the first day of class, I have everybody raise their hands if they're a transfer student; if they're just finishing up a degree; if they're doing a standalone degree; or if they're just taking classes for fun. So, I have an idea of what my class is made up of. Sometimes they volunteer the information, at some point during the semester. I have them do a getting to know you handout on the first day of class that has questions like what their career plans are after this.

Here, Professor FT-A is formally collecting information on the motivations students have for enrolling in her class. Professor PT-B talked about his communication with transfer students in the first class as well. He said: "Students are usually self-identified. They let me know at the start of the semester." Transfer students self-identify in the first class in either formal or informal ways to help provide a chance for faculty to get to know their concerns early in the semester.

   Professor PT-C described her experiences communicating with transfer students and responding to students' questions in her professional field:

I identify them because they tell me that they are planning to transfer. And they'll ask me

what I would recommend if they wanted to go and transfer into sciences or more

specifically. Because I have worked in the actual field, I can give them some better

pointers on what they need to do before graduating to get better prepared.

At ACC, advisors encourage students to build relationships with their professors in academic

programs. Leader-A emphasized the positive impact of early communication between transfer

students and their professors. She noted: "We are hopeful the student would identify themselves

to the faculty member and they would have some sort of relationship. Now advisors are going to

tell the student to reach and develop a relationship with their faculty members."

The description of faculty participants suggested that they became acquainted with

transfer students by initiating communications in the first classes. The student had a clear

identity as a transfer student with a transfer intention or plan. They often would like to let their

professor know about their transfer plans and ask for professors' advice in their disciplines,

which had an important fluence on promoting faculty to learn transfer information and connect

students to campus resources.

From a document review of the faculty participants' handouts and surveys used for

getting to know students in the first classes, I found that the questions were designed to help

faculty members get information about their students' previous learning experiences, course

expectations, academic interests, learning styles, and planning at ACC. Faculty hoped to

understand each student at the beginning of the semester in order to better support their learning

progress. Senior transfer leaders also hoped that building relationships between faculty members

and transfer students would help enhance the transfer students' learning experiences. The

communication with transfer students in an early stage of the semester led to faculty participants'

awareness of transfer students and their challenges in academic learning.

Academic Challenges. Regarding the challenges facing transfer students, faculty

participants perceived financial pressure and academic preparation as the main challenges.

Professor PT-C illustrated the characteristics of transfer students. She said:

> Students who come to a community college with an ultimate plan of transferring are
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> typically at a community college for one of two reasons; either they can't afford to do a 4-
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> year university entirely, and so they're trying to make it more affordable by doing a
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> community college program before moving to a 4-year. Or they're at a community
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> college because they don't have the preparation for a 4-year program and so they're trying
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> to bridge that and catch up on their academics so that they can get into a 4-year; Those
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> are kind of the two categories that most transfer students seem to fall into.

Students' financial pressure often emerged due to their family's economic status. Because of this

situation, students had to work while also studying part-time. Professor FT-B narrated her

perception of community college students' financial issues. She said:

> I think at the community college level, we deal with students who have more than one
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> job. Many of them are struggling because they're tired and they need to pay their bills.
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> So, we see a lot of those economic factors play in and conflict with a good study
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> schedule. Some of these students have families. So, they have to get home, they're tired
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> from working those one or two jobs, and then they have to tend to their children.

For transfer students who had to work, they were challenged to maintain a good balance among

competing life demands. Professor PT-D commented: "The level of like balance I think is a big

thing, especially for these students. A lot of them work full-time jobs, so transferring into like

having to balance work and school is really hard for them." Financial constraints contributed to time pressures for students trying to meet all their responsibilities, including schoolwork.

Meanwhile, insufficient academic preparation brought challenges to transfer students' academic learning. Professor FT-E noted: "Academic preparation can be a large thing, particularly with science majors in math because lots of students don't have the math. They are not ready for college math." The professors in Liberal Arts also mentioned that students lacked enough preparation for college-level courses. Professor PT-B said: "I would say the basic level of preparation was consistent across both the 4-year institute and the 2-year institute. Just in that neither group of students really seemed properly prepared for college writing." Additionally, the gap between students' expectations and academic rigor affected their academic performance. Professor FT-A stated:

> In terms of academic preparation, and then some of them in general didn't work hard enough in high school, maybe, didn't have to work hard enough in high school. Then they get to college and it's like, "The papers are longer, and you expect me to have work cited pages and you expect me to show up and turn things in on time."

The perspectives of faculty participants on transfer students' challenges suggested that faculty understood transfer students' issues in inadequate academic preparation and their conflicting commitments among study, work, and family. Students' experiences before entering a community college had a deep influence on their knowledge about college and their transfer aspirations.

Pre-Entry Experiences. When describing students' pre-entry experiences, faculty participants considered that students who were first-generation college students in their families faced more struggles compared to low-income and high school students. Professor FT-C noted:

A first-generation college student is generally pretty much goes walking into unknown territory because there is nobody at home to help them. I find that most of my first-generation students are a little bit nervous, a little bit scared of the whole college process, and not sure whether they can succeed at it. I try to walk them through. First-generation students need a lot of encouragement and a lot of flexibility really.

Professor PT-B also mentioned the influence of first-generation students' pre-entry experiences on their transfer aspirations. He stated:

Both my parents are very well educated. If I ever had a question about something they would tell me, like, go to the registrar, go talk to this person. But I think a lot of times these students don't know who to ask for information, which perhaps influences their aspirations just insofar as they perhaps don't maybe know how far they can go up the ladder because they don't know who to talk to all the time.

Different from first-generation students who often lack access to college knowledge before entering higher education, low-income students are inclined to privilege their work over school. Regarding this situation, Professor PT-D said:

I do know that a lot of my low-income students, they're definitely normally the ones that have jobs, full-time jobs. And they're normally the ones that are more likely to be like, "I have to drop out or miss class." Like they'll put the work first for school because they don't see the immediate payoffs. So that's a big hurdle for them.

Because of their low-income status, these students must also pick work over school to earn income to survive and pay their bills. They do have aspirations to better their life situation given their enrollment at the college, however, their financial circumstances often leave them with little choice but to pick work hours over attending class.

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When I asked about the situation of students who took Advanced Placement (AP) classes or dual enrollment classes at high schools, Professor FT-A noted:

> I would say that my students who take AP and dual enrollment classes typically have their ducks in a row better. They're more, "I know what I have to do, and I know how to get there." They probably just get more help at their high schools too. They get more mentoring from the guidance counselors or from their teachers. And they do have a clearer path.

Enrollment in AP classes and dual enrollment can set the stage differently for transfer students. On the ACC website, I found the introduction about AP classes and dual enrollment. What remains unknown is if all students at ACC had the same access to these types of high school classes. Considering students' different pre-entry experiences, Professor FT-B shared her opinions. She said:

> You see a clear difference between students who have had that college preparatory experience which is wonderful because they transition just fine into our college courses. So, we do have those traditional students, but then we have the students where you can see that there's a big learning gap depending on their high school experiences.

Since community colleges serve both traditional students and nontraditional students whose pre-entry experiences have an effect on their academic preparation, college expectation, and transfer aspirations, faculty at community colleges need to meet students' different needs at different levels. Professor FT-B commended:

> It's a lot for an educator to find medium ground and have to incorporate teaching strategies to connect with all of these groups. How do I make it challenging enough? How do I make it inclusive enough to not lose any of them?

Faculty participants' perspectives and comments reflected that they had a strong commitment to supporting students especially non-traditional students who had unique academic challenges and pre-entry experiences. With this commitment, faculty participants contemplated their teaching strategies in order to address each student's need and get students to prepare for studying at ACC and transferring into 4-year schools.

Mentoring Transfer Students in the Classroom

Faculty participants shared their approach to mentoring transfer students and improving their learning experiences. Faculty participants' self-identity shaped the way how they mentor students. They reflected on their educational practice and made changes to improve equity. During class discussions, faculty participants shared their stories with students and helped them to learn from their college experiences. They put effort into networking transfer students with ACC alumni and transfer advisors in 4-year schools.

Faculty Self-Identity. When I asked faculty participants to describe their approach to mentoring students for transfer, they shared their experiences and mentioned their self-identity in shaping their mentoring strategies. Professor FT-B noted: "Being a first-generation student myself, coming from a Latina background, I identify with students' struggles. I want to be that bridge. I want to give them the support I didn't receive when I attended." The lived experiences of FT-B as a first-generation college student of color shaped how she connected with students.

Professor PT-C expressed her opinion on mentoring students from a position in science fields. She stated:

> When I mentor them, I am trying to prepare them for what they might expect, not only in the transfer program when they get to that 4-year university, but also after graduation in

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the career that they're looking at. The advice I give them is I'm upfront about. This is

based on my experience in the field of science.

This faculty participant paid high attention to honesty in communicating with students about her lived experiences. Professor PT-C said:

Just being honest about, hey, these are my experiences. Good and bad. You might have

the same ones, but yours might be different. Just that kind of being truly honest not

building it up, not breaking, not thumbing it down, or making it seem harder. Just saying

this is what I lived. I think that's probably the most effective strategy that I have had.

The narration of this professor suggests that as a woman in science, the professor values objectivity, problem-solving, and openness. Her mentorship has an influence on transfer students in STEM programs, especially women students, and helps them to learn from what she has experienced in the college and workplace.

Equity Mindedness. Faculty participants served diverse student groups at ACC. During mentoring students, they revisited their practice toward an equitable student outcome. Professor FT-C remarked:

I'm very cognizant of race these days and very cognizant of gender these days that just for

and as well, I really try to adapt the whole power dynamic as well. I don't want my

students to feel that I'm here and they're here, even though I have more degrees than they

do more education. I really try to put us on equal footing right here, because they're really

scared of that power dynamic right there of professor and student. And so, when I bring it

down here and I try to relate with them some of my own experiences when I was first

going to college and things like that, and how that would be to them. So, I would say that

I'm constantly adapting my approach to mentoring them. To me it's relationship first and academic second. I try to build relationships and then academics in the midst of it.

Professor FT-C had a high awareness of the ways his identity as a faculty member provided here with privilege and his awareness of this positionality helped him relate to the students in his classroom differently.

Professor FT-D gave an example of her reflection on working with students and adapting policies to promote equity. She noted:

The students that would contact me about the test were the students that already had As and it's like, "You already have a 95 now you want a 96?" And so, I started reviewing everybody's test and I discovered that a lot of the time it really was like Hispanic students and African American students were a lot quieter, and they had not voluntarily come forward. But when I reviewed their tests, I'm like, "Well, no, you also have some points that you could get back." That's a growing struggle trying to think in different ways and try to adapt policies because this stuff is really subtle.

Moreover, she brought up the value of empowering students especially underrepresented students to advocate for themselves. She said:

I'm still learning and growing on that front. And then it really is big. When I think of it now that I'm trying to model, like asking behavior from them so that when students get to the 4-year, they'll have learned from me, well now this is how you advocate for yourself, and they'll be a little bit better with that.

In addition to building relationships with students and adapting class policies, faculty participants reflected on their teaching pedagogy and made changes to engage all students in learning. Professor PT-B stated:

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Where there's just a large percentage of refugees especially from war-torn areas, Africa through the Middle East. So as for mentoring those types of students, I try to modify certain elements of the syllabus when I'm kind of designing it. To give them something that they might resonate with, or at least something that reflects their culture. For example, if I have one student who's from Africa, and one student who's from Afghanistan, I've tried to pick an African poet and an Islamic poet, just to appear on the syllabus. So, they have a foothold. That way it's not all entirely foreign.

Attention to culturally relevant pedagogy and understanding the different experiences students of color have in the classroom resulted in the faculty participants adjusting their teaching approaches to build a more inclusive learning environment.

Storytelling Approach. In class, faculty participants facilitated conversations to share their stories with students, improve students' cultural competency, and guide students to find the resources they needed. Professor PT-A mentioned:

Depending on what I know about each institution but they're all local. I will advise students about what I know about the culture of each institution. And that will include race, ethnicity, and gender. Some of the schools have a higher population of people of color than others. And so, I think that's important.

Using stories to help understand the culture of higher education was an approach taken by the participants.

Professor PT-A expressed her opinions on engaging students in class discussions and improving students' sense of belonging. She said:

We talk about race, ethnicity, and gender in my classes. So, we do have a lively discussion about it. I have students from other countries that we can bring it in

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and talk about. My hope is that I am welcoming and want to know more. I hope that students have [a sense of] belonging within our class and are valued.

This professor underscored knowing students as an effective mentoring approach. She added:

The strategy I find most effective in mentoring students is knowing them. If I pay attention, they notice that I know their names. I know where they want to go. I know what their interests are. If I pay attention to those things, they feel cared for. I'd like to keep my classroom as a very open discussion.

The emphasis on a deep understanding of students demonstrates the professor's effort for developing a positive relationship with students and enhancing students' learning experiences in the classroom.

Professor PT-D spoke about the importance of knowing students' backgrounds. She said: I think it's good to know if they are first-time college students in their family, what supports they have at home, and what they know about it on their own. So definitely getting that background so I know what they're working with, and then I'll normally sit there and look with them at the programs and go through it, like what I understand from the requirements and make sure that we're on the same page.

She described her approach to sharing her stories with students when she mentored students in class. She stated:

A lot of times I'll share my own experiences, and this is what I dealt with when I first went to college and the things I needed to do to adjust. I spent a lot of time just sharing my own personal experiences and then trying to give the best advice I can based on like, "Here's where you're going to find resources, or here's where I just did a search and I found it, so I think this could work for you."

Hearing stories about the faculty members' own college experiences can help provide a wider level of understanding for the students about the process and help the students realize that what they are experiencing is common.

Professor FT-B further elaborated on the value of sharing personal stories with students and connecting students to resources. She noted:

> I'm connecting with the students and listening to them. When I listen to these students many times they can relate to my experience, so I share with them. I tried to be the relatable person that can help students connect to the campus community, and to help students find the resources that they need to help them.

The narrative stories of their own experiences helped faculty participants talk about their self-identity in ways that helped mentor transfer students in their classes. Faculty participants reflected on their educational practice and teaching pedagogy to build a more inclusive and equitable space for all students. Faculty shared their stories with students to enhance their communication and understanding with students, which in turn motivated students to pursue their aspirations.

Network Building. Faculty connected with ACC alumni that had successfully transferred to 4-year universities, invited them to come back classrooms, and increased transfer students' knowledge about academic learning and campus life at a 4-year university. Professor FT-E noted most of students in his class planned to transfer to a local 4-year public university. He described his work in connecting with ACC alumni who transferred to the university and how he invited the alumni to share their experiences with current transfer students. He said:

> I can specifically talk about the public 4-year university in class because most of students aim at this university. Last semester, I invited four students who graduated last May, who

are now at the university to come to my class. And I got both of my classes together to

talk about their first semester at the university. They talked about their professors and

some things that had nothing to do with it, like parking and food.

The Professor emphasized the value of the conversation for transfer students to understand more

about 4-year university. He commented: "Because it's a mystery. Community college students,

lots of them are first-time college students for their families. They don't have a lot of college

knowledge."

Similarly, Professor FT-B highlighted the friendships and networks between transfer

students and ACC alumni. She shared her opinion on connecting with ACC alumni:

Coming from diverse backgrounds, if I have students who are first year college students,

or if they're transferring when they're finishing their second, but they have that first

attending culture, I have put some in touch. When we have diversity club meetings and I

see that we have our first year and a second year, introducing them and having them

network and then reaching out to those former students as well. I think that is key for

those students because again, we had that workforce mentality at the community college

where our students are working and sometimes, they don't have a chance to make friends.

I've intervened and I've tried to encourage friendships and networking there as well.

The description of Leader-B provided supplementary information on faculty mentoring transfer

students in class and building a network for current students. She said:

We have faculty who are well connected with their former students. They'll bring in

students who've left ACC and transferred to 4-year schools to give a student panel and

tell current students about their transfer process. Those faculty stay connected with their

successful students and bring them back to encourage and empower the current students.

Additionally, faculty invited transfer advisors to the class to help transfer students know about advising services on campus. Leader-A remarked: "We are very appreciative to some of our faculty will invite transfer advisors into the classroom." During mentoring transfer students in the classroom, faculty not only inspired students with their personal stories but also networked students with ACC alumni who successfully transferred into 4-year institutions and connected students with the transfer advisors.

Considering what in-class information faculty provided for transfer students, I reviewed the survey data by analyzing the 40 faculty members' completed responses to determine alignment with the interview data. Among five types of information, "academic learning advising" and "transfer advising and course planning" were the top two types of information that nearly half of the faculty members provided for students in class, while "financial aid" (seven faculty members) and "transfer policies" (five faculty members) were the information that fewer faculty members mentioned in class. Seven faculty members reported that they provided other in-class information such as, "campus events related to transfer," "open houses," "campus tours," "transfer field trips," and "transfer fairs." The information connected transfer students to transfer resources on campus and in local 4-year institutions. Outside the classroom, faculty also provided services for supporting students and promoting transfer.

Supporting Transfer Students Outside the Classroom

Faculty participants introduced their interaction with transfer students outside the classroom. They improved students' asking behavior by adding explanations of the office hours and motivating students to visit their office hours. They wrote reference letters to support students' transfer applications. They referred students to the transfer center and guided students to find resources.

Office Hours. In community colleges in Virginia, there is a policy regarding office hours that began during the establishment of the VCCS (Errico, 2022). During interviews, all faculty participants pointed out that they had office hours and that they provided additional learning support for students. The participants perceived the office hour was an avenue to address each student's questions through individualized tutoring. Concerning transfer students, faculty paid attention to their asking behavior and encouraged students to use office hours outside the classroom. Professor FT-E mentioned: "For community college students, office hours sometimes have to be explained. It's like, what are office hours? In my syllabus, it says office hours are when I'm available to answer questions." Merely providing office hours is not enough. The faculty participants noted how they had to contextualize and explain the purpose of office hours to their students.

For example, Professor PT-C described how she explained the meaning of office hours to students. She said:

> I tell them, when it says office hours, it means I'm in my office. You can come to talk to me because I'm just in my office and I'm doing nothing. I'm literally sitting there twiddling my thumbs and waiting for people to show up. That usually gets a little laugh out of them because I know some of them assume office hours mean the professor is working. Do not disturb. This is especially true in first-generation freshmen. They don't understand office hours mean students are welcome to the office. And I usually manage to make a bit of a joke out of it and make them laugh. They don't come usually, but I try. Some of my colleagues will call them "consultation hours" or "come find me hours."

Prior research also highlights that the name *office hours* caused miscommunication and barriers for students to make the most of resources for their success in college (Quintana, 2019). Calling

office hours "student hours" could help in increasing how students perceived this set-aside time that faculty offered for them (Johnson et al., 2023).

Leader-C shared her opinion on the positive impact of faculty's encouragement on students, which helped students feel less intimidated and could benefit from communicating with faculty outside the classroom. She stated:

> I think students expect the instructor to ask them first because they're used to that. And then they come here and it's kind of reversed. They have to talk to the instructors. They're intimidated by making that first step. I think the more responsive instructors can be to students, the more comfortable the students will be.

Office hours might be a new concept for community college transfer students who are experiencing higher education for the first time. Faculty strategies for translating the meaning of office hours into a friendly and welcoming tone could motivate transfer students to visit their office hours and get support.

Reference Letters. For transfer students who prepared for their 4-year university applications, letters of reference were required. Writing letters of reference was a common service faculty provided for supporting transfer students. Compared to part-time faculty participants, all full-time faculty participants pointed out that they frequently wrote letters of reference for students. Professor FT-C said: "I write several letters of reference every semester. I'm constantly recommending my students." The part-time faculty participants who had taught at ACC for a longer time mentioned that they often wrote letters of reference for transfer students as well. Professor PT-C noted: "I do write letters of reference. I am usually asked to write one or two letters of reference a semester. And I almost always write those." She expressed her willingness to support students. She said: "I want students to succeed, they're going to do well."

The part-time faculty participants who currently have little experience writing letters of reference mentioned that they wrote grade reports for transfer students which were also required documents for transfer application. Professor PT-D noted: "What students do normally ask me for is a grade report. So, if I know it's a student transferring, I fill out the grade report and sign it for that college, so I do have to do that." Professor PT-B also talked about his work in filling out grade reports for transfer students. He shared: "Sometimes I will get emails from the transfer center asking me to fill out reports or documents for a student. They're sort of similar to a recommendation letter." These grade reports are important because they help place transfer students in the right course level at the university and are evidence of prior learning on a topic.

In my observation on a transfer advising meeting at ACC, the transfer advisor reminded a transfer student to contact his professors for letters of reference when they started to prepare for their application to a 4-year school. The transfer advisor advised the student in the session I observed to reach out to his professors earlier and manage his time wisely. This advice suggested that professors often were asked to write letters of reference for transfer students. Being an instructor at ACC, faculty participants perceived the work of writing letters of reference or grade reports for transfer students as their responsibility.

Student Referral. As advisors concentrated on guiding transfer students throughout the process from application to enrollment, faculty at ACC usually referred students to advisors when students had specific questions about transferring into a 4-year school. Professor FT-D introduced the idea transfer advising at ACC to students. She noted: "The advising is officially within the advising office. The transfer center leader is the head of the transfer advising. Most of the advisors are trained in various areas of advising transfer." Professor FT-B described a scene in which she referred transfer students to advisors. She stated:

Many times, I'll have students say, "Well, I want to transfer to this 4-year school, what is the course requirement?" And this is something that I always say, "I'm not an advisor, so please send out an email, copy me in it, and schedule a meeting, I'd be happy to sit in and help you figure out what course is the one you need. So, you're not taking a class that doesn't transfer."

Part-time faculty participants knew about the advising services on campus and connected students to advisors. Professor PT-D said:

I know about the student success center and advisors. I'm not involved in those things really, but I know that they do exist, and I have at least the knowledge of how to refer students to there or get students in the right direction to this.

Professor PT-A highlighted the importance of referring students to help their progress. She remarked:

I do know how I think the idea here is that you should be helping students progress. There's a very clear line even to adjuncts that you are to help the students move forward in some way. The track is to go to their advisors first.

Correspondingly, Leader-B mentioned that student referral was the normal involvement of faculty in supporting transfer students. She noted: "It's mostly referral. Like go advisors and they'll help you figure out what classes to take, how to apply, and when to apply there. That's the most frequent."

The descriptions of participants indicated that faculty were familiar with transfer advising at ACC and often referred transfer students to advisors for obtaining guidance. They were well informed on campus resources so they could refer students to appropriate offices. Faculty participants recognized student referral as a part of their job and committed to advancing

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students' progress toward achieving a successful transfer. Given the selection process for faculty participants, it is unsurprising that these faculty members worked to support transfer students. What remains unknown is how other less transfer invested faculty members at ACC do referrals.

Resource Exposure. Faculty connected transfer students to advisors for specific transfer information, but also improved students' knowledge to take advantage of campus and local community resources. Professor FT-A talked about how she informed students about campus resources and encouraged students to use these resources when they entered a 4-year school. She said:

> I encourage students who are getting disability services or who are eligible for disability services to use them here and use them at their 4-year school. Most faculty are sensitive to the disability needs of students and accommodation needs. I've had students in the class who were legally blind. They've gotten through the class. It's really important I think especially at a 4-year school for students to use their disability services accommodations because they're smart enough to do the work and they just sometimes need a little help to get the particulars done.

Meanwhile, faculty taught students to search for resources that they needed. Professor PT-A gave an example of telling students to find resources on the ACC website. She said:

> You just go to the website and type in advising, and it takes you to the page. And I will model that. I will have it up on the screen and say, this is where it is, this is how you get to it and show them.

Teaching students how to find resources on their own helps in developing this skill and to empower students to know how to find resources without faculty involvement.

Regarding the exposure to resources, Professor FT-C described how he used multiple ways to inform transfer students about resources. He noted:

The transfer center leader is always emailing us about the transfer events. I recraft those emails and I post them in my announcements to my students so that they'll know about them. There are posters all over campus when these events happen, and I refer students to those posters for more information on that. And so, I make sure that communication is very clearly outlined and that they can't miss it.

Furthermore, Professor PT-B mentioned his support for students to get the resources and communicate with 4-year schools. He said: "If there is a college ambassadorship come in from any of the neighboring colleges, I'll walk the class over there to it. Not all of them are going to transfer but meeting these individuals and getting the resources." Professor PT-B underlined the faculty's key role of making students informed of 4-year schools and requirements. He remarked: "Keeping students in communication with the college that they intend to go to, I think is the biggest responsibility, but also helping the students meet their GPA requirements and general education requirements to go to that college." This type of connector behavior among the faculty participants was noted in the section above.

Leader-A pointed out that advisors usually showed transfer students resources during their meetings with students. She stated: "We really try to connect them early with that transfer institution. I hope faculty are using this." The narrative of faculty participants suggested that they improved the exposure of resources to students and help students to learn to benefit from using these resources at a community college and a 4-year university. Faculty participants paid attention to connecting transfer students to local 4-year schools and provided multiple ways for informing students about the transfer resources.

Moreover, I reviewed the survey question asking faculty's perspectives on what resources they thought best support students seeking to transfer to a 4-year university. Across 40 faculty members' answers, "transfer advising," "transfer coursework," "transfer guides," and "transfer website" were four frequently repeated resources. Regarding the out of class support, nearly half of the faculty members reported that they mentored students with transfer aspirations and supported students in their application to a 4-year institution. The data matched the descriptions of faculty participants in the interviews. It suggested that ACC faculty had a shared value on the college's transfer function and aligned their services with the college's primary goals of moving transfer students forward.

Getting Through COVID-19 Pandemic

This section reviews faculty participants' description of how they helped transfer students during times of crisis. They adapted to the online setting and adjusted some class policies to benefit students' learning. What is more, faculty participants gave students emotional support and retained them in the college.

Teaching Accommodation. The outbreak of the global pandemic in 2020 brought unprecedented educational disruption, which forced colleges and universities to transform face-to-face classes into online classes. Faculty at ACC adapted their teaching to help students in virtual settings. Considering the sudden shift to online teaching, faculty participant demonstrated that they got prepared for online teaching before the pandemic. The shift for the participants was not a big issue. Professor FT-D described her experience moving to online classes: "I was actually in good shape because I already had online versions of all my courses. I had the materials developed." When the campus gradually returned to normal in-person classes, faculty still provided online options to make sure students could access classes. Professor PT-C said:

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I've learned like I mentioned my in-person classes, I still have a Zoom option for students

who can't make it to class or who are too ill for class or for whatever other reason they

would prefer a Zoom option as opposed to actually being in class.

The hybrid classes with a mix of in-person and online access helped increase flexibility for

students and benefit their learning. Following the hybrid teaching, faculty adjusted class

attendance and assignment requirements to be more flexible to students. Professor PT-A noted:

If students are late on an assignment for something, if they've had difficulty getting to

class or meeting some other thing, I ask them to tell me about it ahead of time if they can.

I'm not punitive, not that I would be anyway. I don't know if COVID changed that, but it

gave me more belief it is right to adjust for individual circumstances. To be

understanding, give limits, but be understanding for adjustments.

Flexibility in faculty's teaching was carried over to post-COVID classrooms. Professor FT-A

also mentioned her adjustments to tailor teaching to individual cases. She said:

For my own teaching, I have been more lenient about attendance. I've been more lenient

because I have an attendance policy and before COVID I was strict about it. I've been

more lenient about late projects just because if you get COVID and you get sick, you're

kind of down for the count for a while in some cases.

In addition to making accommodations for teaching, faculty adapted to use technology for

producing virtual materials that could be available for all students no matter whether they

attended the class in person or online. Professor PT-D talked about her adaptation to help

students get access to class materials. She stated: "The biggest accommodations that we have

made are the flexible deadlines. I am an in-person instructor, but I have adapted to having those

on demand videos and virtual sessions when needed. That's done a lot more of that." Facing the

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educational disruption during COVID-19, faculty participants tried their best to adjust teaching

accommodations and incorporate technology into teaching for supporting students' learning.

Meanwhile, they broadened avenues to meet and help students. Leader-A commented:

> I see faculty during COVID, they offered personal notes, email check-ins, and Zoom
>
> sessions. And I even see now they're offering office hours both in person and through
>
> Zoom. They're trying to meet students where they're at to help them with that and to
>
> provide any sort of tutoring or supplemental help that they need.

A range of online options remained in place for students after the pandemic and added flexibility

when students could not attend classes in person.

Online Learning. Although faculty had a quick adaptation to online teaching, they

indicated that students' learning was influenced by a virtual environment during the pandemic.

Professor FT-C shared his opinion on online education and its impact on transfer students. He

noted: "I think that only about 20% of students are good at online education." A lack of

preparation for online learning among students resulted in uneven outcomes. Professor FT-E

pointed out that the issue of less interaction in the virtual classes affected students' learning. He

stated:

> I don't like teaching asynchronous because there's very little interaction. From the
>
> student's point of view, it's the student and the course and maybe the student and the
>
> teacher. Whereas in classes, I like to get the students together. I think Zoom is better than
>
> asynchronous. And I think in class, in person is better than zoom. There are multiple
>
> interactions going on. I think that helps all of them. And they learn better.

In order to improve students' learning, faculty included some notifications to encourage students

to get involved in an online class. Professor FT-B said:

On my syllabus, I had to make a very clear, if you were taking a synchronous class, you need to have your camera on, so that we can communicate. I am considerate and I know that things happen. We can't force students sometimes to interact, but that was a huge challenge in our language course.

Because online learning requires students to have necessary devices such as the internet and computers, the students in rural areas without access to the devices struggled with their academic studies and transfer plans. Concerning transfer students in rural areas, Professor PT-B mentioned:

Some students didn't have internet and I know these two that I've talked to that are transfer students and want to go to 4-year institutions, they didn't have internet, so they are effectively kind of flunked out of high school. I mean what are you going to do if your classes are online? And you don't have internet, so there's just a lot of lost time to make up for and not a lot of class time to actually go about making that up.

Rural areas do not always have broadband infrastructure to support online learning (Rush-Marlowe, 2021). Looking for stable access to the internet and computers challenged students in a rural area. Professor FT-E described this challenge and introduced how ACC provided students access to devices. He said:

The students who were most challenged were students who were rural because they can't do Zoom without broadband. We're a very rural area, so access to technology was an issue. Here we put access points in the parking garage. If students had a laptop, they could come to the parking garage and get broadband. We have [The Center for Academic Vision and Excellence] that's the general tutoring area. There's a Zoom room in there.

Some students just didn't have hardware in general, they don't have computers at home.

We have lots of labs and computers on campus.

The faculty participants noted that finding supports for students to be successful in online learning classes was important and they recognized the technology challenges in rural areas.

The global pandemic brought disruption to students' learning but also affected their well-being. When students talked about their difficult experiences, to Professor PT-C, she tried to give students emotional support. She commented on this situation: "I mean that's kind of my job. I'm not a therapist, but sometimes I'm a therapist." Moreover, Professor FT-B shared her experience listening to students and communicating with students. She said: "I think it's just that communication piece where students describe how overwhelming the process may be. And that connection piece to taking them to the mentors. So, we relied heavily during the pandemic and with email and Zoom." Communicating with students provided a critical basis for relationship-building for faculty participants. This communication took many forms (e.g., office hours, emails, Zoom meetings, and in-class announcements).

Leader-C further mentioned the faculty's adjustment to communicate with students during the pandemic and highlighted the positive impact of faculty's quick feedback on strengthening their relationships with students. She remarked:

I think more instructors are better at when a student emails them getting back to them faster. Every once in a while, we got complaints that I emailed so and so, and they didn't get back to me. But the COVID really changed the situation.

The description of Leader-C reinforced that faculty put effort into students' online learning and timely communication to support students at both academic and emotional levels. In particular, transfer students in a rural community college faced unique issues in accessing

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devices for online learning and pursuing their aspiration to enter 4-year institutions. Faculty participants recognized students' issues and connected students to campus resources. They made changes in teaching accommodations and learning strategies to help students get through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report from the National Student Clearinghouse showed a national decline in transfer enrollment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic (Causey et al., 2020). By reviewing transfer data among community colleges in Virginia (SCHEV, n.d.-a), I found a similar pattern compared to the 2018-2019 academic year, the VCCS experienced a 4.21% decrease in transfer student enrollment to 4-year institutions (private and public) in the 2019-2020 academic year. The number of transfer students from ACC to 4-year institutions (private and public) declined by 9.65%. Considering the student transfer rate in the 2019-2020 academic year, VCCS was 13.47%, while ACC's transfer rate was 14.86%. The data showed that the total enrollment of transfer students to 4-year institutions was negatively affected by the pandemic.

Compared to community colleges in Virginia as a whole, ACC still held a higher transfer rate. The narrative of Leader-A reflected on this situation. She said:

> Our overall enrollment has declined due to COVID, which is also a national trend. I would say we do have a decline in transfer students specifically to our overall decline in enrollment. Typically, I'm going to give very rough general numbers, about 70% of our incoming class each year do our students that want to transfer to a 4-year school. That hasn't really changed.

As ACC served a majority of students who intended to transfer, the faculty's effort in adapting teaching accommodations and online learning contributes to supporting transfer students and retaining them during and after the pandemic. Moreover, because of neighboring local 4-year

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schools, ACC has strong transfer partnerships that ensure the transfer students' vertical pathways to local 4-year schools. ACC Faculty's engagement in transfer partnerships further contributes to promoting transfer.

Transfer Partnerships With 4-Year Programs

The third theme is the faculty's engagement in transfer partnerships with 4-year programs. Surrounded by 4-year schools, ACC has developed and sustained long-term transfer partnerships with its neighborhood institutions of higher education. Faculty participants introduced how they worked with content area faculty and advisors of the local 4-year schools and how they collaborated with the ACC transfer center to address students' questions.

Working With Local Partners

When describing their experiences working with partners in 4-year institutions, faculty participants demonstrated their knowledge about local universities nearby ACC. Some faculty participants graduated from these local 4-year universities and built their relationships with content area faculty over time at their alma maters. Other faculty participants worked in different 4-year institutions and got familiar with the local transfer universities after their hire. Professor FT-A reflected on her work with content area faculty in nearby 4-year universities. She noted: "In the area, we've got one public school and three private schools. Those are our closest 4-year schools. When I work with content area faculty, like with teaching faculty regardless of the school, they're pretty easy to work with." The basis of the relationships centered on shared disciplinary content expertise. Centering on the specific discipline and the transferable curriculum, Professor FT-C described how he worked with content area faculty and aligned his classes with 4-year universities in order to facilitate seamless credit transfer. He said:

I work closely with the faculty at a local public 4-year university. They have invited me

for the last couple of years to work with them on reworking their entire first-year

program, in choosing a new textbook, and creating a whole new program. And so, I've

really built up a relationship with them generally, and I've aligned our first-year class

with the university's class. We follow the same learning objectives and the same content

they do so that our students can easily transfer into this 4-year university and be accepted

by this 4-year university.

This type of collaboration helped smooth out the transfer pathway for students. Professor FT-B

shared information about her service as a committee on faculty panels and how she collaborated

with faculty members at 4-year institutions. She noted: "I've sat on faculty panels for language

programs before. Where again, you get that networking piece, you get to collaborate with 4-year

faculty and see what resources are available. And I come back and offer them to my students."

Bringing back new information to ACC helped Professor FT-B share resources with students.

In addition to the collaboration with content area faculty for course building and

academic programs, faculty participants engaged transfer students in participating in

undergraduate research projects at 4-year institutions. Professor PT-C stated:

I do also promote undergraduate research programs at a local 4-year school. They've got

a program which is a STEM internship research program basically. And so, I plug things

like that into my classes. I target them more to students who are intending to transfer and

transfer into the STEM fields. But I also tell them that it's a great opportunity no matter

where you go. because it shows that you are willing to go the extra mile. And it doesn't

matter where you're applying. The experience looks great on a CV. So, I plug things like

that.

Exposure to undergraduate research opportunities while still at the community college helps expand what transfer students think is possible in their content areas and exposes them to 4-year college student experiences.

As an alumnus of the public 4-year university close to ACC, Professor PT-B mentioned his support for transfer students who wanted to transfer to the 4-year university and help them with undergraduate research projects. He noted:

> I put students in contact with some faculty that I know. I have helped students work with undergraduate research projects. I've got a couple of students that want to get published in undergraduate journals for some essays they've written for me. I help them with that.

Because of the familiarity with the local 4-year university, Professor PT-B further shared his experiences working with transfer offices and connecting transfer students to resources at the 4-year university. He added:

> When I asked to work with transfer offices at the university, I became friends with the director of my program or graduate school there. So, I will send students his way and he'll put them in contact with the correct faculty, which I hope is helpful. I hope it at least gives some of these students enough confidence. Because again, like I said, for me at least, the issue seems to be that students just don't know who to talk to. Sometimes if you can give them a face to a name, it just makes things a little less stressful because students can't go to their parents if their parents aren't college graduates.

Similarly, Professor FT-E was also an alumnus of a local 4-year university and an expert in his academic programs at ACC. He introduced his work relationship with transfer advising at the 4-year university. He said:

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We have an admission and transfer advisor from the local 4-year school who comes twice

a week (two days a week). When we have transfer guides published and stuff like that,

we work together. We sometimes work together on individual students. She asks me a

question about what they need to do or if they're getting ready for the university and they

haven't done exactly what we say, it's how can we get them to the university? And that's

usually about an individual student. So, in general, transfer guides and specifically about

individual students. Sometimes I tell all my students that they should go talk to this

advisor.

The constant presence of a transfer advisor from the local public university at ACC provides

immediate access for students contemplating transfer and serves as a conduit of information

sharing about the challenges students may have and resources available to support transfer

students after their transfer. The transfer advisor is a critical partner on campus.

By reviewing the transfer advising information on the university website, I located

information about the transfer advisor who focused on serving potential transfer students at ACC

and another two Virginia community colleges. During my observations of an On-site Admission

Day and a transfer training at ACC, this transfer advisor attended both activities. For the On-site

Admission Day, she led the university admission team, coordinated the event with the transfer

center leader, and met with transfer students at ACC. During the transfer training meeting, she

represented one of ACC's 4-year university partners and participated in the event. From the

communication between the advisor and ACC faculty and staff, I could see that she had a good

relationship with them, which no doubt helped sustain the transfer partnership between ACC and

the local 4-year university. Leader-C pointed out: "The local 4-year university is definitely a 4-

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year university that works more seamlessly with us. They give us details. They work with our students."

Furthermore, Leader-B described the faculty's involvement in vertical transfer and ACC's long-term transfer partnership with the local 4-year public university. She noted:

Faculty work in discipline contracts as liaisons to help align our students well for transfer. They also make sure that our curriculum is a good pathway to setting students up for success. Certainly, the local 4-year public university is where the vast majority of our students transferred to, and we have research that shows if a student does well here and has a 3.0 GPA, they're going to do well when they go to this university. That's institutional research telling us, but more importantly, they can see if there's a class or content area that students are not doing well in. Then we can get our faculty and their faculty together. So maybe we use the same textbook and better align the objective.

Faculty's work in their content areas strengthened their relationships with faculty and advisors in local 4-year institutions as well as facilitated a smoother pathway for transfer students to 4-year universities neighboring ACC. In particular, one local 4-year public university has become the primary receiving school for ACC transfer students. Nearly half the ACC transfer students enrolled at this university (SCHEV, n.d.-a). Faculty connected students to the university's professors and engaged students with undergraduate research projects, which laid the groundwork for positively impacting the transfer students' sense of belonging to their intended 4-year university in the region. Transfer students could envision themselves as students at this local university because most of their peers successfully transferred to the university and several alumni returned to ACC to share their experiences. Professor FT-E commented on this phenomenon: "Students are all focused on transfer. Some of them think they're a 4-year

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university student already. Some of them live in the university's city in the apartments." At ACC, faculty noted how transfer students felt like real college students and belonged in the local 4-year university because of the effective transfer partnership.

Collaborating With Transfer Center

The transfer center is an official place on campus that provides information, guidance, and resources for transfer students. All faculty participants said that they knew the location of the transfer center and the contact information of the transfer center leader. Their most frequent involvement with the transfer center was student referral. Additionally, they received emails from the transfer center leader and got notices about transfer events and resources on campus. Professor FT-A talked about her participation in a transfer event. She said: "I did help at a transfer fair. It was a really good experience." She also served on the curriculum committee, received updates on transfer programs and policies, and met with the leader of the transfer center.

As a director of the transfer center, Leader-B further described the process of how she reached out to students, faculty, and staff and kept the campus community updated on transfer-related activities. She noted:

> I coordinate college fairs, information tables, onsite admission events, and those types of things. I am sending out emails about this semester about "here are things going on that help support transfer students to learn." In addition to emailing all faculty and staff, I attend the curriculum meeting, or the faculty senate meetings and can tell them what's going on. And we have a monthly email newsletter. Any transfer support activity that's going on is entered there.

Leader-B shared with me a previous monthly newsletter. When reviewing the newsletter, I could see that the newsletter noted upcoming events ranging from education strategies to campus life. Specifically, there were three transfer announcements submitted by a private 4-year university neighboring ACC. The university is approximately a 20-minute drive time to ACC. It is also one of ACC's local partners. The university held three campus events and posted them in the ACC monthly newsletter. The upcoming campus events were named "Open House," "College Evening," and "Prospective Transfer Day." The prospective transfer day offered transfer students opportunities to visit the university, join in conversations with students at the university to learn about their experiences, and have lunch on campus. For transfer students, these events were helpful for them to get familiar with the university where they might be interested in pursuing their bachelor's degrees and to prepare for their transition into a 4-year university. Professor FT-C highlighted the value of the transfer events and motivated students to participate in these events. He noted:

> Every time that there is a transfer college fair and invite, I offer extra credit to my students to go to that fair. I think it's part of their academic process, and so for me, it's easy to do that because I think they benefit in my class that helps them have those academic goals.

In this case, Professor FT-C incentivized students to attend transfer events. Given the multiple demands on students' time, the offering of extra credit placed a value on their attendance at these events. Professor PT-B shared his opinions on encouraging transfer students to attend transfer events and meet with the transfer center when they sought information and advice. He stated:

If we don't meet because they're meeting with the transfer center, I don't hold them

accountable for that. I tell students that their future is more important than this. This hour

we kind of set aside and I don't want them to feel guilty about going to this opportunity.

Due to serving as a faculty leader, Professor FT-B got more involved in meetings with the

transfer center. She described her work. She said: "I'm a professor and an Associate Dean. I've

referred many students. On the dean side, I have also been in many meetings with the transfer

center as well trying to meet student needs."

Although faculty participants referred students to the transfer center and received activity

announcements from the center, they mentioned that they usually informed transfer activities to

students rather than getting involved in these activities themselves. Professor PT-D talked about

her experiences from a position as an adjunct faculty. She noted: "I don't have much involvement

with the things that they host outside of just the classes that I teach. Like I get invited to them.

They're just normally held during the day. And I can't make it to those events." As well, part-

time faculty do not have role responsibilities for events outside of their classroom teaching.

Faculty participants seldom attended transfer activities resulting from busy schedules in teaching

classes and serving academic programs. In particular, part-time faculty members had

commitments in other institutions and worked under per-semester contracts. The part-time

faculty centered their responsibility on teaching students. However, all faculty participants

pointed out that they paid high attention to addressing transfer students' questions and

communicated with transfer center. Leader-A gave an example of faculty contacting the transfer

center. She said:

If a student in their program is struggling, they'll contact us. Sometimes, for example, if a

student wants to transfer to a 4-year university but let's say they're doing C-level work.

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They're not going to get into the university. So that faculty member may refer students

back to us to look at other options. Those kinds of conversations are happening as well.

Leader-A commented on the working relationship with faculty members: "I have a great

relationship with our faculty across the college because they need outside of the class support to

help their students inside the classroom. Vice versa. So, we work very collaboratively." Supports

for inside classroom activities were linked to part-time faculty work responsibilities and done

more frequently.

Leader-C highlighted the collaboration between faculty members and transfer advisors in

the curriculum. She noted:

> I do see that on a smaller scale with the curriculum committee, faculty will come in and
>
> propose a class and then we kind of get to look at, okay, well if you start this new class,
>
> how does that affect the students? So, it's a really strong collaboration here. I think
>
> curriculum is the one thing that would bind us together.

Leaders' narratives mirrored how faculty participants engaged themselves in transfer

partnerships with 4-year programs. They worked closely with content area partners in local

universities neighboring ACC. Meanwhile, they motivated transfer students to attend various

transfer events on and outside of campus and collaborated with transfer center to make sure that

students were on the right track to transfer.

Faculty Role Model: A Transfer Champion

The fourth theme highlights a faculty participant who was a well-known expert in

transfer programs, coursework, and advising at ACC. The faculty's unique relationship with the

transfer center leader and her role in bridging academics and advising has established her

reputation as a faculty role model for getting involved in the vertical transfer. The narrative from

three senior transfer leaders outlined this faculty participant's services and contributions.

Unique Faculty-Advisor Relationship

When I invited the three leaders to describe an ideal community college faculty who supported transfer students, all of them recommended a particular professor as an active transfer advocate at ACC. By reviewing survey responses, I found that this professor submitted her completed survey early and expressed her willingness to participate in an interview. This information suggested that the noted faculty member was attentive to the research about the faculty's role in supporting community college transfer students intending to enter 4-year institutions. I did not know who the leaders would signal out as a great faculty transfer champion until their interviews and learned at that time that the faculty mentioned was selected for the interview portion of my study—it was Professor FT-D, one of nine faculty participants in the interview. She had served ACC for more than 15 years and taught courses in STEM disciplines. During my observations of transfer training and curriculum committee meeting, I was impressed by her strong voice in the conversation about transfer policies and her professional knowledge on both sides of advising and teaching.

From a position of an academic advisor, Leader-C shared an example of how she worked with this professor to guide students to make out a transferable curriculum. Leader-C stated:

> I dealt with the professor who is probably one of our strongest transfer advocates. I had a student that came in and wanted to do our STEM transfer degree. He had some credits here and some credits at other colleges. I started to look at it and try to figure out what he still needed. It was very complicated [be]cause the STEM classes that are segmented. So, I emailed her and said, can you please look at this student? She ended up giving him a

step-by-step plan on what he needed to do to finish our degree and also assisted him with

how it would transfer.

Leader-C expressed her appreciation of the professor's expertise in evaluating transfer courses

and assessing students' needs in vertical transfer. Leader-C remarked:

It's extremely helpful because we can follow the STEM transfer curriculum. But she

[Professor FT-D] really has the more in-depth knowledge on what the student needed and

how the courses were going on and changing. So, it was extremely helpful that she got

involved and did as much as she did.

Leader-C's description demonstrated Professor FT-D's high reputation in professional

knowledge and work for promoting the success of students to transfer to 4-year institutions. The

professor's rich experiences working with transfer students resulted in her becoming a faculty

role model. Professor FT-D's work in transfer support for students helped her establish a trustful

relationship with advisors.

Professor FT-D introduced her teaching and advising services to transfer students in her

classes. She said:

In the past, I was the program manager for all our transfer degrees, for the AA college

transfer and the AS science. As a program manager, I end up working with transfer

students that are trying to navigate the program especially the most complicated is

STEM, and to help facilitate this. About six years ago, I developed and started teaching a

student orientation course specifically for STEM transfer students. I teach a special

section for science, engineering, and computer science students. I work with these

transfer students. I help them develop their plan to get through the community college.

For the most part. I become these students' advisors, they come to me with their

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questions. Sometimes advisors will send me students I help advising because if they have

a real picky curricular question that's specific to STEM curriculum then curricular faculty

is sometimes in a better position to answer those questions.

Because of Professor FT-D's passion and effort in mentoring transfer students, students sought

her out for advice. Professor FT-D reflected: "Students found me approachable and then it kind

of got through the reputation." Meanwhile, Professor FT-D worked closely with the leader of

transfer center for advising transfer students and facilitating the implementation of transfer

programs. Leader-A described the collaboration between Professor FT-D and the leader of

transfer center. She said:

> They advise students together. The transfer center leader has a caseload of students. The
>
> professor has it as well. They'll talk back and forth about students. If a student gets off
>
> sequencing or needs to repeat a course, they're having conversations on how to catch
>
> them up or the student really needs to set back for a course. So, they're case managing
>
> their students together. The Professor tends to do a lot of the curriculum advisement,
>
> whereas transfer center leader is handling a lot of the service advisement.

This expanded role for the faculty member makes Professor FT-D a faculty leader on campus

even though she does not have a central campus administrative role.

> Professor FT-D further described her close working relationship with the leader of the

transfer center. She gave an example of their collaboration on attending *Transfer Virginia*

monthly meetings and dispersing information to the campus community. Professor FT-D stated:

> The transfer center leader and I are two state representatives of our college. There would
>
> be a monthly meeting and the *Transfer [Virginia]* Director sends a summary and a Zoom
>
> recording. The transfer center leader is really good about this. She'll actually highlight

things and send them to various people and be like, "you need to look at this register. They're doing a portal thing. Did you look at this?" I deal more with the curriculum and again, the faculty stuff. I'm more likely to be, "your discipline is coming on board for discussing its common curriculum. Did you get this email? Are you planning on going to your disciplinary meeting? Do you need me to explain anything to you about what it is you're going to be asked to do?"

The two campus representatives broached their roles in *Transfer Virginia* from their particular vantage points. The transfer center director paid attention to keeping advisors updated about transfer applications, requirements, and the resources for guiding students, whereas Professor FT-D focused on curricular and disciplinary perspectives. Correspondingly, the leader of the transfer center shared her experience working with Professor FT-D in *Transfer Virginia*. She said:

I'm a professional faculty non-teaching, and I'm paired with the Professor FT-D who's a teaching faculty member. We work together on the *Transfer Virginia* initiatives. She does all the formal emails to faculty for the good of *Transfer Virginia*. She's the faculty liaison and I'm the staff, direct service, and advisor liaison. I work very closely with her. We both always know what everyone's doing.

In addition to working together for *Transfer Virginia* initiatives, Professor FT-D and the leader of the transfer center collaborated with hosting programs for educating faculty members and advisors about vertical transfer. Professor FT-D noted: "We have hosted presentations where we talk about the *Transfer Virginia* stuff. We are having *Transfer Virginia* Director going to come in. We're all going to get together. So again, that's an effort." The leader of the transfer center emphasized the positive impact of Professor FT-D on engaging faculty members in getting

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updates on vertical transfer. She said: "If this professor will host a presentation about transfer or curriculum changes at the faculty Senate and for those who attend the faculty senate, which is probably a third of the faculty. They're there and engaged." In this capacity, Professor FT-D held high levels of social capital with her fellow faculty members and the information she shared was received differently compared to if it had been a proclamation by central administration.

The transfer center director further explained the significance of having Professor FT-D's support in communicating with faculty in 4-year institutions. She said:

> The one thing I like about having a faculty working closely with me is she has clout with other faculty at 4-year colleges. Because the truth of the matter is I can email them, but they see I'm not a teaching faculty and they might just blow my email off, but if she emails, I'm a faculty and the science rep, then sometimes she can get answers that I can't because it's faculty to faculty. I think that's a real dynamic.

Again, the social capital and credibility Professor FT-D had at her disposal for working with faculty members was higher than the Transfer Director.

During my visit to the transfer center, I could see the business cards of Professor FT-D that were put together with the business cards of transfer advisors. I met with Professor FT-D who was very familiar with the transfer center and passionate about helping transfer students. The professor's office was in a science building within a 10-min walk to the transfer center. The short distance also brought convenience for in-person communication. Both Professor FT-D and the leader of the transfer center had served transfer students for more than 10 years. They collaborated on hosting programs, sat on the curriculum committee, represented ACC to attend transfer-related meetings at the state level, and worked for *Transfer Virginia* initiatives. Based on the consistent and effective collaboration, they built a faculty-advisor relationship contributing to

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vertical transfer. Professor FT-D underlined the value of this unique relationship. She remarked:

"I don't know entirely how other colleges do this. But I do think from talking to colleagues at other colleges that transfer center leader and I have a pretty unique relationship in terms of having faculty and advising working together."

Bridging Academics and Advising

Because of the long-standing divide between academic affairs and student affairs, developing partnerships to bridge the two areas is increasingly important for student success in higher education (Eddy & Kirby, 2020). At ACC, Professor FT-D represented a faculty role model in advising transfer students and promoting vertical transfer. Her work helped to bridge academics and advising. From a position as a coordinator of academic advising, Leader-C described her deep impression of Professor FT-D's knowledge in both sides of academics and advising. She noted:

> Professor FT-D is on the curriculum committee. When I started on that committee, I would listen to her talk. She was the one person that watched out for both sides, like advising and the instructors. I was just in awe of her because at that point I didn't know there were instructors who even thought about us.

Leader-C further commented on Professor FT-D's high involvement in transfer advising. She said: "She really gets involved. It's very helpful for us to make sure the students are getting the right information. But then it's hard because some faculty don't keep up with advising." Given the existing knowledge gap between faculty and advising, Professor FT-D shared her opinions. She said:

> Some faculty do not understand what the advising deals with when students sit in their offices because we've insulated them from that. Some faculty do not have students

turning up in their offices trying to figure out how to get to wherever. I mean that's kind

of unique to the trickier majors. The fact, there's a lot of stuff when we're having debates

about it in the curriculum. I'm actually on the side with advising. I'm advocating their

position because it makes a lot more sense.

In colleges and universities, faculty often exercised the power in decision-making in curriculum

and teaching (Bess & Dee, 2008). As the course credits are the crucial part for students

transferring to a 4-year institution, faculty need to know how courses transfer into the 4-year

universities in order to better support transfer students.

Professor FT-D spoke about the active role she played in engaging faculty members in

the conversation with transfer advisors related to the curriculum. She noted: "Especially in

curriculum, there's a history where faculty don't always listen to advising. But if it's coming from

me, they're like, "I guess, I have to listen to that."" Professor FT-D underscored that community

college faculty should consider transfer as a whole rather than merely center on their disciplines

or departments. However, it was a challenge for faculty members. Professor FT-D illustrated this

challenge. She said:

Faculty have to think of it as a combination of courses. In other words, not just advocate

for their disciplinary area, but think about overall what the package of credits is. I think

that's a changing faculty role and responsibility that for a long time they could get away

with not really paying attention to the whole curriculum. Faculty need to understand how

it works as a whole and be better advocates for a big picture collection of courses.

Furthermore, she highlighted the important role of faculty in helping advisors understand the

curriculum. She said: "The faculty can advise the advisors on curricular issues especially when

it's a very specialized curriculum. That's important." Correspondingly, Leader-C shared her

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perspectives on the importance of establishing a partnership between faculty and advisors to better help transfer students in vertical transfer pathways. She noted:

> I think it would be faculty that work closely with us to share information. Like we could share information about the curriculum, they can share information about the coursework in the class, and how the course fits into the student's transfer plan. I think ideally it would be a partnership between us and the faculty.

The supportive interaction could foster the establishment of a partnership. Leader-C talked about her pleasant experience communicating with Professor FT-D. She commented: "This professor is not intimidating. She really knows her stuff. I have no problem asking her questions. She's definitely great." Leader-C's experience suggested a trustful relationship between Professor FT-D and advisors, which could facilitate a shared success of advising transfer students.

As a Dean of Student Success, Leader-A acknowledged Professor FT-D's outstanding work in helping transfer students navigate the transfer pathways and underlined the professor's contribution to bridging academics and advising. Leader-A noted:

> I think the professor does a super job. She takes it seriously. She's teaching the introductory course, so she gets to meet students. She works with students in the STEM programs too. She understands course sequencing and pays attention to what's happening at other 4-year universities. She's constantly having these conversations with her students. She invites transfer advisors into her class to talk to students. I would say she truly is one of the best. I wish that other people took such a proactive role like she does.

The overall descriptions from ACC senior transfer leaders outlined the unique faculty-advisor relationship between Professor FT-D and the transfer center director as well as the active role of Professor FT-D in bridging academics and advising to support transfer students' success.

Through my observation of ACC transfer training and the following leadership lunch, I could see from the top-level leaders (the President and the Academic Deans) to the mid-level leaders (Department Chairs and Program Directors) to first-line leaders (advisors and coordinators), and to local partners in 4-year schools (admission staff and counselors), they showed high respect for Professor FT-D's opinions on transfer programs. Her long-term service at ACC, professional knowledge of the transferable credit courses, and contribution to students' successful transfer built her well-earned reputation of being like a transfer champion. As a faculty role model, Professor FT-D's remarkable work in vertical transfer could inspire more people to get involved in improving transfer pathways in some way as she did. Leader-A mentioned her future hopes. She said: "It would be interesting to see what the professor does and how she keeps up with it. Because I think whatever she does, I would like to see replicated in other areas."

Professional Development on Transfer

The fifth theme was about the faculty's expectations of professional development on transfer. Professional development activities usually provide opportunities for the campus community to learn skills and build a network to foster their growth. In early February, ACC held a transfer training program, which was the first campus-wide professional development event in 2023. The intention of the workshop was to expand people's knowledge about *Transfer Virginia* initiatives and network with ACC faculty, staff, VCCS administrators, and partners in local 4-year schools. During interviews for this study, both full-time faculty participants and part-time faculty participants shared their perspectives on their expected type of professional development activities that would help them learn about the transfer.

Full-Time Faculty's Expectations

All five full-time faculty participants sat on the curriculum committee, collaborated with faculty in 4-year institutions to build the common curriculum, and got informed of *Transfer Virginia*'s current work in developing a portal to ease the transfer process. They talked about their expectations of faculty professional development activities that could help them learn more about *Transfer Virginia* initiatives and connect their learning to the educational practices of serving transfer students. Professor FT-C noted:

> I think the college has done a great job of educating us on the *Transfer Virginia* initiatives, but that's more on making sure that our classes are prepared and ready for *Transfer Virginia* because it's such a big initiative by the VCCS and making sure that we know exactly how to help our students specifically, practically, and personally. Some training on that might be really good.

This faculty participant provided suggestions on the potential schedule and form of faculty professional development activities on transfer. Professor FT-C added:

> For example, when we go back to the campus on the first week of January, we'll have three days of professional development on that day. It would probably be great to have the transfer center leader has one of those hours for the transfer to help us know how we as faculty could do a better job making sure that we have the correct and basic information. Maybe even, she could get us a [frequently asked questions] card with the answers on it. That would be something that would be useful for us to help with our transfer students and make sure that every one of us as faculty and even do this in the adjunct faculty.

Professor FT-A also emphasized the need of getting updates about *Transfer Virginia* initiatives and making accessible print materials that could help people who still preferred paper copies over digital copies. She noted:

> I think the biggest thing is I would like help making sure that we're giving up-to-date information about transferring especially with *Transfer [Virginia]* right now. Everything is still a little bit up in the air. And so having the most up-to-date information. I'm old enough that I like paper. I would like a handout with bullet points about here are the changes to transfer information and here are people you should contact.

How information is shared about transfer at ACC matters in keeping faculty informed. What type of professional development programming occurs to expand transfer knowledge also matters as this learning can help expand faculty engagement in transfer and help students receive up-to-date and accurate information.

Professor FT-E shared his perspectives on the faculty's professional development on transfer and highlighted the necessity to know how to guide students to make use of the *Transfer Virginia* portal as a tool to map out their transfer plans. He said:

> We're implementing all these new curricula that came out of *Transfer Virginia*. So that's the thing that probably currently we need to know as college faculty about transfer is how all that's working. There's a website that students can go on when they're in high school. I want to go to this 4-year school and this major, but I want to start at this 2-year school. What courses should I take? What majors should I do? and stuff like that. We need to know more about that stuff.

Again, having accurate information on the transfer process makes a difference. Being a faculty member who identified herself as a minority, Professor FT-B further illustrated the function of

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faculty professional development not only for expanding faculty's knowledge about transfer policies but also advancing their understanding of students' needs. She said:

> Professional development activities could be in the service that we provide to our faculty. These are the state initiatives. These are the agreements that we have with four years. On the diversity end, we need to meet on the student side. How do we communicate responsibly? How do we create an environment where they're welcome and they can find the resources? I come from a diverse background, so I can easily identify those, but not all of our faculty do. So that's where professional development opportunities need to come in.

Supporting faculty through professional development programming becomes critical to transfer outcomes.

As one of the state representatives at ACC, Professor FT-D worked with the transfer center leader to plan and host professional development activities on campus. She pointed out the existing situation of faculty attendance in professional development activities. She said:

> Since *Transfer Virginia* started even before that we offer presentations. We give workshops. We make professional development available. We generally are very hesitant to mandate it for a lot of reasons. There's no state mandate or college mandate that says everybody has to go listen to the talk about transfer.

Meanwhile, Professor FT-D underscored the powerful influence of top-level leaders on promoting professional development activities and engaging faculty in these activities. She said: "We actively promote this stuff. Our Vice President of Instruction and Student Services has actually been very good about promoting. 'You should go to these events. You should be

interested in this. You should pay attention. This is important.'" Leadership buy-in to the importance of transfer helps support faculty working in the classrooms.

Part-Time Faculty's Expectations

All four part-time faculty participants described their expectations of faculty professional development on transfer. Different from full-time faculty participants' concentration on transfer initiatives at the state level, part-time faculty participants desired to know more about transfer program information, academic major requirements, students' transfer process, and mentoring skills. Professor PT-B proposed his suggestions for keeping faculty informed on transfer programs in particular the specific contact information of 4-year institutions. He noted:

> Being an adjunct professor, all of the professional development activities are going to be optional. I think it would be important for all faculty to be aware of at least through the individuals who to contact at all times for the transfer program. And be aware of who to contact at each particular college and whether it's a 4-year university nearby.

The fact that Professor PT-B could not identify a point person to contact for transfer questions shows a gap on campus regarding faculty awareness levels. Knowing that the participants were selected because of their heightened engagement with transfer students can mask the extent to which transfer information is widely known and used by all faculty members.

Considering the potential of on-site professional development activities, Professor PT-D suggested the creation of virtual transfer training courses that could benefit adjunct faculty to learn on their own. These faculty could then utilize the information for mentoring students. She said:

> Because I'm an adjunct professor so anything asynchronous would be super helpful just because I can't attend during the day. I'd say like a crash course into the different

universities that students can transfer to. Here's how you find the program requirements

because most of the time, I don't know what is required of my students. Those would be

things that are good to know. Maybe some general life skills and help to mentor students.

Here's how you can balance some things that would help students overall.

With the same concern on mentoring students, Professor PT-A underlined that professional

development activities ought to expand faculty's knowledge about their students in order to help

faculty connect to their students more. She stated: I think faculty should want to know more

about their students. If I'm hosting it, I want them to know their students more especially the

diverse students." Making students feel seen and heard, and like they belong on campus was

evident to these part-time faculty participants as a critical strategy for student engagement.

From the standpoint of receiving professional development about the transfer, Professor

PT-C discussed the practical information required to equip faculty with skills for addressing

transfer students' issues and guiding these students through the transfer process. She said:

I would be happy to sit through a training on the general life cycle of the transfer process.

Starting from a student expressing interest in the transfer until they successfully complete

the transfer. What should they expect to do? What are they looking for at each step?

What should they be focusing on? and including their people, who should I contact? If I

have a student who's asking a question that says they're somewhere in the first stage or

the second stage, it gives a bit more of a framework for this student is coming to me with

a question where do they fit? Because that helps me better serve them.

Furthermore, Professor PT-C suggested that understanding the basic elements about transfer and

the responsibilities of adjunct professors have for sharing this information with students would

be helpful. She recommended providing specific support materials such as a list of common questions facing transfer students that could help adjunct faculty to respond to students' needs. Professor PT-C added:

> I think as an adjunct faculty, it is a little above and beyond our role to expect us to know how the transfer program works or to know details about that. I think it is reasonable for us to know who to send the student to when they say, "I want to transfer, I need help."
>
> We should at the very least have some list of "this question goes to this person."

Having all faculty members, including part-time faculty, understand the basics of the transfer process, common questions and answers about transfer, and who and what office faculty should identify for student referrals would help develop all faculty to be transfer advocates.

Due to serving as a leader of the faculty association, Professor PT-C spoke about the importance of helping adjunct faculty feel more connected on campus. She said:

> What I'm trying to do with it right now is to build a footprint among the adjunct community and try to figure out what on campus is useful to adjuncts. I'm trying to make a more direct connection between the adjuncts and what is available on campus partly to help students out. But a lot of it is also to make adjuncts feel more connected and invested in unity, more part of the campus.

Compared to the descriptions between full-time faculty participants and part-time faculty participants, I noted that the extent of community college faculty involvement in transfer work affected their expectations of professional development. Full-time faculty participants exercised more power in curriculum building and transfer programs than part-time faculty participants. They were more attentive to the change in state transfer policies and the impact of these policies on the academic programs. Because all the full-time faculty participants served on the curriculum

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committee, they directly engaged in making decisions and having dialogue with top leaders about decisions regarding the transfer programs and the partnerships with 4-year universities. My observations of a curriculum committee meeting and transfer training on campus provided me an opportunity to see that full-time faculty members had a higher attendance rate than part-time faculty. These full-time faculty members tended to raise questions and speak up in the meetings more often, whereas part-time faculty were often quiet.

Regarding professional development, part-time faculty participants were more interested in learning transfer requirements and having a toolkit to better serve transfer students and address their questions in the transfer process. All four part-time participants mentioned that they seldom participated in professional development activities. They preferred a more flexible, comprehensive, and accessible transfer training or course online for them to learn in a self-paced manner.

The faculty professional development that met both full-time faculty and part-time faculty's needs would be an ideal opportunity to educate them about transfer. Professor FT-C clearly described what a good faculty professional development activity could look like. He remarked: "Professional development that happens [to help faculty members] know exactly what our responsibilities are, what the college expects of us, who we can communicate to, and who we can send our students to communicate to would be very good." Professional development opportunities to support faculty members in doing their job better would be welcome by all faculty.

Summary

This chapter presented a profile of participants by outlining the process of using a survey to inform faculty participants about an opportunity to participate in research interviews.

Ultimately, 12 participants were included in the study—nine faculty participants and three senior transfer leaders. The chapter provided a detailed narrative of five themes that responded to the research questions in the study. Under the theoretical framework of momentum for community college student success (Wang, 2017), the results demonstrate that faculty members' mentorship for transfer students in and out of the classroom aligns with building the three main domains of momentum including curricular, classroom teaching and learning, and students' motivational attributes and beliefs. Meanwhile, the faculty's knowledge of transfer students' pre-entry experiences, academic preparation, and conflicting commitments aligns with reducing the friction on counteracting transfer students' momentum.

There is a need to explain how faculty involvement in vertical transfer affects transfer students' momentum toward moving to 4-year universities. In particular, one faculty participant who held a leading role in advocating vertical transfer and advising transfer students was recognized as a faculty role model. The unique faculty-advisor relationship and faculty's contribution to bridging academics and advising help extend the explanation to the model of the momentum for community college student success. Furthermore, as a rural community college surrounded by 4-year universities in the local place, faculty's engagement in transfer partnerships and expectations of professional development activities can provide implications for advancing policies and practices in vertical transfer pathways. In the next chapter, I explain the relationship between the study's results and the theoretical framework, and discuss the study's recommendations, future directions of research, and conclusion.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This case study explored the role of community college faculty in the transfer process, with a particular focus on the vertical transfer pathways. Using the theoretical model of momentum as a framework, the study aimed to answer the research questions:

1. In a rural community college with a high student transfer rate, how do faculty perceive their role in the transfer process?

    a. How do they foster partnerships with 4-year programs that assist students with navigating transfer?

    b. How do they partner with the college's transfer center to support student transfer?

2. In a rural community college with a high student transfer rate, how do faculty interact with potential vertical transfer students?

    a. What interactions occur in the classroom that promote transfer?

    b. What interactions occur outside the classroom that promote transfer?

The case study findings revealed participants' perceptions of faculty's roles in supporting transfer students in a rural community college and their work in facilitating the vertical transfer process. To frame this chapter, I first illustrate how the findings correspond to the research questions. Then, I compare the findings to the existing literature on transfer and assess how the study's findings have relevance or contribution to the previous literature. I further tie the study's findings to the theoretical model of momentum. Based on the discussion of the study's findings, I provide implications for transfer policy and practice to amplify the faculty's voice in the

vertical transfer process as well as to engage faculty in building more equitable vertical transfer pathways. I close this chapter with recommendations for future research and conclusions.

Discussion on Faculty Involvement in Vertical Transfer

Centering on the purpose of the case study, I collected data from multiple sources (documents, an online survey, interviews, and observations), and derived five themes through data analysis. The five themes included: (a) vertical transfer pathways at a rural community college, (b) teaching and learning at a rural community college, (c) transfer partnerships with 4-year programs, (d) faculty role model, and (e) professional development on transfer. The five themes disclose the ways in which faculty were involved in the vertical transfer. In the following section, I present the interpretation of the five themes, discuss the relationship between faculty's involvement and transfer students' momentum, and explain the potential extension of the theoretical framework to draw attention to community college faculty's impact on students' momentum toward a successful transfer to 4-year institutions.

Recognizing Faculty's Role in Transfer Process

A national report comparing enrollments from Spring 2020 to Spring 2023 highlighted that community college enrollments had a slight increase, whereas 4-year institutions continued to experience a decline in undergraduate enrollment (Berg et al., 2023). The grim situation of undergraduate enrollment heightens 4-year institutions' need for transfer students from community colleges. Previous research stressed transfer as a critical avenue for community college students' mobility to 4-year institutions (Cohen et al., 2013; Dawson et al., 2021; Handel & Williams, 2012; Taylor & Jain, 2017). Getting students to prepare for transfer has become an institutional mission of community colleges (Beach, 2011; Cohen et al., 2013; Townsend, 2001; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). Within this context, the study's first research question was an

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inquiry about the faculty's perception of their role in the transfer process. The site college for this study was a rural community college with a high transfer rate. The nine faculty participants in the study articulated their commitment to the college's mission of meeting the educational needs of transfer students.

Because most of the students at ACC planned to transfer to 4-year schools, faculty participants had a primary emphasis on helping students move forward. Both full-time and part-time faculty participants knew that students planned to transfer from their college to local 4-year schools. As a result of the campus's focus on transfer and the college's distinctive characteristics of having a long-term transfer partnership with local 4-year schools and a collaborative institutional culture in serving students, faculty members used early in-class communication with students to review and know their transfer plans. Rural community colleges usually have limited resources (Eddy et al., 2019) and as a result may not have as many student services staff in advising and transfer offices. Thus, faculty's knowledge about students' transfer plans and transfer programs serves as a vital resource of information and motivation for students, which actively impact students' aspirations in pursuing bachelor's degrees (Chrystal et al., 2013; Hlinka, 2017; Hlinka et al., 2015; Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020).

Faculty participants' descriptions of their informal transfer advising highlight how they augment the formal transfer advising that is typically the sole responsibility of student services offices. In rural community colleges that are short staffed, employees take on multiple duties and have a heightened awareness of the work of all the offices on campus and the resources available to students. In the classroom, the faculty participants reported how they prioritized teaching students to improve their learning of content in their disciplines. The informal transfer advising between faculty participants and transfer students mainly centered on academic programs or

disciplines that faculty participants were knowledgeable about. If transfer students asked specific questions about topics such as applications, requirements, or transferable credits, faculty participants, in particular part-time faculty participants primarily referred transfer students to transfer advisors for obtaining formal advising services.

The informal transfer advising role the participants noted suggests that transfer students tended to seek advice from their instructors in the classroom about the transfer process. The presence of these transfer students in classes plays a crucial role in motivating faculty to become a connection between transfer students and transfer resources. The research site is a rural community college. The long-term presidency, successful leadership, the designated transfer center and staff, and the sustainable partnership with local 4-year schools all contribute to building a transfer culture on campus. This transfer culture contributes to the college's high transfer rate compared to the other 13 rural community colleges in Virginia. As a small size college that encourages campuswide collaboration, both full-time and part-time faculty participants knew how to refer transfer students to advisors and often referred transfer students to advisors. These actions highlight their strong commitment to the community college's mission of supporting student transfer. All faculty participants shared a common commitment to their role as a connector to help transfer students become aware of available resources and encourage transfer students to use resources on campus and in 4-year institutions. In rural community colleges, faculty hold a pivotal role in connecting students to campus resources and information (Finnegan, 2019). Faculty participants' perception of their role as a connector reflected their crucial influence on helping students locate resources that could help guide them through the transfer process.

Central to research question one about faculty's role in the transfer process, the results of faculty participants' work with local partners and collaboration with the college's transfer center indicates that the faculty in this study were actively involved with the transfer center on campus and in sharing information with students about transfer. On the state level, VCCS is a system that provides guidance for community colleges' transfer policy implementation and makes *Transfer Virginia* a statewide legislative initiative to bring faculty collaboration between 2-year community colleges and 4-year institutions. In this study, the full-time faculty participants all served on the college's curriculum committee and received updates on *Transfer Virginia* initiatives. Their involvement in *Transfer Virginia* helped to build common curricula in their disciplinary areas to ease the vertical transfer process. Faculty participants' service on curriculum committee and their active involvement in *Transfer Virginia* demonstrated their commitment to promoting transfer. Previous research has emphasized community college faculty as an important component to sustain transfer partnerships and support transfer by involvement in working with transfer partners and transfer-related tasks (Yeh & Wetzstein, 2020).

Faculty participants worked closely with local 4-year schools because these schools were the primary receiving schools for their transfer students. The purpose of building common curricula pathways between the community college and the nearby 4-year universities aligns with the guided pathways framework (Bailey et al., 2015) for streamlining students' educational journey. Finnegan (2019) pointed out the role community college faculty have in their participation in developing guided pathways (Bailey et al., 2015). Although community colleges nationwide have implemented the guided pathways, 45% of faculty have very little or no knowledge about the guided pathways (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2020). My study confirmed that all full-time faculty participants knew *Transfer Virginia* built

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guided pathways between community colleges and 4-year universities and created transfer

guides based on common curricula for students to explore transfer opportunities throughout the

state and plan their educational journey (Transfer Virginia Administrative Site, n.d.). The part-

time faculty participants, however, did not mention involvement in *Transfer Virginia.* Thus, it is

important for campus leaders to find ways to improve knowledge sharing with part-time faculty

because this group of faculty teaches the majority of community college students, and given the

role faculty in the classroom have in serving as a primary resource for students about transfer and

their interaction with transfer students outside the classroom to connect students to resources

they serve as critical linchpins in improving transfer success for students.

 In addition to working with local 4-year schools to help build common curricula, other

faculty participants described that they fostered relationships with content area faculty in nearby

4-year universities, connected transfer students with faculty, advisors, alumni from the local 4-

year schools, and engaged transfer students in undergraduate research projects. Faculty

participants' efforts helped increase transfer students' knowledge about academics and campus

life at local 4-year schools. Prior research has suggested that early exposure to 4-year university

culture and expectations helps community college transfer students navigate their vertical

transfer process (Wang et al., 2020). What is more, the good relationships between faculty

participants and faculty members in the 4-year schools reinforce collaboration that serves to

facilitate transfer programs. Thus, there is not only benefit to transfer students as a result of

obtaining consistent transfer information from their faculty members (Jackson, 2013), but also

benefits to the community colleges as they build transfer partnership capital that supports long-

term successful collaborations among the institutions (Amey et al., 2010).

At the research site of my study, the transfer center is a hub for students, faculty, advisors, and local transfer partners. All nine faculty participants mentioned that they paid attention to announcements from the transfer center and informed students about transfer events and activities on campus and in the local 4-year schools. On the student side, faculty members play a role as a connector and become a resource for transfer students. On the community college side, faculty members improve transfer students' engagement and facilitate the implementation of campus activities. Kisker (2007) confirmed the positive influence of faculty in sustaining and institutionalizing transfer activities on campus.

Central to their role as a connector, full-time and part-time faculty participants expressed their different expectations on professional development on transfer topics. Prior research recommended professional training as a means to equip faculty members with the knowledge and skills to support transfer students (Davies, 1999; Finnegan, 2019; Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020). The findings from my study point out the different developmental needs of full-time faculty and part-time faculty given their different roles, which contribute to how faculty prefer learning how to provide better support to transfer students. Full-time faculty participants experienced a broader extent of college transfer work than part-time faculty participants. They served the college for a long period, became familiar with campus resources, and built a network on campus, which equipped them with the knowledge base and skills to connect transfer students to resources. Yet, part-time faculty participants who were new to the college did not have these advantages. They learned to address transfer students' questions either by googling, searching the college's website, or asking their department chairs, peers, and transfer center. Although faculty participants all viewed themselves as connectors for transfer students, full-time faculty participants wanted to learn more about transfer policies and information at the state level

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whereas part-time faculty participants wanted to know more about the practical details of the students' transfer process and requirements between the research site and the local 4-year universities. Further, part-time faculty members desired more online options for professional development. This finding can help improve the design of faculty professional development on transfer at community colleges.

In this study, the faculty participants were selected due to their high interaction with transfer students in and out of the classroom. Faculty's perceptions of their role as a connector in the transfer process reveal that they see themselves holding a positive role in helping transfer students. Some faculty participants with administrative duties also taught in the classroom. They paid great attention to informing students about transfer resources and policies. Faculty participants involvement in transfer work with local partners and the college's transfer center reinforces their experience in guiding transfer students move toward to 4-year schools and enhances their role as a connector for students' successful transfer. Furthermore, the study shows that part-time faculty were also committed to the college's transfer mission, provided informal transfer advising, and connected transfer students to resources on campus and in the local community. Previous research suggested a negative relationship between community college students' exposure to part-time faculty instruction and their likelihood of transferring (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009; Xu, 2019). In contrast to this result, my study provides specific information about part-time faculty participants' involvement in the transfer process. It helps inform understanding about the positive influence part-time faculty can have on transfer students toward 4-year institutions, especially in the context that community colleges increasingly relied on the teaching of part-time faculty (Ran & Sanders, 2019).

Highlighting Faculty's Interaction With Transfer Students

In this study, the second research question inquired about the faculty participants' interaction with potential vertical transfer students. In the classroom, teaching is the primary activity of faculty members. All nine faculty participants showed a once-a-week frequent interaction with transfer students in their class. They noted that almost 90% of their students intended to transfer to 4-year schools, thus indicating a high knowledge level about their students' educational goals. During class, faculty participants got to know their students' transfer plans, academic challenges, and pre-entry experiences. Crisp and Nuñez (2014) suggested that the factors including socio-demographic (e.g., socioeconomic status, financial aid support); precollege; environmental pull factors (e.g., family responsibility, work commitment, part-time enrollment); degree expectations; and individual college experiences all influenced the vertical transfer process. These factors were evidenced in this study. For example, faculty participants described students' struggles because of their conflicting commitments from study, work, and family.

Faculty participants underscored that their transfer students who came from first-generation and low-income backgrounds faced challenges in financial pressure and academic preparation. These students often lacked knowledge about academic expectations and the rigor of higher education, which affected their aspirations to go to 4-year institutions. To better support transfer students, faculty participants initiated conversations with students in the early stage of the semester and started to build a relationship with their students. The faculty-student in-class interactions helped transfer students facilitate their academic adjustment (Laanan, 2001) and connected them to academic learning in higher education (Flaga, 2006). In addition to describing faculty participants' early communication with transfer students, the study presented a summary

of questions used by faculty to organize the first-class conversation and get information about their students. These findings help advance an understanding of community college faculty's effort in building relationships with students and its influence on the students' learning experience. In particular, through first-class communication, faculty participants could identify transfer students, which in turn benefits transfer students to feel valued when faculty know their educational needs and provide them with support.

The early conversations establish a foundation for faculty to mentor transfer students in the classroom. All the faculty participants demonstrated their awareness to embrace diversity and adjust their mentoring strategies to help students get prepared for their transfer to 4-year schools. The research site is a Predominately White institution. The minority faculty members play an outsized role in educating the campus community about diversity and improving their cultural competence given how few there are on campus. Their self-identity deeply shapes how they mentor students. For example, one faculty participant with a self-identity as a first-generation college student and a minority member on campus noted that she was attentive to creating a welcoming environment, building a network for students, and helping students find resources. In addition, faculty's academic backgrounds affect the way they mentor students. For example, the faculty participant in a STEM program emphasized honesty and truth when she shared her lived experiences with students. As a woman in the science field, she took a value-free and objective approach. Wang (2020) suggested that women transfer students who experienced gendered stereotypes and biases had concerns about their success in STEM fields. Thus, this faculty participant's mentorship could help motivate STEM transfer students especially women students to persist in STEM fields and pursue success as she did.

During mentoring transfer students in the classroom, faculty participants reflected on their educational practices and made changes to promote an inclusive and equitable learning environment. For example, one faculty participant shared how she observed how racial minority students asked questions about transfer and how she encouraged them to advocate for themselves not only at their college but also when they transferred to 4-year schools. Eddy and Kirby (2020) pointed out that people with an equity mindset shaped how they understood students' experiences especially the experiences of students of color. When the faculty participants used an equity mindedness approach, they could identify the issues facing transfer students from racial minority backgrounds and could empower them to achieve their transfer aspirations. This finding highlights the role of community college faculty members in mentoring minority transfer students, which can address the transfer racial gap noted in prior research (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Crisp et al., 2020; Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012).

Faculty participants organized discussions in class, shared their college experiences with students, and engaged students in talking about their own stories. The open discussions fostered mutual understanding between faculty and students. Transfer students, in particular first-generation students, can learn from their faculty college experiences and increase their knowledge about higher education. What is more, faculty participants invited ACC alumni who had successfully transferred and 4-year schools' advisors to the classroom and this networking opportunity with their students contemplating transfer provided more in-depth information about what student life is like post-transfer. The information shared by college alumni and transfer advisors serves as a resource to improve transfer student capital (Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020) as students navigate the transfer process. Through a network, transfer students build a relationship with college alumni and transfer advisors from 4-year schools. As Flaga (2006) and

Chrystal et al. (2013) suggested, students consider the social transition as well as the academic transition when they enter 4-year schools. The finding in this study demonstrates how community college faculty enhance their classroom to provide a nurturing space for improving students' social transition in vertical transfer.

In the classroom, the interactions between faculty and potential vertical transfer students showcase the role faculty members have in building a welcoming space, being equity mindedness, empowering students to achieve their transfer aspirations, inviting students to share stories, and connecting students to transfer peers and advisors. These strategies are similar to Wang and colleague's (2021) specific recommendations for faculty to improve transfer student success. Outside the classroom, faculty participants interacted with potential vertical transfer students by providing services to support them in the transfer process. For example, faculty participants described that they added explanations of their office hours in the syllabuses and spoke about the meaning of office hours to students to encourage them to visit during office hours and ask questions. This finding was a recommendation for practice in the literature for faculty to "normalize help-seeking behaviors" for supporting transfer students (Wang et al., 2021, p. 12). Faculty participants also wrote reference letters, referred transfer students to advisors, and increased students' exposure to transfer information and services. These findings also align with the conclusions of prior research (Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020) about how faculty supportive sources increase students' transfer capital. The descriptions from three senior transfer leaders provided confirmations of faculty participants' contributions to the support network of transfer students and working with local 4-year schools and the college's transfer center to support transfer students.

The outbreak of COVID-19 deeply affected transfer students from achieving their goals to enter 4-year institutions, as Brohawn and colleagues (2021) suggested, and evidenced by how faculty participants described transfer students' challenges in the pandemic. When all classes shifted to online, students in rural areas faced issues that disrupted their transfer plans. For example, faculty participants noted that the student populations who were most challenged in the pandemic were rural students because of their limited access to broadband and technology. The faculty participants connected students to campus resources such as tutoring centers and labs that offered reliable internet and computers. Faculty participants also mentioned that they provided students with emotional support to retain them to complete their education. They used multiple ways to reach students, gave timely responses, kept flexibility, and continued to offer hybrid classes after the pandemic. This point shows that faculty in rural community colleges take various roles in supporting students (Finnegan, 2019). The findings of this study present in detail faculty participants' interaction with potential vertical transfer students to help them get through the pandemic, which contributes to understanding the importance of faculty support for community college transfer students during times of crisis.

Faculty's Involvement and Transfer Students' Momentum

In this case study, I used the theoretical model of momentum for community college student success (Wang, 2017) as a framework to explore the community college faculty's involvement in supporting transfer students in vertical transfer pathways. Wang (2017) applied momentum as a term to delineate students' progress to achieve their goals in education. When students pursue educational goals, their momentum is affected by collective forces which can either support students moving forward or produce friction that builds resistance to forward progress (Wang, 2017). With a focus on community college student success, the momentum

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model (Wang, 2017) addresses students' momentum building through educators' enablement and empowerment. In this case study, community college student success focused narrowly on rural community college vertical transfer student success. The momentum is limited to transfer students' progress toward a successful transfer to a 4-year institution. Faculty's interaction with transfer students and faculty's services on transfer partnerships become forces that can affect transfer students' momentum. As the findings show, faculty participants were committed to the college's transfer mission and perceived their role as a connector for supporting student transfer. This commitment can be a positive force to strengthen transfer students' momentum to fulfill their goals.

Wang's (2017) model of momentum put the classroom as a core place of opportunity for community college students to cultivate their momentum. Thus, defined curricula, classroom teaching and learning, and students' motivational attributes and beliefs provide three main levers of momentum. The findings of this case study demonstrate how faculty participants interacted with transfer students in the classroom. Their mentorship built transfer students' momentum in three main domains. For example, faculty participants described their informal transfer advising that concentrated on curriculum questions and academic programs. In particular, full-time faculty participants sat on the college's curriculum committee and took part in building common curricula at the state level. They were knowledgeable about the transferable curricula in their disciplines. They provided transfer students with curricular guidance. Students' curriculum momentum can improve with a clear coursework path toward transfer (Wang, 2017). Indeed, the grounding premise of the guided pathways (Jenkins et al., 2018) is that clarity of course requirements for degrees and course progression will support student success.

Faculty participants modeled good teaching strategies to help improve student momentum. For example, faculty participants opened their first class to communicate with students and got to know more about their educational needs. They understood transfer students' vulnerable academic preparation and mentored them with learning skills such as time management. Specifically, faculty participants in the Liberal Arts programs emphasized students' writing skills, whereas STEM faculty participants paid attention to students' math skills. Faculty participants' instructions and influences on students' learning add transfer students' momentum (Wang, 2017).

At the beginning of the semester, faculty participants used the first class to build a welcoming space to get know students, initiate communication with students, and invite students to talk about their expectations and motivations to study at the college. Faculty participants noted that transfer students often told them about their transfer plans and asked for their advice. The early relationship established between faculty participants and transfer students helps transfer students to make clear their goals and commit to achieving their goals. Student connections with faculty members helps build their momentum of aspiration (Wang, 2017). In the classroom, faculty participants shared their stories with transfer students and invited students to learn from their lived experiences. For example, faculty participants talked about their college life, offered suggestions to transfer students, and guided them to find information. For transfer students, especially underrepresented student groups, faculty in-class interactions can not only enhance their motivational momentum to work hard and preserve in realizing their educational goals (Wang, 2017), but also reduce friction by connecting students to transfer resources and addressing their academic and financial concerns. Faculty participants noted how their own

experiences as a first-generation student and their experience at the local 4-year universities motivated them to help transfer students.

Beyond the classroom, this case study inquired about faculty's interaction with transfer students outside the classroom. For example, faculty participants opened office hours to give supplemental instruction or tutoring for improving students' academic preparation. These supports can build transfer students' momentum in academic learning. Faculty participants wrote reference letters to support transfer students' applications, which can raise students' momentum of motivation by receiving positive comments from their instructors. Faculty participants referred transfer students to the transfer center and connected them to campus resources can motivate students to ask for help and make use of resources, which empowers students to achieve their goals and adds to their "agentic momentum" (Wang, 2017, p. 286). The findings demonstrate that the faculty-student interaction outside the classroom helped build transfer students' momentum and kept them on the track toward moving to 4-year schools. Wang (2017) suggested that the interaction between faculty and students out of the classroom was traditionally underrated and was needed to boost students' learning and momentum. This case study contributes to understanding faculty-student interaction outside the classroom and provides implications for educators to support transfer students by increasing faculty-student interaction outside the classroom.

In addition to the three main domains of momentum, Wang's (2017) momentum model delineated friction forces that were barriers to reducing students' momentum. These forces included: "counter momentum friction," "carry-over momentum," and "other forces" (Wang, 2017, p. 282). This study's findings show how the involvement of faculty in vertical transfer can remove points of friction and in turn, smooth the transfer students' process. For example, faculty

participants worked with content faculty members in the local 4-year schools for aligning

coursework and sustaining transfer partnerships. They became familiar with academic programs

in the local 4-year schools and brought updated information back to the community college and

the transfer students in their classes. Increased information about transfer can help students

clarify the transfer pathway from their college to a local 4-year school and receive advice from

faculty related to courses and academic programs.

Faculty participants also collaborated with the transfer center and informed transfer

students of events and activities the center hosted. The resources of the transfer center can

increase transfer students' knowledge about financial sources or scholarship opportunities in

their intended 4-year schools and address their financial concerns. Moreover, faculty participants

demonstrated their understanding of transfer students' conflicting responsibilities and pre-entry

experiences such as first-generation students, low-income students, or high school students

taking advanced placement (AP) or dual enrollment classes. The knowledge about transfer

students' unique experiences before entering the community college guided how faculty

participants mentored students in the classroom, which lays the basis to build students'

momentum (Wang, 2017).

In this case study, I highlighted a faculty participant as a faculty role model because of

her long-term services and proactive role in supporting student transfer. In the classroom, this

professor teaches students in STEM programs and also provides advice for guiding students

overall to map out transfer pathways. She developed a set of STEM transfer student orientation

courses and advised students in the courses. Outside the classroom, she manages the college's

transfer degree programs, represents the college at state meetings, works closely with the leader

of the transfer center for caseload advising, reaches out to faculty groups in the college and 4-

year institutions, facilitates the transfer program's implementation, and organizes transfer-related professional development activities. The professor's wide extent of involvement in transfer and consistent success in helping students enter 4-year schools has established her high reputation at the college as a transfer champion. Meanwhile, this professor also built trustful relationships with advisors and formed an effective collaboration among student support areas to serve transfer students. When viewing the professor's efforts of supporting transfer students using the momentum model, I notice that her teaching and advising activities in the classroom help build transfer students' momentum in the main domains. Outside of the classroom, her unique relationship with advisors and her role of bridging academics and advising help to transform the "counter momentum friction" (Wang, 2017, p. 282) into forces to increase transfer students' momentum toward a successful transfer. For example, Wang (2017) claimed that students lacked clear pathways and advising when they pursue their educational goals. These are barriers that affect students' momentum. In this study, this professor has rich experience in guiding transfer students to navigate transfer pathways and figuring out transferable curricula. Her bond between teaching and advising benefits students and helps them to remove barriers along the transfer pathway.

Wang (2017) pointed out that the factors of friction could not account for momentum and could not stay at the main domains of cultivating students' momentum. It suggested that reducing the friction points outside of the classroom might not be related to students' momentum in the classroom. However, in this study, this professor fosters transfer students' momentum toward achieving their transfer goals because she had expert knowledge in both teaching and advising and works as an instructor and an advisor. During her involvement in the transfer process, the professor holds a mindset to clear up advising issues facing transfer students and

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embed the advising into teaching. This finding can be confirmed by the descriptions of three senior transfer leaders and my observations across transfer training and a monthly curriculum committee meeting. Thus, this finding of blending in-class support that helps reduce friction can help extend the explanation of the momentum theory. When community college faculty have deep involvement in teaching and advising and act as transfer champions to advocate transfer, they can breakdown the frictions outside of the classroom countering students' momentum, direct students' momentum to the right track, and finally cultivate students' momentum in the classroom toward their accomplishments. Wang (2020) suggested that faculty who implanted advising in their teaching could better support transfer students' success. This suggests several potential implications for advancing policy and practice in vertical transfer pathways.

Implications for Transfer Policy and Practice

Findings from this case study indicate that community college faculty perform an important role in improving transfer students' momentum to successfully move to 4-year institutions. All community colleges within VCCS follow state level transfer policies that guide the college's transfer program implementation and define the extent of faculty's involvement in transfer work at the state level, such as the work of building common curriculum. This case study involved a rural community college with a high student transfer rate, and the college's mission, organizational characteristics, culture, and leadership shape the way faculty get involved in the transfer process and interact with students. The faculty participants all had high levels of interactions with transfer students, knowledge about the transfer process, and connections with local 4-year university transfer partners. Based on the perceptions of these highly engaged faculty members, I present implications to improve transfer policy and institutional practice for engaging faculty in supporting transfer students and smoothing vertical transfer pathways. I state

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each implication from a state level, a community college-university transfer partnership level, and an institutional level.

In Virginia, state transfer policy regulates the transfer pathways from 2-year community colleges to 4-year institutions and seeks to expand collaboration among statewide higher education institutions (SCHEV, 2016). Guided by state transfer policy, *Transfer Virginia* is a collaboration among SCHEV, VCCS, and Virginia's colleges and universities to provide students with transparency in college transfer across the Commonwealth (Transfer Virginia, n.d.). This entity holds "legitimate power" (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 563) and can induce faculty members in both 2-year community colleges and 4-year institutions to work together. The findings from this case study present that community college faculty who participate in transfer work at the state level and collaborate with content area faculty in 4-year institutions help transfer students connect to people in 4-year institutions and receive transfer information. The outcome of these state-driven collaborations can especially benefit underrepresented transfer students such as first-generation students or low-income students who often lack a support network to obtain transfer information and resources.

At the state level, for rural colleges in a state with a coordinated system such as ACC in this study, transfer leaders should expand the participation of faculty members in serving on committees that support state transfer program initiatives (such as *Transfer Virginia*) or being a member of the state transfer committee. For rural colleges in a state without a coordinated system, transfer leaders could work with unions at the local community college and 4-year school levels to increase faculty collaboration for the enrollment and retention of transfer students to sustain the development of both 2-year and 4-year institutions. Considering the different institutional sizes and administrative styles, state transfer leaders may encourage

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faculty's voluntary participation and encourage participation by working with campus-based leaders to obtain faculty release time to engage in this work. Due to the services requiring time and commitment, state transfer leaders can give faculty members recognition that shows appreciation for their professional competencies and expert skills (Bess & Dee, 2008).

In the vertical transfer pathways, community colleges are sending students, whereas 4-year schools are receiving students. There are power differentials between faculty members from the two types of higher education institutions, which can disrupt equitable collaborative relationships (Wang, 2020). The declining undergraduate enrollment of 4-year institution increases institutional dependence on community college transfer students who aspire to get a bachelor's degree. This situation challenges the existing power relationship between community colleges (sending students) and 4-year institutions (receiving students) in the transfer process. State transfer leaders need to balance the power dynamic, create shared goals to enable all faculty members to work together, and get timely feedback from faculty participants to maintain their collaborative relationships.

Community colleges and 4-year institutions establish transfer partnerships for improving transfer and degree attainments (Kisker, 2007). At the community college-university transfer partnership level, a long-term and effective transfer partnership natures institutional growth. The findings of the study show that the research site built good transfer partnerships with local 4-year schools, which produced a win-win situation of a high transfer rate in the research site and student enrollment stability in local 4-year schools. Campus leaders in both community colleges and 4-year institutions can offer opportunities for faculty members to engage in transfer programs and participate in decision-making progress such as serving on the curriculum committee or being the college's transfer representative. Faculty members can collaborate with

transfer advisors to create transfer materials in their expert fields and educate the campus community about transfer.

For example, in this study, the research site and a local public 4-year university developed joint institution transfer reports that tracked the academic performance of transfer students. The report presents data from transfer students who had moved into the 4-year university and compares their academic performance to non-transfer students at the 4-year university. In reviewing the transfer report, the research site faculty members and advisors can discuss how to get students well prepared for transfer whenever they notice a decline in students' academic performance in a certain discipline. The local 4-year university's faculty members and advisors also provide their suggestions to improve students' academic preparation and align first-year coursework to facilitate the transfer pathway from the research site to the 4-year university. The information sharing buttresses trustful relationships between partners, sustains their long-term transfer partnerships, and brings ongoing support for transfer students. Effective solution seeking discussions occur that address issues raised by the data and point to the need to have good tracking data to make good decisions regarding curriculum that seamlessly connects the community college to the 4-year university programs.

Ardoin and McNamee (2020) suggested that the use of jargon in higher education might bring barriers to students' success, especially rural students. Campus leaders in both community colleges and 4-year schools should pay attention to the use of academic jargon when they communicate with transfer students about transfer policies and requirements. For example, the terms (such as vertical transfer and upward transfer) are widely used in academics to define the transfer pathway from 2-year to 4-year institutions. In particular, the language used (upward transfer) indicates the pathway from a community college to a 4-year institution is upward. It

also indicates that one institution is higher or better than the other. For transfer to be fair and equitable for all students, the hierarchy should be minimized. In this study, faculty participants did not use vertical transfer as a term to describe students' transfer paths. They also did not mention upward transfer in their descriptions. This observation suggests that faculty participants seldom use these academic terms in daily communication with students or one another.

Not all community college students are transfer students, and faculty participants tended to use educational plans to name students who focused on transferring compared to other students who did not intend to transfer. In addition, faculty participants reflected on their educational practices and adjusted strategies to improve students' learning for a more equitable outcome. For example, when the participating faculty noticed office hours were a form of jargon that discouraged students from seeking help outside of the classroom, they offered explanations of the intention and the meaning of office hours to students. They used more welcoming words to define office hours and encouraged students to make use of their office hours.

For transfer students who are new to higher education, the incomprehensible jargon could affect their transfer aspirations. Community college faculty members who teach a majority of transfer students can often meet with transfer students in the classroom and become familiar with the language that students prefer to use. Moreover, community college faculty members can contribute to assisting students to understand transferable coursework and reduce the transfer gap among underserved student groups (Schudde et al., 2021). Leaders in the 4-year schools which rely on the enrollment of transfer students may launch workshops, invite community college faculty to share their strategies for teaching and mentoring transfer students, and further cross-institutional collaboration for developing easy-to-understand transfer materials. When community college faculty act as transfer agents in the classroom, it can foster effective transfer

partnerships, increase the 4-year school faculty's knowledge about transfer students, and improve transfer students' experiences from filling out transfer applications, to admissions, and finally to succeed at a 4-year school.

At an institutional level, community college campus leaders should be aware of the faculty's positive role in the transfer process. As the findings noted, faculty participants took responsibility for teaching transfer students, and also connected transfer students to resources on campus and in 4-year institutions. They also provided emotional support for transfer students and helped retain them during times of crisis. Specifically, the findings manifest the importance of faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom. Campus leaders can consider providing support for faculty to enhance their interactions with students outside of the classroom, such as guidelines on how to help students use office hours efficiently, how to write strong reference letters, where to refer transfer students, and what resources are most useful for transfer students.

Considering the gap between academic affairs and student affairs (Eddy & Kirby, 2020), campus leaders may facilitate meetings involving both faculty and advisors to increase their mutual understanding and learn from each other about their effective approaches to mentoring transfer students. My study found that full-time and part-time faculty held different expectations about professional development on transfer. Campus leaders should adjust the format of professional development activities and enable all faculty to have opportunities to learn knowledge and skills for supporting their students. For instance, prior to the professional development event, campus leaders may conduct research to get to know faculty members' general interests and expectations for professional development. After the event, a follow-up feedback collection can help leaders to assess the effectiveness of organizing professional development activities.

Since not all students in a community college are planning to transfer, a well-organized professional development event can be a valuable for not only educating both full-time and part-time faculty but also bonding them as a unity to serve students for all. It is particularly meaningful for part-time faculty members, who either teach online classes or only show up on teaching classes on campus, to find a sense of belonging in the college, which in turn, can benefit students to feel more supported when they interact with part-time faculty in and outside of the classroom. The part-time faculty participants in this study did not have as much knowledge about transfer resources or details on the curricular pathway relative to full-time faculty participants. The professional development activities can offer great opportunities for part-time faculty to increase their knowledge and skills to mentor students. The creation of online training about transfer requirements and students' common questions can benefit part-time faculty to learn on their own and support part-time faculty as connectors to better respond to their students in the classroom.

The findings of this study show that with a collaborative culture, faculty participants and transfer advisors in the research site maintain close working relationships and cooperate with student services staff. The transfer center functions as a hub to serve transfer students, implement transfer programs, and network campus community and local transfer partners. The servant leadership of transfer center leaders reflects the college's culture of valuing collaboration and trust that nurture the efforts in engaging faculty in promoting transfer. Considering the different involvement of faculty in the transfer work at ACC, the college could hold workshops and strengthen mutual understanding between full-time faculty and part-time faculty to help them learn from each other about how they become connectors to support transfer students. Transfer center staff could increase follow-up assessments to surface common questions facing full-time

faculty and part-time faculty who teach a majority of transfer students in class and develop

transfer materials to guide faculty to better support transfer students.

Campus leaders play a crucial role in building a college's collaborative culture and

promoting faculty involvement in vertical transfer. They should broaden people's buy-in and

foster trust for successful change (Eddy & Kirby, 2020). To get more faculty to engage in

transfer work and amplify faculty's voice in students' momentum building, campus leaders could

initiate conversations to recognize faculty models who hold a proactive role in advocating

transfer, invite other faculty members to reflect on their responsibility, cultivate collaboration

between faculty and transfer advisors, and mark the achievement in the shared goals of

supporting student success.

Recommendations for Future Research

I provide recommendations for future research to advance the understanding of the

community college faculty member's role in vertical transfer pathways. First, future studies

could investigate broad definitions of community college faculty members. This study was a

single-case study that involved a rural community college with a high student transfer rate. The

research site was a 2-year, small-size, predominately White community college. The faculty

participants who were selected for the interviews had primary responsibility for teaching and

reported frequent interaction with transfer students. Because of the sample selection, this study

cannot fully present the perspectives of the community college faculty groups who are non-

teaching faculty and faculty groups from other types of community colleges such as large-size

community colleges, urban community colleges, and minority-serving community colleges. In

the future, researchers could use multiple case studies to expand the sample size and inquire

about the role of community college faculty in vertical transfer pathways and the perception of

faculty with lower interactions with transfer students. Considering a phenomenology approach focuses on the common meaning of a participant group who experienced a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018), researchers may conduct phenomenological studies to explore the lived experiences of a group of community college faculty who got involved in serving transfer students and the transfer programs.

In addition to qualitative research, future work may examine the association between community college faculty's involvement and transfer students' outcomes. For example, researchers could use t-tests to compare the transfer rate from one group of transfer students who interact with full-time faculty and another group of transfer students who interact with part-time faculty. Such studies may contribute to understanding the impact of part-time faculty on transfer students in community colleges and helping community college leaders' decision-making on part-time faculty employment and retainment. Researchers could also use linear regression to predict the relationship between community college faculty's involvement and student transfer rate, which may benefit state policymakers to discern the influence of community college faculty on students' mobility to 4-year institutions and adjust transfer policies to redefine the role of community college faculty.

The findings in this study demonstrate that community college faculty cared about transfer students' experiences when they moved to 4-year schools, whereas 4-year school faculty cared about transfer students' academic performance before they enrolled in 4-year schools. This point is similar to the suggestion in a recent report about unaligned concerns from faculty in community colleges and 4-year institutions on vertical transfer students (Rabinowitz et al., 2023). Additional studies could investigate the reasons underlying faculty's concerns and the existing knowledge gap between faculty in community colleges and 4-year institutions. Such

research could bring up new strategies for leaders in both community colleges and 4-year institutions to develop transfer partnerships, work more seamlessly with each other, and provide constant support for transfer students before and after their college transitions.

Furthermore, a longitudinal study could provide an opportunity to track the transfer students of each of the participating faculty members over time. First, data analysis could determine how many students from each of the faculty members' classes actually transferred. Second, the transfer students could be tracked over time to determine their performance and success once at the 4-year university. Students' career outcomes, earning levels, and employer perspectives of the students could be analyzed to determine patterns of mediating variables contributing to their successes in post-transfer.

Finally, this study used the theoretical model of momentum for community college student success (Wang, 2017) as a framework to explore the faculty's role in supporting transfer students in the vertical transfer pathways. The discussion about faculty's impact on building transfer students' momentum was based on the analysis of the interview data from the study's participants including 12 participants (9 faculty members and 3 senior transfer leaders). Among them, eight faculty participants identified as White, and one faculty participant identified as multiple races. Wang (2017) suggested the need to consider the diverse backgrounds of community college students when applying the momentum model. Central to vertical transfer, future studies may look into transfer students who identify with a certain background such as first-generation students, low-income students, or racial minority students. Researchers may inquire about how faculty help a certain transfer student group to navigate the transfer process, how faculty improve their momentum toward a successful transfer to a 4-year institution, and if the race or gender of the faculty member influences students' momentum trajectories. Such

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research could help enhance the application of momentum theory, increase the knowledge about the relationship between faculty-student interaction and community college student transfer, and advance transfer practice in easing the vertical transfer process and narrowing the transfer gap between White students and underrepresented minority students.

Conclusion

According to the AACC (2023), there are a total of 1,038 community colleges in the U.S. From the establishment of the first community college to the present, over 120 years, American community colleges have evolved and have a mission that enables diverse students to access a range of certificates and 2-year associate level degrees, and to access a 4-year undergraduate degree via transfer from the community college. This educational journey to the baccalaureate is termed vertical transfer (Townsend, 2001). With a focus on the vertical transfer pathway, I used a case study design to explore community college faculty's role in supporting transfer students and selected a rural community college with a high student transfer as the research site. Guided by momentum theory, I sought multiple sources including documents, an online survey, interviews, and observations for data collection and analysis. The findings consisted of five themes and responded to research questions.

The central research questions for this study centered on how community college faculty perceive their role in the transfer process and how these faculty members interact with potential vertical transfer students. I found that community college faculty participants from the research site saw their role as a connector for transfer students and they interacted with aspiring transfer students both in and outside the classroom. In the classroom, faculty participants mentored transfer students and offered informal transfer advising. Outside the classroom, they supported transfer students and connected transfer students with resources on campus and in 4-year

schools. The unique role faculty participants have with their students provides an opportunity for the faculty members to act as advisors, particularly full-time faculty participants, and help bridge academic content areas with transfer advising perspectives.

The role the faculty participants noted in the transfer process also extended beyond working with students and involved working with content area faculty in the local 4-year schools to foster transfer partnership and collaborating with the transfer center to inform students of transfer information. Specifically, this study delineates how full-time and part-time faculty got involved in supporting transfer students. Because of the different extent of involvement, full-time and part-time faculty had unique expectations of professional development on transfer. This study contributes to advancing the understanding of part-time faculty's support for student transfer and institutional design of professional development to educate community college faculty about the transfer.

When tying the study's findings to the momentum theory, I noted that faculty's involvement improved transfer students' momentum toward achieving a successful transfer to 4-year schools. Recall, the research site has the highest transfer rate among rural community colleges in the state and high completion rates upon transfer. This study helps add to the momentum theory's application in addressing faculty's positive role in community college transfer student success. In particular, the faculty role model bonding teaching and advising helps extend the explanation of the momentum theory to the context that faculty with deep involvement in teaching and advising can guide students to navigate transfer pathways and strengthen students' momentum to reach their goals.

Through the study, it is clear that faculty involvement in vertical transfer greatly smooths the pathways and supports student success, which enhances the faculty's capability of being a

transfer agent, as noted in prior literature (Dowd et al., 2018; Fay et al., 2022; Pak et al., 2006; Taylor & Jain, 2017). Just like the Dean of Student Services at the research site remarked:

> Faculty have transfer students in class and can check on students every single week. They know more about the student than we do when the student only comes to meet with us once a semester or twice a semester. The impact that faculty have on the student and the ability to guide the student to their next step, I think that would transform our students' experience.

The leader's comments underscore the importance of engaging faculty in the transfer process and equipping them with skills to guide transfer students. Even with the evolution of community colleges over time, the transfer mission remains valued by students, especially underrepresented students, who desire to pursue a bachelor's degree, and by 4-year institutions which rely on the enrollment of community college students. Based on this reality, my study argues the faculty member's essential role in building transfer students' momentum and empowering students to fulfill their educational aspirations. Meanwhile, the study showcases the success of a rural community college in transfer services, faculty involvement, and long-term effective transfer partnerships with local 4-year schools. This success could inspire more higher education institutions to learn and follow the way to get faculty involved in achieving institutional transfer mission as well as working collaboratively with other faculty statewide to maximize community college transfer function for enhancing student attainment.

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Appendix A

Community College Faculty Survey

Community College Faculty Survey

Q. Consent Form

This dissertation research project is titled Faculty Matter: A Case Study of Rural Community College Faculty Involvement in Vertical Transfer. The purpose of the study is to investigate the role of community college faculty in supporting transfer students who aspire to transfer to 4-year institutions and earn a bachelor's degree. I invite you to participate in this research. Following the survey, I will conduct individual interviews to deepen my understanding of faculty perspectives of their role in the transfer process. You will be given an opportunity at the end of this survey to volunteer for an individual interview. Thank you for your consideration.

Your participation will involve you completing a short survey that should take 2-3 mins. You will be asked demographic questions about your professional experiences and questions related to your interactions with transfer students. Your participation in the study is voluntary, and you can withdraw participation at any time or stop to answer any questions. All data for this study will be stored in password-protected files on the researcher's personal computer, which is also password-protected. All data will be de-identified before analysis and publication to protect privacy and confidentiality. There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

If you have any questions or concerns about your privacy and participation in this study, please contact the College of William & Mary Institutional Review Board Ethics Committee, Tom Ward, Chair of the EDIRC at tjward@wm.edu, or 757-221-2358. You may also contact the Principal Investigator for the research project, Jingjing Liu at jliu25@wm.edu.

You will provide your consent for this short survey by checking the box "yes" below.

- o Yes

- o No

Q1. What best describes your gender?

- o   Woman
- o   Man
- o   Non-binary/other gender
- o   Prefer not to say

Q2. Which Race(s) do you identify? Please check all that apply.

- ☐   American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐   Asian
- ☐   Black or African American
- ☐   Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐   White
- ☐   Multiple Race
- ☐   Prefer not to disclose

Q3. What is your ethnicity?

- o   Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin
- o   Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin

Q4. What is your current position?

- o   Full-time faculty
- o   Part-time faculty (Adjunct faculty)
- o   Other _____

Q5. How long have you been teaching at your institution?

- o   Less than 5 years
- o   5-10 years
- o   10-20 years
- o   Longer than 20 years

Q6. Which academic program do you work in?

- o Arts
- o Business/Accounting
- o Education
- o Health Sciences
- o Human and Public Services
- o Information Technology
- o Manufacturing/Electronics
- o Engineering/Science/Math
- o Transportation
- o General Education
- o Other _____

Q7. Transfer students are a group of students who intend to transfer to 4-year institutions and get a bachelor's degree. Can you identify the students in your class(es) that have intentions to transfer?

- o Yes
- o No

Q8. How often do you interact with transfer students in class?

- o Often—once a week
- o Sometimes—once a month
- o Rarely—once a semester
- o Never
- o N/A

Q9. What in-class information do you provide students that helps promote transfer? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ Academic learning advising
- ☐ Transfer advising and course planning
- ☐ Financial aid/campus resources advising

☐ Inform students of transfer policies

☐ Connect aspiring transfer students with faculty at 4-year institutions

☐ Other _____

☐ None of the above. I do not provide any in-class information for promoting transfer.

Q10. How much time do you interact with transfer students outside class?

o Never

o Once a week or more

o Once a month

o Once a semester

o N/A

Q11. What are the out-of-class supports you provide students that promote transfer? Please check all that apply.

☐ Mentor students with transfer aspirations

☐ Support students in their application to a 4-year institution

☐ Connect students to academic programs in 4-year institutions

☐ Serve or attend transfer-related meetings (such as admission, curriculum building, articulation agreement, transfer partnership)

☐ Work with transfer services staff in implementing transfer programs

☐ Work with faculty in 4-year institutions to support transfer students

☐ Other _____

☐ None of the above. I do not provide any out-of-class services for promoting transfer.

Q12. To what degree do you think it is important for community college faculty to have an active role in supporting transfer students?

o Extremely important

o Important

o Moderately Important

o Slightly Important

o Not important

Q13. What resources do you think best support students seeking to transfer to a 4-year university?

Q14. Are you willing to participate in a one-to-one interview? The interview will be either a one-hour Zoom meeting or a one-hour in-person meeting on your campus. Each participant will receive a $50 Amazon gift card for their participation in the interview. There will be a total of 7-9 selected faculty members for the interviews; not all volunteers will be selected.

o Yes

o No

o Other _____

Q15. If you are willing to participate in the interview and receive the notification, please provide your name and email address. Thank you.

Name:
Email Address:

Recruitment Email (Faculty)

Community College Faculty Recruitment Email

Dear Faculty Member,

My name is Jingjing Liu, and I am a doctoral student at William & Mary. I am conducting a case study on community college faculty involvement in vertical transfer and would like to invite you to participate. For the purposes of my study, I consider a vertical transfer student to be anyone who intends to transfer from a community college to a 4-year institution. The study is to explore how community college faculty supports transfer students.

I invite you to complete a short survey that should only take 2-3 mins. Please click link for the short survey. You will give your consent to participate in the project at the beginning of the survey. At the end of the survey, you will be asked if you would like to participate in an individual interview (60 minutes) for discussing your professional experiences in interacting with transfer students and your perspectives on the faculty's role in transfer process. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to include contact information. I will select faculty members from among the volunteers, and each interview participant will receive a $50 Amazon gift card for their participation. Prior to the interview, I will have you fill out and sign an informed consent form.

Thank you for your time and consideration in helping me recognize the faculty's role in supporting transfer students. If you have any questions, please contact me at jliu25@wm.edu.

Best regards,

Jingjing Liu
Ph.D. student in the Higher Education Program
William & Mary School of Education

Appendix C

Recruitment Email (Staff)

Community College Senior Transfer Leader Recruitment Email

Dear XXX,

My name is Jingjing Liu, and I am a doctoral student at William & Mary. I am conducting a case study on community college faculty involvement in vertical transfer and would like to invite you to participate. For the purposes of my study, I consider a vertical transfer student to be anyone who intends to transfer from a community college to a 4-year institution. The study is to explore how community college faculty supports transfer students.

I invite you to participate in either an individual online interview (60 minutes) or an in-person interview (60 minutes) to discuss your professional experiences in collaborating with faculty in transfer work and facilitating the transfer process. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to include some contact information and professional history at the college. Each participant will receive a $50 Amazon gift card for their participation. Prior to the interview, I will have you fill out and sign an informed consent form.

Thank you for your time and consideration in helping me understand better the faculty's role in supporting transfer students. If you have any questions, please contact me at jliu25@wm.edu.

Best regards,

Jingjing Liu
Ph.D. student in the Higher Education Program
William & Mary School of Education

Appendix D

Consent Form (Faculty Interview)

Department: William & Mary School of Education

Researcher: Jingjing Liu

Study Title:
Faculty Matter: A Case Study of Rural Community College Faculty Involvement in Vertical Transfer

This form has information about this research. Where it says, "See Below," there is more information to complete later in this form. You and I will discuss this information so you can decide whether to take part in this research. Make sure you discuss your concerns and have all your questions answered before deciding to take part in this research.

Informed Consent	It is important that you understand this research so that you can decide whether you want to take part. This process is called informed consent. To make your decision, you must consider all the information below. You should especially consider: • The purpose of this research. • How this research differs from standard medical care. • The risks. • If the possible benefit of taking part in this research is worth the risk. • The alternatives to taking part in this research.
Voluntary Participation	You do not have to take part in this research. It is your choice whether or not you want to take part. If you choose not to take part or choose to stop taking part at any time, there will be no penalty to you, or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
Purpose	The case study explores the role of community college faculty in supporting transfer students and facilitating the transfer process.
Number of Participants	7-9 faculty members
Duration	60 minutes (a semi-structured virtual interview or an in-person interview on your campus)
Procedures (See Below)	While you are in the study, you will have different activities, which may involve certain risks.

Risks (See Below)	There are no known risks associated with participation in this study.
Benefits	There are no known benefits of participating in the study.
Alternatives	The alternative to being in this study is to not take part.
Costs (See Below)	There are no costs to participants associated with this study.
Payment	You will receive a $50 Amazon gift card after the interview process is completed.
Ending Study Early	There are a number of reasons you may decide, or be asked, to stop the study early. You may also opt to stop participating at any point in the study.
Privacy and Confidentiality (See Below)	Information will be collected about you for this study regarding your time at the college and your perspectives on faculty roles in the transfer process. Steps will be taken to protect your identity. But the information collected about you can never be 100% secure. Confidentiality will be assured via keeping data in a secured setting and providing a code for use in reporting out the data versus your name.
New Information	New information may come out during this study. You will be given any new information that could change your decision to take part.
Contacts (See Below)	A list of people to contact is included later in this form.

Additional Sections with More Detailed Information
Procedures and their Risks

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to choose to take part in an hour online interview (Zoom meeting) or to take part in an hour in-person interview on your campus and give the researcher the opportunity to conduct a follow-up interview if additional information will be needed. The in-person interview location will be the public meeting room or the office on your campus. The online interview will be recorded in Zoom with recording voice only. The in-person interview will be recorded by audio recorder with recording voice only. You are allowed to consent or decline from being recorded. The questions that you will be asked will be the faculty's role in supporting students who intend to transfer from a community college to a 4-year institution and facilitating the transfer process.

The audio recordings, transcribed interviews, and reflective notes from the interviews will be organized into files with a pseudonym in electronic formats. The pseudonym will be used for data collection during the entire process of the study in order to protect your identity. There are no known risks associated with this study.

Contacts

For Questions About:	Person or Office	Contact Information
The Study	Researcher: Jingjing Liu	jliu25@wm.edu
If you need to contact someone other than the study personnel about a concern or your rights as a research subject	Tom Ward, EDIRC Chair	tjward@wm.edu

<u>Signatures</u>

Participant: By signing this form, you are agreeing that:

- You were given the opportunity to read this form.
- All of the information in this form was discussed with you by me to your satisfaction.
- All your questions have been answered to your satisfaction.
- You were not pressured and you voluntarily agree to take part in this research.

_____   _____   _____
Your Name   Your Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of Person Obtaining/   Signature of Person Obtaining/   Date
Assisting with Consent   Assisting with Consent

_____   _____   _____
Name Researcher   Signature of Researcher   Date

_____   _____ _____
Name of Witness   Signature of Witness   Date

(Witness required if the only language the subject speaks and understands is English, but the subject cannot read English, or if the subject is blind or cannot physically sign the consent form.)

 Copy of Signed and Dated Consent Form Given to the Subject/Parent/LAR

Consent Form (Staff Interview)

Department: William & Mary School of Education

Researcher: Jingjing Liu

Study Title:
Faculty Matter: A Case Study of Rural Community College Faculty Involvement in Vertical Transfer

This form has information about this research. Where it says, "See Below," there is more information to complete later in this form. You and I will discuss this information so you can decide whether to take part in this research. Make sure you discuss your concerns and have all your questions answered before deciding to take part in this research.

Informed Consent	It is important that you understand this research so that you can decide whether you want to take part. This process is called informed consent. To make your decision, you must consider all the information below. You should especially consider: • The purpose of this research. • How this research differs from standard medical care. • The risks. • If the possible benefit of taking part in this research is worth the risk. • The alternatives to taking part in this research.
Voluntary Participation	You do not have to take part in this research. It is your choice whether or not you want to take part. If you choose not to take part or choose to stop taking part at any time, there will be no penalty to you, or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
Purpose	The case study explores the role of community college faculty in supporting transfer students and facilitating the transfer process.
Number of Participants	3 staff members
Duration	60 minutes (a semi-structured virtual interview or an in-person interview on your campus)
Procedures (See Below)	While you are in the study, you will have different activities, which may involve certain risks.

Risks (See Below)	There are no known risks associated with participation in this study.
Benefits	There are no known benefits of participating in the study.
Alternatives	The alternative to being in this study is to not take part.
Costs (See Below)	There are no costs to participants associated with this study.
Payment	You will receive a $50 Amazon gift card after the interview process is completed.
Ending Study Early	There are a number of reasons you may decide, or be asked, to stop the study early. You may also opt to stop participating at any point in the study.
Privacy and Confidentiality (See Below)	Information will be collected about you for this study regarding your time at the college and your perspectives on faculty roles in the transfer process. Steps will be taken to protect your identity. But the information collected about you can never be 100% secure. Confidentiality will be assured via keeping data in a secured setting and providing a code for use in reporting out the data versus your name.
New Information	New information may come out during this study. You will be given any new information that could change your decision to take part.
Contacts (See Below)	A list of people to contact is included later in this form.

Additional Sections with More Detailed Information

Procedures and their Risks

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to choose to take part in an hour online interview (Zoom meeting) or to take part in an hour in-person interview on your campus and give the researcher the opportunity to conduct a follow-up interview if additional information will be needed. The in-person interview location will be the public meeting room or the office on your campus. The online interview will be recorded in Zoom with recording voice only. The in-person interview will be recorded by audio recorder with recording voice only. You are allowed to consent or decline from being recorded. The questions that you will be asked will be the faculty's role in supporting students who intend to transfer from a community college to a 4-year institution and facilitating the transfer process.

The audio recordings, transcribed interviews, and reflective notes from the interviews will be organized into files with a pseudonym in electronic formats. The pseudonym will be used for data collection during the entire process of the study in order to protect your identity. There are no known risks associated with this study.

Contacts

For Questions About:	Person or Office	Contact Information
The Study	Researcher: Jingjing Liu	jliu25@wm.edu
If you need to contact someone other than the study personnel about a concern or your rights as a research subject	Tom Ward, EDIRC Chair	tjward@wm.edu

<u>Signatures</u>

Participant: By signing this form, you are agreeing that:

- You were given the opportunity to read this form.
- All of the information in this form was discussed with you by me to your satisfaction.
- All your questions have been answered to your satisfaction.
- You were not pressured and you voluntarily agree to take part in this research.

_____   _____   _____
Your Name   Your Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of Person Obtaining/   Signature of Person Obtaining/   Date
Assisting with Consent   Assisting with Consent

_____   _____   _____
Name Researcher   Signature of Researcher   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of Witness   Signature of Witness   Date

(Witness required if the only language the subject speaks and understands is English, but the subject cannot read English, or if the subject is blind or cannot physically sign the consent form.)

Copy of Signed and Dated Consent Form Given to the Subject/Parent/LAR

Appendix F

Interview Protocol (Faculty Interview)

The purpose of this individual interview is to understand the community college faculty's role in supporting transfer students intending to move from community college to a 4-year institution in seeking a bachelor's degree.

General Questions (Warm-up)

Transfer students are a group of students who intend to transfer to 4-year institutions and get a bachelor's degree.

Warm-up Q1. Can you describe how you have worked with transfer students in the past?

a. How do you identify transfer students in your class?

b. Have you advised transfer students in the past?

c. How have you kept track of the transfer students who have moved onto a 4-year institution?

1. How do you perceive the challenges facing transfer students in academic learning?
    a. Academic preparation?
    b. Conflicting commitments—family/work/getting to class?
    c. Need supplemental instruction/tutoring?

2. How do you address transfer students' challenges and improve their learning?
    a. Refer to tutoring center
    b. Refer to academic advisor
    c. Refer to transfer center
    d. Provide additional learning supports
    e. Provide help sessions

3. Describe the type of transfer advising at the college?
    a. Does this occur within the advising office?
    b. By faculty advisors?
    c. Within the transfer center?

4. What type of support have you provided students intending to transfer?
    a. Writing letters of reference
    b. Connect with faculty at 4-year institutions
    c. Connect with ACC alumni that have successfully transferred
    d. Work with an undergraduate research project.

5. Describe your approach to mentoring students for transfer.

   a. How does your approach to mentoring adjust based on race/ethnicity/gender?
   b. What strategies have you found most effective in mentoring students.
   c. What type of college mentoring programs exist on campus?

6. From your perspective, how do students' pre-entry experiences impact their transfer aspirations?

   a. first-generation college student
   b. low-income student
   c. Site of high school (e.g., have AP or dual enrollment) aligned with academic rigor and preparation.

7. What are your experiences working with partners in 4-year institutions?
   a. Do you work with content area faculty?
   b. Do you work with transfer offices at the university?

8. What are your experiences working with the campus transfer resources office here at ACC?
   a. Have you referred students?
   b. Have you helped on faculty panels?
   c. Have you hosted programs?

9. In your perspective, what are the community college faculty's roles and responsibilities in promoting transfer?

10. What type of professional development activities would you like for educating community college faculty on the knowledge about the transfer?

11. How has COVID influenced the experiences of transfer students at ACC?
   a. Please describe any accommodations you have made to your own teaching.
   b. Please reflect on which student populations were most challenged in the pandemic.
   c. How have students described their experiences to you, especially related to transfer?

12. Is there any other information you would like to add?

Appendix G

Interview Protocol (Staff Interview)

The purpose of this individual interview is to understand how you see the roles faculty have in supporting transfer students intending to move from community college to a 4-year institution for achieving a bachelor's degree.

General Questions (Warm-up)

Transfer students in this study are a group of students who intend to transfer to 4-year institutions and get a bachelor's degree.

Warm-up Q1. Have you seen the recent national report about the enrollment decline of transfer? How is the situation at ACC?

Warm-up Q2. What is your experience working with faculty members in supporting transfer students?

  a. How have students coming to the transfer office described their work with faculty members as the student investigates transfer?

  b. How often do faculty contact your office? How often does your office reach out to faculty members?

1. Do you feel that ACC faculty members are aware of transfer students in their classrooms?

  a. What examples can you share to support this view?
  b. In considering the total faculty at ACC, what percentage of the faculty do you identify as advocates for transfer? Examples?
  c. Are there certain disciplinary faculty who support aspiring transfer students more?

2. Are there mentoring programs for transfer students at ACC? How do ACC faculty mentor transfer students?

3. How do faculty contribute to working with partners in 4-year institutions?

  a. Do they work with content area faculty?
  b. Do they work with transfer offices at the university?
  c. Who is the initiator of connecting between ACC and 4-year institutions?
  d. Are there some 4-year institutions that work more seamlessly with ACC?

4. How do faculty work with the campus offices related to transfer and advising services?

5. Please describe an ideal community college faculty who supports transfer students.
6. What type of professional development (PD) activities would help educate community college faculty about the transfer?

    a. What kind of programs does your office currently offer?
    b. How is faculty participation at currently available PD offerings from your office?
    c. What PD have you found to be well received by faculty participants?
    d. What type of follow up is there on faculty participants and transfer rates/experiences?

7. What support should faculty give transfer students to help them get through the aftereffects of COVID?

    a. Please describe any accommodations you have made to your own teaching.
    b. Please reflect on which student populations were most challenged in the pandemic.

8. As I am trying to understand the role of community college faculty in the transfer process, is there any other information you would like to add?

Appendix H

Crosswalk Table

Theoretical Framework (Wang, 2017)	Interview Questions (IQ)	Link to Research Questions (RQ)	Literature Review
Teaching/ Learning Momentum	FIQ (Warm-up Q1). Can you describe how you have worked with transfer students in the past?	FIQ (Warm-up Q1)→ RQ2	Flaga, 2006. Laanan, 2001. Wang, 2020. Wang et al., 2021.
	LIQ (Warm-up Q2). What is your experience working with faculty members in supporting transfer students?	LIQ (Warm-up Q2) → RQ1	
	FIQ1. What are challenges facing transfer students in academic learning?	FIQ1 → RQ2	
	FIQ2. How do faculty address transfer students' challenges and improve their learning?	FIQ2→ RQ2	
	LIQ1. Do you feel that ACC faculty members are aware of transfer students in their classrooms?	LIQ1→ RQ2	
Curricular Momentum	FIQ3. Describe the type of transfer advising about at the college?	FIQ3→RQ2	Hlinka, 2017. Hlinka et al., 2015. Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020. Taylor & Jain, 2017. Wang, 2020. Yeh & Wetzstein, 2020.
	FIQ4. What type of support have you provided students intending to transfer?	FIQ4→ RQ2	
	LIQ5. Please describe an ideal community college faculty who supports transfer students.	LIQ5→ RQ2	

Theoretical Framework (Wang, 2017)	Interview Questions (IQ)	Link to Research Questions (RQ)	Literature Review
Motivational Momentum	FIQ5. Describe your approach to mentoring students for transfer.	FIQ5→RQ2	Chrystal et al., 2013. Crisp & Nuñez, 2014. Crisp et al., 2020. Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012.
	LIQ2. Are there mentoring programs for transfer students at ACC? How do ACC faculty mentor transfer students?	LIQ2→RQ2	
Carry-Over Momentum	FIQ6. In your perspective, how do students' pre-entry experiences impact their transfer aspiration?	FIQ 6 →RQ2	Crisp & Nuñez, 2014.
Counter Momentum Friction	FIQ7. What are your experiences working with partners in 4-year institutions?	IQ7→ RQ1	Davies & Casey, 1999. Fay et al., 2022. Fink & Jenkins, 2017. Kisker, 2007. Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020. Schudde et al., 2021. Taylor & Jain, 2017.
	FIQ8. What are your experiences working with campus transfer resources offices at ACC?	FIQ8→ RQ1	
	FIQ9. In your perspective, what are the faculty's roles and responsibilities in promoting transfer?	FIQ9→ RQ1	
	FIQ10. What type of professional development activities would you like for educating community college faculty on the knowledge about the transfer?	FIQ10→ RQ1	
	LIQ3. How do faculty contribute to working with partners in 4-year institutions?	LIQ 3→ RQ1	
	LIQ4. How do faculty work with the campus offices related to transfer and advising services?	LIQ 4→ RQ1	
	LIQ6. What type of professional development (PD) activities would help educate community college faculty about the transfer?	LIQ6→ RQ1	

Theoretical Framework (Wang, 2017)	Interview Questions (IQ)	Link to Research Questions (RQ)	Literature Review
Other Forces	FIQ11. How has COVID influenced the experiences of transfer students at ACC?	FIQ11→ RQ2	Brohawn et al., 2021. Causey et al., 2022.
	LIQ (Warm-up Q1). Have you seen the recent national report about the enrollment decline of transfer? How is the situation at ACC?	LIQ (Warm-up Q1) → RQ2	
	LIQ7. What support should faculty give transfer students to help them get through the aftereffects of COVID?	LIQ7→ RQ2	
Open-ended question	FIQ12. Is there any other information you would like to add?	n/a	n/a
	LIQ8. As I am trying to understand the role of community college faculty in the transfer process, is there any other information you would like to add?		

Note. FIQ = ACC Community College Faculty Interview Questions. LIQ = ACC Senior Transfer Leader Interview Questions. RQ1 = Research Question 1: In a rural community college with a high student transfer rate, how do faculty perceive their role in the transfer process?. RQ2 = Research Question 2: In a rural community college with a high student transfer rate, how do faculty interact with potential vertical transfer students?

Appendix I

Observational Protocol

Formal Event: ACC Transfer-related Meeting Location: ACC Campus Role of An Observer: Nonparticipant Observer Date/Time: With the approval of gatekeeper Length of Meeting: With the approval of gatekeeper	
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Questions: 1. How many faculty attend the meeting? 2. What responsibilities do faculty take in transfer work at ACC? 3. What discussions/suggestions/concerns do faculty get involved in the meeting? 4. How do faculty communicate with other attendees (staff and administrators)? 5. How do other attendees (staff and administrators) respond to faculty during the meeting?	Personal thoughts/insights/feelings
Informal Event: ACC Transfer Center Sidewalk Location: ACC Campus Role of An Observer: Nonparticipant Observer Date/Time: With the approval of gatekeeper Length of Sidewalk: With the approval of gatekeeper	
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Questions 1. What is the decoration of the transfer center? Are there any introductions to the faculty? 2. What do students look for when they come to the transfer center? Do they talk about their interaction with faculty in and out of the classroom? 3. How do transfer center staff respond to students' requests? Do they suggest students increase communication with faculty? 4. Are there any faculty visiting to transfer center? 5. What is the work environment of the transfer center? Is the work environment welcoming/inclusive/supportive?	Personal thoughts/insights/feelings

Appendix J

A List of Priori Analysis Codes

Theoretical Framework (Wang, 2017)	Deductive Categories
Teaching/Learning Momentum	teaching responsibility, advising/mentoring, technology, online learning, faculty-student relationship
Curricular Momentum	curriculum, course, articulation agreement, credit, discipline, major, syllabus, college website
Motivational Momentum	communication, transfer student, transfer information, guideline
Carry-over Momentum	underserved group, adult learner, family, friend, and peer support, resources
Counter Momentum Friction	4-year institution, partnership, transfer policy, state policy, VCCS, rural area, rural community college, full-time, part-time, adjunct, instructor
Other Forces	leadership, funding, culture, campus environment, global pandemic

Appendix K

A Coding Sheet

CC: Participant discussed the college's culture, diverse students, and community college mission.

CO: Participant discussed the impact of COVID-19, their teaching pedagogy, and students' experiences.

FR: Participant discussed their roles and responsibilities in promoting transfer.

FSI: Participant discussed their services for transfer students inside the classroom.

FSO: Participant discussed their services for transfer students outside the classroom.

FW: Participant discussed their work with 4-year partners and campus resource offices at their college.

LS: Participant discussed local 4-year schools and their partnership/services with local schools.

PD: Participant discussed professional development activities at their college.

SFI: Participant discussed student-faculty interaction and student-faculty relationship building.

TS: Participant discussed transfer students' challenges, motivation, pre-entry experiences, backgrounds, and transfer barriers.

VT: Participant discussed the vertical transfer pathway that community college students intended to transfer to a 4-year school.

Appendix L

Peer Review Confidentiality Agreement

I agree to participate in a peer review for the researcher's (Jingjing Liu) doctoral dissertation.

I agree to respect and maintain the confidentiality of all peer review proceedings by not

disclosing the electronic form of the transcript and all information acquired in connection with

the review I perform. I agree to return to the researcher (Jingjing Liu) all materials I received for

the peer review and not to retain any copies of such materials.

By signing this form, I agree to the confidentiality stated above.

Name of Reviewer_____   Signature of Reviewer_____

Date_____

Jingjing Liu

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Educational Background

Ph.D.   William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia
Educational Policy, Planning & Leadership: Higher Education

M.Ed. University of Houston, Houston, Texas
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies: Higher Education

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Professional Committee

The Council for the Study of Community Colleges
Community College Leadership and Administration Academic Programs Committee

Professional Presentation (Selected)

Liu, J. (2021, April). *Faculty involvement in community college transfer: A focus on vertical pathways* [Paper presentation]. The Council for the Study of Community Colleges 2021 Virtual Conference.

Liu, J., O'Neal, T., & Mize, J. (2021, April). *Antiracist post-secondary curriculum: An exploratory factor analysis* [Paper presentation]. William & Mary 1st Annual Graduate Research Virtual Symposium on Racial & Social Justice.

Eddy, P. L., **Liu, J.**, Smith, R., & Giscombe, D. (2022, April). *Internationalization of higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic: A case study of William & Mary* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association 2022 Virtual Conference.

Liu, J. (2023, February). *Faculty in classroom: Helping international students adapt and succeed* [Conference session]. American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education 2023 Conference, Indianapolis, IN.

Hatch-Tocaimaza, D., Smith, D., Bowlin, W., **Liu, J.**, Monges, S., & Okur, A. (2023, April). *Understanding change in university-based community college leadership programs* [Conference session]. The Council for the Study of Community Colleges 2023 Conference, Chicago, IL.