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New Reverse Transfer: A case study analysis of implementation between a community college and a four-year institution

by

Sarah L. Wilson

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:

Larry Ebbers, Co-major Professor
Janice Nahra Friedel, Co-major Professor
Cynthia Fletcher
Carol Heaverlo
Cheryll Reitmeier

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2015

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DEDICATION

To my high school sweetheart,

Aaron,

for being a true partner.

For our children,

Kate, Grant, and Eli,

may this one day inspire you

to achieve something bigger than yourself.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am humbled and appreciative as I achieve this milestone in my educational journey. While these acknowledgements only demonstrate a small glimpse of my gratitude to those who have helped me along this path, I hope that it may convey my sincere appreciation.

I am one of the lucky few to have two major professors. It has been a joy to work with both Drs. Larry Ebbers and Janice Nahra Friedel. Thank you, Dr. Ebbers, for your support, kind words, and constant belief that I would accomplish this. As a mother to three small children and as fulltime professional, the path was steep. Nevertheless, you never wavered in your support of me and you never let me use that as a reason to stop working. Thank you for guiding me. Thank you, Dr. Friedel, for pushing me to do more and for seeing my potential. We had many long nights on Skype and numerous drafts between us, and you held me accountable and helped me to achieve. I am forever grateful for you bringing me under your research wing of reverse transfer and for encouraging me along the way.

As an undergraduate at Iowa State University, I was fortunate to take Fundamentals of Food Preparation with Dr. Cheryll Reitmeier. In that class, Dr. Reitmeier helped me to understand why milk is white, the standard characteristics of a fried egg, and how to be a critical thinker. As a young college student, she was instrumental in shaping me as a learner and as a professional. She made me feel important, smart, and valued; and I believe she is pretty special, too. Thank you, Dr. Reitmeier, for being a wonderful mentor to me for all of these years.

Thank you to two other very important members of my committee, Drs. Cynthia Fletcher and Carol Heaverlo. Thank you, Dr. Fletcher, for providing feedback and guidance on my research. I am so thankful to have had the opportunity to take a course with you in my

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graduate studies, and I am appreciative of your perspective and expertise. Thank you, Dr. Heaverlo, for teaching me what it means to be a qualitative researcher. Your willingness to spend extra time with me and to be my researching sounding board is forever appreciated. Thank you for giving me room to grow as a researcher while also providing guidance whenever I needed it.

Thank you to my 10 participants of this study. I was able to conduct this study because of your insight and willingness to share with me your experiences. I am truly grateful for your involvement and stories.

Prior to this research, for the study to be considered, I was encouraged by some special individuals who believed in me before I believed in myself. To Dr. Tom Chacko, thank you for asking me every six weeks if I had applied to the PhD program. Your constant belief in me started the ball rolling. To Dr. Ann Coppernoll, for allowing me to start the program while I was working for you in undergraduate programs. To Dr. Diann Burright, for being a light in my life during this experience. Since working for you in the College of Business, you supported me and encouraged me through these “five individual papers”. I saw my way through this with your optimism, perspective, and support. To Danny Johnson, for telling me second-rate statistics jokes, for the chocolate, and for supporting me while I was pursing my dream.

I have been so lucky to have had such wonderful peers during this journey. Thank you to Zoë, Jared, and Lindsay for the laughs, feedback, and support. Thank you for peeling me off the ceiling when I needed it and for pushing me forward every time I stalled. While I was not in a traditional cohort, I was fortunate to be adopted by one. Thank you to all of you for letting me into your group and for providing the support from which we all benefited.

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To my good work buddy, Leah, thank you for laughing at my jokes and for telling me some good ones, too. Your friendship has meant the world to me and I am thankful for your presence in my life. To my old graduate school pal turned friend-for-life, thank you, Dr. Julie Yankey, for being my inspiration and for making me think a PhD is not that big of deal. By the way, it is! We did it! Thank you for all your support, encouragement and many, many lunch dates and conversations. They meant the world to me.

I am especially grateful to the woman who shaped me into who I am today—my mom, Linda. My mom has always been supportive of me, even when she did not agree with what I was doing. She knows me too well—I was going to do it either way. During this journey, she never once told me I could not or should not do it. She was always supportive, yet understood how difficult it was. Thank you, Mom, for all the Saturday mornings with the kids and for covering for me when I needed you. Most importantly, thank you, Mom, for your love, for showing me the value of education, and for believing in me.

Thank you also to my wonderful mother and father-in-law, Nancy and Gary. Thank you for filling in for me when I was writing and for taking care of my family while I was attending class, traveling to conferences, or working late. Thank you for love and understanding.

To my other family members, friends and colleagues, thank you for asking about my research even though you may not have understood the context of my study. Thank you to the staff in the College of Human Sciences Student Services for understanding when I was writing and for encouraging me as I finished.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my partner in life, my husband, Aaron, and my three children: Kate, Grant, and Eli. Thank you, Aaron, for feigning interest in my research, for editing my never-ending papers, and for giving me the space to pursue this

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crazy dream. Your love and support kept me going to the finish. Thank you for this. I love you. Thank you to my children for their laughter, smooches, and snuggles. I especially thank you for making me feel so loved.

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ABSTRACT

The new reverse transfer has emerged in recent years as an innovative pathway for degree completion. The term, once used to refer to students who transferred to a community college from a four-year institution, has undergone a contextual change (Hagedorn & Castro, 1999; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Yang, 2006). The term today has a new application and references a different pathway, which refers to students who transfer credits from a community college to a four-year institution and retroactively earn a two-year degree with their newly earned four-year college credits (Bragg, Cullen, Bennett, & Rudd, 2011; Friedel & Wilson, 2015; Marling, 2012). The reverse transfer pathway has emerged as community colleges pursue innovative opportunities to serve students and improve completion rates. President Obama's Completion Agenda and state accountability measures are also contributing to the need for innovative completion programs. To explore the growth and implementation of reverse transfer programs, a case study analysis was conducted in a Pacific Northwest state with an urban, multi-campus community college, a public liberal arts university, and their respective state higher education agencies. The case study analysis sought to understand the factors that influence the implementation process of the new reverse transfer and the challenges and support mechanisms that influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program in the Pacific Northwest state. The data were coded, analyzed, and arranged into four emerging themes: (1) measures of success, (2) influence and stability, (3) responding to something new, and (4) benefits outweigh the cost. The findings revealed that strong working relationships between colleagues at each institution were a cornerstone to the successful implementation. Campus administrators and state higher education agencies support are important contributors to the implementation and future stability of the program.

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Flexible and forward-thinking campuses are important attributes in successful implementation. Finally, a focus on student achievement and a belief in the program were revealed as characteristics of a successful program. A discussion of the implications for practice, policy, and research are also presented.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The new reverse transfer has emerged in recent years as a new pathway for degree completion. The term once used to refer to students who transferred to a community college from a four-year college has undergone a contextual change (Hagedorn & Castro, 1999; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Yang, 2006). The term today has a new application and refers to a different pathway, which refers to students who transfer credits from a community college to a four-year institution and retroactively earn a two-year degree with their newly earned four-year college credits (Bragg, Cullen, Bennett, & Rudd, 2011; Friedel & Wilson, 2015; Marling, 2012). The reverse transfer pathway has emerged as community colleges pursue innovative opportunities to serve students and improve completion rates. President Obama's Completion Agenda and state accountability measures, such as state performance based funding models, are also contributing to the need for innovative completion programs. Subsequently, community colleges and four-year institutions are partnering together to create formal reverse transfer programs designed to improve degree completion rates (Friedel & Wilson, 2015).

With the evolving use of the term "reverse transfer" and the creation of academic programing to support reverse transfer, it is necessary to explore reverse transfer best practices, implications for institutions, and outcome potential for students. In order to further explore the evolving application of the term "reverse transfer" and the academic programs used to support reverse transfer, a case study analysis was conducted in a Pacific Northwest state with an urban, multi-campus community college and its feeder institution, a public liberal arts university. In this study, the new reverse transfer program was investigated from the perspective of one theory and one model: Diffusion of Innovations theory (Rogers, 2003)

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and Performance of State Higher Education Systems model (Richardson, Bracco, Callen, & Finney, 1999). This case study analysis sought to understand the factors that influenced the implementation process of the new reverse transfer and the challenges and support mechanisms that influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program in the Pacific Northwest. Through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, the study focused on the partnership between an urban, multi-campus community college, a public liberal arts university and their respective state agencies.

For purposes of this research study, unless otherwise noted, the term "reverse transfer" refers to the "new reverse transfer" (i.e., the transferring of credit from a four-year college back to a two-year college to retroactively earn an associate's degree) and may be used interchangeably. This chapter provides the background of the dissertation research in the following sections: statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, theoretical framework, research design, overview of the dissertation, and definitions of common terms.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, the number of institutions and states implementing reverse transfer programs has grown. As of 2013, 60% of states had reverse transfer programs, with the majority of those programs implemented at the state level (Friedel & Wilson, 2015). With the growing implementation of reverse transfer programs, a small number of quantitative studies have been conducted. These quantitative studies, however, have not been empirical studies, but rather have been primarily descriptive in nature (Bautsch, 2013; Ekal & Badillo, 2011; Friedel & Wilson, 2015; Iowa Department of Education, 2013; The University of Alabama, 2012).

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At present, there are no known qualitative studies on the new reverse transfer. As such, in order to contribute to the literature, it is important to explore the experiences of individuals, staff, administrators, community colleges, and four-year colleges who work with reverse transfer programs. Additionally, there is much to learn and understand from these entities in terms of the influences of implementation. Research conducted by Richardson, Bracco, Callen, and Finney (1999) and Rogers (2003) addressed the influence that state higher education structure and individual persons, respectively, have on implementing a reverse transfer program. This research may potentially contribute to the literature to better inform institutional personnel, state administrators, and policy makers about the reverse transfer program.

Purpose of the Study

This case study analysis sought to better understand how individual persons and state higher education governance structures influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program. The new reverse transfer, defined as students who transfer from a two-year college to a four-year institution and retroactively receive an associate's degree with their newly earned four-year college credits, is emerging across the nation (Friedel & Wilson, 2015). This study may potentially contribute to the literature on the new reverse transfer. It was set in the Pacific Northwest and focused on the partnership between an urban, multi-campus community college, a public, liberal arts university and their respective state agencies.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the researcher in the collection and analysis of data:

1. What factors are influencing the implementation process of the new reverse transfer?

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1a. How do staff members describe their experience and influence over the implementation of the new reverse transfer program?

1b. How does a state system of higher education influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer?

2. What are the challenges and support mechanisms that influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program?

Significance of the Study

This study was conducted in response to the lack of qualitative research in the literature regarding the new reverse transfer. At the time of this writing, no known research existed that addressed the experiences of staff during the implementation phase of the new reverse transfer. The information garnered from this study may provide support and insight regarding the development of new reverse transfer programs and encourage others to implement a new program on college campuses. Additionally, this study may inspire institutions to seek new and potentially better ways to administer new reverse transfer programs. Findings from this study may also be helpful to those looking to understand the student experience in the process of participating in the new reverse transfer. The findings cannot be directly transferred to the student experience. They can, however, illuminate potential strengths and challenges students may encounter.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, the lens through which the new reverse transfer program was explored was through one theory and one model: Diffusion of Innovations theory (Rogers, 2003) and Performance of State Higher Education Systems model (Richardson, Bracco, Callen &

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Finney, 1999). The researcher sought to use these concepts to help inform the study and were used as a means to frame the study.

Diffusion of Innovation

Implementing a new idea, process or product can be challenging, and even more challenging is encouraging individuals and organizations to quickly implement the innovation. One such new initiative on college campuses is the new reverse transfer program. Similar to other innovative ideas, implementing the new reverse transfer can be challenging for personnel involved in the process. Roger's (2010) Diffusion of Innovations (DI) theory was explored to better understand these challenges. Roger's DI theory "explains social change" which is "one of the most fundamental human processes" (p. xviii). Diffusion is defined by the DI theory as "the process by which (1) an *innovation* is (2) *communicated* through certain *channels* (3) *over time* (4) among the members of a *social system*" (p. 11). Most notably for the purposes of this study is the influence that the social system (e.g., environment, campus culture) has on how readily an innovation is implemented. This is true and relevant to the new reverse transfer because the "social and communication structure of a system facilitates or impedes the diffusion of innovations" within the system or unit (i.e., community college or four-year college) (p. 37). Three of the four elements of DI (innovation, communication channels, and social systems) are used as a framework to better understand how different variables in this case study influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program.

DI postulates that the innovation-decision process requires an individual [or organization] to go through a "series of choices and actions over time" that are used to help

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evaluate the innovation (Rogers, 2010, p. 168). The nature of this process is outlined in a sequential process of innovation decision making:

1) Knowledge occurs when an individual (or other decision-making unit) is exposed to an innovation's existence and gains an understanding of how it functions.
2) Persuasion occurs when an individual (or other decision-making unit) forms a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the innovation.
3) Decision takes place when an individual (or other decision-making unit) engages in activities that lead to a choice to adopt or reject the innovation.
4) Implementation occurs when an individual (or other decision-making unit) puts a new idea into use.
5) Confirmation takes place when an individual seeks reinforcement of an innovation-decision already made, but he or she may reverse this previous decision if exposed to conflicting messages about the innovation. (Rogers, 2010, p. 169)

According to Rogers (2010) this five stage process of DI is the progression in which an individual, over time, evaluates the new idea/program/product, forms an opinion, and decides whether to embrace or exclude the innovation in future practice. This process which an individual follows informed the study as to how and why certain actions were employed (or not employed) during the implementation of the new reverse transfer.

Performance of State Higher Education Systems

State systems of higher education include "the public and private postsecondary institutions within a state, as well as the arrangement for regulating, coordinating and funding them" (Richardson et al., 1999, p. viii). Thus, one can visualize the far-reaching scope that the state system of higher education plays on a college's campus. Specifically, this model served as a lens to help inform the researcher as to how a state's higher education structure influences the implementation of a new program, such as the new reverse transfer.

The higher education system within each state "…operates in a policy environment that is the result of efforts over time to balance the often conflicting interests of academic

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professionals and … the market" (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 12). As defined by Richardson et al., the market is the broad concept of the "array of interests and influences that are external" (p. 12) to the state and college and university systems. Further, the relationship between state and higher education institutional priorities is a principle point of the authors' study. This relationship comes together to form the Continuum of Governance Designs.

The two key components of Continuum of Governance Designs are: (1) state policy roles, and (2) system designs. In order to evaluate the state policy roles, Richardson et al. relied on Clark's (1983) Triangle of Tension, which represented the tension between higher education, state authority and the market (1999). From Clark's work, and another model by Williams (1995), Richardson et al. built a model to explore the state policy roles for higher education. This model explains how the state serves as: (1) provider; (2) regulator; (3) consumer advocate; or (4) steering role as defined on a continuum. The primary distinction between roles involves the "use that a state makes of the market. In a market dominated environment, price is a function of demand. In the consumer advocacy role, the state concentrates on supporting demand. In the regulating role, the state controls price" (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 15).

The second key component is system design of state governance structures for higher education systems. Richardson et al. categorize states into three main structures: (1) segmented, (2) unified, or (3) federal. Segmented systems have "multiple governing boards" that manage many institutions without one sole state agency; unified systems share a common "ways of communicating and measuring" and have one governing board that oversees all institutions in the state; federal systems have a statewide board to oversee budgeting and programming, but also allow for local independence on issues such as strategic planning and accountability (p. 16). While Richardson et al. did not attempt to

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portray one structure as superior, they do agree that the structure of a higher education system is of importance and often understated (1999). This model was used to analyze the state system in the Pacific Northwest state and better understand how this structure influences the colleges and universities within it.

Research Design

A case study methodology provided the framework to better understand how state higher education governance structure and individual persons influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer. Case study is an "intense description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit" that can "describe the phenomenon in depth" (Merriam, 2002, p. 8). According to Yin (2009), case study is an excellent methodology to employ when "a) 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, b) the investigator has little control over the events, and c) the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context" (p. 2).

Case study, as a research methodology, has been used "in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge for individual, group, organization, social, political, and related phenomena" (Yin, 2009, p. 4). As discussed in Chapter 3, case study methodology may employ several data collection methods. For the purpose of this study, semi-structured interviews with staff members involved in reverse transfer programming were conducted. In addition to individual interviews, documents, letters and policies were analyzed as a form of document analysis. Document analyses assist in the research process because they "corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (Yin, p. 103).

Overview of the Dissertation

The dissertation is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on the literature review of the new reverse transfer research that specifically explores the outcomes of

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traditional and new reverse transfer students, the importance and value of the new reverse transfer program, current research on reverse transfer participation, college completion initiatives, and a theoretical framework critique. Chapter 3 provides the methodology (case study) and methods used for this study. The analysis of the data is presented in Chapter 4, and in Chapter 5, a discussion of the findings and implications of the study is provided.

Definition of Terms

The most commonly used terms in this study were defined for this research:

Diffusion: The "process by which (1) an *innovation* is (2) *communicated* through certain *channels* (3) *over time* (4) among the members of a *social system*" (Rogers, 2010, p. 11).

Innovation: An "idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or another unit of adoption" (Rogers, 2003, p. 475). For this study, the term innovation is referring to the new reverse transfer program.

New Reverse Transfer: An emerging term in higher education which refers to students who begin at a two-year college and transfer to a four-year college before completing a degree. Credit is then transferred back to the two-year college retroactively in order to award a degree. Other terms, such as "new reverse transfer", "transfer back", "reverse university transfer", and "reverse articulation" are also used interchangeably in the field (Bragg, Cullen, Bennett & Rudd, 2011; Friedel & Wilson, 2015; Marling, 2012).

Staff member: A term to refer to any non-faculty member involved in the reverse transfer program. Also, it does not include students.

***State system of higher education*:** Refers to all private and public postsecondary institutions in a state, which includes the responsibility and oversight of regulation, coordination and funding models/sources (Richardson, Bracco, Callen & Finney, 1999).

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Traditional Reverse Transfer: This term can be used to refer to multiple patterns of transfer. Historically, however, and for the purposes of this paper, the term refers to students who start at a four-year college and then transfer to a two-year college (Townsend & Dever, 1999).

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CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 serves as a review of the literature on the new reverse transfer programs and initiatives. The literature review is organized into five sections: (1) overview of the outcomes of traditional and new reverse transfer students; (2) importance and value of the new reverse transfer program; (3) current research on reverse transfer programming; (4) college completion initiatives; and 5) theoretical framework critique. To help organize the literature discussion, a literature map is provided in Figure 1.

Reverse Transfer Terminology

The mobility patterns of college students have changed significantly in the past twenty years. Researchers have studied the movement of transfer students and have illustrated the complicated patterns in transfer performance and movement (Bahr, 2012; Laanan, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Townsend & Dever, 1999). Transfer student patterns are a "complex phenomenon that has been defined in different ways in research: transfer, swirling, double-dipping, etc." (Hossler, Shapiro, & Dundar, 2012a, p. 11). Since multiple terms and transfer pathways exist, it is necessary to clarify the definition in order to focus on a specific pattern. The term "reverse transfer" has been applied to many transfer pathways and is explained differently by various researchers. One such example is Hossler, Shapiro, and Dundar's (2012b) use of the reverse transfer term when referring to students who begin at a university and then subsequently transfer to a two-year institution. Three separate transfer pathways for reverse transfer students have been outlined in work by Townsend and Dever (1999). Largely, Townsend and Dever referred to reverse transfer as "students who move from a four-year college to a two-year college" because their "transfer [is] in a pattern that is the reverse of the traditional pipeline pattern" (1999, p. 5).

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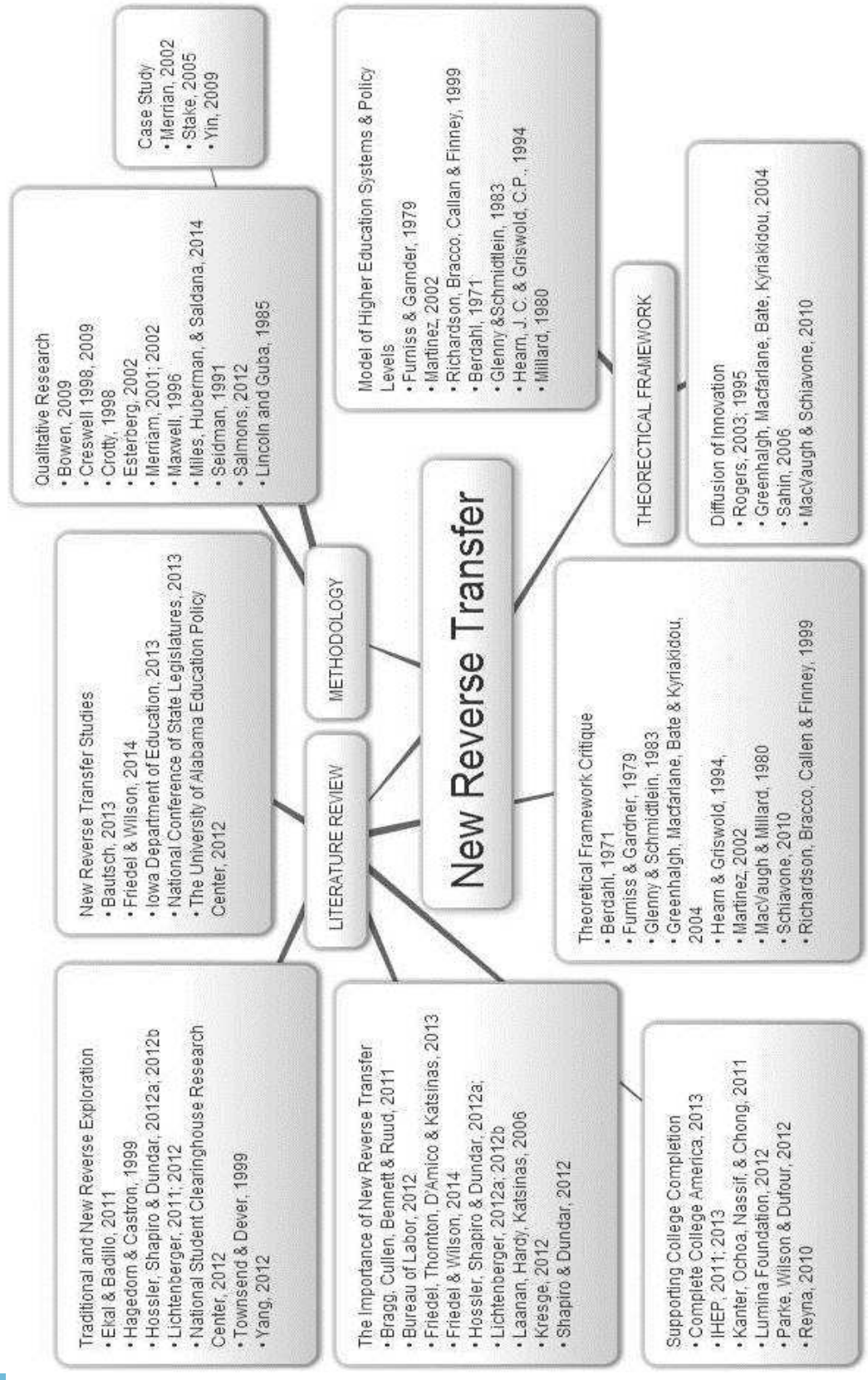

Figure 1. Literature Map

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Townsend and Dever referred to students who are "undergraduate reverse transfer students" (URTS), as those that either: (1) "begin their education at a four-year school and then transfer to a two-year school and stay there for a while" … or (2) briefly, reverse transfer … "students who attend a two-year college, often during the summer, simply to earn a few credits that can be transferred back to their four-year college" (as cited by Friedel & Wilson, 2015, p. 6). This second grouping of students are called "summer sessioners" in research by Hagedorn and Castro (1999, p. 23). A third type of reverse transfer students are called post baccalaureate reverse transfer students (PRST) (Townsend & Dever, 1999; Yang, 2006). The post baccalaureate group of students typically has earned a bachelor's degree before attending a community college. They attend for different reasons than traditional students, including for personal growth, career exploration and professional advancement (Friedel & Wilson, 2015; Townsend & Dever, 1999).

For decades, these three subgroups of reverse transfer have existed and have been studied by researchers. Current community college and higher education policy literature, however, reflects a change in the term's usage (Friedel & Wilson, 2015). An emerging pattern, the "new reverse transfer" has been appearing in the literature and on college campuses in recent years. Beginning in the mid-2000s, the term reverse transfer evolved and started to refer to the new reverse transfer, students who transfer "academic credits for applicable coursework at the university…back to the community college for the purposes of awarding an associate's degree" (Marling, 2012, p. 2). In addition to using the term "new reverse transfer", "educational research and policy initiatives also use the terms 'reverse credit transfer', 'transfer back', 'reverse articulation', and 'reverse university transfer' interchangeably" (Friedel & Wilson, 2015, p. 8).

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Exploration of Traditional and New Reverse Transfer

With the growth of new reverse transfer programs across the nation, research on the topic has been slowly emerging. One known study on reverse transfer was at partnering institutions, the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and El Paso Community College (EPCC). UTEP and EPPC's initial report shows promise in their reverse transfer program. As of 2009, UTEP and EPCC awarded 2,874 associate degrees (AA/AS) to students in their new reverse transfer program. An impressive result from this report is that 70% of these reverse transfer students went on to earn a bachelor's degree (Ekal & Badillo, 2011).

Performance outcomes on new reverse transfer have been slow to emerge and have not been widely published. In contrast, however, is the substantial amount of research on traditional reverse transfer populations (defined as students who start at a four year college and then later transfer to a community college) (Townsend & Dever, 1999; Yang, 2006). Unfortunately, research conducted on traditional reverse transfer students has not been overly promising in terms of outcomes and graduation rates. In one example, a study by National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC) "examined the mobility and success of students who entered four-year colleges and universities and then transferred to two-year college. By the end of the six-year study period, 17.8% had returned back to their four-year college and one-third had either completed their associate degree or were still enrolled at the community college (Hossler, Shapiro, & Dundar, 2012a)" (Friedel & Wilson, 2015, p. 9). One positive outcome from related research notes the positive influence that receiving an associate's degree has on rates of persistence and completion (Friedel & Wilson, 2015). A study on traditional reverse transfer students and postsecondary outcomes conducted by Lichtenberger's (2011), revealed that "earning an associates' degree was among the most important factors in predicting a timely return to a four-year degree" (p. 2). Additionally, a

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NSCRC snapshot report determined that "graduation rates were highest for the students who transferred after receiving an associate's degree. About 71% of these students earned their bachelor's degree within four years, and nearly 80% either graduated or persisted at a four-year institution" (Lichtenberger, 2012, p. 1).

While it is promising that current research demonstrates that earning an associate degree before transferring leads to higher baccalaureate attainment rates, it does not demonstrate that the reverse transfer of four-year college credits will produce the same outcome for students in new reverse transfer programs. Additionally, it is important to note that "tracking the traditional reverse transfer student enrollment has shown that not all reverse transfer students behave in the same manner, so generalizing any forthcoming data of the new reverse transfer programs may be problematic" (Friedel & Wilson, 2015, p. 9). For instance, Hossler, Shapiro, and Dundar (2012a) determined that "enrollment at a two-year institution after beginning college at a four-year college or university does not necessarily mean that a student has made a permanent reverse transfer" [to persist at the two-year college] (p. 5). After attending a two-year college, some students return to their original four-year college, others transfer to a completely different four-year college, and some do not attend any college or university at all (Hossler et al., 2012b). Notably, "results also show that — whether or not they [students] had intended to return to their institution of origin — the majority of reverse transfer students did not return" (p. 5). Of equal importance, a NSCRC report found that "increasingly more students attend multiple institutions, transferring once, twice, or even three times before earning a degree" (Hossler, Shapiro, & Dundar, 2012b, p.5). Indeed, one third of all college students transfer at some point in time before finishing a degree (Hossler et al., 2012a). Due to the fact that a significant amount of transfer students attend several institutions, move to different states, and transfer from public to private

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colleges, many students are simply not accounted for in mobility studies (Hossler et al., 2012a). One can clearly see that forecasting a student's mobility pattern is "complicated, difficult to track, and not yet fully understood" (Friedel & Wilson, 2015, p. 9).

Importance of the New Reverse Transfer

The implementation of reverse transfer programming is an innovative program designed to improve the completion rate of students who attend community colleges. Students, college administrators, and policy creators may see the value in reverse transfer programs for three primary reasons. First, recent research studies demonstrate that "associate's degree completion is positively and significantly related to both a timely return and a timely completion of a bachelor's degree" (Lichtenberger, 2012, p. 32). Research shows that completing an associate's degree is one of the most important factors that influences a student's return to a four-year institution (Friedel & Wilson, 2015; Lichtenberger, 2011). Second, students who have received their associate's degree demonstrate higher employment and salary rates (Friedel & Wilson, 2015). In 2011, the Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that a person with an associate degree had median weekly earnings of $768 a week. In contrast, a person with only a high school diploma earned almost $130 less a week (Bureau of Labor, 2012). Further, it is important to note that in 2011 the unemployment rate with an associate degree was 6.8%; whereas a person with only a high school diploma experienced an unemployment rate of 9.4 % (Bureau of Labor, 2012). The economic importance of education is far-reaching, and programs such as the new reverse transfer at community and four-year colleges help to develop human capital in our communities and neighborhoods (Laanan, Hardy, & Katsinas, 2006). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, reverse transfer programs help community colleges increase their

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completion rates and support student success in the classroom (Friedel & Wilson, 2015; Taylor, 2013). Due to the fact that "70 to 90 % of students make the move to four-year colleges and universities before earning two-year degrees" the reverse transfer program is aptly designed to address this issue (Kresge, 2012, para. 2). To add to these transfer statistics, it is also reported that community colleges are not credited with serving the nearly two-thirds of their students who go on to complete a four-year degree (Shapiro & Dundar, p.9). Administrators at community colleges and four-year institutions are fully aware that policymakers are increasingly focused on "student outcomes as indicators of the success and quality of individual public institutions" (Hossler, Shapiro, & Dundar, 2012a, p.10) and are tying funding to performance (Bragg, Cullen, Bennett, & Ruud, 2011; Friedel, Thornton, D'Amico & Katsinas, 2013).

New Reverse Transfer Studies

Research is beginning to emerge on the new reverse transfer. Currently, there are four relevant studies to review: (1) 2012 Survey of Access and Finance conducted by The University of Alabama Education Policy Center; (2) the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) Hot Topics in Higher Education brief (Bautsch, 2013); (3) Summer 2013 survey of the National Council of State Directors of Community Colleges conducted by Iowa Department of Education; and (4) Friedel and Wilson's 2015 study on the national landscape of the new reverse transfer. Studies 1-3 were largely outlined in Friedel and Wilson's 2015 report and are briefly summarized as follows.

The first study is the 2012 Survey of Access and Finance Issues by the Education Policy Center, at The University of Alabama. This study surveyed members of the National Council of State Directors of Community Colleges (NCSDCC) as to whether or not reverse

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transfer was under development or fully present in their state. The study revealed 34 states had the program, six states were neutral (neither agreeing or disagreeing that reverse transfer was being developed in the state), nine states did not have the program, and two states did not respond to this question (The University of Alabama Education Policy Center, 2012).

A second study was reported in a 2013 National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) publication. The NCSL brief outlined each state's participation in the new reverse transfer (Bautsch, 2013). The report demonstrated, that as of January 2013, 15 states passed legislation which addressed reverse transfer, had active reverse transfer agreements in state, or were currently developing agreements (Bautsch, 2013). In early May 2013, the NCSL "was aware of at least three additional states that were introducing reverse transfer legislation during the current session" (Friedel & Wilson, 2015, p. 10).

The third study, conducted by the Iowa Department of Education, was administered at the April 2013 National Council of State Directors of Community Colleges' (NCSDCC) meeting. An administrator in the Division of Community Colleges at the Iowa Department of Education surveyed participants about their state's reverse transfer policy or legislation. The study revealed that "eleven states responded to the survey: four said that reverse transfer was supported by state policy or legislation, four stated that it was present in their state at the institutional level, and three said that it was not present at all in their state" (Friedel & Wilson, 2015, p. 10).

A fourth study was conducted by Friedel and Wilson (2015) to further explore the current state of the new reverse transfer. The study provided an "overview of the new reverse transfer and the current status of reverse transfer participation and implementation procedure within each of the 50 states" (Friedel & Wilson, 2015, p. 1). Findings revealed, through a numerical rating system of (1) no participation; (3) emerging participation; (5) full

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participation), that 18 states had no participation, 11 states had emerging participation, and 21 states had strong participation in implementing state-wide reverse transfer programming. Table 1 provides an overview of each study and the results by state (Friedel & Wilson, 2015).

Supporting College Completion

Performance measures and completion rates have become hot topics in higher education policy and practice discussions. The Obama administration's college completion agenda has set a goal of increasing the nation's college degree completion rate to 60% by 2020 and adding at minimum 10 million more degrees awarded from community colleges and four-year institutions (Kanter, Ochoa, Nassif, & Chong, 2011). This goal strives to "ensure the vitality of our nation's economy" and "to strengthen our community colleges… [so to] produce the best-educated and most-competitive workforce in the world" (Parke, Wilson & Dufour, 2012, p. 1). The initiative strives to "improve college completion rates [which] has caused community colleges and four-year colleges and universities to collaborate in creating strategies to reach these goals" (Friedel & Wilson, 2015, p. 11).

One such example of institutions partnering to improve completion rates is Project Win-Win, a partnership between the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) and the Institute of Higher Education Policy (IHEP), funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education (and, in Michigan, by The Kresge Foundation). Sixty-one community colleges and four-year institutions in nine states (Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Virginia, and Wisconsin) participated in Project Win-Win. The main objective was to find former students who were no longer in college and who never earned a degree, and award qualified students a degree retroactively (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2011). As of August 2013, over 6,700 eligible students were identified and more than

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Table 1. Research studies related to reverse transfer

Document Source	**2012 Survey of Access and Finance Issues by the Education Policy Center conducted by The University of Alabama Education Policy Center**	**Summer 2013 survey of the National Council of State Directors of Community Colleges conducted by Iowa Department of Education ****	**2013 Hot Topics in Higher Education brief by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)**	**2015 The New Reverse Transfer: A National Landscape (Friedel & Wilson)**
Question	*Statewide reverse transfer agreements with state universities to document community college degree completion are being developed in my state. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral/Don't Know, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)*	*Does your state have legislation or state policy regarding revers transfer?*	*State Transfer and Articulation Policies, Reverse Transfer*	***Rating RT participation: 1: no participation; 3: emerging participation; 5: full participation***
Alabama	A	n/a		3
Alaska	N	n/a		1
Arizona	A	n/a		3
Arkansas	A	Yes	x	5
California	SA	No, institutional		3
Colorado	A	n/a	x	5
Conn.	A	No, institutional		1
Delaware	D	n/a		1
Florida	A	n/a	x*	5
Georgia	A	n/a		1
Hawaii	SA	n/a	*	5
Idaho	SA	n/a		3
Illinois	D	No, institutional		5
Indiana	A	n/a		5
Iowa	SA	n/a	x	5
Kansas	SA	n/a		5
Kentucky	A	n/a		1
Louisiana	A	n/a		3
Maine	Blank	n/a		1
Maryland	SA	n/a	x	5
Massachusetts	A	n/a		3
Michigan	A	n/a	x	5
Minnesota	D	No, institutional	x	5
Mississippi	SA	Yes		5
Missouri	SA	n/a	x	5
Montana	D	n/a		1
Nebraska	D	n/a		1
Nevada	SA	n/a		5
New Hampshire	A	No		3
New Jersey	A	n/a		3
New Mexico	A	n/a		1
New York	N	n/a	x*	5
North Carolina	A	n/a	x*	5
North Dakota	A	n/a		1

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Table 1. (Continued)

Ohio	A	n/a	x	5
Oklahoma	SA	n/a		5
Oregon	A	Yes	x*	5
Penn.	D	n/a		1
Rhode Island	D	n/a		1
South Carolina	N	n/a		3
South Dakota	Blank	n/a		1
Tennessee	SA	n/a	x	5
Texas	SA	Yes	*	5
Utah	D	No, institutional		1
Vermont	A	n/a		1
Virginia	D	n/a		1
Wash.	A	No		3
West Virginia	A	No		1
Wisconsin	N	n/a		3
Wyoming	D	n/a		1

* Per publication, only some higher education institutions currently participate in the reverse transfer agreement.
** States who did not respond to the NCSDCC survey are listed as n/a.
***Table from Friedel & Wilson, 2015.

4, 500 students were awarded a degree (Institute of Higher Education Policy, 2013). In addition to the degrees awarded, Project Win-Win participants shared their challenges and struggles with the program at the 2013 IHEP Institutional Policy Forum. The noted problems included "inadequate data systems, high volume and time-consuming reviews of student records, and difficulty locating eligible students at valid addresses" (Friedel & Wilson, 2015, p. 11). These findings are particularly compelling because they run parallel to problems experienced in reverse transfer programs (Friedel & Wilson, 2015).

Another completion initiative, specific to reverse transfer programming, is the "Credit When It's Due: Recognizing the Value of the Quality Associate Degree" grant initiative. The grant is funded by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Helios Education Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Lumina Foundation, and USA Funds. The "Credit When It's Due" program, beginning in 2012, was an initiative that was "designed to encourage partnerships

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of community colleges and universities to significantly expand programs that award associate degrees to transfer students when the student completes the requirements for the associate degree while pursuing a bachelor's degree" (Lumina Foundation, 2012, para. 2). The grant provided funding to 12 states (Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon) in order to assist in executing and sustaining the program, as well as for reporting the participation of reverse transfer program in each state (Kresge Foundation, 2012). Preliminary data will likely be shared with the public in 2015. The forecast from the baseline data is expected to reveal the progress made by the 12 participating states.

Theoretical Framework Critique

In addition to exploring the literature on the new reverse transfer, the current study was also informed by diffusion of innovation research and by state higher education systems research. It is necessary to provide a critique on the theoretical frameworks used in this study in order to inform the reader about its application and historical context.

Diffusion of Innovations (DI) was first published in 1962 by Everett Rogers for use in rural sociology. The theory focuses on understanding how an innovation is adopted among individuals and organizations. DI is widely used by a variety of academic disciplines, including sociology, psychology, marketing, organizational management and many interdisciplinary fields (Greenhalgh, Macfarlane, Bate, & Kyriakidou, 2004; MacVaugh & Schiavone, 2010).

The DOI model provides a lens to view how a new idea is communicated through an organization. While the framework helps to explain in what manner social structures and communication channels influence how an innovation is implemented, there are instances

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where the theoretical framework may not be applicable or fully utilized. For example, Roger's DOI theory assumes that when an innovation is presented to an organization, all members are given an opportunity to either adopt or reject the innovation. However, not all members of an organization are given a choice to participate; the decision to implement may be made at an administrative level. Additionally, DOI employs a simplified view of how a phenomenon moves through an organization (Lyytinen & Damsgaard, 2001). For example, implementing a new program, such as the new reverse transfer program, is a complex phenomenon and involves many facets of an organization; DOI may oversimplify these experiences and aspects. This is demonstrated by the fact that institutions of higher education are not homogeneous; not all individuals involved share a common culture or viewpoint (Rogers, 2010). The DOI model does, however, provide a valuable model that critically explores how communication channels and social systems influence the implementation of a new innovation. These two elements are particularly relevant to understanding reverse transfer implementation on college campuses and are focused on in this study.

State systems of higher education include "the public and private postsecondary institution within a state as well as the arrangement for regulating, coordinating and funding them" (Richardson, Bracco, Callen & Finney, 1999, p. viii). Higher education systems serve many masters and are accountable to both those that it serves and those that help provide service to students. Higher education needs "considerable autonomy in making internal education decisions," but a government and its people, are "within its rights to demand accountability of all social institutions, including higher education" (Furniss & Garnder, 1979, p. ix). In order to better understand the system of accountability and the forces that impact university systems, researchers have spent considerable time exploring structure and

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policy innovation in higher education systems (Berdahl, 1971; Glenny & Schmidtlein, 1983; Hearn & Griswold, 1994; Millard 1980).

While the majority of historical research on higher education systems has focused narrowly on certain aspects of the system (e.g., finance, legislation, change models, etc.); the work by Richardson, Bracco, Callen and Finney (1999) set out to develop a holistic viewpoint of state higher education systems. In 1994, the California Higher Education Policy Center developed a "conceptual, holistic understanding of state higher education systems" which included higher education structures and the environments within the states (Martinez, 2002, p. 350). As a result of this study, the Richardson et al. (1999) model of State Higher Education Systems was formed. This model was intended to assist policymakers and higher education leaders in deciding if a state's policy priorities and the role they would play balanced with the higher education's structure (Martinez, 2002). The Richardson et al., model does not provide insight into whether or not certain attributes of a system are necessary for success (Martinez, 2002). The model, however, does encourage the researcher to consider the context in which a process is occurring, which is a relevant perspective when considering how a state system operates. Further, the Richardson, et al., model encourages the researcher to consider the relationships between systems and the levels of compatibility in a higher education system (Martinez, 2002).

Summary

The literature review explored the historical context of the new reverse transfer program, current outcomes of traditional and new reverse transfer programs, the significance of the new reverse transfer, current national landscape of the new reverse transfer participation studies and related initiatives. Additionally, a critique of the theoretical

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framework was also provided. Chapter 3 will provide a detailed discussion of the methodology of the study.

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CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research in higher education embodies many forms, topics, and approaches. However, what qualitative researchers share, "is the notion that all social reality is constructed, or created, by social actors" (Esterberg, 2002, p. 15). A qualitative methodological approach is an appropriate and valuable approach for this study because it focuses on individual meaning and honors the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2009). Within this field of research, one can look even closer to reveal the wide variety of characterization of qualitative research including the tendency of the research to use the natural setting of the participants, to utilize the researcher as the key instrument, and to employ multiple sources of data (Creswell). A qualitative approach was selected because of its ability to give voice to a phenomenon by asking those involved to use their experiences to share about the topic. This study sought to be richly descriptive and to deeply understand how people have constructed their world in relation to the implementation of the new reverse transfer program (Merriam, 2002).

The purpose of this case study was to better understand how a state's higher education system structure and how individual persons can influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program. This chapter will explore the study's methodology in the following nine sections: (1) research questions; (2) methodological approach; (3) participants; (4) data collection; (5) data analysis; (6) trustworthiness; (7) ethical issues; (8) positionality; and (9) delimitations.

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Research Questions

Seeking to understand how individual persons and state higher education governance structure influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program, the study was framed by two central research questions. The research questions for this study follow:

1. What factors are influencing the implementation process of the new reverse transfer?
    1a. How do staff members describe their experience and influence over the implementation of the new reverse transfer program?
    1b. How does a state system of higher education influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer?
2. What are the challenges and support mechanisms that influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program?

Methodological Approach

Research design is the "underlying structure and interconnection of the components of the study and the implications of each component for the others" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 4). As such, it is important to lay a clear pathway of how a research study will be conducted and how the components interact. The following section provides a detailed account of the methodological approach of this study in effort to demonstrate the framework and the relationship between the study's components. This study was designed following Crotty's ETMM (epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods) model (1998). Framing the study around the ETMM model ensured the "soundness of [the] research and make[s] its outcomes convincing" (Crotty, 1998, p. 6).

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Epistemology: Constructivism

The "E"—Epistemological framework, is Constructivism, which understands that knowledge is socially constructed by individuals based on their experiences within the world (Crotty, 1998). This epistemological perspective is relevant to this study because participants are asked to consider and describe their own experiences in relation to working on the implementation of the new reverse transfer. Constructivism does not seek to find the one truth, but rather it seeks to understand how people construct their knowledge and own truth (Crotty). This is particularly relevant when studying how a program is implemented because it is understood that individuals may experience the same phenomenon differently.

Theoretical Perspective: Basic Interpretive

This qualitative study, like most qualitative studies, sought to learn more about how individuals make meaning and experience a phenomenon. The lens through which this study was viewed is grounded in the "T"—Theoretical perspective, of Crotty's model. The use of a theoretical perspective offers a philosophical framework that "provides a context for the process and grounds its logic and criteria" (Crotty, 1998, p.7). The theoretical perspective used in this study is a basic interpretive approach, which seeks meaning and understanding of the social world (Merriam, 2002). This approach embodies all the features of qualitative research, which includes researcher as instrument, an inductive strategy and a descriptive outcome (Merriam). The basic interpretive approach helped to structure the study of implementation and provided the framework for participants to share their individual experiences with the new reverse transfer program.

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Methodology: Case Study

To better understand how state higher education governance structure and individual persons influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer, a case study methodology provided the framework for the design of this study. Case study is an "intense description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit" that can "describe the phenomenon in depth" (Merriam, 2002, p. 8). According to Yin (2009), case study is an excellent methodology to employ when "a) 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, b) the investigator has little control over the events, and c) the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context" (p. 2). Case studies focus on a bounded and contained system within limiting structures. Merriam explained the bounded nature of a case study by describing it an "intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community" (Merriam, 2002, p. 8).

Case study, as a research methodology, has been used "in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organization, social, political, and related phenomena" (Yin, 2009, p. 4). According to Yin, case study design has five components: (1) the study's questions; (2) its propositions to reflect on an issue; (3) its unit(s) of analysis; (4) the logic linking the data to the propositions; and (5) the criteria for interpreting the findings. Questions in a case study are typically constructed as "how" and "why" questions and should be used to clarify the purpose of the study (Yin). Next, study propositions should be identified in order to help direct the study and focus the research. Third, the researcher must identify the unit of analysis; that is, what will be the focus of the case? For example, will the study focus on an individual, a group, or an organization? Next, the study will need to link data to propositions and provide the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin). This is the analytics piece of the study, which includes identifying patterns, themes, and explanations.

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Finally, in order to support the findings of a case study, the researcher must identify and address any contrary findings in other related research. (Yin).

Methods

Collecting data in a case study can take on many different forms and can be broad and diverse. Primarily, there are four main forms in which case study evidence may be collected: interviews, documents/records, observations, and artifacts. For the purposes of this study, interviews, documents/records, and artifacts were a part of the data collection process; observation was not used. Additionally, field notes were collected by the researcher during the study.

The first and primary data collection method was interviewing. Interviews are an excellent source for collecting data directly related to the case study topic. Since two principle uses of case study are to "obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others", interviews are a common method in case study research (Stake, 1995, p. 64). Interviews provide a first-hand account of the case to be studied and allow the researcher to interpret and probe compelling issues and findings. Interviews, however, are not without their faults. For example, interviews may be skewed by researcher bias or may provide inaccurate information due to unreliable recollection by the participant (Yin, 2009). Extensive practice and preparation are the keys to facilitating a successful interview (Stake, 1995).

Interview questions were designed to explore the influence of state systems and individual persons on implementing the new reverse transfer. Questions were also formulated to build on the knowledge of Wilson's (2014) study on reverse transfer implementation. Wilson's study resulted in six recommendations for practitioners, ranging from encouraging institutions to form cross-campus committees, automating the credentialing and evaluating of

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degree requirements, and outlining the procedures to share data inter-institutionally (Wilson, 2015).

Document analysis and record review is another form of case study data collection. Document analysis is a "systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents" which permits the data to be "examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Documents can take on many different forms including newspapers, letters, administrative documents, emails, diaries, etc. Using both primary and secondary sources is important because both sources often "contain insights and clues into phenomenon" (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002). When reviewing documents, a researcher needs to "have one's mind organized, yet be open for unexpected clues" (Stake, 1995, 68). Another important reason to study documents is that they "corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (Yin, 2009, p. 103). As discussed later, providing multiple sources of data helps to create good and trustworthy research. For this study, documents ranged from (1) Memorandum of Understanding documents between the two institutions; (2) Example communication letters sent by each institution to participants regarding reverse transfer program; (3) Board approval documents; and (4) Website text regarding reverse transfer program (e.g., frequently asked questions, homepage for program).

As mentioned previously, many case study methods employ the use of direct observation and participant-observation. For the purposes of the study, observation was not used due to the fact that the researcher was not able to directly observe the participants because the researcher was not able to travel to the state. The final source of data collection is the study of artifacts as a source of evidence. Such artifacts may include physical or cultural artifacts, tools or instruments, pieces of art, etc. (Yin, 2009). While the use of

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artifacts is used less often, due to availability and applicability, they remain a valuable source of data in a case study.

Lastly, in addition to the interviews and document analysis, field notes were collected during the interviews. Field notes provided participant descriptions, inferences and researcher reactions (Esterberg, 2002) and served as a reflective piece for the researcher during data analysis. In an effort to separate the researcher's feelings and opinions on the data, bracketing was used to differentiate the participant's responses and the researcher's observations (Esterberg, 2002).

Participants

Common to a qualitative study, the participants in the study were determined through purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2002; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) and were determined through a connection established at the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois (OCCRL). OCCRL serves as the research and assessment entity for the Lumina Foundation's Credit When It's Due Grant (CWID), and as discussed in Chapter 2, CWID is a grant program to support the new reverse transfer program across the nation. OCCRL supports the "research and impact assessment for CWID to include research on reverse transfer, development/dissemination of briefing papers, assistance in planning/conducting grantee learning community convening to share best practices and policies, and facilitating communications" (Lumina Foundation, 2014, para. 13). A research assistant at OCCRL suggested these two institutions as a research study because they have had success implementing the program and the staff were "excited about the program." Additionally, a formal relationship and memorandum of understanding were

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already in place at the beginning of this study which provided the basis of an established program.

The participants in this case study are situated in a Pacific Northwest State which has influenced the implementation of the reverse transfer program at the two institutions (Figure 2). Urban Community College (UCC) has an annual enrollment of nearly 17,000 who attend classes on three campuses throughout the state. Liberal Arts University (LAU) is a public liberal arts college that serves approximately 7,000 students (see Figure 2). While there are multiple campuses and facilities associated with UCC and LAU, it is important to note that this case study focuses mostly on the campus on which UCC and LAU share a building. On this campus, the two institutions share a Higher Education Center which is utilized to teach classes, provide student services, and house faculty and staff members.

Within the Pacific Northwest state, the universities are governed by a university system agency, and its community colleges are coordinated by a state community college agency that oversees the community college and workforce development in the state. At the time reverse transfer was introduced at UCC and LAU, there was relative stability in the state higher education governance structure. However, during this study, there were dramatic changes to the governance structure within the state. In the summer of 2015, the university state agency will be dissolved and all universities will be independently governed. While the community colleges are all currently independent, there are upcoming changes to the board and commissions that assist with mission oversight and budgeting. The community colleges will likely see multiple governing boards. These changes were discussed by participants and are explored in Chapter 4.

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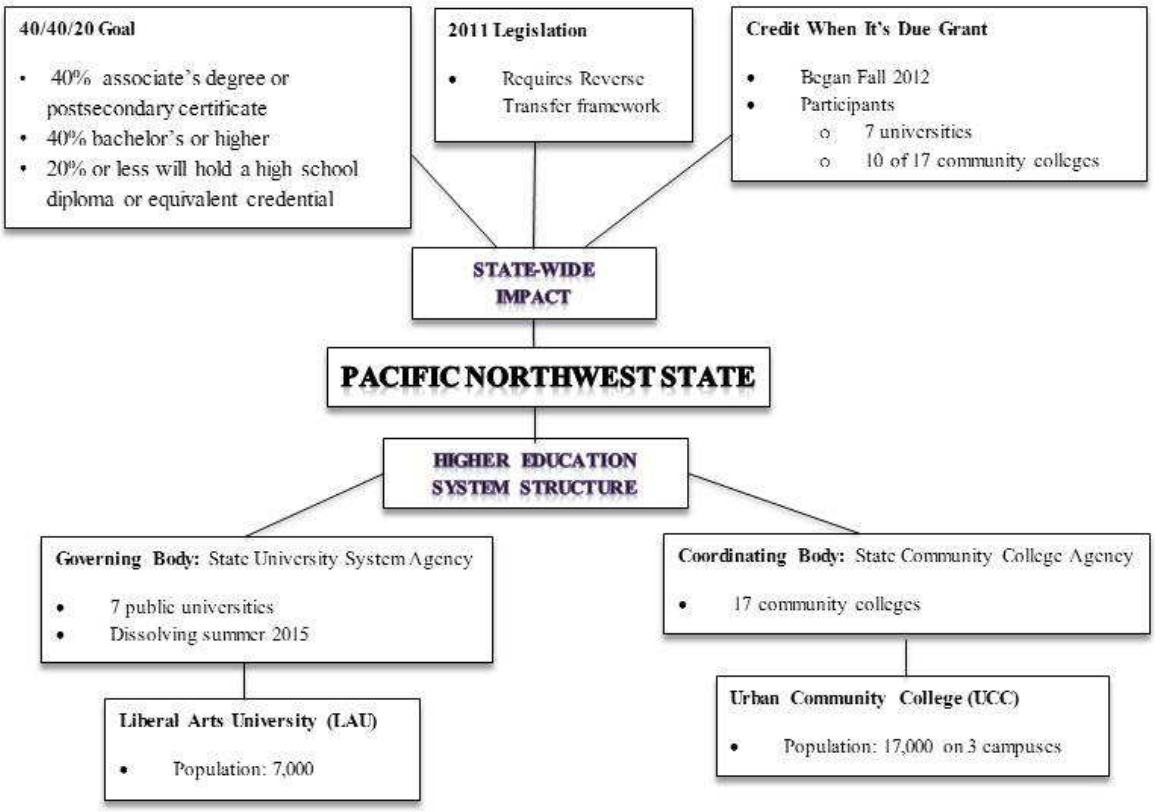

Figure 2. Influence in the Pacific Northwest State

In addition to understanding the state's higher education structure, it is also important to explore the influencing factors that prompted reverse transfer implementation in the state. In 2011, the Pacific Northwest state legislators presented a landmark higher education goal, called the 40/40/20 goal. The goal states that by 2025, 40% of the state's adults will have an associate's degree or postsecondary certificate, 40% will hold a bachelor's or higher, and the remaining 20% or less will hold a high school diploma or equivalent credential. Legislation passed in 2011 helped to support this goal and provided a structure for the new reverse transfer program. This legislation required a reverse transfer process to be created and implemented in the state. In response to the legislation, in September 2011, Pacific Northwest staff members from the university and community college state agencies and institutional staff took a site visit to University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and El Paso

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Community College (EPCC). UTEP and EPCC had an established reverse transfer program and had demonstrated some early success with the program. Later that fall, UCC staff attended a conference on the Project Win-Win grant, which was a Lumina grant related to reverse transfer programming. During this time, individual institutions began piloting reverse transfer programs in the state. In the fall of 2012 the reverse transfer program was officially launched in the Pacific Northwest state as a result of receiving the Credit When It's Due Grant (CWID). By summer 2013 the first reverse transfer degree was awarded in the state. In spring 2014, 200 total associate degrees were awarded in the state through reverse transfer The CWID grant ended in September 2014, but the reverse transfer partnership between UCC and LAU has continued as of the writing of this study (see Figure 3).

Since purposeful sampling enables the researcher's participation lists to evolve during the data collection process, members selected for the study grew based on recommendations and referrals from participants (Miles et al., 2014). The sampling criteria for this study were to select staff members who worked with the new reverse transfer program at either the UCC or LAU in the Pacific Northwest state. Additionally, administrators who worked with the reverse transfer program at the state higher education offices were also selected. Participants were contacted via email to seek participation in the study. After each interview, participants were asked for suggestions of other possible participants. This resulted in snowballing of five additional participants. Snowballing is a referral to new participants from current participants (Esterberg, 2002). At total of 10 interviews were conducted with 10 different participants. While there is not a prescribed number of interviews a researcher must conduct, for this study the researcher collected data until data saturation occurred (Merriam, 2001). Data saturation occurred when the researcher heard similar ideas/thoughts related to the topic or no new information was identified through the data collection process (Merriam, 2002).

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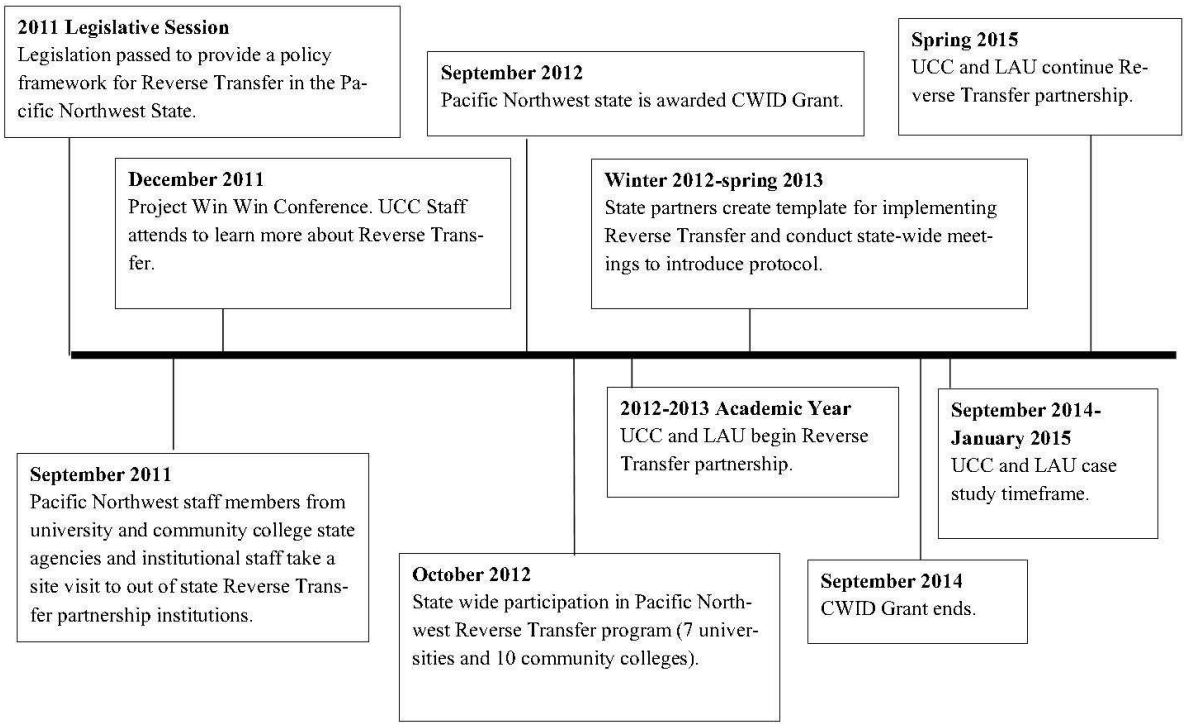

Figure 3. Reverse Transfer Timeline at Pacific Northwest

Each participant was emailed an informed consent form prior to the first interview in this study (Appendix A). This consent form explained the details of the study as well as the participant's rights in this study. Participant privacy and confidentiality were honored, and each participant was given the ability to stop participating in the study at any time and was informed that he/she may contact the researcher with questions before, during or after the study.

Data Collection

Interviews were used as a means to help people tell their stories and were a critical component of a case study (Yin, 2009). Seidman (1998) placed high value on the interview as well, stating that "stories are a way of knowing" (p. 1). Individual, semi-structured interviews served as the primary method of data collection for this study because interviews

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provide a first-hand account of the case and allow the researcher to interpret and probe compelling issues and findings. An interview protocol was used which included questions, probes, and follow-up ideas (Appendix C).

All of the research participants were located out-of-state, and were interviewed by phone or through Skype® (online videoconference tool). The choice of phone or Skype® was given to each participant, but a Skype® interview was the preferred method so that observation of the participant could occur. However, only one interview was conducted using Skype®. All of the other nine interviews were conducted over the phone. The interviews were recorded using both a hand-held audio recorder and an iPad application.

Conducting an interview requires the researcher to draw upon the skill set of "trust, thoughtful questioning, perceptive probing, empathy and reflective listening" (Salmons, 2012, p. 1). Since one of the interviews was conducted online, it is important to note that the researcher was not only aware of this dynamic, but was sure to follow the same "fundamental steps and thinking" (p. 2) as a face-to-face interview. Since nine participants either did not use Skype® or were unable to access the software, a phone interview was utilized with these participants (Salmons). Conducting an interview by phone is a known limitation of the study, but it did not impede upon the goodness and trustworthiness of study. The researcher attempted to reduce any difficulty by adequately preparing the participants of the method of interview and allowed the participants to ask any questions and addressed any concerns.

In addition to the interviews with key participants, document analysis served as another means to collect data. Documents used in this study included memorandums of understanding, form letters, meeting minutes, email communications, program advertisements and publications and internal documents (see Table 2). Documents are a

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Table 2. Document analysis

Document Title	Origination
State Profile	CWID
Transfer Website	LAU
Student Welcome Letter	LAU
Reverse Transfer Advertisement Poster	LAU
Reverse Transfer Website	State Community College Agency
Board of Education-Topic Summary	State Community College Agency
Reverse Transfer Persistence and Completion Document	State Community College Agency
Grant Agreement	State Community College Agency
Reverse Transfer Website	State University Agency
RT Template for Implementation	State University Agency
Legislative Issue Brief	State University Agency
Endorsement of Reverse Transfer	State University Agency
Reverse Transfer Website	UCC
Board of Education, Agenda Item	UCC
Reverse Transfer FAQ	UCC
Email to department heads about RT	UCC
Memorandum of Understanding	UCC and LAU
Reverse Transfer Advertisement Poster	UCC and LAU

valuable source of information for case study research because they "corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (Yin, 2009, p. 103).

Data Analysis

While the researcher may form impressions and concepts during the collection process, it is necessary for the researcher to return to the data, deconstruct it, and dissect it (Stake, 1995). Creswell (2009) describes this as peeling back the layers of an onion in order to "move deeper and deeper into understanding the data" (p. 183). During this process, the researcher is making sense of the data, determining how parts are related, identifying what concepts diverge from one another, and recognizing patterns.

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Creswell (2009) described an interactive and interrelated process to data analysis in qualitative research. First, the researcher must organize and prepare the data (which includes transcribing, organizing, and sorting data). Next, the researcher should read through all of the data and get a "general sense" of the data. Third, begin a detailed analysis with a coding process, is followed by the fourth, create themes and categories from the coding. Step five includes representing the data in a narrative or other means of discussion. The final step of the process is to provide an interpretation of the data; or in other words, how does the data make meaning (Creswell)?

For this study, data analysis occurred simultaneously with the collection of the data. By analyzing the data during the collection process, not only was data "parsimonious and illuminating", it was focused, yet comprehensive and approachable (Merriam, 2001, p. 162). The interview dialogue was transcribed after each interview and reviewed for accuracy.

Once the transcription was completed, coding and analysis of the text occurred. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) suggested that coding occurs in two cycles. The first cycle, groups the data into data chunks and the second cycle further groups the first cycle codes into subsequent codes (i.e., bundling together like ideas/topics) (Miles et al., 2014). In the first cycle, codes were assigned in terms of descriptive codes (short phrase or singular word to describe the response data); in vivo codes (words or short phrases in the participant's own words); and process coding (gerunds-based codes to demonstrate action in the data) (Miles et al.). This early cycle and application of coding was used to shape and adjust the study as needed and to inform the study of early themes (Merriam, 2001).

At the completion of all of the interviews, the second cycle of coding began. This second coding process, pattern coding, groups the "summaries [from the first cycle] into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 86). Pattern

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coding serves to condense the data, focus the researcher, and create a cognitive map for understanding the interactions (Miles et al.). Most notably for this study, the pattern coding process helped to explore causes/explanations for implementation and to understand the relationships among people who work on the new reverse transfer program at the two institutions and respective state agencies.

In addition to analyzing and coding the interviews, data were analyzed using the documents associated with the new reverse transfer. Since document analysis is a "systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents" it is important to consider how to use the data from such methods (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). The use of document analysis produces data ---"excerpts, quotations, or entire passages—that are then organized into major themes [and] categories…" (p. 28). In addition to creating evidence, document analysis also helps to triangulate the data collected from other sources (Maxwell, 1996). For this study, data collected from the participant interviews was supported by document sources. Specifically, documents from the new reverse transfer program provided a glimpse into the development of the program on campus (Bowen, 2009).

Using documents such as memorandums of understanding, form letters, meeting minutes, and institutional documents, the researcher reads, interprets, and edits the data from the documents. Just as in the coding process for interviews, the data were analyzed by content and themes. During this critical process, the documents were critiqued in terms of relevance to the topic, purpose and completeness of document and the reliability of the source (Bowen, 2009). Lastly, the researcher made note of an absence of documents. Incomplete or sparse documentation revealed pertinent data in terms of noting possible errors or oversights in the case (Bowen).

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Once all of the data were coded and field notes critiqued, a summary of findings was produced. In keeping with a good and trustworthy qualitative study, a rich, descriptive report was produced that communicates the experiences of staff members who have participated in the implementation of the new reverse transfer.

Trustworthiness

Conducting scholarly research requires the researcher to produce good and trustworthy research. In order to do so, it is necessary for researchers to fully understand and apply the concepts of what makes a good and trustworthy qualitative study. The following section addresses several strategies that were used in order to support the trustworthiness of the study. The trustworthiness of the study was provided by detailing the credibility, transferability, and dependability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

In order for a study to be considered credible, it is necessary for the researcher to accurately portray the multiple realties of the participants and to have those realities approved by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). That is, do the research participants agree that how the study portrays them is accurate? To ensure that credibility occurred, this study utilized three techniques: (1) triangulation, (2) member checking, and (3) peer review.

Triangulation is the use of multiple and different sources and methods in a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996; 2002). For this study, triangulation occurred by using multiple data collection methods (interviews and document analysis) and by using different data sources (staff members at each institution and within the state; documents from multiple sources). The use of multiple data points provided a comparison point that helped to substantiate the data and increased the credibility of the work.

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The second strategy used to ensure credibility was the use of member checks. Member checking is the sharing of research findings, field notes, transcripts, etc. with each research participant. Participants were asked to review the data to see if it "rings true" with them (Merriam, 2002). During this research study, member checking occurred with all interview participants, and participants were asked to review and provide comment or approve the data as presented.

Lastly, the study relied on a peer review to help establish credibility. A fellow researcher was used to review the study before and during the study to help identify inconsistencies and potential biases. Additionally a peer reviewer provided suggestions for improvement, as well as to challenge any assumptions. Finally, an editor provided technical oversight which helped to contribute to the credibility of the study.

Transferability

Qualitative research promises to provide an understanding of how an individual makes meaning. Due to this tenant of qualitative research, it is commonly understood that most qualitative work is not generalizable. Instead, qualitative research seeks to provide thick description that enables "someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). In other words, the researcher provides the instrument (i.e., data) that the audience judges as transferable or not to their context. The rich, thick description of the findings is critical to making this judgment possible.

Providing rich, thick description was a key strategy of this study. The study provided a thorough description of each participant's demographics, and settings and context of the

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case, as well as detailed extracts from interviews and documents. Doing so helped to maximize the likelihood that a reader will be able to scrutinize and apply the outcomes.

Dependability

It is necessary for qualitative research to be dependable. For this to occur, in addition to the use of triangulation, an audit trail should be kept by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail is a "detailed account of the methods, procedures and decision points" that are carried out in a study (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). For this study, an audit trail was kept through a journal that includes the researcher's reflections, reactions, assumptions and any problems or concerns related to the research. The researcher kept a reflective journal of her own feelings as a researcher. Doing so further enhanced the dependability of the study.

Ethical Issues

Conducting responsible research requires the consideration of moral and ethical implications. Topics such as researcher competence, informed consent, and harm and risk are all worthy matters to reflect upon at the on-set of a study. While one cannot fully prepare for any and all ethical or moral crossroads in a qualitative study, preparing and reflecting at the beginning of the study is a valuable and necessary step (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). To address the ethical issues of this study, the following section address: (1) worthiness of the research; (2) researcher competence; (3) informed consent; (4) harm and risk; and (5) honesty and trust (Miles et al., 2014).

As an emerging initiative in higher education, reverse transfer is a worthy topic for research. As discussed in Chapter 2, the new reverse transfer is a growing program across the nation. The study helped to contribute to the literature which demonstrated a lack of

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qualitative research on the topic. Additionally, this study helped to provide applicable and current research for higher education professionals working in the field.

Next, while the researcher is relatively new to qualitative research, she is a competent researcher. The researcher has completed all of her coursework for her doctoral degree, including four methodological research courses (with a qualitative focus), and holds the doctoral candidacy status. The researcher has also completed human subjects training and received Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval before the study began (see Appendix A).

Third, all research participants were given full information about what is involved in the study (Miles et al., 2014). This includes also signing a full consent form (see Appendix A). Additionally, the IRB reviewed and approved the study as exempt from human subjects protections (see Appendix A).

Fourth, full consideration has been given to the likelihood that harm may occur. It is the belief of the researcher that minimal risk exists. One potential harm that could have occurred was that a participant had concerns about reverse transfer implementation or possibly had damaging statements about the program. These experiences could reflect negatively on the person or institution. In order to minimize the risk, all participants are reminded that the data they share are considered confidential, but not anonymous. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were given the option to opt-out at any time. As discussed earlier, participants were also asked to review the data collected and to verify the information collected. Lastly, the researcher described the research study completely to each participant and strived to establish rapport and trust with each participant.

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Positionality

It is a necessary and valuable process in qualitative research to consider the researcher's own positionality and how it may impact the study. By doing so, the reader is able to "better understand how the individual researcher…arrived at the particular interpretation of the data" (Merriam, 2002, p. 26). In this section, two main topics are explored: (1) researcher bias, and (2) insider/outsider status.

Researcher bias is how the researcher affects the case and how the case affects the researcher (Miles et al., 2014). As a researcher, there are many events that can deeply influence the approach and analysis of the study. For this study, the researcher had previously worked on the topic of reverse transfer and had spent many hours researching the program. Additionally, the researcher had extended informal conversations with professionals in the field regarding this topic. As a result, the researcher had many experiences that shaped the researcher's opinion on the topic. Those experiences influenced the researcher's continued interest in the topic and have further informed the research.

The concept of how previous experiences influence research is discussed at length in qualitative research. Insider/outsider positionality is defined by many researchers as the occurrence of the researcher sharing their participant's background, personal experiences, race/ethnicity, etc. (insider), or not having a shared background or experience (outsider) (Mercer, 2007; Merriam, 2002). In this study, the researcher may be considered an insider because of the researcher's work in higher education for ten years and for the broad understanding on the reverse transfer program. Conversely, the researcher may be viewed as an outsider because the researcher is a PhD candidate and not an employee of the state system or institutions in which the study occurred.

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As a result of the researcher's bias or insider/outsider positionality, the researcher attempted to authentically represent the voices and viewpoints of the participants. As discussed earlier in this chapter, ensuring the goodness and trustworthiness of a study helped to address these issues.

Delimitations

This study was a case study analysis of how state higher education structure and individual persons influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program in the Pacific Northwest state. It was focused on the partnership between an urban, multi-campus community college and a public liberal arts university. Two main delimitations existed in this study, which included case study participant characteristics and staff-focused experiences. This study is situated in the Pacific Northwest and is delimited to the relationship and experiences between two colleges and the state higher education system. The information collected may not always be applicable to states and institutions in other states and systems. The second delimitation is that the primary focus of this study was on staff member experiences. Other groups of individuals, including students, family members, or outside stakeholders, were not included in this case study. Even though delimitations exist in this study, it is the belief of the researcher that the research still has implications for institutional personnel, state administrators, and policy makers who work on implementing the new reverse transfer.

Summary

This study sought to better understand how state higher education governance structure and individual persons influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program. This case study analysis, seeking to contribute to the literature on the new reverse

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transfer, was set in the Pacific Northwest and focused on the partnership between an urban, multi-campus community college and a public liberal arts university. In this study, the new reverse transfer program was investigated from one theory and one model: Diffusion of Innovations theory (Rogers, 2003) and Performance of State Higher Education Systems model (Richardson, Bracco, Callen, & Finney, 1999).

This study was conducted based upon a growing desire to understand more about the reverse transfer program. A thorough literature review discussed the outcomes of traditional and new reverse transfer students, the importance and value of the new reverse transfer program, current research on reverse transfer participation, college completion initiatives, and a theoretical framework critique. The research design followed professional protocols and procedures to ensure good and trustworthy research in a case study analysis. The design also accounted for ethical concerns when conducting qualitative research.

The findings of this study are presented in Chapter 4. Lastly, the findings, implications, and recommendations are discussed in Chapter 5.

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CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. The purpose of this study was to better understand how state higher education governance structure and individual persons influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program. Two primary research questions guided this study:

1. What factors are influencing the implementation process of the new reverse transfer?
   1a. How do staff members describe their experience and influence over the implementation of the new reverse transfer program?
   1b. How does a state system of higher education influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer?
2. What are the challenges and support mechanisms that influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program?

Ten participants were interviewed via a phone interview or Skype® interview. Interviews averaged in length of 30 minutes, with two interviews lasting over 45 minutes. Participants were assigned pseudonyms in an effort to protect their identities.

The data analysis process included writing a reflection following each interview, listening to the recorded interviews, and reading and coding the transcriptions. For this study, data analysis was concurrent with the collection of the data. By analyzing the data during the collection process, the data were both "parsimonious and illuminating," as well as focused and comprehensive (Merriam, 2001, p. 162). Next, the researcher coded the text which occurred in two cycles (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The first cycle, grouped the data and assigned descriptive codes (short phrase or singular word to describe the response data); in vivo codes (words or short phrases in the participant's own words); and process

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coding (gerunds-based codes to demonstrate action in the data) (Miles et al., 2014). At the completion of all of the interviews, the second cycle of coding began. This second coding process grouped the "summaries [from the first cycle] into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs" (p. 86). Pattern coding served to condense the data, focus the researcher, and create cognitive map for understanding the interactions (Miles et al.). Most notably for this study, the pattern coding process helped to explore causes/explanations of implementation and to understand the relationships among people who worked on the new reverse transfer program at the two institutions.

In addition to analyzing and coding the interviews, documents from Liberal Arts University (LAU), Urban Community College (UCC), the university state agency, the community college state agency and the Credit When It's Due Grant were analyzed and used to support and develop themes. Documents used in this study included memorandums of understanding, form letters, meeting minutes, email communications, program advertisements and publications and internal documents (see Table 2). Since document analysis is a "systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents" it was important to consider how to use the data from such methods (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). The use of document analysis produces data—"excerpts, quotations, or entire passages—that are then organized into major themes [and] categories…" (Bowen, 2009, p. 28).

Four themes emerged through the data collection and analysis process: measures of success; influence and stability; responding to something new; and benefits outweigh the cost. Each of the four primary themes had subthemes that were used to further classify the data (see Figure 4).

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Theme 1: Measures of success
Subtheme 1a: Importance of relationships
Subtheme 1b: Efficient and effective practices

Theme 2: Influence and stability
Subtheme 2a: Influencing change
Subtheme 2b: Stability

Theme 3: Responding to something new
Subtheme 3a: Ripple effect
Subtheme 3b: Flexibility vs. rigidity

Theme 4: Benefits outweigh the cost
Subtheme 4a: Focus on students
Subtheme 4b: Believing in the program

Figure 4. Themes of Case Study Analysis of Reverse Transfer

Demographics

Ten study participants were selected based on their involvement in the reverse transfer program at either the Urban Community College (UCC), the Liberal Arts University (LAU) or in the state higher education agencies (see Figure 2). The following describes each individual participant as a means to situate each participant in the study and to provide rich details of each interview. Table 3 lists the participants' pseudonyms and a brief description of their professional background. In order to support the goodness and trustworthiness of the data, member checks were performed on the data and each participant was provided an opportunity to respond to its accuracy.

Donna

Donna is a 24 year employee of UCC, working for 13 years in her current position as Director of Enrollment Services. In her current role, she oversees the admissions office and registrar's office, which includes staff members in UCC Central, Enrollment and Student Records. When describing UCC, she said:

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Table 3. Demographics of the participants

Participant Pseudonym	Institution or State Agency Affiliation	Years working with Institution	Job Title
Christina	UCC	9	Student Records Specialist
Donna	UCC	13	Director of Enrollment Services
George	State University Agency	6	Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success Initiatives
Julie	State Community College Agency	2	Consultant
Kelly	State Community College Agency	3.5	Director of Research and Communications
Leah	LAU	2	Academic Advisor and Business Outreach
Nancy	LAU	0.25	Provost and Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs
Nate	UCC	6	Academic Advisor/Transfer Specialist
Nick	LAU	12	University Registrar and Director of Enrollment and Retention Assessment
Rachel	UCC	5.5	Vice President of Student Services

We're a comprehensive community college. We offer immediate classes for people who plan to transfer to a university after they've finished their three, two years of college at a community college. We also offer career technical classes. Those are programs that are offered for people who want to earn a degree or a certificate and go straight into the workforce. For instance we have electronics, manufacturing, welding, we have a business tech. Those sorts of programs that are direct from college to work.

We also offer academic skills classes. Those are usually for people who have maybe been in the workforce for a long time, graduated high school or didn't graduate high school and really need some remedial brush up before they start college level classes.

Those are usually middle school to high school rap mass reading type classes to bring somebody up to speed to get them ready to take college level classes. Of course we've got community education. Things like basket weaving, art classes that are not for credit; those sorts of things, we offer that too. Then we also have a workforce division where we provide classes and workshops for people who are currently employed that need to do some CEE work, some education in the field in which they are already working.

There are three main campuses. There's one in [City A] with 4700, [City B] with 6400 and [City C] is 3400. I primarily spend two days a week in [City A], two days a week in [City B], and one day a week at [City C].

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When preparing and training her staff, her philosophy is to cross train on services, as well as to train each staff member to work on any of the campuses:

> *We also do training on the different campuses. Because although the students are all very similar, we have a big cross-section of different types of students who attend UCC…We have a pretty big range in our age demographic…When you [her staff] get here I don't want you to be stunned and unable to help anybody. You have to be ready to do the work on any campus. So they [her staff] do move around.*

Donna was clear about her belief and support for the reverse transfer program, but she also discussed her opinion on the opposition that she encountered:

> *I have to say very late in my career I'm not as collaborative as I used to be and I don't really care to hear the opinions of people who really don't have a dog in this fight. If they don't like this concept that's their own business but it really doesn't influence me.*

Christina

Christina is Student Records Specialist at UCC and has been working at the institution for 9 years. She works in the Registrar's Office reviewing degree audits and conferring degrees where she is supervised by Donna. She described UCC as *"a very student-friendly campus and college"* that serves more non-traditionally aged students. Christina also shared that UCC serves many displaced students who are trying to *"enhance their employability with new job skills."* Christina is one of three staff members at UCC that review degree audits for the reverse transfer program. Each semester, she reported spending approximately 13 hours of staff time reviewing degree audits of reverse transfer students. These hours do not include the additional steps of sending out correspondences to students, awarding degrees, or tracking the data. Christina shared some of the time intensive steps required of the reverse transfer program:

> *The other thing, besides running the audits, that took some time was the sending out [of communication]. Once we ran the audits, if students were*

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> *close to a degree, or even if they'd earned their degrees, then we would send out correspondences to them letting them know 'You're finished with this degree,' or 'You're really close to this degree, this is what you need.' Also, awarding the degrees, and then tracking all of this information, too [were additional steps]…We had to do a lot of analysis of their coursework, and try to figure out what they were close to finishing…Actually, we're still working on some programming on our end to really help us out with it.*

Christina was conversational and was open to sharing her experiences with the reverse transfer program. She shared several examples of how the reverse transfer program has changed UCC's processes and policies for the better:

> *One of the other things we had was that students, if they stopped out for a year, that they couldn't use their original catalog year that they might have started on. For example, if a student completed a program that we've furloughed out, we couldn't grant that degree even if they had completed all their requirements at the time, because they couldn't use that catalog year. Because they hadn't been attending within a certain time period. We got rid of that requirement, and while, if we no long offer the program and the student hasn't completed the requirements, that's not something we can do anything about, but if they completed the requirements ... That was one of the things that we addressed. We've [also] changed it to where students can use the most current graduation guide even if they're not currently attending UCC…Something else we've changed… We got rid of our last term of attendance rule, where their final term of completion had to be done at UCC. I think what has gone well. It has caused us to look at our own internal processes, and why we do the things we do.*

Rachel

Rachel is the Vice President of Student Services at UCC and has been with the institution for over five years. She supervises Donna, the Registrar, and spoke fondly of Donna and her team. Rachel shared that she believed that the long history of *"partnering in education with LAU"* was a very important component to understanding the reverse transfer program. Rachel described UCC as having a *"traditional community college population."*

> *UCC is a comprehensive community college. We have professional, technical, transfer certificates. High-school partnerships. GED. ADE. Counseling services. Disability servicing. We do everything that a comprehensive community college does. Our students average in age, thirty-two is our*

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average age. Most students are part-time…Many of them work and have families.

Rachel was pragmatic in her approach to the reverse transfer program and clarified her role with reverse transfer as someone who is focused on the larger, big picture impact. She knew the general procedure involved with the program, but she explained that the Registrar's team was fully in charge of the program:

I still talk about it [reverse transfer]… I can get reports … how many students we found and how many students transferred, and how many reverse transfer students we have, and what's the most commonly left course on the table. Things like that. But I'm not involved in the day to day. I see the big picture.

Nate

Nate is an Academic Advisor and Transfer Specialist UCC and is one of five advisors working at UCC. He has been in this role for six years and works *"one on one"* with students. Nate described UCC as one of the largest community colleges in the state and that the institution's main goal was improving the lives of students:

We've been interactive throughout the community for years... Since I started, we always operated on the open door principle. Goal is getting as many people in, and helping them, educating them, bettering their lives.

Nate was very student focused and spoke fondly of his role helping students reach their goals and achieve success:

It's more about how the students succeed once they leave college, than how good you are at getting students into college. Personally, I think that's a reasonable and respectable goal. It should be about how you prepare students to succeed in the world…It has to be about finishing a goal, not just starting a goal.

What can we do to both allow a student to earn more degrees, and the college to complete more students without slowing down a person's timeline for their goals?…I am a believer in, we live in a credentials based society, so you need a piece of paper. And it's what you know and how to do what you know. How can we allow students to earn those [credentials] that will propel them, and make them successful in their careers?

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Nate was a strong supporter of the reverse transfer program because it helped students earn a degree. He was passionate about connecting students to their resources and providing students with opportunities:

> *For me, it's on making students understand the value in having an Associate's degree, even if they're intending to go for a Bachelor's degree. One, it's a mile post. You've completed half way through college, let's get something that proves that. Two, it's a great thing to have in case something happens in your next two to three years, and you need something to fall back on. I work with them to see, how we can keep them moving on what they're interested in. If they're a Psychology student, or Criminal Justice, they want to keep working in those classes, and we as a college are running out of options for them, but there's still lots that they can do at the college. They can start moving forward, and doing dual enrollment, and working with both of the schools, or they can go entirely over to LAU, and then they can still send us back transfers, and get degrees. A lot of my philosophy centers around the value of being able to say 'I have an Associate's in this. I have a one year certification in this. I have a Bachelor's degree in this. I've been working on another certification in this.' Even if it was still not in their 4 year plan, they have 4 different certifications or degree that support their knowledge in what they know, and that's very valuable when it comes to working into their career.*

Nick

Nick is the University Registrar and Director of Enrollment and Retention Assessment at LAU. He has been in this position for 12 years. Nick described LAU as serving predominately undergraduate students, but also a few Master's programs. He also described the areas in which LAU students come from and the demographics of the student population:

> *We are a regional comprehensive institution, in the sense that we certainly serve a substantial number of students from our sort of immediate area, geographically, but certainly have a strong general presence in other western states as well.*
>
> *We are probably a little above average in terms of proportion of first generational, low income students; that's certainly not super significantly...I definitely have a mix of quote-unquote 'traditional' majors, residential students, and non-traditional students. Our incoming student population leans towards, traditionally, some freshmen but we have probably about a 60/40*

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> *split between new freshmen and new transfer students, somewhere roughly around that mark.*

Since Nick was involved in the early stages of implementing reverse transfer, he was able to share how LAU and UCC began working together. Nick also shared that while there wasn't a direct benefit to LAU, partnering with UCC helped to appease subtle political pressure:

> *There wasn't a huge incentive for LAU as an institution [to have a reverse transfer program, but] politically there was…There was subtle pressure from the state in terms of encouraging this to get developed… I didn't feel like I was under a ton of pressure, but I felt like if it were a situation where I had a major objection to doing it, that I probably would have had to come up with a really damn good reason for why it couldn't happen, you know?*

Nick had a practical approach to the reverse transfer program and supported the program because it helped foster LAU's relationship with UCC, and it did not require LAU to invest extensive resources. Even though he did not believe that the reverse transfer program benefited LAU, he still supported the program:

> *Honestly, I think the whole processes were fine. Honestly, it hasn't even taken as much time to kind of babysit as I thought it was going to, and frankly the advantages for us have been not incredible ... You know, certainly anytime we can partner with UCC to do anything positive is advantageous, just in terms of relationship-building.*
>
> *It certainly could be argued that it's been advantageous for our students to have the degree if they were awarded one. I'm certainly not going to complain about the little chunk of grant money that we got. Honestly, the whole point of this is much more advantageous for the community college system than it is for the 4-year institutions.*
>
> *We've been fine with it because it's politically advantageous and it's benefited some of our students, and it hasn't been that big of a hassle, so we've been completely fine with it. Has it sort of transformed the essence of the institution? No. It just hasn't been that impactful.*

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Nancy

Nancy is the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at LAU. She is relatively new to this role, having served for a few months. Though new to the role as Provost, she has served as Associate Provost and Department Chair at LAU, as well as being a teaching faculty member. During the reverse transfer implementation, she was not an administrator and said that she wasn't involved in the program, stating, *"It's a little more in the weeds than I tend to get."* She was able to comment that the reverse transfer program had value:

> *I do see value in the program. I think it's a good relationship, a good partnership that we have with them [UCC]. It's just one more piece of that. I think it just enhances our partnership with UCC.*

Nancy shared that the state had been involved in getting community colleges and state universities involved in the reverse transfer program:

> *The state has been very actively involved in getting the community colleges and the state universities the four year institutions to form partnerships. That's historically been something that the state's been involved in, both at the legislative level and also the state board of higher education as well within the Pacific Northwest university system. Those are long standing involvements.*

Leah

Leah is an Academic Advisor and works in Business Outreach at LAU. She has been working in this role for two years. Before the interview, she stated in her email that she was not fully involved in the program and was concerned that she would not be able to share many details about the program. However, the interview produced several important stories that helped to contribute to the study. With her close proximity to the UCC campus, she was able to easily make referrals about the reverse transfer program and assist students:

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> *Our building is shared with Urban Community College. So I talk to the community college here, and we try to work together as far as to really help the students. Basically, I have reached out, talking to the community college and said okay, 'what can I do on my part to help students who are reverse transfers finish their degree?'*
>
> *Really my big part, because I'm basically on one of the community college campuses, as far as we share a building, is the students are, when I meet with them, if they're close to their associate's but they want to transfer or something, I let them know that that is an option. Some people just want to transfer and don't really think about their associate's, and once I tell them [about reverse transfer]. 'Oh, okay. I didn't know that,' and then they know that's an option. It's a win/win situation for the student and the community college.*

Leah supported the reverse transfer program because she believed it helped students earn a credential which would benefit the students in the long term. She also believed that the program is beneficial to the community college:

> *I see it as a benefit for the students because students may come in and just be a couple classes away from their associates, and then some people feel that that is really important that they've accomplished something, so it will show them that they have a degree. It's not a bachelor's yet, but it's an associate's. That's one thing. The other thing is students transfer to universities thinking 'Okay, I'm going to finish my bachelor's degree.' Things happen, and if they get into it and something happens where they can't finish their bachelors, they at least have an associate's degree to maybe go get a job or something until they can finish their bachelor's degree…*
>
> *…This helps the student in the sense that they get their associate's, but it also helps the community college because they get the completion rate, so it's really a win/win situation there. It's a win/win situation for the student and the community college.*

As an advisor at LAU, Leah felt that she did not know about the details associated with the program's organization and management. Despite her lack of knowledge about the structure of the program, she was looking forward to the growth potential of the program:

> *I don't know what the numbers are between the two colleges here or anything. I don't see those. I don't deal with those. But the hope is that it would just grow momentum as far as people finding out more and ... I'm figuring there's a bunch of people that could use a reverse transfer and get an associate's but they just are not aware of it.*

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Kelly

Kelly was the Director of Research and Communications for the Community College State agency which helped to implement reverse transfer in the Pacific Northwest State. She was in this role for three and a half years. During that time she was the state lead for the community colleges on the CWID grant for reverse transfer. At the time of this study, she had left this position [due to the grant ending] and was in a new role as Director of Student Success and Assessment for a state community college association. Kelly believed that UCC and LAU had a natural relationship due to their close proximity and that they were *"doing a lot of really cool stuff down there. Geographically, it's to their advantage because both of those institutions sit pretty much just isolated."*

When asked about why reverse transfer is beneficial, Kelly shared three main advantages:

> *One is that it's really helped highlight the partnerships. It's really helped bring together the universities and the community colleges and see how they can put a more student-centered focus out there and actually mean it. I think that's very positive. Second, it's obviously helping with the completion agenda. We are seeing more degrees granted. The third thing that I think is really beneficial to the state and to the institutions is that the community colleges which have been involved have really had to take a look at their data. We've really had to look at practices and policies that they had in place and what might be impacting student completion.*

Kelly was excited about the potential that reverse transfer was bringing to the state. She thought it was very important for the state agencies to recognize that each institution would need flexibility on how the reverse transfer program was structured and implemented:

> *Each institution has their own challenges. We couldn't have the same processes and things for Community College X that we would have for UCC. They're completely opposite organizational structures. Community College X can automate everything and they have for the most part…You can't dictate the same distinct processes and the same everything. They all do their MOU [memorandum of understanding] separately and differently. They've all done transcripts exchanging differently. It's just all how they want to do it within*

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> *their partnership. We just had them all do whatever it was that they needed. Some people hired staff, some people got software. Just depending what their individual institutional needs were.*

George

George was the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success Initiatives for the University State Agency. He was in this role for six years before the position was eliminated as a result of the dismantling of the State University System. At the time of the study, George was working in another state with their state level higher education board. As Assistant Vice Chancellor, George worked with the seven universities in the state to partner with the 17 community colleges. According to George, all but one of the universities had a very strong willingness to participate from the start. George believed that they were willing because the state agencies had "*done their homework*" by visiting another state and exploring how that state implemented their reverse transfer program. This visit allowed George to see, *"how they did it, and how they overcame barriers."* He quickly learned that the university side of the program would be easier to manage than the community college's role:

> *And on my side, quite frankly, it was easier. It became very clear to me after that trip that the heavy lifting of the reverse transfer is on the community college, not on the part of the university. The university part is fairly easy. It's identifying the students who transfer, but within certain parameters or credits earned, for what degree, for what school they were transferring from. Then things are a little more complicated, with the agreement and how they convert that into a reverse transfer degree. Generally the university will be lesser involved.*

George shared that most institutions were able to *"quickly identify students and award degrees without a lot of noise."* The ability to do so helped with *"community college attainment goals, state-wide goals for a community college degree attainment."* George also noted a long-term benefit that they were hoping to see as a result of the reverse transfer

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program: *"We believe, we don't know yet, but believe that students who do this are also more likely to persist and earn a Bachelor's degree."*

When reflecting on why he believed universities chose to participate in the program, he shared three compelling reasons:

> *There were three reasons. I'll start with probably the least compelling. The least compelling was, but still a factor, was playing well together in the sandbox. The heavy lifting is on the community college side, it was a small effort for a university to do something. It was the community college's work. And those relationships are increasingly important. Number two, we had shared preliminary research that it might increase bachelor's degree attainment. They got the Universities interested. And number three, and that's going to be overlooked really. University folks said it would be purely in the university's best interest to incentivize students to transferring early, as soon as they know where they're going and what they want to major in, because it would be less time.*

Julie

Julie is the Credit When It's Due grant consultant at the state community college agency. She was hired in late 2013 to assist in the coordination of the CWID grant. She assisted with conference submissions, hosting webinars, compiling reports, and talking with each institutional partner. She also created a list of best practices associated with reverse transfer programming, which was compiled through institutional partners' feedback and a student survey. Julie noted, however, that the best practice report could not be used to establish any trends because in *"some cases it was a matter of one person saying something."*

When reflecting upon her work with UCC and LAU, she was complimentary stating, *"[We interacted] quite a lot. I knew them before, so it was an easy transition. We have a well-established and positive collaboration together. They made it really easy."* In working

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with all the state partners, Julie noted the positive experiences she had with those individuals as well:

> *I think that influence was very positive. How the state went about it, was how they typically go about things, and that is to say with a very collaborative based approach. That works really well with this group of people. This group of people that regularly comes together are also unique. They are unique, I think, in that they are very interested in systemic changes and also very willing to be open to change. I think those two things in particular are really helpful. They're just very willing to work together, and not just work together, but again in the collaborative open fashion and they're willing to ask the tough questions of themselves and of their staff to make things change.*

Julie also noted that the state agencies involvement and funding that was awarded as result of the CWID grant were essential in supporting the reverse transfer program in the state:

> *I think it was instrumental not only in the financial support, which is crucial to take on new initiative, because so many of them aren't funded. But also, having the additional support of [the grant]. I think that having the Credit When It's Due definitely made it possible. We just don't have the funding and resources to deal with to do extra initiatives.*

Thematic Findings

The following section discusses the findings of the study. The data collected and analyzed from the 10 participant interviews and document analysis produced four main themes and the eight subthemes (two within each main theme). Each theme is supported and compared with the literature relevant to the topic areas of reverse transfer best practices, higher education governance structures, diffusion of innovation, learning and organization theory. The themes identified for this study included:

- Theme 1: Measures of success
  - Subtheme 1a: Importance of relationships
  - Subtheme 1b: Efficient and effective practices

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- Theme 2: Influence and stability
  - Subtheme 2a: Influencing change
  - Subtheme 2b: Stability

- Theme 3: Responding to something new
  - Subtheme 3a: Ripple effect
  - Subtheme 3b: Flexibility vs. rigidity

- Theme 4: Benefits outweigh the cost
  - Subtheme 4a: Focus on students
  - Subtheme 4b: Believing in the program

Theme 1: Measures of success

The success and/or failure of the reverse transfer program across the nation is yet to be determined by a precise metric. While it is not possible to quantify the numeric value of the program, it is valuable to look at one state's experiences and garner any applicable information that can be shared. For UCC and LAU, the success may be relative, but it can be demonstrated by exploring the stories of each institution's staff members. To address the ambiguity sometimes associated with the word "success," for the purposes of this study, "success" was defined by two outcomes: (1) a functional, productive reverse transfer program that has awarded degrees/certificates consistently each semester, and (2) has participated in the reverse transfer program and has done so with few barriers, while also receiving accolades from an external organization not affiliated with the institution. For this study, the external organization is the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois (OCCRL), which as mentioned earlier, is the research entity for the Credit When It's Due Grant. To further explore the reasons behind this success, the research will present findings that emerged from data collection and categorize these findings in two subthemes: *Importance of Relationships* and *Efficient and Effective Practices*.

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The first subtheme, *Importance of Relationships*, emerged from interviews with nearly every participant. Five participants described the value of their professional relationship with another staff member at the other institution/agency. Other participants shared how they perceived the value of another's relationships and how that brought value to the programs. The close, professional relationships between the state level agency staff members, administrators and advisors at the two institutions were critical to the success of the program and are shared in detail as follows. Additionally, this theme explores how the social structure facilitates or impedes the implementation of reverse transfer (Rogers, 1995). For UCC and SAU, the relationships within the social structure were strong and positive, which contributed to the success of the program's beginnings.

The second subtheme, *Efficient and Effective Practices*, emerged from conversations with those involved in implementing the program. Due to the previous relationships and experiences between the two institutions, part of the success of the program could be contributed to their ability to easily modify existing, related agreements, processes, or forms. State agency participants were strategic in the implementation process, visiting another institution to model and involving future constituents and partners in the process. This is an important component in how people learn and solve problems according to Brandsford and the National Research Council (2000). When individuals are involved in understanding how something works from the beginning, they are more likely to be able to solve problems and find solutions (Bransford & National Research Council, 2000).

Subtheme 1a: Importance of relationships

The existing relationships between campus and state partners played an instrumental role in the success of the reverse transfer program. The structure of this relationship began as

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a formal relationship, but over time has become informal due to the interpersonal networks that have formed (Rogers, 1995). These relationships make up the social structure which "can affect the diffusion and adoption of an innovation" (p. 26). While this social structure can either "facilitate or impede" the implementation of a program, in this study, the social relationships were a cornerstone to the successful implementation of the reverse transfer program (p. 36).

This is first demonstrated at the state level agencies with Kelly, Director of Research and Communications with the community college state agency and George, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success Initiatives with the university state agency. They had a close working relationship which was relied upon during the implementation phase of reverse transfer in the state. George described how their relationship influenced the process:

> *Kelly and I were partners in crime… We went on the road, basically…So, I think we took advantage of existing partnerships, path of least resistance. Kelly and I worked really well together. There was no ego. Not to sound self-congratulatory, but I do think that it's the team of people that are working together.*

The importance of relationships was a cornerstone in the planning associated with the Credit When It's Due Grant. In the state profile document published by CWID, the Pacific Northwest state relied on local level partnerships, stating "the parameters of revere transfer processes and programs are driven by local decisions and formalized by memorandums of understanding among the partners." A letter to UCC's department heads from Donna, UCCs' Registrar, demonstrates the importance of involving all faculty and staff in the reverse transfer program (see Appendix E). The letter sought approval of changes to forms and processes and discussed future communication plans.

Between the two institutions, staff mentioned the same value of relationships. At UCC and LAU, their close proximity to each other, due to them sharing a building, also

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contributed to their ease of working together: Christina, UCC Student Services Specialist explained:

> *They [LAU] were very willing to work with us. I've gone to conferences where other community colleges have spoken about the reverse transfer program, and their partner institutions haven't really seen the value, and they haven't really been cooperative of wanting to do that at all. We've got a pretty good relationship with LAU, so that's helped out a lot. We have a really good relationship with them.*

Leah, an advisor at LAU, continued to discuss the working relationship between the two institutions:

> *Our building is shared with UCC. So I work, I talk to the community college here, and we try to work together as far as to really help the students in whatever we can. Basically, I have reached out, talking to the community college and said okay, what can I do on my part to help students who are reverse transfers finish their degree?*

When discussing the program with participants, many times those interviewed mentioned the value and long-standing working relationship between the institution's registrars. This was not only demonstrated in other staff's interviews, but it coincided with what the Registrars at both institutions experienced. Donna, UCC's registrar, explained why the program works for them:

> *I think honestly I have to say LAU really is built on the relationship that the registrars at the two colleges have with each other. We've know each other. We've been at meetings together. We've helped with state organizations together so when it was time to work together, we were able to speak warmly with each other and work out how this was going to happen for both of us. That worked out well. I think in places where the community college registrar's office and the university registrar's office don't have any sort of communication or connection with each other, it may get harder because it's like how do we start this conversation and how do we come to agreement with this? This has been my observation for people who have not been able to really make this work, is that the communication wasn't good between them.*

Nick, LAU's registrar, concurred with Donna:

> *Donna and I had known each other for a long time... UCC and LAU are used to working with each other on articulation and program agreements, etc., so it*

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> *wasn't like we were forging a new relationship, really. You know, certainly anytime we can partner with UCC to do anything positive is advantageous, just in terms of relationship-building… I mean, they really are our primary community college partner, and they're really our only primary community college partner. We certainly get transfer students from elsewhere, but it's a very long-standing positive relationship and there's just a lot of students. It was really kind of the logical decision.*

Kelly at the state community college agency explains the benefit of UCC and LAU's relationship for students, "*I think with these informal partnerships like UCC and LAU, they're both seeing how this is good for their students*."

Subtheme 1b: Efficient and effective practices

Due to the complex nature of implementing programs between institutions, it was noted that participants believed that simplifying and reducing workload was a priority. In order to make this happen, it was important for those involved to understand and learn about how the program could and should work. Brandsford and the National Research Council (2000) explored this phenomenon of how people learn. When individuals understand the relationship between the structure and function of a process, they are more likely to be able to solve problems (Bransford & National Research Council. 2000).

The study revealed efforts used to help educate staff and campus partners. For example, training and marketing plans were discussed in the Memorandum of Understanding between UCC and LAU, and the marketing and communications strategies were outlined in the CWID profile. Participants in the study understood the need to educate their partners and placed value in investigating the process so that they would have greater buy-in and success. In order to do so, the state agency staff members put together a team of staff members from the universities and community colleges within the state. It should be noted that UCC and LAU staff members were not a part of the initial team. The team took a trip to El Paso

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Community College and the University of Texas, El Paso, who have an established, active reverse transfer. George, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success Initiatives at the university agency, shared the value of the experience: *"I think the thing that went well, whatever success we had, was first of all doing our homework. The preparation and planning. We learned how they did it, how they overcame barriers."* While UCC and LAU were not a part of this exploratory trip, this proved to be a valuable step in beginning the program in the Pacific Northwest. After this exploratory trip, Kelly and George put together a pilot program in the state, which lead to the development of a protocol for future programs (see appendix D). George explained:

> *We developed a protocol, there's a list of about somewhere between 7 and 10 launch steps, logical steps to follow if they wanted to go down this road. The first one was: "what are your academic policies and other policies in place that would either facilitate or prevent the agreement from being executed?" And that was first because in some cases the colleges, I don't know about UCC, but I know for example at another community college they had an academic policy that a student had to take a certain number of their last credits had to be taken there in order to graduate… The first one was policy. Then the second one I believe was data sharing. What is the status of your data sharing agreement and again, what would have to change to introduce a sharing agreement to make this happen?*

By shadowing another successful program and having a pilot program, the state agencies were able to clarify best practices or considerations for future institutions. This process meant that while there was still work ahead for future institutions considering reverse transfer, their workload was sure to more streamlined and efficient.

George, with the university state agency, also mentioned how valuable current partnerships were in starting the program:

> *… I think [it] was taking advantage of existing partnerships and relationships. The path of least resistance. Using institutions that were already working together, already knew each other. Talking to each other, already shared students, instead of trying to roll out a top down centralized program, because that's not [our state's] culture.*

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Documents that were distributed by LAU, UCC and the state level agencies all attempted to efficiently communicate the program's benefits. One approach, coordinated by the state agencies, was to create a logo *"to brand reverse transfer to make it easily identifiable to constituents."* This logo appears on several documents including CWID and UCC and LAU's advertisement posters. However, it should be noted that this logo was not consistently used on all marketing materials and was noticeably missing from the LAU and UCC's website. It was, however, on the State University Agency's website.

Another step that helped to make the process more efficient was Donna and Nick's (UCC and LAU's Registrars, respectively) ability to easily collaborate about how the program would work between their two institutions. Due to their previous experiences implementing programs and creating *"transfer-friendly"* procedures, it was easy to begin working together on the reverse transfer program. Donna explained:

> *Nick, who's the registrar at LAU, he and I might have been a committee too, but we were basically just emailing each other or phoning each other. "Here's a draft of this." "What do you think of that?" "Change that wording to this."*

Nick continued, explaining how they formed their agreements:

> [*We thought], all right, what's going to be the easiest way to do this? Just kind of framed it off of our common interests and what was happening with other agreements that had already been developed in the state, and just kind of piggy-backed on language and a little bit of process-type stuff. We didn't want to reinvent the wheel. We already had a really good mechanism for sending transcripts back and forth, so it just kind of piggy-backed on existing entities and just kind of made it work, to be honest with you. It hasn't even taken as much time to kind of babysit as I thought it was going to, and frankly the advantages for us have been not incredible ... You know, certainly anytime we can partner with UCC to do anything positive is advantageous, just in terms of relationship-building.*

The procedure and policy discussion is outlined in the literature as an important step when implementing the program (Friedel & Wilson, 2015). Forming a committee,

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automating processes, and considering institutional degree awarding policies were performed by staff members at UCC and LAU and demonstrate current best practices (Friedel & Wilson, 2015). Rachel, the Vice President of Student Services at UCC, commented on the ease of implementing the program due to the current status of programs between the two institutions. She used a metaphor for how the institutions responded to the state's interest in reverse transfer implementation, *"The mechanisms were in place. Sometimes ideas come and they require that you build a foundation before you build the building and what the state usually wants is the roof."*

Theme 2: Influence and stability

In this section the second theme, *Influence and Stability*, is discussed. First the subtheme, *Influencing Change,* is explored and then the discussion will address how the reverse transfer began at UCC and LAU, what changed as a result, and how the institutions responded to that change. Rogers' (1995) Diffusion of Innovations theory supports this theme by providing an explanation of the value of communication channels in an organization.

Second, the stability and future of the program between the two institutions and within the state will be reviewed. This subtheme was supported by Richardson, Bracco, Callen, and Finney (1999), which demonstrates the importance of understanding how the policy environment, system design, and leadership influence the state higher education systems. These concepts are of value because they describe how the institutions perceive the program's importance and the ability of a program to stand the test of time. It is necessary to consider how individuals respond to the new reverse transfer because the "social and

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communication structure of a system facilitates or impedes the diffusion of innovations" within the system or unit (i.e., community college or four-year college) (Rogers, 2010, p. 37).

Subtheme 2a: Influencing change

Starting a new program or initiative can be full of excitement and challenges for higher education institutions. For UCC and LAU and their respective state agencies, this is no different. In terms of communicating and implementing the change, Rogers (1995) demonstrates the importance of communication channels. These channels, either mass media or interpersonal channels, are the mediums from which participants "create and share information with one another…to reach a mutual understanding" (p. 18). For UCC and LAU, the reverse transfer program was started among colleagues across institutions. These individuals depended upon the "subjective evaluation" of the program by their colleagues to determine if they would adopt the program or not (p. 19). The relationships and related encouragement were the keys to influencing the change that was necessary for the reverse transfer program to occur. This subtheme explores these relationships and their influence at the state agency level, institutional level and between individual colleagues.

Institutions are pulled many directions and serve many masters. Just as in most states, political forces exist in this Pacific Northwest state. The formation of the reverse transfer program in the Pacific Northwest state was created partially in response to the governor's 40/40/20 initiative. Not knowing how this initiative would impact the colleges, Donna, UCC Registrar, stated, "*We'd better take this opportunity now to start planning for what's going to happen in the future.*" In terms of the model developed by Richardson et al. (1999), UCC, LAU and their respective state agencies align with the "steering role" outlined in the state policy role for higher education (p. 15). The Pacific Northwest state agencies in higher

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education support outcomes that are "consistent with the state government's priorities" (p.15). This is demonstrated by the state agencies involvement in the reverse transfer program and their support of legislative initiative.

During the time of reverse transfer implementation, the Pacific Northwest state had been experiencing change in its university systems for several years, much of which occurred after reverse transfer began with UCC and LAU. Kelly explained the history of the recent changes in the state university system:

> *Well there used to be the university state system. We had a senate goal that passed I guess was it in 2013? That basically gave the three largest Pacific Northwest universities their independence. Those three now all have their own boards. There are four remaining small regionals that are still technically the Pacific Northwest system but for … 85% of the student population is free from them so nobody really talks about Pacific Northwest university system any longer. As of July 2015 those other four will get independent boards too, so it will be completely gone. The community colleges, similar to your state, they're all independent. All independently governed, locally elected boards. The agency about which I spoke just previously is at the state level. It's mainly the pass through that handles the funding formula. It handles program approval, course approval, Perkins reporting. My team held all the data for the community colleges, that type of thing, but they're all very independent. Recently we have now our Commission and that gets to be, not a governing body, but kind of an oversight body for all of post-secondary including private career schools, public universities and community colleges.*

Kelly explained how the new Commission has been influencing the state's higher education systems and the possibility of funding being tied to performance and completion:

> *Especially as the state's been coming along, there's been more accountability that's been built in. We have what are called achievement compacts. Those are between every public educational institution and the Pacific Northwest Education Investment Board which is the P20. Everybody has to report on this set of metrics including all the K12s, all the universities and all the community colleges, have to report on this set of metrics. That wasn't tied to anything yet. That's the key word. As we're moving toward outcomes-based funding, there's just been a lot more accountability and a lot more, kind of a reigning in for all the institutions.*

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In addition to the political influence, it was noted that administrators have played an important role in encouraging student services teams to start the program on their respective campus. One such administrator, Nancy, Provost and Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs at LAU, believed that the state was motivating institutions to begin reverse transfer through partnerships, *"The state has been very actively involved in getting the community colleges, the state universities, and the four year institutions to form partnerships."*

George, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success Initiatives at the university agency, shared his experiences with getting buy-in at the institutional level:

> *It primarily involved working from the top down to get buy in from their president, through their provosts...I should probably note that once you get the top down going, people below are much more willing to give their time and energy.*

Donna, UCC Registrar, explained how she was approached at UCC to begin the reverse transfer program. There was both encouragement from her internal administrators as well as from the governor's office through a completion initiative:

> *It caught on first with the administration. The Presidents liked the sound of it. The VPs said this is a great idea. Also at the same time in [the state], we have what we call the 40/40/20 initiative, meaning we need more high school graduates and we need more community college graduates and we need more university graduates…It was just the student services managers and my VP and the President were like hey this is a great idea. We want you to do this. I met with my own staff and said okay here's what we're going to do and here is how were going to go about that. You could call us a committee but we're just the same old committee that meets every week on.*

At the University level, Nick, LAU Registrar, expressed the same sentiment about the subtle pressure from the state:

> *The state sort of starting to push them as a potential option. The governor definitely expressed interest in, at around that time, in reverse transfer in the sense that he was really pushing when he called for sort of 40-40-20 plan. It was kind of couched, to some extent, in the dynamic of the community*

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> *colleges, at that phase, were really being pressured to produce degrees…Although there wasn't a huge incentive for LAU as an institution, politically there was. I would say, subtle pressure from the state in terms of encouraging this to get developed, and to some extent enabled us to use developing the agreement as an example of our partnership activity, which is a metric that gets thrown around at the state level. It didn't feel like I was under a ton of pressure, but I felt like if it were a situation where I had a major objection to doing it, that I probably would have had to come up with a really damn good reason for why it couldn't happen, you know?*

While there may have been encouragement from administrators, Donna, Director of Enrollment Services at UCC, felt as though she was able to begin and administer the program as she believed. Donna shared her thoughts on this outlook:

> *When my bosses said 'here's what you're going need to do,' I don't feel like I need to drag in lots of people from all over the place. I feel like the people who are going to operationalize this, we all need to put our heads together and figure out how we're going to do it but I'm not here to know people's philosophies.*

Subtheme 2b: Stability

The structural changes mentioned in Subtheme 2a by Kelly brought about uncertainty about the stability of the reverse transfer program within the state and between UCC and LAU. In the summer of 2015, the university state agency is scheduled to be dissolved and all universities will be independently governed. While the community colleges are all currently independent, there are upcoming changes to the board and commissions that assist with mission oversight and budgeting. In the near future, the community colleges will likely see multiple governing boards. Due to the turmoil at the state university system and changes in the oversight, the future of reverse transfer at that state level is unknown. Richardson, Bracco, Callen and Finney's model (1999) encourages the consideration how the policy environment, system design, and leadership influence the state higher education systems. While it is not the focus of this study to define the state's culture, political leanings, or

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legislative priorities, it remains beneficial to mention that the state system design influences policy makers and professional leaders in their decision making. At the beginning of reverse transfer implementation, the Pacific Northwest state was considered a federal system according to Richardson, Bracco, Callen and Finney's model (1999). The federal system had a statewide board responsible for "collecting and distributing information, advising on budget and planning programs" and each institution or local board maintained their own strategic direction, management and advocacy (p. 17). With recent changes to the state system design, the Pacific Northwest state is emerging as a fully segmented system due to the absence of one state higher education governing agency. Kelly, Director of Research and Communications at the community college agency stated, *"To say that there are a lot of things that are yet to be resolved is a quite the understatement."* She explained what may happen to reverse transfer as the new commission unfolds:

> *Now, the Commission is getting more interested in reverse transfer because obviously we have this completion agenda for the states. They're looking to see what they can do to help impact completion. They're getting more interested. I would imagine they're going to have to be the ones to be the champion for it once the [CWID] grant is over.*

Further opinion from the state agency level comes from George, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success Initiatives at the university agency, discussed how some institutions are more likely to continue with reverse transfer than others. Additionally, each institution will make decisions in the future that determine the priorities of programs, such as reverse transfer. George elaborated:

> *I think that it will continue to go along in a couple of cases. I think UCC and LAU is one example… I don't believe it's got the legs at the other institutions. So I think some of the programs will continue. I think it's because UCC and LAU have had success. It actually had significant numbers. So they'll continue to do it. It's going to be a constant challenge from the community college perspective, because of the work involved. It will be vulnerable to budget cuts, staffing reduction. I can easily see how even at UCC and LAU and the*

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> *workload. I can see how it's just going to be one of those things they say, we aren't going to do this anymore.*

When considering the future of the program between the two institutions, there are human factors involved. For example, because the two institutions are comprised of relatively small staffing units, they are susceptible to delays or project termination. The State Profile document also mentioned staffing issues as a challenge to the program by stating, *"The state has managed staff turnover of those individuals responsible for reverse transfer at community colleges and universities."* Donna, UCC Registrar, shared her opinion on how staffing issues influences the workload and ability to complete projects at UCC by saying:

> *Who is out on maternity leave, who broke their leg and now I have a new project? I'm barely doing what I'm barely supposed to be doing! …that sort of thing happens all the time. Just when you think you have a little bit of stability, somebody pulls the rug out.*

Nonetheless, she was optimistic about the future of the program:

> *I think that the future is that I bet we'll probably partner with a lot more people and that will help us with our procedures too. What I'm hoping is that if indeed the funding starts coming from completions, that our institution will realize if we have our eyes on this, we will earn more money. I really think the advising is a big piece of it.*
>
> *Hopefully the whole concept will start catching on across the nation where an advisor at any university might say; oh I see that you transferred in here from UCC with 85 credits. You were really close to something there. Why don't you send your transcript back and see if you can get … To me it seems like the more awards that you have along the way, the better it is for you to put on a resume.*

Donna's counterpart at LAU, Nick, expressed his willingness to continue the partnership with UCC in the future:

> *If UCC is interested in continuing it, then they certainly won't get any disagreement from me. I think it would be fairly straightforward for us to renew our MOU on it and move forward, especially since everything's built already. It's not that much work.*

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The advisors at both institutions were optimistic about the future of reverse transfer as well. Nate, an advisor at UCC, expressed his hope that the program continues and even offered some ideas for expanding the program:

> *I do think so, and I certainly hope that they continue to go towards. I do think that they will continue to offer the reverse transfer, and I hope that they look for more partners outside of our immediate are, because we don't just have students that want the school we have set up, or the right state. I think we'll continue to do it, because they understand the value of [reverse transfer]. The students see the ability to be able to accumulate ... (Accumulate I guess is the best word) Accumulate the different types of degrees that show their specialties and what they know.*

Even though Nate was optimistic about the future of the program, he expressed his lack of knowledge about how the program performed overall and how he can be frustrated by students not knowing about the program:

> *I don't have access to specific numbers that really help me understand how much of an impact we are, or maybe even not having. I just get all the ground floor, and I know that when I tell students about this, what's still frustrating is that not very many of the students know about it, and I think they should.*

Leah, an advisor at UCC, shared that she thought the program would continue to grow, but just as Nick stated, the institutions would need to continue to spread the word about the program to students:

> *You know, a lot of things are spread by word of mouth, and I think as more and more people talk to their peers, "I did this, it was really easy, I got my associate's, all I had to do was transfer back there" . The hope is that it would just grow momentum as far as people finding out more, and I'm figuring there's a bunch of people that could use a reverse transfer and get an associate's but they just are not aware of it.*

Rachel, the Vice President of Student Services at UCC shared a positive outlook on the program and partnership:

> *I do think it's a partnership that will continue. Number one, it's a fairly, I want to say easy, it's a fairly predictable routine to run. We know when to look for students and we know when to communicate with them. I don't see a reason it would stop.*

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Christina, a staff member in UCC's Registrar's office, discussed the likelihood of the reverse transfer program while also noting a possible improvement:

> *I think it [reverse transfer] probably will [continue] for a while. I do see, in the future, that we communicate more with our reverse transfer partners so that they, once they know you' completed a degree, that they also know that. There's also talk about that being on their admission application where it's no longer an opt-in.*

The future stability of the reverse transfer program can be narrowed down to the individual persons and institutions involved in the program. Participants were uncertain of the future state-level support of the reverse transfer program. However, at the institutional level of UCC and LAU, participants mutually agreed on the continuation of the program. Of course, it is important to note, as Donna, UCC Registrar, mentioned, the program depends on individual persons being able to do the work and the institutional priority to support it.

Theme 3: Responding to something new

In this section, the third theme, *Responding to Something New,* is discussed. Within this theme, two subthemes are explored: *The Ripple Effect* and *Flexibility vs. Rigidity*. The first subtheme, *The Ripple Effect*, emerged from the participants' responses to questions about how they first heard about reverse transfer and how it moved through the organizations. Donna, UCC Registrar, shared her experiences on how it came to community colleges and universities in the state, *"It caught on first with the administration. The Presidents liked the sound of it. The VPs said this is a great idea."* The reverberation of reverse transfer throughout the Pacific Northwest state is explained in Roger's Diffusion of Innovation theory (1995) which describes the diffusion of new information and how it is communicated throughout an organization. The DI theory noted that when a new program is introduced, such as the new reverse transfer, it promotes a change that alters the structure and

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function of a system (Rogers, 1995). Alterations that were made as a result of reverse transfer created positive change for all students by improving policies and procedures.

The second subtheme, *Flexibility vs. Rigidity*, discusses the response to the program and how the institutions reacted to change. At UCC and LAU, participants reported a positive response to the implementation of reverse transfer, which is attributed to their flexible and forward-thinking culture. This subtheme was supported in the literature, which stated that organizations that can practice discernment and flexibility are likely to overcome problems and experience organizational success (Thomas, 2010).

Subtheme 3a: The ripple effect

When a new program is introduced, such as the new reverse transfer, it promotes a change that alters the structure and function of a system (Rogers, 1995). This change, in the case of UCC and LAU, was a positive one that spread to other areas within the college, including college policy and procedure. For example, Christina, Student Records Specialist at UCC, shared an example of how the reverse transfer program implementation changed the way the Registrar's Office processed transcript evaluation:

> *It has caused us to look at our own internal processes, and why we do the things we do. I think that having to review so many transcripts and files at a certain amount of time. We looked at how we can automate more. So now, we can apply that to other areas, not just as part of reverse transfer.*

Christina went on to share that the program's implementation required that a new temporary staff person be hired to off-set some of the work associated with reverse transfer. The new staff person helped reduce the workload on other tasks, which allowed for the current staff to create an articulation table. This table not only streamlined the process, making it more efficient, but it is also used with all students when they bring in credit to UCC. Christina explained this change:

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> *They hired a temporary staff. Actually, she took on some of the job duties of our enrollment specialists so that they could help with setting up equivalencies, because that's what we had also going on at the same time. We didn't have an articulation table before this, so every time we looked at a transcript, it was usually reviewing the course descriptions pretty much over and over again, or 3 people looking at the same course.*

Donna, UCC Registrar also shared the same sentiment. Reverse transfer brought about a reason to review policies and procedures. These changes would help all students, including those that were not reverse transfer participants. Donna explained:

> *Well, I definitely think that looking at our own procedures and policies around granting degrees was incredibly helpful. There wasn't any particular reason to look at those things before. We were just like cranking away, doing our own things, all the procedures and policies. This made us really stop and ask ourselves, why is this important? Do we find this in accreditations? Do we find this in registrar's best practices? If we don't, well what do we do this for? We changed quite a bit of our own protocol internally and that was extremely helpful. That opened up a whole lot of log jams frankly for our students who are just attending UCC. That was very helpful, that review of internal policy and procedure.*

Donna shared another example of how UCC changed their procedures after implementing reverse transfer. She explained how all students are now benefiting from the reverse transfer process in completing degree requirements:

> *While we're looking at the [transcripts for] these reverse transfer students, we're also looking at any sort of certificates or any other degrees that they might have earned along the way before they transferred. We're not just looking at the Associates. You may have come here in who knows when? A few years before you decided you were a transfer student and take a lot of automotive, but you didn't finish your General Ed because you rushed into automotive and not into reading, writing and humanities. Now you have all of your approved automotive classes, and guess what? You finished your General Ed at the same time. While you're finishing your transfer degree, why wouldn't we award you your automotive certificate? We had to ask ourselves those questions too. It's like well if you find the degree, why wouldn't you award it? Our board also approved that; that we could award automatically. If we find a completion, we can award a completion whether we have a student's permission or not. We decided we'd do it specifically because of this initiative, but then we thought, well why wouldn't we do that every time anybody applies for graduation? If we can find something else that they've earned at the same time, why wouldn't we award that?*

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At the state agency level, a similar message was shared by Kelly, Director of Research and Communications at the community college agency. The reverse transfer program has caused a ripple effect across college campuses in terms of how policy and procedure are written. Kelly stated, *"we've really had to look at practices and policies that they had in place and what might be impacting student completion."*

Nate, UCC's academic adviser, believed that the reverse transfer program started the conversation about current policies and how changing these policies have created positive changes for all students. For Nate, this program's implementation gave the college a reason to reflect on its practices and a motivation to change to be more student-friendly. Nate shared his experiences:

> *The biggest challenges were really on the policy side. There were specific policies that prevented a lot of what we wanted to do from happening. There's one of these ones, which is just always to enter everyone with the [current] catalog year. When a student, if they had been stopped out more than 6 months, they had to pick up from the newest catalog year. That would mean that degree requirements could actually change, so a lot of what they already put in was now not really valuable anymore, because of this shift in the degree itself.*
>
> *The student put in the work six years ago, and because they had to take a year off, essentially it was punishing them for having to take their year off…Working with, and respecting the work the student had already done, and allowing them to just finish the pieces that they needed to be able to earn that degree. That was the biggest one for me, and a lot of the students that we work with at UCC are non-traditional. Our average age is in the lower 30s. I think it's 33 or 34 right now. So we deal with people, and they have families, they have jobs, they have things that force them out of the standard way we'd think of as the typical student. So when life happens they have to respect that…*

Subtheme 3b: Flexibility vs. rigidity

At these two institutions a desire to incorporate and "make it work" were common responses to the reverse transfer program. While this case study focused on two institutions

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and their relationship with the state agencies, participants shared stories about other institutions that did not have such success with implementing reverse transfer. For example, George, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success Initiatives, shared, *"I would say…there was a very strong willingness right from the start [to participate]. Except for with the University X, that's another story."* During our interviews, participants at the state agencies were able to comment on why they believed UCC and LAU had success and why other institutions did not. As detailed in the following, participants believed that being flexible and forward-thinking are vital factors in successful implementation. According to Thomas (2010), organizations that can practice discernment and flexibility are likely to overcome problems and experience organizational success.

George, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success Initiatives, shared that other college partners had a difficult time overcoming differences in polices and agreements. Some institutions had *"stumbling blocks"* which George attributed to those institutions that were not flexible or "*weren't willing to negotiate*". This was also support in documents that support *"reverse transfer processes and programs"* that are *"driven by local decisions and formalized…among the partners."* Kelly, Director of Research and Communications, also shared that institutional culture played a role in starting reverse transfer programs. Each institution should be allowed to implement the program as is possible for them. It is not a one size fits all program. Kelly explained:

> *Each institution has their own challenges. We couldn't have the same processes and things for [one institution] that we would have for [another]. They're completely opposite organizational structures. [One] can automate everything and they have for the most part. It's just kind of like a process that happens behind the scenes…You can't dictate the same distinct processes and the same everything. They all do their MOU separately and differently. They've all done transcripts exchanging differently. It's just all how they want to do it within their partnership.*

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At UCC, the organizational culture appeared to be flexible and open to change to support the program. Christina, Student Records Specialist at UCC, shared about taking the suggested changes to the UCC Board for approval:

> *We made the case for it, and then they had to approve it. It had to be approved through our curriculum committee, and then it went to another committee/board. They [the board] were pretty open to them. Some of the changes, we researched what other schools in the state were doing, and we tried to align ourselves to.*

Due to this flexible atmosphere, UCC was able to implement the necessary changes to streamline and make the process more efficient. A letter to department heads at UCC, demonstrated the importance of involving all faculty and staff in the reverse transfer program. The letter demonstrated the process by which Donna, UCC Registrar, and her team sought approval for the changes necessary to improve the reverse transfer awarding process (see Appendix E). In addition to requesting approval, the letter stated, *"The completion agenda is a high priority and this would greatly help in that effort."* Letters such as these provide examples of the work associated with implementing a new policy. Donna explained her approach to changing policies:

> *UCC did really review a lot of our own internal processing procedures and ask ourselves, why do we make students do that? For years we had, you have to complete your final term before you gradated UCC. Clearly reverse transfer doesn't work that way. We asked ourselves, why do we have that rule?*
>
> *I started working here 20 years ago and one of my staff members who is doing the audits started working a couple of years before me. We both were like well I don't know, that was just a rule. We were like, do we really feel that now in 2014 or 2013 or12, whenever we started, do we really feel like that is justifiable given student's role? Are we shooting ourselves in the foot by saying we won't accept those credits and transfer and we graduate degrees? Is that in anybody's best interests at this point? We were like 'no', it's not. We took it to the board. They were like 'yeah what were you guys doing that for?' We were like 'I don't know; it was a rule when we got here.' We thought there was some justification, and perhaps there was back in the day, but not anymore*

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Donna also shared her experiences when reflecting on how UCC responded to the program:

> *Well I definitely think that looking at our own procedures and policies around granting degrees was incredibly helpful. There wasn't any particular reason to look at those things before. We were just like cranking away, doing our own things, all the procedures and policies. This made us really stop and ask ourselves, why is this important? Do we find this in accreditations? Do we find this in registrar's best practices? If we don't, well what do we do this for?*
>
> *We changed quite a bit of our own protocol internally and that was extremely helpful. That opened up a whole lot of log jams frankly for our students who are just attending UCC. That was very helpful, that review of internal policy and procedure.*

Nate, Academic Advisor at UCC, also shared about his belief that UCC was flexible and responsive to the changes necessary to implement the program and how this has improved the college overall:

> *As time moves, you have to adapt, and change with the time. When I first started, I felt like UCC was behind the times. And then they made these changes, they caught up to the types of students. We're seeing a lot more the way technology's integrated into life, and so we utilized that to make some small adjustments, and being able to promote, basically the way the student can make themselves more valuable when it comes to stepping into a career…I think by willing to move forward, and make these big adjustments, going digital with everything we do, doing direct texting, that it did help us step in front, or at least pace the current population that we're working with.*

When I asked Nate why he thinks UCC and LAU are having success with the reverse transfer program, he attributed it to *"institutional buy-in."* This concept of "institutional buy-in" appeared to be a very important trait at UCC. Rogers (1995) explained this phenomenon by stating innovations that are perceived by individuals as being a good idea, easy to implement, and simple to understand will be more likely to be adopted than other innovations/programs. Nate explained his belief as to why reverse transfer works between UCC and LAU:

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> *That's kind of a cliché phrase, but 'institutional buy-in.' I think most of people that I have met at the college, value it. A lot of my teammates and supervisors value it. They understand the importance of it, and because everybody for the most part, agrees that it's something that is valuable for the school, and for the students, that we're willing to do what's necessary to make it happen. When everybody is on board, the ship really sails easier, so it makes it that way.*

Theme 4: Benefits outweigh the cost

The final theme that emerged from the findings, *Benefits Outweigh the Cost*, was embedded in the participants' responses. The first subtheme, *Focus on Students*, developed from participants' stories of how the lives' of students were impacted by the reverse transfer program. While the study did not focus on the student experience, most participants shared stories and gave examples of how the program impacted students. Notably those "on the ground", the advisers in this study, were those that spoke most fondly and regularly about their students.

The final subtheme, *Belief in the Program*, is supported by reverse transfer literature (Friedel & Wilson, 2015; Taylor, 2013) and emerged from the overall belief and goodness of the program which echoed from each institution and state agency participant. In the end, it was the belief of the participants that the reverse transfer program was doing more good than any cost to the institution.

Subtheme 4a: Focus on students

The study focused on the experiences of staff involved in the reverse transfer program. While it was expected that students would be mentioned in the data, it became apparent that encouraging students to participate and graduate was the focus at these two institutions. Many times, stories were shared about teaching students the value of the associate's degree. UCC staff members spent a lot of time explaining to students why it is

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important. For example, Christina, Student Records Specialist at UCC, stated, *"The message to students has changed. That you've completed these courses, you've earned this; this is something that you should want to have. Because there is a value to it."* In LAU's letter to students regarding the reverse transfer program, LAU frames the program as an important recognition, *"You deserve recognition for each benchmark you meet while working towards your bachelor's degree. Why not take advantage of this offer to see if you've earned a UCC diploma?"* In a LAU and UCC's advertisement poster, students were persuaded to join reverse transfer as a means to *"up your job qualifications and earning power; get the credential you deserve; add a valuable degree to your resume."* In an UCC's Board Meeting, a summary agenda item explained that the reverse transfer programs *"will benefit students who had not yet earned a certificate or degree at UCC upon transferring to LAU."* A final document to support the programs focus on students comes from UCC's Frequently Asked Questions website. Students are persuaded of the value of a reverse transfer degree by a statement that said, *"You've worked hard; if you've earned a degree or certificate from UCC, you deserved to have it."*

Nate, Academic Advisor at UCC, was most passionate about the value and importance of the reverse transfer. He tries to convey this in his conversation with students as well. Nate explained why he found value in the program:

> *I won't personally hide the fact that, of course UCC is trying to complete more degrees so that we help our own numbers. Where really, it's about the student adding more value to themselves, and show off the work that they've done. Which is what we're trying to do as an institution, is get people prepared for the lives that they want to lead once they leave school.*

Leah, Academic Advisor at LAU, also shared her opinion about why the program is important for students. Leah elaborated:

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> *I see [reverse transfer] as a benefit for the students because students may come in and are just a couple classes away from their associates. This helps them. Some people feel that that is really important that they've accomplished something, so it will show them that they have a degree. It's not a bachelor's yet, but it's an associates. That's one thing. The other thing is students transfer to universities thinking 'Ok, I'm going to finish my bachelor's degree'. Things happen, and if they get into it and something happens where they can't finish their bachelors, then at least have an associate's degree to maybe go get a job or something until they can finish their bachelor's degree.*

As an administrator, Rachel, Vice President of Student Services at UCC, attributed the reverse transfer as a means to encourage completion of a worthy credential. Rachel explained:

> *A lot of our students leave here [UCC] without a degree or certificate because a lot of people don't want to go to a community college anymore. They just want to get it through the university. And then something happens in their lives where they don't finish at the university. And if you leave here before you get a degree, you wind up maybe investing four to five years in college and then you leave with nothing to show. And so we were really invested in the idea that students would have something to show.*

Julie, the consultant at the state agency, shared similar thoughts on teaching students the value the associate's degree:

> *I think one of the big challenges from the student side is that many students don't understand and value an associate's degree. I think that's kind of huge. I think it's good that colleges and universities are being more proactive about actively tracking where students are in the progression process and completion process. Because a lot of students don't track it.*

George, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success Initiatives at the state university agency, believed it is in the best interest of everyone involved, community colleges, universities and students to move through the higher education credential as quickly and as efficiently as possible. The reverse transfer program is a means to encourage this. George elaborated:

> *So, at the community college, we don't want to make them stay longer than they need to. And from the university perspective, we don't want them to leave earlier than they should. Passing them through quickly is really a big*

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> *advantage to the student. The trick is articulating that to students. You have to get them to want to do this.*

While most students do appear to have a positive reaction to the reverse transfer, there have been some situations around student not wanting the degree they are eligible to receive. Donna, UCC Registrar, shared that some students want to be *"career students"* and do not want to leave the comfort of UCC. She believed, however, that the institution had a responsibility to have those students move on. She elaborated:

> *There are some students who say, 'No I don't want that.' The reason why they say that is because they want to continue their financial aid. If you've earned something at UCC, if you've earned a degree or a certificate here, then the financial aid office is going to tell you 'Hey congratulations! You've completed. You don't have anything more.'*
>
> *In most situations if a student has not used up their maximum allowable financial aid support at the community college or they have not done a lot of saving and withdrawing so that their case is not below par, they can always apply to continue if they have a valid reason why they need to continue…You know what? When something is really reasonable and justifiable and somebody hasn't been jittering around here and wasting all their credits, we usually approve them but when somebody has just gone to community college as a career and they are earning their financial aid and their loan and their close to completion and they've already earned three or four different certificates or degrees here, the answer is no you need to move on…*
>
> *The point of it is its comfortable. It's the nicest place I've ever been. I like it when you give me this money. We're not a social service. We are an educational institution and as hard as that is to sometimes convey to people who are like no, we have to…Our own conscious tells us, I know you want to stay here forever but it's not right...It's just leaving the nest. It's tough.*

Even though it was apparent that the staff believed strongly in the program, there were moments where participants were frustrated by the lack of student knowledge of the program. Participants said that students were *"surprised to learn about this option"* or *"didn't know it was possible [to reverse transfer]."* Despite the institutional approach to advertising and communicating to students, there was still a gap in knowledge. Nate, Academic Advisor at UCC shared, *"It is nice for me to still see excitement when a student*

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sees it, but it's also slightly frustrating, because I feel like you should already know about something like this." One of the central themes from the interview with Nate was that, as an advisor, he likely spent the most one-on-one time with the students, but he noted that he knew the least about how the program was actually performing. He explained:

> *It's hard. I don't know ... I don't have access to specific numbers that really help me understand how much of an impact we are, or maybe even not having. I just get all the ground floor, and I know that when I tell students about this, what's still frustrating is that not very many of the students know about it, and I think they should. We send the messages out, you got to read the e-mail to get the message, that kind of thing. They'll look at the poster to understand what's happening. I still see, at least once or twice a week, when I present the concept to a student, they go "Oh, really, well that's interesting. I can actually go to the University next term, and keep going with what I want to do, but I don't have to give up on earning my Associate's degree.*

Donna, UCC Registrar, also communicated her surprise that more students weren't participating in the program. She also believed that this may be an area for UCC to improve upon. Donna explained:

> *They're like "Oh wow! I didn't know I got that. Oh that's cool." Clearly we know there's a little gap in our advising because why do you not know that you earned a degree or a certificate here? Why is that? Where did that get missed in the conversation? Because we have mandatory advising, it kind of makes you wonder if we're making you talk to an advisor, why didn't you two talk about the fact that you've earned a degree?*
>
> *Now all of our advisors have access to degree audits and they have all the training. What we know is they have access, they've been trained and they aren't necessarily running every time they see a student. That's good information and that's something that instructors and students are going to have to work on.*

Subtheme 4b: Belief in the program

New programming efforts appear at institutions with great frequency. Much like the MOOC (massive open online course) or first year experience curriculum, reverse transfer has been spreading across the nation (Friedel & Wilson, 2015) and the benefits of the program

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have been discussed in the literature (Friedel & Wilson, 2015; Taylor, 2013). It was important to explore the reasons as to why reverse transfer has had such success at UCC and LAU. The final subtheme that emerged from the data was the inherent belief in the value of the program. The program has overcome many barriers (e.g., cost, staff issues, changes in policy), yet it has continued forward. Every participant who was interviewed spoke about the value of getting degrees in the hands of students. This program does just that: it encourages degree competition. Administrators, staff members, and advisors alike shared the same ideal: this program works to help students earn a degree. In LAU's letter to students regarding the reverse transfer program, LAU stated that the program *"helps students earn the degrees and certificates they are entitled to and that they need to be competitive in the job market."*

Rachel shared her reasons for supporting the program at UCC:

> *It just makes a lot of sense; the students that we serve have complicated lives. These are not people that have moved here to live in our dorms. They're not seventeen or eighteen, away from mom and dad. These are people that have really complicated, complex lives. So the more we can do to help them achieve a degree or a certificate that seemed really attractive to us.*

George found value in the program in the hopes that future research will help support the idea that earning an associate's degree helps to support bachelor's degree completion. According to Ekal and Krebs (2011), research is being conducted but there is no current evidence of this phenomenon occurring with reverse transfer. George explained:

> *We believe, we don't know yet, but believe that students who do this are also more likely to persist and earn a Bachelor's degree. Donna Ekal has been studying this at the University of Texas, El Paso. We're waiting for the study to come out.*

While there was strong support for the program, participants shared a desire to refute the detractors of reverse transfer who refers to the institutions participating in reverse transfer as "diploma mills". Kelly, Director of Research and Communications at the community

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college agency, shared that she did not believe reverse transfer to be an easy means for a degree. Rather, she viewed it as awarding a degree to a student who has worked hard to earn the credential:

> *It's not like we're giving the students something for free. They earn it! Why not give it to them? It's kind of like that practicality aspect of it where it's not the community colleges trying to be a diploma mill. We're actually just giving the students what didn't already earned. It resonates with some and it falls with others.*

Donna shared a similar dislike of the term:

> *The word 'diploma mill' was doing rounds quite a bit. Although I did have to speak up in a meeting and say, I think you're using that term inaccurately. We're not granting anyone anything that they didn't earn and we haven't changed this degree so that they can earn it with less amounts of credit. We're not handing our diplomas here. People are earning them and we are helping them find them.*

As a system-level staff person and consultant, Julie had a unique perspective since she was not directly affiliated with one institution. She believed that the people at the university and community college level are the ones who are making the program work. While the initial start to the program came from the state level, the people of the institutions are the ones who believe in the program and make it successful. Julie explained:

> *I think, in that they [institutional staff] are very interested in systemic changes and also very willing to be open to change. I think those two things in particular are really helpful. They're just very willing to work together, and not just work together, but again in the collaborative open fashion. They're willing to ask the tough questions of themselves and of their staff to make things change.*

Nick, LAU Registrar, echoed Julie's sentiment about the institutions working together to make reverse transfer work, *"Maybe it's just that it's so new of a concept and idea that schools are actually willing to work together, instead of working against each other."*

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Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this study. Several themes emerged from the data collected from the interviews and document analysis: measures of success; influence and stability; responding to something new; and benefits outweigh the cost. The first section, *Measures of Success*, described two key factors that contributed to the success of the implementation of the reverse transfer program between UCC and SAU. The first factor was the close professional relationships between the state level agency staff members, administrators, and advisors at the two institutions. How the social structure that facilities or impedes the implementation of reverse transfer is of importance to the diffusion of a program (Rogers, 1995). For UCC and SAU, the relationships within the social structure were strong and positive, which contributed to the success of the program's beginnings.

The second factor was that the two institutions used efficient and effective practices that reduced the amount of work on the front-end of implementation. Participants were strategic in the implementation process, visiting another institution to model after and involving future constituents and partners in the process. This is an important component in how people learn and solve problems according to Brandsford and the National Research Council (2000). When individuals are involved in understanding how something works from the beginning, they are more likely to able to solve problems and find solutions (Bransford & National Research Council. 2000). This theme also presented examples of how participants were able to use existing programs and partnerships to efficiently implement reverse transfer.

The second theme, *Influence and Stability*, revealed how a few key individuals play in big role in promoting change, while also supporting the future of the program. This theme was supported by Rogers (1995) theory which places value in communication channels in an organization. This theme also discussed the stability of the reverse transfer program. While it

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is a strong program, external factors are at play in the program's future. This subtheme was supported by Richardson, Bracco, Callen and Finney (1999), which demonstrates the importance of understanding how the policy environment, system design, and leadership influence the state higher education systems. In this study, participants noted the sweeping changes that were occurring in the higher education system structures the state which left the future of reverse transfer unknown.

The third theme, *Responding to Something New*, summarized how UCC and LAU responding to learning about the program and how they implemented the necessary changes. First, the theme discussed the participants' experiences that the reverse transfer program helped to improve processes directly related to reverse transfer, as well as to other programs. Referred to as the "ripple effect" by the researcher, improvements rippled in by means of additional programs and policies across the institution. The literature supported this theme by noting that when a new program is introduced, such as the new reverse transfer, it promotes a change that alters the structure and function of a system (Rogers, 1995). Within this theme, the researcher also explored the response to the program and how the institutions reacted to change. While new programs can have a positive influence on policy and procedure, positive changes are more likely to occur in an institution that has a flexible and forward-thinking culture. This subtheme was supported in the literature, which stated that organizations that can practice discernment and flexibility are likely to overcome problems and experience organizational success (Thomas, 2010).

The final theme, *Benefits Outweigh the Cost*, revealed that institutional support and belief in the good of a program were important to the program experience. Additionally, this theme was informed by the genuine support from staff of student success and achievement. The benefits of reverse transfer program have been outlined in the literature (Friedel &

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Wilson, 2015; Taylor, 2013), and were echoed in the experiences of those professionals at UCC, LAU and the respective state level agencies. Stories shared by participants highlighted the direct benefits to students and the staff members' belief in the importance of the program.

Chapter 5 provides an examination of the findings based on the research questions. It also includes the limitations and implications, offers recommendations for future research, policy, and practices, and provides the researcher's personal reflections upon completing the study.

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CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter provides a brief summary of the study, examines the findings based on the research questions, discusses the limitations and implications, and offers recommendations for future research, policy, and practices. It concludes with the researcher's personal reflection.

Summary

This study explored the experiences of a community college and a four-year college that implemented a new reverse transfer program in a Pacific Northwest state. The study sought to understand the factors that influence the implementation process of the new reverse transfer and the challenges and support mechanisms that influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program. The partnership between an urban, multi-campus community college, a public liberal arts university and their respective state agencies were a focus of study. This study may be of importance due to the emerging prevalence of reverse transfer programs across the nation and the subsequent lack of literature on the topic. A qualitative methodological approach was a valuable approach for this study because it provided a means to explore and understand the meaning that individuals and groups attribute to their experiences (Creswell, 2009). Case study analysis was used as the method for this study because it enables an "intense description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit" (Merriam, 2002, p. 8) that focuses on a bounded and contained system. Additionally, due to the recent innovation of the reverse transfer program, meaningful qualitative data were not available in the literature.

Ten participants were interviewed for this study, and a document analysis was conducted on documents related to the new reverse transfer program. The research questions

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for this study were designed to explore the factors that influence reverse transfer implementation, as well as the support mechanisms and challenges associated with the program's implementation. Participants were staff members and administrators of the community college and university, as well as staff members from the state agencies. The data were collected through interviews, field notes, and document analysis. Each transcript was transcribed and coded. Theme development emerged from the data and was shared with each participant for review as a part of the member checking process. Four final themes were identified, along with eight subthemes. The application of these themes to current research and to the research questions of this study are presented in the following discussion.

Research Questions and Findings

This section provides a discussion of the findings of this study as they relate to the original research questions. A discussion of the results as they relate to the current literature and theoretical framework is also provided. The following research questions framed this study:

1. What factors are influencing the implementation process of the new reverse transfer?
    - 1a. How do staff members describe their experience and influence over the implementation of the new reverse transfer program?
    - 1b. How does a state system of higher education influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer?
2. What are the challenges and support mechanisms that influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program?

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Research Question 1a

What factors are influencing the implementation process of the new reverse transfer? How do staff members describe their experience and influence over the implementation of the new reverse transfer program?

Two of the themes identified in the data provided an answer to this question. The first theme that helped to answer this question was *Importance of Relationships.* The existing relationships between campus and state partners played an instrumental role in the success of the reverse transfer program. The social relationships were a cornerstone to the successful implementation of the reverse transfer program (Rogers, 1995, p. 36). These relationships were regularly credited and cited as an influence in the success of the program.

George, university state agency, also shared that his relationship with Kelly, community college state agency, contributed to the ease of implementing reverse transfer in the state. George said that [we] *"worked really well together. There was no ego. Not to sound self-congratulatory, but I do think that it's the team of people that are working together."* Donna, UCC's registrar, discussed the benefit of having a close working relationship with her counterpart, Nick, at LAU. She explained this by stating, *"When it was time to work together, we were able to speak warmly with each other and work out how this was going to happen for both of us."*

It was also noted that the two institutions as organizations had a strong, long-time working relationship which helped to facilitate the program. Previous collaborative programming and events helped to foster this. Additionally, the two campuses share a building that serves both student populations. Leah, an advisor at LAU, explained that sharing a building fostered their rapport with each other and with the students. She stated, *"I*

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talk to the community college here, and we try to work together. [I ask] What can I do on my part to help students who are reverse transfers finish their degree?"

The second theme that helped to answer this research question was *Benefits Outweigh the Cost.* The participants spoke positively about the reverse transfer program and shared that they believed in the benefit it provided to students. Providing motivation to complete more education, creating an alternative plan if the student does not complete bachelors, and increasing completion rates—were factors that support reverse transfer (Friedel & Wilson 2015; Taylor, 2013) as well as reasons the participants shared when explaining why they supported the program. While it was clear that all the participants supported the program, two participants at the university level shared their belief that the program did not directly benefit the university. However, they supported the program because they believed that it was good for their relationship with UCC and for students. UCC felt as though they had to convince others of the value of the program and disputed claims that the reverse transfer program was awarding degrees that were unearned. Donna shared, *"We're not handing our diplomas here. People are earning them and we are helping them find them."*

Another finding that helped to answer this research questions was that advisors at both institutions strongly supported the program and promoted it with students although they were not involved or aware of the greater impact of the program. Although training for advisors was noted in the Memorandum of Understanding between UCC and LAU, it did not appear to be applied consistently. Ekal and Krebbs (2011) encouraged the involvement of advisors in the reverse transfer process, as the advisors are an important part of getting students involved. Despite their confidence in the program, the advisors were unable to articulate the details of how the program was tracked or measured, which signified a disconnect in the program. Nate shared, *"I don't have access to specific numbers that really*

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help me understand how much of an impact we are, or maybe even not having." It was also noted that the advising staff did not discuss the influence of the completion agenda or the governor's 40/40/20 plan for the state. This omission is important because it speaks to the need to involve advisors in the organization's greater goals and outcome measures. Involving the advisors in the big picture of reverse transfer may help further support the program.

Research Question 1b

What factors are influencing the implementation process of the new reverse transfer? How does a state system of higher education influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer?

Participants shared that the early stages of the formation of the reverse transfer program was influenced by the governor's 40/40/20 initiative. The landmark higher education goal stated that, by 2025, 40% of the state's adults will have an associate's degree or postsecondary certificate, 40% will hold a bachelor's or higher, and the remaining 20% or less will hold a high school diploma or equivalent credential. Unsure of how this initiative would initially impact the colleges, Donna, UCC's Registrar, remarked, *"We'd better take this opportunity now to start planning for what's going to happen in the future."*

Before approaching UCC and LAU, the two state agencies, university state agency, and community college state agency started a pilot program after visiting an institution in another state that had implemented the program successfully. This site visit proved to be a very valuable step in the implantation because they were able to, *"learn how they did it, how they overcame barriers."* Once this pilot was designed, the two state directors recruited institutions to participate by "working from the top down to get buy in". The approach to start with institutional presidents and provosts has been shown to encourage the "fastest rate

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of adoption of an innovation" (Rogers, 1999, p. 29). By securing buy-in from the administration, state level agency participants believed that program was likely to be implemented. In fact, both registrars at UCC and LAU stated that, when their administrators were in support of the program, they [themselves] knew that the program would start.

At the time of implementation, the state-level agencies felt as though all but one of the universities and community colleges were amenable to the program. While it was not directly relevant to this case study, it is interesting to note that one institution in the state was not willing to cooperate and collaborate to implement the reverse transfer programs. Participants believed that this was due to the fact that because it was the largest institution with very strong private financial backing, it did not believe it had to participate or collaborate on state initiatives. Several participants noted this in their interviews and it was reflected as a concern regarding the future of the program in the state.

Through the experiences of the participants, it was revealed that the two state agencies' financial investment in the reverse transfer program played a small role in the program's implementation. For example, the awarding of the Credit When Its Due grant, which was overseen at the state level, allowed for the distribution of funds to support the reverse transfer program. At the state agencies, this grant allowed for the hiring of a consultant (Julie) to help with reporting and researching data for the CWID grant. At UCC, they also hired a new staff member to help support the Registrar's Office. Hiring additional staff to oversee the program or dedicating a current staff member to program is a best practice supported in the literature (Friedel & Wilson, 2015).

It is necessary to note that, while there was a small financial incentive for institutions to participate in the reverse transfer program, the administrators interviewed did not believe it was a significant incentive. Rather, they chose to participate because of the program's ability

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to assist students and increase completion rates. Further, with the CWID grant expiring in the fall 2014, it was unclear how the state would further financially support the reverse transfer programs at the state. In fact, one participant asked the researcher for any recommendations on how their state could or should invest in the program.

Another important finding emerged through the *Stability* theme. The higher education governance structure in the Pacific Northwest state is currently undergoing significant change. During the data collection stage of this study, the university state system was beginning to dissolve, and in the summer of 2015, the current system will be dismantled. Significant changes are also occurring at the community college state agency in terms of their oversight committee. Kelly, Director of Research and Communications at the community college state agency, stated, *"To say that there are a lot of things that are yet to be resolved is a quite the understatement."* These changes, most of which have unknown implications at this time, are likely influence the relationships between the state agencies and institutions, as well as the reverse transfer program in the future.

Research Question 2

What are the challenges and support mechanisms that influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer program?

The value of having strong relationships has echoed across many concepts in this study, and it continues to inform yet another component, research question two. The relationships between institutions, staff, and state agencies were an invaluable component of the success of UCC and LAU's reverse transfer program. It is interesting to note that the state agencies, who have worked with other institutions in the state on reverse transfer, noted that institutions that did not have strong, on-going relationship experienced more difficulty

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starting the program. “Playing well in the sandbox” goes beyond appeasing political pressure. In this study, “playing well” with others has allowed for both student and institutional achievement and success.

Next, it is important to note that both Registrars experienced supportive administrative units. The two administrative staff members interviewed (Provost and Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs and Vice President of Student Services) were also in support of the program. However, both administrators stated that they were not directly involved in the daily events of the program and that allowed their Registrars to oversee the program. In fact, the Vice President of Student Services, Rachel, deferred most of the questions to Nick, LAU’s Registrar. Supportive administrators were another factor that contributed to the program’s success.

A third support mechanism was explained in the theme, *Flexibility and Rigidity*—UCC and LAU were able to implement the reverse transfer program successfully due to their flexible campus culture. The literature supports this phenomenon by stating that organizations that can practice discernment and flexibility are likely to overcome problems and experience organizational success (Thomas, 2010). Since UCC and LAU were able to be provide evidence of the necessity of changing policies and procedures, their organizational boards and committees agreed to implementing the changes. Donna noted, *“We changed quite a bit of our own protocol internally and that was extremely helpful.”* The flexible culture at UCC and LAU can also be attributed to the long tenure of both Registrars. Over the years, both had established trust and reliability within their institutions.

In terms of challenges, participants discussed the lack of student knowledge of the program. Advisors created flyers and handouts on reverse transfer and spent time with students discussing the program on an individual basis. Creating a communications plan as

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an institution is an important best practice (Friedel & Wilson, 2015). Even though institutional documents support the use of a marketing strategy, and advisors employed many methods to communicate the program (e.g., text messages, emails), advisors still experienced challenges in *"getting the word out."*

Next, three participants mentioned the perception that the reverse transfer program was not helpful or valuable. As mentioned previously, participants shared their concern that some viewed the reverse transfer program as promoting a diploma mill mentality. Kelly, with the community college state agency, summarized her belief by saying that reverse transfer, *"resonates with some and it falls with others."*

The final experience that helps to answer research question two is amount of work associated the reverse transfer implementation. As reported in the literature, beginning the reverse transfer program requires extensive preparation and planning (Friedel & Wilson, 2015). Both Registrars were able to scaffold a plan for the program, but it was necessary to train other staff members and prepare for the program. Further, the program requires continual maintenance as student transcripts arrive regularly. Evaluating transcripts, updating the database and communicating with students were large projects that required the staff to use creative thinking and problem solving skills. In response to the new workload, UCC was able to hire an additional staff person which reduced the work for those processing reverse transfer students.

Discussion of Theoretical Framework

The use of the theoretical framework, Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) (Rogers, 2010) was beneficial to this study in that it provided a lens to view how a new idea is communicated through an organization. While the framework helped to explain how social

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structures and communication channels influenced how reverse transfer was received at UCC and LAU, there were some instances where the theoretical framework was not applicable or fully utilized. For example, Roger's DOI theory assumes that, when an innovation is presented to an organization, all members are given an opportunity to either adopt or reject the innovation. In the case of LAU and UCC, not all participants were in a position where they were given a choice to participate; the decision was made at the administrative level and many staff involved participated because it was a job assignment. Additionally, DOI employs a simplified view of how a phenomenon moves through an organization. However, implementing a new program such as the new reverse transfer program is a complex phenomenon, and DOI may oversimplify the experience. This is demonstrated by the fact that institutions of higher education are not homogeneous (Lyytinen & Damsgaard, 2001). Not all individuals involved share a common culture or viewpoint (Rogers, 2010). The final limitation of the use of the DOI theory in the study is that the rate of diffusion is not explored. DOI considers the time that it takes for an innovation to be adopted by members of the system to be a key element in the diffusion process. The study did not consider how quickly or slowly the reverse transfer program was implemented at the two institutions, nor was this a consideration that the researcher believed to be applicable to the case study.

In future researcher studies, researchers may consider exploring more deeply how learning theories (Bransford & National Research Council, 2000; Mezirow, 1997; Vygotsky, 1980) and organizational theories (Pennings, 1975; Thomas, 2010) inform the reverse transfer implementation process. For example, learning theory considers how prior experiences and world view influence how people learn and process information. More specifically, transformative learning theory explores how an individual's habits and points of view, their "frame of reference," influences how individuals learn (Mezirow, 1997).

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Organizational theory is a broad classification of organizational analysis and would require a researcher to narrow and focus on an appropriate theory. One potential theory within organization theory is structural contingency theory. Structural contingency theory would have practical application to how institutions respond to reverse transfer in relation to the campus environment and structure (Pennings, 1975).

The Performance of State Higher Education Systems model served as a lens to help inform the researcher as to how a state's higher education structure influences the implementation of a new program, such as the new reverse transfer (Richardson, Bracco, Callen & Finney, 1999). It was not the focus of this study to interpret how the changes to state higher education governance structure influenced the operations of the state institutions. This model, however, helped to situate the study and examine expectations for how the higher education systems within each state balances the often "conflicting interests of academic professionals and…the market" (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 12). This model was adequate in its use to analyze the state system in the Pacific Northwest state and better understand how this structure influences the colleges and universities within it.

Limitations

As discussed in Chapter 3, the researcher took steps to ensure the goodness and trustworthiness of the study by addressing credibility, transferability and dependability. While effort was made by providing rich, thick description of participants, using member checks and peer debriefing, and utilizing triangulation, there were several limitations to caution the reader when interpreting the study.

A small number of participants contributed to this study. In this study, the researcher interviewed 10 participants who were involved in the program at UCC, LAU, or their

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respective state agency. As a case study, the researcher is bound to the case and those participants within it (Creswell, 1998). Although there may have been other individuals who were tangentially involved in reverse transfer, it was necessary to limit participants to those directly involved in the program. Further, once saturation was reached, the interviews were concluded. If another research methodology had been employed, it is possible that results of the study may have been different.

Another limitation may be due to the sole interpretation of the researcher. As a qualitative researcher, one must be aware of his or her own experiences and biases (Miles et al., 2014). This concept of positionality was discussed in Chapter 3 and was addressed by the researcher's use of bracketing while interpreting the data (Seidman, 1998). An additional limitation was that interviews were conducted by telephone or Skype®. This resulted in the researcher not having direct interaction with the participants, and reduced the possibility of seeing all interpersonal and non-verbal indicators of the participants. Efforts were made to reduce this limitation by conducting member checks, employing triangulation, and, in one case, conducting an additional interview.

The study was conducted at a community college and university on the West coast; therefore, it may not reflect the experiences of institutions in other parts of the United States. Another limitation is that the two institutions are in close proximity to each other. Therefore, institutions that are not in close geographic proximity may not experience the same results. It is also necessary to consider institutional size and culture when exploring the results of this study. Not all institutions will have the same history and relationship as UCC and LAU, which greatly influenced the findings of this study.

Finally, the researcher did not explore the individual personalities and backgrounds of the participants. Since the study focused on experiences at the institution and the professional

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relationships of these participants, the researcher did not fully investigate and respond to individual traits and characteristics. Learning more about a participant's background experiences and beliefs would have allowed for a more in-depth explanation of how an institution operates in terms of its people and culture. However, since this was not the focus of this study, the results did not include this component.

Implications

Analysis of the study's data demonstrates the complexity of experiences and meanings that have come from the implementation of the reverse transfer program at UCC and LAU. Despite the limitations of this study, there are a several ways in which this study contributes to and builds upon the current literature. As discussed in Chapter 2, very little qualitative research has been conducted on the new reverse transfer. No known research existed at the time of my study that addresses the experiences of staff during the implementation phase of the new reverse transfer. While researchers have studied the traditional reverse transfer and how the pathway impacts students (Hossler, Shapiro, & Dundar, 2012a; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Yang, 2006), there has been comparatively little written the new reverse transfer. Further, researchers at the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois (OCCRL) encouraged the topic of this research by stating, "It would be good to have a qualitative case study that captures perspectives from the 4 year partner institution, 2 year feeder institution(s), and state policy support perspective." This study has provided insight into this topic. The results of this study provide support and understanding into the development of new reverse transfer programs and help to tell the story about implementing a new program on college campuses between partner institutions.

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This study may be of interest to institutions that seek new and potentially better ways to improve new reverse transfer programs. For example, as noted in Theme 1 and by Wilson & Friedel (2015), college campuses will benefit from forming a reverse transfer committee, reviewing relevant policies and procedures, and automating processes. Findings from this study may also be helpful to those looking to understand the student experience in the process of participating in the new reverse transfer. While the findings cannot be directly translated to the student experience, they can illuminate potential strengths and challenges students may face. Lastly, this study helps to illuminate the dynamic between community colleges, universities and state agencies. Results from this study can be used to help organizations understand the dynamic between these entities.

Recommendations

The results of this study have provided opportunities for continuing work in new reverse transfer programming. Following are several recommendations made practice, policy, and future research.

Practice

With the growing prevalence of reverse transfer programs across the nation, it is important to consider the future of the program. This study sought to better understand the program and how individuals, as well as state agencies influence the program. As a result of the study, four recommendations for practice emerged and are detailed below.

1. ***Support and Foster Cross-Campus Relationships***

In this study, every participant shared stories about the value of relationship between partner institutions. Administrative teams should consider methods that help foster relationships with partner institutions and colleagues. Professionals in this study that had

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close working relationships with those at other institutions were more likely to reach out for assistance, collaborate on the program, and report satisfaction with the program. Fostering cross-campus relationships by encouraging joint training sessions or annual meetings are all ways of promoting the relationship building. These relationships were very important to helping the reverse transfer program between UCC and LAC, as well as between the state agencies and their respective institutions. Offering opportunities for professionals to build relationships across campuses would do much to promote the growth of reverse transfer programs. Further, it will be important to start the conversation regarding how the four-year institutions can benefit from reverse transfer. As evidenced from this study, the four-year institution did not see a direct benefit. Rather, they participated because they wanted to 'play well in the sandbox'. Demonstrating the benefit to the four-year college may help to strengthen the overall program.

2. Frame Reverse Transfer as a Means to Support Performance Based Funding

On a related theme, a second implication for practitioners comes from the benefit institutional relationships provide through reverse transfer programs. Many institutions are experiencing increasing demand for accountability and completion from President Obama's Completion Agenda and state accountability measures, such as state performance based funding models (Bragg, Cullen, Bennett, & Ruud, 2011; Friedel, Thornton, D'Amico, & Katsinas, 2013). Subsequently, in order to improve the degree completion rates, institutions should continue to partner with each other to create formal reverse transfer programs as an innovative way to increase completion rates.

3. Adequately Prepare and Pilot a Program

As institutions create reverse transfer programs it is recommended that each campus start small and pilot a new program. This will help to establish a program, create buy-in, and

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overcome problems. In the Pacific Northwest state, university and community college state agencies were able to visit existing reverse transfer programs at El Paso Community College and the University of Texas, El Paso and build on that previous experience. As recommended by Friedel and Wilson (2015), forming a committee and a communications plan are critical steps in starting a program. UCC and LAC staff members were able to benefit from previous pilot and built their programs from this foundation. Many times, campuses are reluctant to begin new programs because of the work associated with implementation. As a result of this study, practitioners can see that adequately preparing and investing in the planning stages are critical steps in the process, but they also help to demonstrate worth and validity in a program.

4. Include Advisors in the Entirety of the Program

The last implication for practice is one that was mentioned briefly in work by Ekal and Krebs (2011), and Friedel and Wilson (2015). These authors discussed the importance of including advisors in the planning stages and process. The current study built on this research by encouraging the advisors' participation not only in the planning stage, but also in the results and on-going maintenance of the program. This study illuminated the fact that advisors are very important in the "on the ground" portion of the program (e.g., informing students, answering questions, etc.). However, this study also revealed that, while advisors are able to answer general questions, they may not able to answer the "big picture" questions. Advisors at both UCC and LAU experienced a lack of information about how the program is working and benefiting students. It is necessary to include advisors in the on-going planning and institutional outcomes so that they can help to improve the program by identifying trends and concerns that students are sharing. Allowing advisors the ability to fully participate in the discussion is an important step that creates a continual discussion on improvement and

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retention. Additionally, the study revealed that students were not fully aware of the reverse transfer program and its benefits. Fully utilizing advisors to reach out to students and promote the program may also help to strengthen reverse transfer programs.

Policy

While this research study did not include a full discussion on policy, it is necessary to respond to the role that policy plays in reverse transfer programming. Two recommendations for policy are detailed as follows.

1. ***Allocate Financial Resources to Support Reverse Transfer***

For the Pacific Northwest state, there is legislation that provides a framework for the reverse transfer program. However, due to the current transitions occurring in the state, it is unknown how reverse transfer will be overseen. This study revealed that both LAU and UCC received a small monetary incentive to participate in the program. However, four participants commented that while the money was appreciated, it was not enough to create and sustain the program as is. Due to this, intuitions will have to make an individual decision as to the future of the individual programs. As a result, it is recommended as a result of this study, that policy makers and legislators consider allocating resources to support the program. Assuming that quantitative research can demonstrate the program's success, legislatures are likely to see a return on investment.

2. ***Create a Framework for Reverse Transfer, while Allowing for Individualization***

The second policy implication is a recommendation that came from the experiences of both state level agency participants. While the state agencies were able to provide a template for colleges to consider while implementing the program, they also reported the need for flexibility. It is advised that institutions be given general parameters and allowed to

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make decisions based on what works best for their individual campuses. Participants in this study shared the value of being able to shape the program as it best fit their individual needs. Staff members at the state agencies both shared that allowing each campus to build their own programs contributed to the overall success of the program. As policy makers consider implementing more criteria around reverse transfer, it will be necessary to allow for individualization and personalization at each campus.

Future research

While there is growth across the nation in the number of reverse transfer programs, we still have much to learn about its future and its impact on students and college campuses. The following sections outline two recommendations for future research.

1. ***Quantitative Research: Establish a Baseline and Conduct Longitudinal Studies***

As mentioned in Chapter 2, there is emerging quantitative research at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and El Paso Community College (EPCC). However, there have not been any generalizable results to base an argument for or against reverse transfer. In the coming months, results from the Credit When It's Due (CWID) grant will likely become available and provide more data to analyze. Due to CWID's larger scale, trends and recommendations may be produced that will continue to advance the program. Additionally, it is necessary for future reach to include longitudinal studies on the students who participate in reverse transfer. Such studies can identify longer range outcomes and implications for students who participate in reverse transfer.

2. ***Qualitative Research: Explore Differences and Understand the Student Experience.***

In terms of further qualitative research, it is necessary for future researchers to explore successful (and problematic) programs across the nation as it relates to the individual

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experience and meaning making. This qualitative study was one case study in the Pacific Northwest which may not reflect the experiences of those in other regions. Future research should be conducted in other states, including the Midwest, South and Northeast. Additionally, while most reverse transfer programs are organized between community college and 4-year public universities, there are known private colleges that partner with community colleges. Exploring this dynamic may provide new information as well. Lastly, it may be informative to take a closer look at the student experience associated with reverse transfer. Institutions may benefit from knowing student barriers, recommendations for communication, and strategies for supporting students through the program. While we may see parallel results to that of a traditional transfer student, future research would either support or refute these findings.

Personal Reflections

During this study, I was able to learn about and fully experience a complete research study. I plan to use what I have learned in future research and in my work as a practitioner. As I continue to develop as a researcher, I will need to refine and practice my interviewing skills with participants. During transcription, I could hear myself conversing, rather than listening. I suppose this is from my need to put people at ease and reduce any of the participant's anxieties. While this is a practice I employ in my daily professional career, it is not the best means for collecting data during a study. I will need to practice more at listening and being more at ease during some uncomfortable moments of waiting.

As I look back, I also reflect upon my own pathway for selecting a topic. In the beginning I was looking for a topic that was relevant, emerging, and relatable, as well as bridging my interest in community colleges and 4-year colleges. As a scholar, I envision my

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own work in higher education and can see the value in critically reviewing how and why we do things. I also see the importance of the student's perspective within this program. I have even had the pleasure of practicing my research in "real life" by working with current students at my institution and informing them about the reverse transfer program. I felt a closeness to my research participants in that moment, echoing their sentiment of helping one student at a time and encouraging them to pursue what they have already earned.

Reflecting back on my work for this study, I am amazed at how much resilience and determination one must have in order to complete a dissertation. I think back on my high school softball coach who used to chant, "Intestinal Fortitude, Guts, Guts, Guts!" At the time, it was relevant to my life as an athlete, but now it rings true to my work as a researcher. Conducting this study has been arguably the most challenging personal choice I have ever made. Looking ahead, I believe that I will always be a scholarly practitioner. I hope to continue this work as I see incredible value in informing policy makers, contributing to the literature, and in serving our students.

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APPENDIX A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

Date: 7/30/2014

To: Sarah L Wilson
1200 Gerdin
Ames, IA 50011

CC: Dr. Larry Ebbers
N256 Lagomarcino Hall
Dr. Janice Friedel
N247F Lagomarcino Hall

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Dissertation: The New Reverse Transfer: A Case Study Analysis of Implementation Between a Community College and a Feeder Institution

IRB ID: 14-358

Study Review Date: 7/30/2014

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
  - Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
  - Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:

- **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**
- **You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application.** Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

  Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

  Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form. A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review. **Only the IRB or designees may make the determination of exemption**, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Please be aware that **approval from other entities may also be needed.** For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. **An IRB determination of exemption in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.**

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.

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APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Study: The New Reverse Transfer: A case study analysis of implementation between a community college and their feeder institution.

Investigators: Sarah L. Wilson

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to better understand how state higher education governance structure and individual persons influence the implementation of the new reverse transfer.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are either a staff member at an institution which has implemented the new reverse transfer or are a staff member at the state higher education offices. You should not participate if you have not been involved in the reverse transfer program on your campus or in your state.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview and answer approximately twenty (20) question related to your experiences with the new reverse transfer. Your participation will last for approximately forty-five (45 minutes). The interviews will be recorded electronically for transcription purposes. Once the interviews and transcription are completed, you will be sent a copy of the transcript for your review. You will be asked to check for accuracy and to correct any errors. Once this check occurs and you agree to its accuracy, your participation in the study will end.

Risks or Discomforts

While participating in this study you should not experience any risks or discomforts. Although minimal, a possible risk associated with this study is the possibility that someone outside of the study could link your responses back to you. Steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and confidentiality (please refer to the "Confidentiality" section on this form. You have the right to decline answering any questions or to amend your response at any time.

Benefits

If you decide to participate in this study, there is not likely to be any benefit given directly to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit higher education professionals and

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administrators, as well as inform legislators on the experiences of staff members who are involved in implementing the new reverse transfer program.

Costs and Compensation

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Participant Rights

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

It is possible that you did not have a positive experience with implementing the new reverse transfer program. You will be encouraged to share those experiences to better understand implementation process. However, if you feel uncomfortable sharing you may choose not to participate or end the interview at any time. The principal investigator will ask no further questions.

If you have any questions *about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury*, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

Confidentiality

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

- Only the principal investigator, investigator's faculty advisor, and a qualified transcriptionist will have access to the raw data
- When the data are analyzed, an identifying coding system will be used removing your identifying information
- After the raw data has been transcribed, the recorded audio files will be destroyed

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Questions

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information ***about the study,*** contact:

Principal Investigator:	Iowa State Faculty Advisor:	Iowa State Faculty Advisor:
Sarah L. Wilson	Dr. Larry Ebbers	Dr. Janice Friedel
Email: slwilson@iastate.edu	Email: lebbers@iastate.edu	Email: jfriedel@iastate.edu
Phone: (515) 490-1771	Phone: (515) 294-8067	Phone: (515) 294-4719

Consent and Authorization Provisions

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study. Please keep a copy of the informed consent form for your records.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

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APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Institutional Staff Questions

3. What is your professional classification and title?
4. How long have you been involved in the reverse transfer program?
5. How were you first involved in reverse transfer?
6. What was the rationale behind your institutions entry into the reverse transfer program with your partner institution?
7. Can you tell me a bit how you are involved with the program?
8. What has influenced your involvement in the program and subsequent processing?
    a. Is there a committee for the RT program?
    b. Electronic evaluation?
9. How do students find out about the program? (e.g., how is it communicated with students?)
10. What's it been like to work with the partner institution?
    a. How do you share data?
    b. How did you communicate?
    c. How did you resolve differences in opinion or policy?
11. What went well for your institution and what were some challenges?
12. How has the institution benefitted from the reverse transfer program?
13. What do you see as the future for the reverse transfer program?

State System Questions

1. What is your professional classification and title?
2. How long have you been involved in the reverse transfer program?
3. What influenced your involvement in the program?
4. How has the state benefitted from the reverse transfer program?
5. Can you describe the state's relationship with the reverse transfer program?
    a. How did you communicate with the colleges?
6. What went well in the state and what were some challenges?
7. What do you see as the future for the reverse transfer program?

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APPENDIX D. REVERSE TRANSFER TEMPLATE

Template for Reverse Transfer Campus Implementation
Oregon University System-Oregon Department of Community Colleges

1. Policies: what changes were made to academic policies (graduation policy, for example) to address potential barriers?

2. Data Sharing: what is the current status of data sharing between your two institutions for reverse transfer purposes? Are any data sharing agreements or MOUs in place or in development? Please attach a copy if so.

3. Identification of students: What is the" universe" of students (e.g., transfer students who have earned 90+ credit hours only, AAOT, DPP, or AAS only, date range)? How many students have been identified so far using these criteria?

4. Communication: How have you communicated with students regarding sharing of their data, opt-in /opt-out. etc.? What, if any, future process for obtaining student permission is being considered or implemented? Please share a copy or sample of your communications.

5. Process for awarding degrees: What process are you using, e.g. a letter or email to students from presidents'/others, invitation to graduation ceremonies, etc.?

6. Tracking students: What processes are in place or needed to track persistence and completion of Reverse Transfer students?

7. Other (media contacts, coverage, or events, other activities not addressed above)

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APPENDIX E. SAMPLE LETTER TO DEPARTMENT HEADS

Department Heads,

The Student Records Specialists are in the process of reviewing LAU transcripts as part of the UCC/LAU Reverse Transfer Program. All of these students moved on to LAU prior to completing a degree at UCC and are currently working on their bachelor's degree at LAU. We are reviewing their LAU transcripts to see if we can now award an UCC degree based on additional courses they completed at LAU.

We will be referencing LAU's articulation site to check for equivalencies. For the purpose of Reverse transfer **only,** if the site equates one of LAU's upper division courses to one of our lower division courses we would like your approval to apply the upper division course without having to process a Course Substitution form, which is currently the only method by which Upper Division coursework is applied to UCC Certificates or Degrees. (This awarding of upper division credit without a written Course Substitution form has been approved XXXX, dependent upon the approval of each Department Head.)

For example, in review of a Reverse Transfer student that is working on one of the articulated CS degrees, the LAU transcript shows the student completed **XXX** at LAU. According to the articulation site if an UCC student completed XXX they will grant XXX credit. So, in this case, we would grant XXX credit toward the student's UCC AS transfer degree, based on the completed **XXX** course at LAU.

In addition, you may be hearing individually from the Student Record Specialists asking about LAU courses that might fulfill UCC course requirements in your specific program. The intention is that as you provide information on course equivalencies, the Student Records Specialists will be developing a matrix that can be used across all students from your department who have moved on to LAU. The hope is that you will be contacted less and less as the matrix expands.

The completion agenda is a high priority and this would greatly help in that effort.

If you have questions please get in touch.

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