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by

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**Evaluating the Transfer Culture at a Texas Public University  
Through the Experiences of Community College Transfer Student's**

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**Evaluating the Transfer Culture at a Texas Public University  
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**by**

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## **Dedication**

Para la familia Del Real Viramontes. Para mi mamá Martha y mi papá José gracias por ser mi primer maestra y maestro en la vida. Gracias por todos sus sacrificios, amor, apoyo, y todas sus bendiciones, sin inportar donde quiera que este. Paola y Moises gracias por brindarme su apoyo incondicional siempre, soy muy afortunado en tenerlos como hermanos. Jason gracias por tu energia, tu sonrisa, y tus ganas de aprender y explorar tu mundo. Mi alma y corazon se mantienen mas joven cada vez que te tengo presente.

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## **Abstract**

### **Evaluating the Transfer Culture at a Texas Public University Through the Experiences of Community College Transfer Student's**

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Abstract: In Texas, the majority of first time college students use the community college as an entry point into higher education. However the number of students who eventually transfer to a four-year university and in particular to the state's flagship institution, is not comparable to the amount of students who enter the system of higher education through the community college. Using the Transfer Receptive Culture framework (Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solorzano, 2011) and through the experiences of seven community college transfer students, this study examines the transfer culture at a Texas public university. This study aims to contribute to the literature by examining the first study that looks into the institutional culture necessary to transfer to an elite university such as Transfer Student University. Findings suggest that the university should improve the outreach, orientation /transition programs, academic/social support services, as well as support the creation of a transfer student community on campus.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### My Story

As a former community college student, I encountered a set of experiences that prolonged my process of successfully transferring into a four-year institution. The one I remember having the most impact on me, happened my first semester of community college in a remedial English course at Los Angeles Community College (LACC). My former English instructor told me that my reading, writing, and critical thinking skills were not up to par with what was expected from students enrolled in her course. Her assessment of my abilities made me feel inadequate for college and I decided to stop going to school. As a result of this experience, I developed a stigma that made it difficult for me to have the confidence I needed to advance through the remedial English pipeline and become transfer eligible. After this event I took a recess from school for three years and went back in 2004 after being encouraged to go back by a former friend.

Looking back at my community college experience I can say that my transfer experience started in the Fall of 2004. During this time I was attending East Los Angeles College (ELAC) and was part of the PUENTE Project, a program in California whose mission is to increase the number of educationally underrepresented students who enroll in four-year colleges and universities, earn degrees, and return to their communities as leaders and mentors to future generations (<http://www.puente.net>) At the time when I was at ELAC, the PUENTE Project was a one year cohort program, where participating students took one English course together for two consecutive semesters. The English course focused on exposing students to Chicana/o Latina/o literature. In addition, students met with a transfer counselor regularly to ensure that they were on track to transfer to a four-year university. The PUENTE project was the first exposure I had to the transfer experience and to what I now identify as what Dimpal Jain, Alfred Herrera, Santiago

Bernal, and Daniel Solórzano (2011) define as a Transfer Receptive Culture, which is the institutional commitment by a four-year college or university to provide the support needed for students to transfer successfully—that is, to navigate the community college, take the appropriate coursework, apply, enroll, and successfully earn a baccalaureate degree in a timely manner (p.257).

Through the PUENTE Project, I was exposed to the University of California system and what it offered in pursuing a college education. Unfortunately even though at that time, I had the institutional as well as the support from my English instructor and transfer counselor to transfer into a four-year university, I was struggling with emotional and psychological challenges due to my academic performance. In 2007, after not successfully completing both the transferable English and Math courses to transfer to a California 4-year university, I decided to take a break once again, I had not passed my English course for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time and if I wanted to take it, I had to take it out of the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD). At the time I tried to enroll at Glendale Community College (GCC), but because I was trying to enroll as a new student after the semester had already started classes were already full. I felt discouraged by my situation and I decided not to enroll anywhere else.

In 2008, I decided to resign from my full-time position as Assistant Manager for AT&T Mobility and return to school full-time. I went back to GCC and this time I successfully enrolled in the classes I needed. At GCC, I was able to pass English 101 the first time and Statistics after two semesters. Since I had been at the community college on and off for almost eight years I did not realize that I had met the requirements to transfer. I also had the support and mentorship of Elvia a peer mentor who worked at the transfer center at GCC and was a former community college student. This was the second time I experienced a Transfer Receptive Culture at the

community college. Through Elvia's support and the support and resources of UCLA's Center for Community College Partnerships (CCCCP), I was able to apply and be admitted to UCLA, as a Chicana/o Studies Major. Getting admitted to UCLA was a surreal experience for me, I was excited to be part of one of the most prestigious universities in the world.

As a result of my participation in CCCC and other programs I was able to excel in the classroom and was also able to participate in conducting undergraduate research through the UCLA Cesar E. Chavez Department of Chicano and Chicana Studies and the UCLA McNair Research Scholars program, which helped me when I was applying to graduate school. In the Spring of 2012, I graduated Cum Laude, received the highest departmental honors after completing my senior thesis, and was admitted to all the graduate programs I applied to.

### **Significance and Background**

In Texas 53% of students choose the community college as their entry point into higher education (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2013). Additionally, 25% of students who start at community college eventually transfer to a four-year institution within six-years (Texas Public Higher Education Almanac 2014). Texas statewide bachelor degree graduation rates for community and technical college cohort of first time entering undergraduates is outdated, the most recent report provided by THECB is for the Fall 2004. This report shows that of all community and technical college students entering as undergraduates in the Fall of 2004, only 13.4% graduated in 6 years

(<http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/DocFetch.cfm?DocID=2300>).

My research focuses on the institutional culture at Transfer Student University (TSU)<sup>1</sup> it is amongst the top 20 public universities in the nation (<http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities/>) and is one of the leading destinations for transfer students, TSU ranks amongst the top 30<sup>th</sup> nationally and top 10<sup>th</sup> in the state (<http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/most-transfers>). One of the limitations of this ranking is that it does not show the number of community college transfer students versus those students who transfer from other four-year universities and/or bachelor degree completion rates.

Through my research I discovered a unique set of policies set in place by the Texas legislature, that may impact the number of students who gain admissions to TSU through the community college. H.B.588, also known as the top 10% law, implemented in 1998, guarantees admission to all Texas seniors who graduate in the top ten percent of their class. (Niu, Tienda, & Cortes, 2006). In the Spring of 2009, the 81<sup>st</sup> legislation session made changes to the automatic admission law at Transfer Student University. Under the new law (SB 175), students applying for admissions beginning with the summer 2011 and forward would be impacted. Currently to be offered automatic admissions for the summer/fall 2014 and Spring 2015, students must be in the top 7% of their class (See Footnote)<sup>2</sup>. This law would ideally bring more ethnic/racial diversity (Tienda, Leicht, Sullivan, Maltese, & Lloyd, 2003; University of Texas Office of Public Affairs [UTOPA], 2003; Walker & Lavergne, 2001, as cited in Tienda & Niu, 2006), greater geographic diversity of incoming students (Montejano, 2001, as cited in Tienda & Niu, 2006), stronger institutional ties between secondary schools and the public flagship universities through

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of anonymity, the study gives this university the pseudonym of Transfer Student University.

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of anonymity of the institution, the study retracts this source. For a copy of this and others sources retracted in this study please contact the author.

expanding outreach efforts (Goodman,2003, as cited in Tienda & Niu, 2006), and additional evidence that class rank is a more reliable predictor of college success than are standardized test scores (Faulkner,2000, 2002; Glater,2004; Rooney, 1998; Walker& Lavergne, 2001, as cited in Tienda & Niu, 2006). I challenge, however, that the top 10% law was created in favor of traditional college going students and actually discriminates against students who rely on the community college as a pathway into higher education. This is evident from the institutional policies and programs set in place at TSU, that I explore in this research study.

Beginning with the Fall/Summer 2001 admissions, TSU set in place the Freshmen Transfer Program (FTP) (See Footnote)<sup>3</sup> FTP expands the admission options available to freshman applicants to TSU, by allowing them to begin their post secondary education at another TSU system university. Once the student fulfills the FTP requirements as a freshman, he or she can transfer to TSU to complete their undergraduate degree (See Footnote)<sup>4</sup>. In the 2010 Community College Transfer Report, published by The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, data shows that the FTP set in place with other TSU System institutions currently takes 1/2 of the admission slots allocated for general transfer students (1,800 of 3,600 slots) (THECB, 2010). The policies and practices set in place through the FTP contributes to the structural impediments that prevent greater community college student transfer success (Hendel and Herrera, 2006), including that of the students from underserved groups such as, students from racial, ethnic, and low socioeconomic status (Zamani, 2001) who use the community college as their primary pathway into higher education.

Recently TSU partnered with Austin Community College and launched a co-

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<sup>3</sup> For the sake of anonymity of the institution, the study retracts this source. For a copy of this and others sources retracted in this study please contact the author.

<sup>4</sup> For the sake of anonymity of the institution, the study retracts this source. For a copy of this and others sources retracted in this study please contact the author.

enrollment program for incoming freshmen. Freshmen Transfer Program through Co-Enrollment (FTPCE) was developed for students who are Texas residents and are eligible for automatic admission under the state's top 10 percent law, but who do not qualify under the new automatic admission policy for TSU (See Footnote)<sup>5</sup>. Students who participate in FTPCE have two years to complete the core curriculum and maintain a 2.5 cumulative grade point average in order to continue with their bachelor's degree at TSU. Some of the benefits for students are that they have access to TSU advisors and resources, but are not required to apply to transfer to TSU. One major challenge to this program is that not every student is eligible and or can apply to be part of FTPCE, TSU offers participation to a selected group of Freshmen applicants.

From these policies and programs we can observe that the transfer culture at TSU for community college students who aspire to transfer to TSU, is limited, or non-existent and looking into this phenomena is of critical importance. For this reason the significance of this study is relevant in at least one way. It will be the first study that looks into the institutional culture necessary to transfer to a Texas public university such as Transfer Student University, through the experiences of community college transfer students.

### **Problem Statement**

The most recent Community College Transfer Student Report (2012) prepared by THECB shows that there is an overall lack of institutional commitment by Transfer Student University towards potential transfer students and more specifically to transfer students coming from Texas community colleges. This is reflected in the data provided by the Office of Information Management and Analysis at Transfer Student University,<sup>6</sup> which reveals that in

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<sup>5</sup> For the sake of anonymity of the institution, the study retracts this source. For a copy of this and others sources retracted in this study please contact the author.

<sup>6</sup>For the sake of anonymity of the institution, the study gives the institution the name of Transfer Student University. For a copy of this and others sources retracted in this study please contact the author.

2012 from 2,279 new transfer students 7.4% dropped out after one year in comparison to first-time freshmen students, which showed a 4.4% drop out rate out of 8,034. This shows a significant difference between the drop out rates between first-time transfer students and first-time freshmen students. Equally significant is the need of the university to develop or significantly increase their support services for transfer students to ensure the access, retention, and graduation, of transfer students from a institution such as Transfer Student University.

The purpose of this study is to (1) understand the institutional culture of community college transfer students at TSU as experienced by seven transfer students (2) contribute to a body of literature that examines the institutional culture necessary for community college students to transfer to a university such as Transfer Student University.

**The research question leading this study is:**

What is the Transfer Receptive Culture for community college Transfer Students at Transfer Student University?

This study will be presented in five chapters, chapter two reviews the literature and theoretical perspectives that I use to support my research. In chapter three I discuss the methods, the setting of where the study took place, and my positionality. In chapter four I discuss my findings through themes I found in my data. Finally, in chapter five I conclude with a discussion on the limitations and implications of my study and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter Two: Review Of The Literature & Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this research study is to investigate and document the transfer culture for seven community college transfer students at a Texas public university. In order to understand this phenomenon, the main objective within the review of the literature was to synthesize studies that addressed the lived experiences of community college transfer students through the transfer process. Given the limited amount of literature on the transfer culture for community college transfer students at a Texas public university, the following discussion will draw on three major areas of research relevant to this study. The first section will introduce the characteristics of community college students including some of the barriers they may face throughout the transfer process. The second section presents a brief discussion regarding the community college transfer students experiences at four-year universities. The third section describes models of affirming transfer culture involving two-year and four-year institutions.

### **Characteristics of Community College Students**

Today community colleges are the largest post-secondary education segment in the United States, enrolling 47% of the undergraduate student population (Hendel and Williams, 2012). Community college students are more likely to be first-generation college students, low-income students, and adult learners. (Malcom, 2013). There are multiple factors leading to students enrolling in the community colleges. Nora and Rendon (1990) revealed that Hispanics and Whites attended their respective community college to prepare to transfer to a four-year college or university. Over 50% of Hispanic and White community college students also considered attending their community college because it was more affordable, they wanted to stay close to home, they wanted to be able to take self-improvement or enrichment courses, and because they wanted to be able to work while going to school in their home town.

Notably degree aspirations for full-time freshmen attending both public and private 2-year college across the nation are important, Laanan (2003) found that about 9% of students at the public and 5% at the private two-year colleges aspired to earn an associate's degree. Laanan also found that, 25% of students at both public and private two-year colleges aspired to earn a baccalaureate degree. In addition about 25% of public and 28% of private two-year college students said they aspired to earn a master's degree. Finally, nearly 10% of public and 14% of private two-year college students said they aspired to obtain a doctorate. Nevertheless community college students have many barriers that may interrupt, delay, or keep them from transferring from the community college to a four-year college or university. One of the personal barriers community college students deal with during the transfer process is having limited financial resources (McDonough, 1997, as cited in Zamini, 2001). In addition, the lack of academic preparation of many students entering the community college (Stewart, 1988) may also discourage their aspirations to transfer to a four-year college or university. For Latina/o community college students the most significant barrier to transfer is that they are overwhelmed with balancing multiple roles and responsibilities outside of college while attending to their academic roles as students (p.243, Ornelas and Solorzano, 2004). In addition, there are institutional elements that can become barriers, for example Zamini (2001) reveals that, undergraduate student matriculation and retention is also impacted by campus climate and culture.

### **Transfer Students Experiences at Four-Year Universities**

Community college students transferring to a four-year university may experience additional social and academic challenges that can negatively impact their transition and ultimately become an obstacle in their goal of earning a bachelor's degree. Townsend &

Wilson (2006) revealed that students described that it was harder making friends with students at the university than at the community college. For example, for traditional-age students integrating themselves socially was easier at the community college because they had already established a social network there. Non-traditional age students also indicated that social integration was easier at the community college because there were other students like them who worked and went to school. In terms of their academic integration, students were evaluated based on their perceptions about their interaction with the faculty at the community college versus the university. Some students reported feeling disconnected from their professors at the university, whereas at the community college they were able to have more one-on-one access to their teachers and build a close relationship.

In addition community college transfer students deal with social and academic perceptions associated with coming from the community college that may have a negative impact during their transition. Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston (2010) report that community college students were being stigmatized as transfer students on their academic transfer adjustment. Their findings revealed that when students recognized their faculty and or campus environment stigmatize them as transfer students negatively, such experience would impede students' academic transfer adjustment (p. 191). The authors went onto assume that the stigma could also negatively influence their course learning experience. Furthermore Kaufman & Feldman (2004) show that for transfer students, the four-year university may have a negative effect on their self-identification within their new university environment, specifically when the student does not do well academically. As a result transfer students may develop an intellectual deficient identity. For example, students who took on this identity did not necessarily see themselves as failures, however they realized that they were not at the same academic standards

in terms of intelligence and knowledgeability level than their peers. This may be in part because as the authors describe, “performance in college is recognized symbolically by society as determining an individual’s intellectual competence and knowledge” (p. 475). Transfer students in their study felt that the school they were attending made them feel stupid, classes were hard, and that during their transition from community college to the 4-year university their intelligence identity changed. This was based on perceptions students had about their peers being smarter than them and on how they felt society perceived the college educated. The authors added that, for students who felt that college was difficult, not only were their own self-identities affected but may have also affected the identities of other students around them. This is as a result of college being a social structure characterized by constant social interactions, whereas the production of identities in college, to an extent are dependent on the surrounding group of students (p.476).

### **Affirming Transfer Culture Models**

In the attempt to eliminate institutional barriers and strengthen the transfer function from the community college to four-year universities, the “transfer culture” four-year universities need to invest and prioritize their commitment to the transfer function. The following are examples of affirming transfer culture models that address some of the structural, social, and academic barriers community college may face during the transfer process.

Hendel and Herrera (2006) introduce the transfer-going model as a way to increase the number of community college students who transfer to a four-year institution and successfully earn a bachelor’s degree. This model was designed to address the structural impediments that prevent greater student transfer success by building upon the common strengths of two-year and four-year institutions (p.4). The transfer-going model encompasses the following elements:

- Establish transfer to a four-year institution as a high institutional priority;
- Ensure that transfer is perceived by students as expected and attainable;
- Offer a rigorous curriculum for all students that includes writing, critical thinking, mathematics, and the sciences;
- Provide high quality instruction, including innovative and research-based pedagogies;
- Develop intensive academic support programs based on models of “academic excellence” (e.g., academic counseling, peer tutoring, and reciprocal learning techniques);
- Create an environment of belonging in which students feel stimulated to achieve at high academic levels; and
- Establish strong community and family linkages that foster intellectual stimulating, secure, and culturally rich environments for students on and off campus (p.5).

In addition, the researchers provide three points of intervention that go hand in hand with this model and critical for student success. These points involve the participation of two-year and four-year faculty and student service professionals in specific and coordinated ways. They are, first, establishing consistent communication with students no later than the first term at a community college to develop an academic plan of action for a successful transfer. Second, on-going commitment from faculty from the two-year and four-year institutions working to identify the essential academic preparation needed to help students make the transition from the community college to a four-year institution. Including, on-going consultation to assure that community college and four-year curricula are properly articulated so that an understandable pathway for each student is created. Three, the intervention of counselors and other student support personnel at two-year and four-year institutions who are critical gatekeepers of information about transfer. (p.5).

Additionally Hendel's (2011) report for College Board is made up of interviews he conducted with twenty-one higher education leaders at 12 four-year institutions known for their commitment for transfer students. Hendel reports that experts say that creating a transfer receptive culture requires that the faculty and staff at four-year colleges and universities connect students with the university campus culture. They provide four key elements to accomplish this task, these four elements are:

Transfer Orientation: Should be different than the freshmen version, for example, experts suggest that more time should be spent on developing a first-term course schedule that aligns well with whatever the student has completed at the community college (p.26)

Transfer Centers: These are "one-stop" service centers, that provide transfer students a dedicated space where they can meet other transfer students, get academic advising, and obtain information and get connected to other programs and services on campus.

Transfer Skill Courses: These are special transition courses that students may take during their first term at the university. These courses provide students an opportunity to look at some of the challenges they will face and provide them with the strategies to overcome them.

Transfer Student Housing: Housing should be reserved specifically for transfer students, this provides transfer students the opportunity to participate in campus life.

A third example of a positive transfer model is provided by Hendel (2012) who describes an emerging transfer culture model that continues to show the importance of an institutional commitment by two- and four-year institutions to provide the resources necessary for students to transfer and earn the baccalaureate degree. The transfer-affirming culture is made up of five elements:

- Envisions transfer as a shared responsibility between community colleges and four-

year institutions;

- Views transfer and attainment of the bachelor's degree as expected and attainable;
- Offers curricula and academic support services that make transfer and degree completion possible;
- Leverages the social capital that students bring to college in service to their educational goals; and
- Includes transfer as an essential element of an institution's mission and strategic vision.

Before I turn to the theoretical perspective and theoretical concept I utilize to examine the transfer culture for community college transfer students at TSU, I would like to offer a background on the development of this theoretical perspective in relation to Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education, as well as my reason in utilizing this framework for this study.

The transfer receptive culture draws on CRT in education to look at the relationships between community colleges and selective four-year colleges and universities. According to Solórzano (1998) a critical race theory in education “challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses, and insists on analyzing race and racism in education by placing them in both a historical and contemporary context” (p. 123). In addition, Solórzano provides five tenets, that form the basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of a critical race theory in education: (a) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (b) the challenge to dominant ideology; (c) the commitment to social justice; (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective. Within this context Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solórzano (2011) expand on each tenet to show how it can inform a transfer receptive culture, I provide a brief summary of the highlights of each tenet below.

The first tenet, the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, allows us to see transfer as a racialized phenomenon. The authors point out that even though the majority of students enrolled in the community colleges nationwide are students of color with high aspirations of transferring to four-year institutions they transfer in low numbers. They also, mention that in colleges with predominantly Latino or African American student enrollment, the transfer rates are even smaller. For these two reasons, the authors claim that race needs to be present when analyzing the transfer commitment made by highly selective four-year institutions to welcome these students (Jain et al., 2011).

The second tenet, the challenge to dominant ideology, allows us to reconsider transfer as something that only the community college is responsible for facilitating. The authors point out that by examining the transfer function from the perspective of a four-year institution, the transfer function becomes a two-way process making an explicit commitment to value transfer students. In addition seeing how community college students are often stigmatized as less smarter than their peers at the four-year institutions, the authors mention that since the four-year institution will actively seek community college transfer applicants, this will show that transfer students can contribute to the university (Jain et al., 2011).

The third tenet, the commitment to social justice, enables us to visualize transfer as a social justice tool. The authors highlight that since for many underrepresented students of color their upward mobility depends on the ability and opportunity to transfer. Seeing how these students either do not transfer or transfer to for-profit colleges and universities, the authors believe that they need to encourage students to transfer to a public selective four-year college and holding these institutions accountable to all students is a commitment to social justice (Jain et al., 2011).

The fourth tenet, the centrality of experiential knowledge, allows us to seek students, faculty, and staff's perspectives on improving the transfer pipeline to selective four-year institutions. The authors claim that the voices of those who transfer and those who support them in this process are critical as the university welcomes these students. The authors suggest that by seeking their feedback and listening to their personal narratives they are able to evaluate how the four-year institution can strengthen their commitment to the transfer function (Jain et al., 2011).

The fifth tenet, the interdisciplinary perspective, allows us to draw on other fields of study as we examine the necessary elements of a transfer receptive culture. The authors say that by utilizing theories and methodologies from an interdisciplinary perspective such as those provided by ethnic studies and women's studies, they are able to provide a multidimensional view of a transfer receptive culture that includes issues of sexism and racism. The authors conclude by saying that with these concepts in mind it is important to draw from other academic fields, in addition to CRT, that can contribute to a comprehensive conceptualization of a transfer receptive culture (Jain et al., 2011).

This study also applies the theoretical concept of microaggressions, subtle insults (verbal, non verbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously (Solórzano, Ceja, Yosso, 2000). Although this concept was developed and historically connected to discuss the racialized experiences of people of color, I have applied this theoretical concept in order to examine how the institution, in this case a public Texas university, discriminates against community college transfer students regardless of their racial background.

In applying the CRT framework and the theoretical concept of microaggressions I aim to highlight that although the majority of my participants were White and enjoyed a certain degree

of White privilege, they were also victims of the institutional microaggressions generally inflicted onto community college transfer students, for being transfer students.

### **Transfer Receptive Culture**

To analyze the transfer culture for transfer students at Transfer Student University, I draw on Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solórzano's (2011) concept of a Transfer Receptive Culture. The authors outline five elements that are necessary for elite colleges and universities to establish transfer as a normalized process to their campus, meaning that transfer students should not be used to make up for freshmen admission numbers. A good example of this process, is the what the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) has been able to do. For the last 15 years 40% of their new undergraduate enrollees at UCLA have been transfer students (UCLA Office of Analysis and Information Management, 2011, as cited in Jain, et al., 2011). The five elements are divided efforts that are pre- and post-transfer:

Pre-transfer:

1. Establish the transfer of students, especially nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students, as a high institutional priority that ensures stable accessibility, retention, and graduation (Jain et al., p. 258). By the university being actively involved in the transfer process it would strengthen the community college/university pipeline by eliminating a lot of the institutional barriers that community college students face during the transfer process.
2. Provide outreach and resources that focus on the specific needs of transfer students while complimenting the community college mission of transfer (Jain et al., p. 258). The university needs to actively recruit community college students on their campuses before students apply to transfer to their university and again when the students are

admitted. This is important because depending on what type of resources and or support the student may have these two times are when students may be full of a lot of uncertainties that may cause unwanted stress. At the same time by having the university reach out to the student during these two crucial time periods, the student would know that the university wants he or she to transfer there and they would start building a sense of belonging, that will enhance his or her transfer experience.

Post-transfer:

3. Offer financial and academic support through distinct opportunities for nontraditional reentry transfer students where they are stimulated to achieve at high academic levels (Jain et al., p. 258). In this case the university needs to create different opportunities for transfer students to be able to receive financial support. Depending on the student he or she may or may not qualify for certain financial aid programs and or benefits. By being able to offer financial support to transfer students it would decrease the financial burden and allow the student to focus on his studies. Additionally, the university should work with the student to be able to offer them with the academic support they need. For example, some students may be employed or be parents with dependent children and therefore their schedules outside of class time is limited. The university should try and work with the students schedule and offer academic support to fit his or her schedule.
4. Acknowledge the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family (Jain et al., p. 258). This is important seeing how community college students are generally stigmatized for being transfer students. By acknowledging their lived experiences the university community can benefit in multiple ways, including by using transfer students as mentors for younger underclassmen. In addition, it is

important that the university along with acknowledging transfer students lived experiences they also take into consideration how these lived experiences go hand in hand with community and family. For this reason, the university should never make the students choose between their student obligations and or their family obligations.

5. Create an appropriate and organic framework from which to assess, evaluate, and enhance transfer receptive programs and initiatives that can lead to further scholarship on transfer students. (Jain et al., p. 258). Any framework that is developed to assess, evaluate, and enhance transfer receptive programs should involve both students who are at the community college as well as those who are now at the university. By involving both groups of students the university will always stay up to date with the current needs of this diverse group of students.

## **Chapter Three: Methods**

This chapter describes this study's research design and methodology. It includes an explanation of the sample, data collection and procedure and data analysis undertaken to address the research question. First, I will describe the qualitative method research design and rationale used to answer the research question. Next, I will describe the data collection and procedure, followed by the sample and data collection for interviews and the data analysis. This section concludes with a description of the site, my positionality and chapter summary. To reiterate, the primary purpose of the qualitative method study is to identify key institutional practices that reveal the transfer culture for community college transfer students, at Transfer Student University. Its unique contribution to the literature is that it offers the first examination of the transfer culture at a Texas public university. A second unique contribution is the inclusion and analysis of interviews with community college transfer students on their experiences with the receiving institution during the different stages of the transfer process including, pre-transfer at their community college, transition, and during their first semester as university students.

### **Qualitative Method Research Design and Rationale**

According to Lichtman (2010) the purpose of qualitative research is to describe and understand human phenomena, human interaction, or human discourse (p.12). Qualitative research allows the researcher to look at a situation as a whole rather than at specific variables, this allows the researcher to have a better understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, the goal of qualitative study is to acknowledge the voices of the participants (Lichtman, 2010). I used a qualitative research approach to evaluate the transfer culture at Transfer Student University through the lived experiences of my participants, including the implicit or explicit interactions participants had with the university, before, during, and after they transferred from

their perspective community colleges to TSU. This proved to be the best approach given that there are different components within the transfer process and the participants had similar but unique experiences.

### **Research Question**

The question guiding this study is: What is the Transfer Receptive Culture for Community College Transfer Students at TSU?

### **Sample & Data Collection For Interviews**

Student participants for this study were recruited from a posted recruitment flyer on the Know Events announcements page, a university wide events calendar put together by the university communications and distributed via the university's email newsletter to students, faculty, and staff. To participate in the study students were selected based on the following criteria: 1.) Community College Transfer Student. 2.) Applied to Transfer and were admitted to the TSU, prior to or during the Fall 2013. 3.) 18 years and older. All seven participants in this study, responded to the recruitment flyer posted in the Know Events page.

Before students were interviewed it was important for me to meet with them informally to give them an opportunity to get to know me, my research project, and answer any questions they had. These informal meetings generally lasted between 10-15 minutes. I used these conversations in order to build trust with the students who were interested in participating in my project. After our initial meeting and after they decided to participate in my study, I also checked in with the participants several times during the semester via email and or through face to face meetings. As a former community college transfer student myself, I also made myself available as a resource, supporting their navigation through the university by offering my support and or connecting them with resources and people on campus. This process aligns with what Denzin &

Lincoln (2005) state about, researchers to establishing trust, rapport, and authentic communication patterns with the participants so that they can capture the subtle differences and meanings from their voices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005 as cited in Chilisa, p.34, 2012). This was valuable for three reasons, first during the interview process it allowed my participants to feel comfortable enough to share their personal experiences, including the emotional and psychological effect that comes with the transfer process. Second, it helped me during the transcription process in that it allowed me to identify the emotional expressions participants experienced when they described their transition from their respective community college to TSU, allowing me to place emphasis on the events and or experiences as needed. Finally, this process was valuable because it helped me make meaning of the events experienced by the participants during the process of identifying themes.

Data was collected through one semi-structured interview with each student participant. A semi-structured interview allows the researcher the flexibility to adjust the interview questions as new ideas are raised by the participants during the data collection process (Olson, 2011) The interview, took place during the fall 2013 semester. The interviews with student participants took place in a study room in the main library on campus, this place was easily accessible for students and a place where the students would feel safe and comfortable. The interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes and all interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Transcription of the interviews took place during the Winter break and the beginning of the Spring 2014 semester. After transcription all of the interviews participants were contacted via email and encouraged to clarify, expand, and provide feedback on their interview transcripts. Out of 7 participants only 4 replied that they were willing to provide me with feedback.

### **Data Analysis**

All recordings were manually transcribed, no analytical software was employed to transcribe the interviews. Manually transcribing allowed me to further analyze data, first by listening to the students experiences a second time, and lastly to ensure their voice were captured accurately onto text. After transcribing all interviews, I began a detailed analysis with a coding process that included transcriptions, emails and notes from all of my interactions with each participant. According to Creswell (2003) coding is the process of taking text data or pictures, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based on the actual language of the participant (called an *in vivo* term) (p.192). Initially, findings were divided into two categories pre-transfer and post-transfer experiences. I began with several themes in each section and through a more focused round of coding a total of 7 codes evolved, four under pre-transfer experiences and three under post-transfer experiences. Under the section of pre-transfer experiences these themes evolved; 1) outreach by TSU before being admitted; 2) no outreach by TSU once admitted; 3) it was just like kind of such a freshmen orientation; and 4) no transfer bridge or transitional programs. The post-transfer experience was made up of 5) first impressions as TSU students; 6) emotional impact; and 7) support by the university. To further understand the transfer culture at TSU I will now describe the setting of this study; Transfer Student University.

### **Description Of Site: Transfer Student University**

Transfer Students University (TSU) is amongst the top 20 public universities in the nation (<http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities/>) and is one of the leading destinations for transfer students, TSU ranks amongst the top 30<sup>th</sup> nationally and top 10<sup>th</sup> in the state (<http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/most-transfers>), for transfer students. According to the Office of Information

Management and Analysis, in 2013 0.1% transfer students were Freshmen, 64% Sophomores, 31.1% Juniors, and 4.8% were Seniors (See Footnote)<sup>7</sup>. These statistics are reflective of the current transfer policies and practices in place at TSU, specific to the FTP program. In addition, in 2012 from 2,279 new Transfer students 7.4% dropped out after one year versus 4.4% out 8,034 First-time freshmen students. (See Footnote)<sup>8</sup> One of the challenges when we look at these numbers is that it does not break the enrollment patterns by community college or four-year university transfer students. Adding to these statistics are a couple of examples that reflects the campus climate for community college transfer students at TSU.

From the Prospective Transfer Students Website sponsored by the university, out of 28 student profiles 4 are from transfer students, 3 of which are from students who transferred from another four-year college or university and only 1 is from a community college transfer student. For community college students aspiring to transfer to a university like TSU, university websites may be the first introduction to the campus transfer culture. The limited representation of transfer student profiles speaks to the invisibility of the transfer student community, and specifically to the absence of the community college transfer student community on the TSU's campus.

In addition an article published in the university newspaper during the Spring 2014 semester, highlighted the anti-community college transfer student culture at TSU. These are some of the quotes selected for the purposes of this study. The following statements were provided by a TSU student who was interviewed for this story, from the information provided this student was in the top 9% of his graduating class, when he was admitted to TSU. The

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<sup>7</sup> For the sake of anonymity of the institution, the study retracts this source. For a copy of this and others sources retracted in this study please contact the author.

<sup>8</sup> For the sake of anonymity of the institution, the study retracts this source. For a copy of this and others sources retracted in this study please contact the author.

attitude reflected in the students comment suggests that community college students who transfer to TSU, somehow bypass traditional admission barriers. He states, “students who were admitted to TSU straight out of high school may feel that transfer students, specifically those from community colleges, got to TSU by circumventing the traditional barriers to admission” (See Footnote)<sup>9</sup>. By using the word “circumvent” this students comment gives a negative perception of students who pursue admissions to a university like TSU through the community college, it makes them seem “unworthy” and “less qualified”. In his next comment this student claims that students who transfer from a community college do not have work hard to transfer to TSU, he says “people who transfer from community colleges don’t have to work as hard, and they get admitted to TSU more easily” (See Footnote)<sup>10</sup>. The attitude expressed by this student regarding the work ethic of community college transfer students insinuates that community college transfer students who get admitted to TSU get a “free pass” when getting admitted. It also devalues their time and hard work put towards their education at the community college, for 25% of Texas community college students this could be up to six-years before they transfer to a four-year college or university. (Texas Public Higher Education Almanac 2014).

The final quote in this section was the final reflection from the student who wrote this story. He suggests that the university would do a good thing by controlling the number of students who transfer to TSU by implementing stricter transfer admission guidelines. The student said, “the University would do well to control the number of students that transfer to the University each semester with stricter transfer admissions guidelines” (See Footnote)<sup>11</sup>. This

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<sup>9</sup> For the sake of anonymity of the institution, the study retracts this source. For a copy of this and others sources retracted in this study please contact the author.

<sup>10</sup> For the sake of anonymity of the institution, the study retracts this source. For a copy of this and others sources retracted in this study please contact the author.

<sup>11</sup> For the sake of anonymity of the institution, the study retracts this source. For a copy of this and others sources retracted in this study please contact the author.

attitude reflects that there is a lot of work to do in educating the university wide community at TSU about community college transfer students, including transfer policies and practices set in place at TSU. As described earlier, currently there is at least one program the Freshmen Transfer Program (FTP) at TSU that controls the number of students who gain admissions to TSU through the community college. For example, FTP takes 1/2 of the admission slots allocated for general transfer students (1,800 of 3,600 slots) (THECB, 2010)

The attitudes expressed by TSU students in the statements above reflects what Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston (2010) describe in their study on community college students being stigmatized as transfer students in large four-year universities. As reported earlier in the literature review section, their study revealed that once students realized that the faculty and or campus environment stigmatize them as transfer students negatively, this would interfere with the students transfer adjustment ultimately negatively influencing their learning experience. This may happen if the faculty underestimate the students' abilities because he or she came from the community college. If the professor has this idea about community college transfer students then it automatically influences the interactions he or she has with the student, and depending on how these interactions play out it can have a negative impact on the students' learning experience. Additionally, the campus environment is overwhelmingly influenced by a majority student population that came to the university as freshmen. As a result all the student programming including student activities, student events, student organizations, student support services, all cater to the traditional undergraduate student population. With this campus environment and the attitudes expressed by students earlier, community college transfer students may feel out of place, unsupported, unwelcomed, and unmotivated to learn.

The university newspaper can have this effect seeing that it can be interpreted as the voice that represents the university and therefore responsible for creating this type of hostile environment for community college transfer students to the point that it can impact their personal, academic, and social transition. In addition, from my knowledge the university never took a stance for or against the article, the comments made and or ideas being represented by the newspaper and students. As a result, this adds to the negative stigma associated with university students that gain admissions through the community college. By the university failing to intervene these sentiments continue to reinforce a negative viewpoint of community college students by devaluing their unique experiences and solidifying their subordinate status within TSU.

Besides these two examples that describe an unreceptive culture for community college transfer students at TSU, I also found some promising examples of support for transfer students at TSU. TSU has a transfer student organization called the Transition Support Program (TSP), which provides various resources to transfer students enrolled at TSU and introduces them to services such as: academic support, social, cultural, and recreational activities, tutoring, graduate school preparation support, and academic and personal development workshops (See Footnote)<sup>12</sup>. In addition, while I was working on this project I learned about and became involved with a group of current transfer students and student allies who were forming a Transfer Student Board. These group of students were frustrated by the lack of institutional support they were getting from the university and decided to do something about it. Their long-term goal was to develop policies and practices that will focus on improving the external transfer process and overall experience for all students transferring to TSU.

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<sup>12</sup> For the sake of anonymity of the institution, the study retracts this source. For a copy of this and others sources retracted in this study please contact the author.

## **My Positionality**

As a Mexican American Male and former transfer student it is important to acknowledge my positionality since it influenced the way I collected and analyzed my data. Being a former community college transfer student myself, I feel that I came into this study with a certain bias and privilege because of the way I was transitioned and supported into the university by people who I now consider mentors. Given my experiences I thought that the experiences of transfer students coming from Texas community colleges might be similar. Once I realized the lack of visibility from the community college transfer student on campus and the lack of institutional support afforded to them, I became angry and disappointed by the situation and decided to commit myself to this project.

While I was able to relate with the community college experiences of most of the participants, I could not completely relate to their university experience. The culture regarding transfer students in the university had a different feel to it in Texas versus what I experience in California and more specifically at UCLA as a community college transfer student myself. There was not visible transfer community on campus, no university sponsor transfer events, and definitely no visible support services specifically for transfer students. At the same time being a Chicano/Latino male during the interview process made it challenging to ask some questions especially because 6 out of the 7 participants were White and 5 were White female students, 1 was a White male student and 1 a Mexican American female student.

I am indebted to these students for sharing their experiences as community college transfer students and TSU and letting me share their experiences with a wider audience. Even though the research process of interviewing can be very technical and unemotional at times, I hope that I am able to do justice to the students narratives as they have been very kind to share

their personal and at times emotional experiences through the community college/university transfer process. I found out that each narrative is similar but in their own way they are very unique as well, this is why I also struggled a lot when I had to analyze their narratives in order to create themes and write this up. Although this process was challenging at times their narratives and their resiliency inspired me in more ways than one.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

My findings were derived through a categorical analysis (Creswell, 2003) I conducted with the interview data. As described in the previous chapter I went through a highly selective process of coding where I generated categories and themes. I selected themes that were the most recurrent across all of the participant experiences. Through coding I began to see how community college transfer students at TSU experienced the transfer culture at Transfer Student University. The transfer process from the community college to TSU for community college transfer students is represented in two categories pre and post transfer in the following seven themes: under the section of pre-transfer experiences these four themes evolved; 1) outreach by TSU before being admitted; 2) no outreach by TSU once admitted; 3) it was just like kind of such a freshmen orientation; and 4) no transfer bridge or transitional programs. The post-transfer experience was made up of 5) first impressions as TSU students; 6) emotional impact; and 7) support by the university. In addition, it is important to highlight that some of the themes overlapped across all of the data and were not exclusive of each other.

Before I discuss the themes, I provide a brief student profile and community college experiences to give the reader a glimpse into their previous higher educational experience before the participants arrived at TSU. The students were asked to provide their own pseudo name for the purposes of maintaining their anonymity. All participants decided to use their real names but for the purposes of maintaining their anonymousness I only provide their first name.

### **Student Profiles & Community College Experiences**

Before I started each interview I asked the participants to provide me with their name, the way they identified racially/ethnically, their class standing, the community college they

transferred from and anything they would like to share about their community college experience.

**Katia 24: Caucasian/Junior/Austin Community College (ACC)**

Katia's community college experience began in the Spring of 2009. She describes her experience at ACC overall as being "very positive" even though she never had been to a conventional school before attending ACC. She said that, it was very easy to use the system at ACC and that everyone she interacted with the staff, advisors, counselors, anybody she ever interacted with there was really courteous and that they put the interest of the students first. Katia, described the teaching quality at ACC as "excellent" and said that her professors had a great attitude towards teaching. She praised ACC's tutoring services and said that if it was not for them she would have not succeeded in the math and science courses she needed to complete to transfer.

**Alana19: Caucasian/Sophomore/Del Mar College (DMC), Corpus Christy.**

As a first-generation college student Alana said that Del Mar College was a fantastic place as a starting point in her post-secondary educational pursuit. She described her community college experience as being really great because she had very supportive professors that provided her with great recommendations to make her transfer to TSU happen.

**Catarina 21: Hispanic/White/Houston Community College (HCC), Honors College.**

Catarina highlighted her participation in various clubs and organizations throughout her community college experience, including participating in the Honors program. She describes her experiences within the honors program as being some of the best because she was part of a cohort of students that were around the same age who were pursuing their associates degree. She also mentioned that as part of the honors program she had the opportunity to travel to Spain,

Paris, and right before she started at TSU, she went to Brazil through a program called U.S/Brazil connect, where she taught English for a month.

**Debbie 36: Caucasian/Sophomore/Austin Community College (ACC).**

Debbie started describing her community college experience telling me about her initial challenges she encounter with the Math assessment to be able to be place in the appropriate math courses. She describes her experience with this as, “I actually failed that assessment, cause it been so long since I was in school, so I had to start all the way from remedial, all the prep, and work all the way up to calculus so that I could transfer into college of natural sciences” (Debbie, ACC). Although she experienced some challenges at the beginning Debbie said that overall her community college experience was very good and that she thought her teachers did an exceptional job, in making sure everyone had equal opportunities and that they were very committed to their teaching.

**Catherine 20: Junior, University of Dallas/Collin College (CC). Plano Tx.**

Catherine was the only student in the group who started her post-secondary career at a four-year university before transferring to a community college and eventually to TSU. She describes her university experience at the University of Dallas (U of D) as “different” seeing that she went to a really big high school and at U of D the number of student’s in her entire undergraduate program were the same number of student’s in her graduating class from high school. She describes this experience as being a big adjustment and that even though she liked the classes and the curriculum she disliked the atmosphere and the overall feel of campus. As for her experience at her community college Catherine said that she had a very good experience and that she found that her teachers were very good and made it easy for her to excel. Catherine also mentioned that when it came to getting support to transfer to TSU, from an academic advisor

they were not very knowledgeable or supportive in providing her with information and or resources. At the end Catherine said that, “I had a pretty good handle on what I needed to do and was very pro active so I didn’t really need their help exactly” (Catherine, CC).

**Michelle 31: Mexican American, Senior, North Vista College (NVC), San Antonio.**

Michelle, described herself as one of those people that just got out of work, went to class and went home and didn’t get involved. She said that as a commuting student and a full-time worker, she really didn’t do anything on campus because most of the events that they had were all in the day time. Michelle described her day as, “for the most part I would show up like at 5 in the evening stay there till 9 or 10 go to classes and then I would just go home, I maybe used the library once or twice but it was because I happened to get off early from work” (Michelle, NVC). Michelle was one of those student’s who went home and pulled up TSU’s website, pulled up their course schedule and what you needed to get in and exactly match it to classes NVC, so that everything she took was going to transfer over.

She did this every semester, she didn’t really go to the advisors because she explained that every time she went to an advisor she didn’t have a set advisor because they had so many students so they had you see who ever was next and each time she found they kept telling her different things, so she stopped going and she decided to do it herself, through the course packets. Michelle also revealed to me that nobody told her that she could transfer after completing 30 credits, so she went through and completed the 60 credits she thought were required, as a result it took her about eight years to go through all of that, because she could only take so many classes a semester. She describes this experience as being hard because she could only go to class at night which limited the different classes available to her, so it took her some

time to get through all the classes that she needed to get through. One of her highlights as community college student, was that she was the commencement speaker at her graduation.

**Matthew 36: Caucasian, Junior, Austin Community College.**

Matthew said he really enjoyed his experience at ACC and is considering going back to complete his Associates degree once he completes his B.A at TSU. One of the first memories Matthew has about his community college experience, is meeting with an academic advisor and being handed what he called a transfer sheet, a list of recommended classes TSU provides community college students who want to transfer to their school. In addition Matthew also mentioned that he participated in a “Transfer Academy,” at his community college. He describes the Transfer Academy as a set of workshops were different topics related to transferring were presented including, transfer requirements, datelines with a timeline of when you should start working on certain aspects of the application, writing the statement of purpose, and other important components of the transfer process. Matthew shared that he only attended one workshop and credits this event with lighting a fire under him to get stuff done and not wait too long to apply.

**Themes In The Transfer Process:**

As mentioned earlier, looking through the interviews I began to understand the transfer culture for community college transfer students at Transfer Student University (TSU). Transfer Student University was a good site to evaluate the transfer receptive culture for community college transfer students, given that TSU is one of the leading destinations for transfer students, ranking amongst the top 30<sup>th</sup> nationally and top 10<sup>th</sup> in the state

(<http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/most-transfers>). In

addition there are policies like the top 10% law which guarantees admission to all Texas seniors

who graduate in the top ten percent of their class. Finally there are two transfer programs the Freshmen Transfer Program (FTP) and the Freshmen Transfer Program through Co-Enrollment (FTPCE) set in place at TSU, for students who are Texas residents and are eligible for automatic admission under the state's top 10 percent law, but who do not qualify under the automatic admission policy for TSU.

These policies and practices directly impact the transfer rates of students who transfer to TSU directly from the community college without the support of the above mentioned policies and or programs. The following seven themes represent the current transfer culture for community college transfer students at TSU they are; 1) outreach by TSU before being admitted; 2) no outreach by TSU once admitted; 3) it was just like kind of such a freshmen orientation; and 4) no transfer bridge or transitional programs (pre-transfer); 5) first impressions as TSU students; 6) emotional impact; and 7) support by the university (post-transfer). What follows is my discussion on each of the themes.

## **Pre-Transfer**

### **Outreach by TSU Before Being Admitted**

Two of the most important elements for community college students aspiring to transfer to a four-year university during the transfer process are having access to information and resources. One of the ways to gain these is through university outreach programs that provide community college students with an opportunity to become familiar with the university prior to the student applying, so that the student can decide if he or she sees themselves for the next two to three years. In general participants in this study did not experience any direct or meaningful interactions with TSU at either points during the pre-transfer process. There seemed to be a superficial relationship between the four-year university (TSU) and the community colleges

including the students in this study. Here the interactions were examined before students applied and were admitted to TSU in terms of being outreached to in their community college campuses.

Out of seven students, six students did not experience direct interaction with anyone from TSU. Two students said they did not see representatives from TSU on their campuses. One student said her and her mother did most of the research about how to transfer to TSU. Three students shared that they saw other Texas universities on campus more than TSU, a student in this group felt she did not have the same opportunities to interact with representatives from TSU because she was not traditional college student. One student felt that as a result of TSU not being at her community college, she was being pushed into going to other Texas four-year colleges and universities. From this group only one student experienced direct outreach from anyone at TSU.

Alana and Matthew were the two participants that responded that they had not seen a TSU presence at their respective community college campuses. Alana describes her experience by giggling and laughing, as she said, “NO, not at all.” Alana’s funny and short response showed that the lack of presence from TSU at her community college did not impact her in a negative way during the transfer process. In our conversation Alana revealed that she had strong support from her professors at her community college to make her transfer to TSU happen, including from one of her professors who was a TSU alumn and adamant that Alana apply and transfer to TSU. Matthew described his experience by saying, “No [...] I never, I don’t believe I ever saw any TSU person over there.” Matthew did not seem phased by the lack of presence from TSU in his community college. Part of it may have been because he took part in a “Transfer Academy” which he described as a class where they went over the things that students needed to do to get ready to transfer, including transfer requirements, datelines with a timeline of when you should start working on certain aspects of the application, writing the statement of purpose, and other

important components of the transfer process. Seeing how Alana and Matthew did not have direct contact and/or support from TSU at their perspective community colleges during the application process, without the support each of them was able to gain at their respective institutions, transferring to TSU may have been delayed and or it may have not happened.

From the three participants who said they did not see a TSU presence in their community college, Katia was the only participant who described gaining support from a parent during the transfer process. Katia described her experience as, “Hmm I don’t recall any that were specifically for TSU. I remember that most of it was research that my mom and I did on our own, just looking things up on the internet and reading forms and advice and stuff like that.” In spite of the fact that Katia did not have an opportunity to be outreached to by TSU her mother was a valuable source of support and motivation while Katia navigated the community college system and transferred to TSU. Katia’s community college experience was different from the rest of the participants because she was a second-generation college student and her mother was a TSU Alumn. This helped Katia during the transfer process because her mother knew both the academic and social college environment and was able to support Katia by making sure she talked to the right people at her community college and at TSU, the right questions were asked, and connecting her to other key resources. Even though Katia’s experience was different in the sense that her mother was helping her navigate the transfer process, no student should have to go through this process alone and/or have to carry the extra burden of doing the research about transferring to TSU via the schools website. Having direct contact with a TSU representative at the community college campus can avoid unnecessary stress by streamlining the transfer process.

Catherine, Debbie, and Michelle all experienced outreach by other Texas four-year colleges and universities except for TSU. Catherine for example said, “No there were people

from TSU Dallas and TSU Arlington but uh, but nobody from TSU that I know of.” In our conversation Catherine brought up two important observations about the lack of outreach by TSU at her community college. First, Catherine described the outreach and recruiting efforts by TSU Dallas and TSU Arlington, two of the universities who are part of the TSU system.

Catherine described TSU Dallas and TSU Arlington recruiting approach as making it easy for community college students to transfer to their perspective universities. Second, since Catherine did not have access to a TSU representative at her community college, she described having to call the TSU’s admissions office on a weekly basis to have her questions answered by their admission representatives. Catherine was specifically concerned with questions regarding both the application and appeals process, since she had been denied admissions to TSU the first time she applied as a transfer student. In our conversation, Catherine shared that she applied to transfer to TSU and appealed twice before she was admitted as a transfer student.

For Catherine the appeal process was frustrating because she had to call the admissions office to speak to someone who would be able to answer her questions and who could guide her through the appeals process, seeing that Catherine appealed her admissions decisions when TSU was transitioning from the paper base appeal application to the on-line appeal application. By having a direct contact to go to for TSU available at her community college, Catherine would have had someone she could have gone to to troubleshoot any challenges she may have encountered during her application and/or appeal process the first time around. A TSU representative could have reviewed and evaluated Catherine’s application the first time around and provide Catherine with feedback about her application, including other opportunities that may have been available to her rather than having to apply and appeal twice.

As an adult non-traditional student who had a full-time job and who could only attend evening classes, Debbie seemed frustrated by the lack of physical presence TSU had during the evenings. Her experience with a TSU presence on her campus was associated with flyers posted around campus.

I never saw TSU, yeah anything. If there were, see this is another thing kind of one of the beefs I had about ACC, but I don't know if it's like this. They had a lot of stuff going on during the day, so if there was TSU [...] I did see signs for you know TSU, interested in TSU or TSU -Dallas, a lot, I saw a lot there at Northridge but it would be during the day. And again, even though you know there is a lot going on during the day, you still have a lot of adult non-traditional students coming after work who may have been interested in that [...] Because I was keeping an eye out for that, you know are they having anything that would be at a good time for me to come to and for the other college too. We saw Texas State, I saw Texas State flyers a lot they were there recruiting (Debbie, ACC).

The physical absence of TSU at Debbie's community college during the evening is a disservice to all community college students who aspire to transfer to a four-year college or university like TSU, because this may be the only time during the day when they can get the information needed to apply and eventually transfer to these institutions. For students like Debbie who are older, have full-time jobs, and who can only attend evening classes, this may create a sense that a University like TSU does not value them as students in the same way that they value traditional age students, who attend classes during the day. For students in this situation this type of disconnection between the university and the community college may influence if students apply or don't apply and if they eventually transfer and enroll at the university. For Michelle, she felt that since there was no official TSU presence on her campus, she was being pushed to attend other local four-year colleges and universities.

From TSU at oh, no there was no mention of TSU at my community college, they had no liaison whatsoever, I think it kind of surprised them that I got in, because they were pushing more towards, well TSUSA is the university we have and I was like, well that is all good and well but I don't want to go to TSUSA, so they were kind of like a mainline into TSUSA, St. Mary's, and Incarnate Ward, they didn't really branch out to like the

bigger colleges the bigger universities outside of San Antonio, they were more like mainlining into all of the locals (Michelle, North Vista College).

Michelle's community college experience brings out two challenges about the transfer process that we have not seen in any of the other student's experiences. First, Michelle describes how her community college did not have a TSU liaison on campus at all. In our conversation Michelle mentioned that it took her about eight years to transfer from her community college to TSU. This was as a result of having bad experiences with the academic advisors during the early stages of her academic career at her community college. Based on her experiences Michelle describes being discouraged in seeking advice, as a result Michelle completed the Texas Core Curriculum a 42-credit core curriculum that replaces the core curriculum in a student's bachelor's degree when they transfer. Completing the core curriculum ensures that all Texas public colleges and universities accept a completed core curriculum block (<http://www.austincc.edu/degrees-and-certificates/explore-educational-choices/university-transfer-and-core-curriculum/questions-and-answers>). Michelle was under the impression that in order to transfer to a four-year university she was required to complete the core curriculum and was not aware that she could have applied to transfer after completing a minimum of thirty hours of undergraduate work. In addition to Michelle's bad experiences with the academic advisors at her community college, her work schedule and class offerings limited her enrolling in the courses she thought she needed to complete to fulfill the core curriculum and become transfer eligible. Second, Michelle describes that as a result of not having a TSU liaison at her community college, they were encouraging her to apply to other local four-year colleges and universities, but not TSU. This type of behavior from the community college not only undermines their personal and academic abilities, but it also undermines their personal and academic potential. By not encouraging the student to aspire to transfer to a university like TSU, the community college is keeping their students from gaining

the knowledge, experiences, and resources that they would have access to by attending a university like TSU. In the long run it may hinder the students ability to fulfill both their academic and personal goals. In this situation having a TSU liaison at a community college would support the seamless transfer between the community college and TSU, by giving students accurate and up to date information regarding community college transfer policies. At the same time it would also motivate more students like Michelle to apply to and transfer to a university like TSU.

Catarina, was the only student out of the group who experienced direct outreach by TSU at her community college, this was how Catarina described as her experience, “No [...] Oh, maybe once actually, I think once or twice but it was rare that we would have booths out and colleges would come, and I think I just spoke to a TSU rep like once or twice and they kind of just gave me the brochure, it was just kind of [...] and I was like okay thanks.” From Catarina’s experience we see that her interaction with the TSU representative was general and meaningless. From our conversation, Catarina revealed that even though she did not have the best experience when speaking with a representative from TSU, she was able to successfully apply and transfer to TSU because her older sister had successfully transferred and graduated from TSU. Not only did her older sister’s experience help when Catarina was going through the transfer process herself, but Catarina also benefitted from knowing her sister’s former teachers at the community college she attended. Since they knew Catarina through her older sister they were able to support her through the transfer process. This type of behavior from the TSU representative(s) is another example of how the university and in particular university representatives who are in charge of promoting the university through outreach and the recruitment of students, can be a disservice to potential community college transfer students. Having a university representative at the

community college is a critical part in the transfer process for potential community college students who aspire to transfer to a four-year university like TSU, and as such any type of outreach and recruitment should be purposeful with the academic and personal well-being of the student in mind and not just the interests of the university.

From the experiences of all the participants and the outreach or lack of outreach from TSU at their perspective community colleges there is evidence to show that the relationship between TSU and their institutions does not reflect a transfer receptive culture. A transfer receptive culture requires that the four-year university provide outreach programs that provide students with the opportunity to become familiar with the university before applying with the goal of developing a sense of belonging. It also requires the creation and distribution of transfer literature both in print and in web form, specific to the experiences and needs of community college transfer students (Jain, et al., 2011). Having support from TSU before and during the application process would prevent students from experiencing some of the unfortunate situations the participants went through, ensuring students engage with the university at an early stage of the transfer process, in order to gain up to the minute information about transfer requirements and application, feel like they are welcomed by the university, and that they have a good transfer experience. Institutional microaggression here is represented by the lack of physical presence from TSU at the participant's respective community colleges, including the lack of meaningful interactions by the university with the participants. By the university not actively reaching out to potential transfer students to recruit them and make sure they have access to appropriate resources to ensure that they increase their opportunities to transfer to a university like TSU may be perceived as the university not valuing community college students.

### **No Outreach by TSU Once Admitted**

Once a student has been admitted to a university like TSU he or she has a lot of questions and may have options in terms of where they want to continue their undergraduate studies for the next few years. Outreach at this point is as important if not more important than before students applied to the university. In addition, this is a point in the transfer process where community college students may have questions and certain anxieties regarding their social and academic integration once at the university, financial aid or scholarship opportunities, housing, and other resources specific for community college transfer students to ensure they have a successful transition into the university. Based on the experiences of the participants there was general or no outreach by TSU once they were admitted as transfer students. These were the experiences of students with TSU outreach after they were admitted:

Catherine, Catarina, and Debbie, described their experiences with TSU reaching out as getting emails from TSU, their perspective departments/programs and financial aid. They make the differentiation between the general emails sent out to the rest of the newly admitted students and someone reaching out to them personally. Catherine described her experience saying, “other than the generic letters that they send to everybody, not really.” Unfortunately Catherine’s experience with generic letters characterized her interactions with TSU during her transition into TSU as an admitted student and during orientation. Use of general letter emails may be cost and time efficient, specifically when sending out general information directed to the whole student body, but the university should understand that community college transfer students may have specific needs and questions regarding admissions, financial aid, housing, and other academic and non-academic aspects of being a community college transfer student and generic letters and or emails are not the best for this student community.

Catarina and Debbie described similar experiences both revealing that they received communications from the university, including their perspective departments but both were nothing more than general communications. Catarina described her experience saying that, “I think when I got the acceptance letter it also came with like a congratulations letter from the College of Fine Arts chair, but it wasn’t really, I guess it wasn’t, I guess that could count as that, there wasn’t anything like personal like email or anything.” Catarina describes getting acknowledgements from the university and from her department chair as a way the university did reach out to her. In addition, Catarina also highlights that even when she received these forms of communication from the university and her department, nothing was personal. Catarina’s experience did not impact her in a negative way during her transition process to TSU but in our conversation Catarina mentioned that once at the university she was trying to connect with Transfer Support Program (TSP), a support group for transfer students she had heard about, but she was not able to connect with them because the information she found was outdated. This is an example of the personal communication that someone from the university should provide to community college transfer students. A university such as TSU, needs to make sure that they connect with community college transfer students at a personal level before they arrive on campus and they need to make sure these interactions are purposeful so an event like this does not happen.

Similarly, Debbie said that, “I remember getting emails from like the College of Natural Sciences advising and financial aid but it wasn’t anything directly targeted personally to me” Different to Catarina’s experience Debbie had to deal with some challenges before she officially started taking courses at TSU. During our conversation Debbie described how because she did not receive some of her email communication after being admitted, Debbie was not aware that as

an incoming Natural Sciences major she needed to take a course, including an assessment during the summer and score a 85% in order to be eligible to enroll in a Chemistry course required for her major in the fall. Debbie was affected by this because if she was unable to score an 85% on this assessment she would be unable to take the course, this would have set her back and possibly jeopardize her status as a student at TSU. Having the university personally reach out to Debbie would have ensured that whether Debbie received her emails or not she was aware of any major specific pre-requisites, given her enough time to plan accordingly and ensure the successful completion of all major requirements, in this way there would be no additional setbacks or unfortunate irremediable outcomes.

Both Katia and Alana revealed that no one from TSU made an effort to reach out to them directly. Katia continues to express that she has been the one who has had to reach out to TSU through the transfer process. “As far as people reaching out, I had to do a lot of the reaching out myself I have to say so” For example, Katia shared that before she transferred to TSU she tried reached out to TSU’s Transfer Interest Group (TrIG) a group she found in a university website, advertised specifically to support the transition of newly admitted transfer students. Katia described being frustrated because she tried reaching out to find out more information about the group and how to join and she never got a response. Katia went as far as writing to the appropriate sources and they were not that much support either. Katia never really got an explanation and assumed they no longer existed. Like Catarina, Katia was under the impression that there was some type of group or organization who supported the transfer student community at TSU. Even though Katia was not able to find the direct support for transfer students she was looking for, being proactive provided her with the opportunities to get involved with other student organizations on campus that were able to support her different needs and interests. If

there was a strong university transfer programming dedicated to the specific needs of community college transfer students events like these would not happen. How does the university expect community college students to be able to come in and succeed academically and socially, when there is no direct support for the transfer student community on campus.

Alana experience is another example of TSU's negligence towards the community college transfer student community. After she was officially admitted Alana reveals that looking for and finding affordable housing, was one of the biggest challenges she encountered as a community college transfer student at TSU. Alana described this event as:

No, no definitely not that was the really hard thing for me apartment finding um, I live on Riverside right now, so [...] yeah I know it sucks I mean I wish I would have known, I just had no idea how to do it and I was thinking about cheap rent, cause I pay for everything myself and so that was the only thing on my mind and I was well I can't live on West Campus, cause is not cheap enough and I can't live on North Campus cause its really not cheap enough and so, Riverside [laughs] and that was my really, and it was so late cause I found mine in July and it was so late in the year and there is just not a lot of options for me, and I had I just had to work with what I had (Alana, Del Mar College).

In our conversation Alana expressed that this was specially difficult for her because she is originally from Corpus Christi, Texas being away from home, living on her own, and not having anyone she could go to for support, was tough. Alana was not aware of any other housing options and as a result she had to accept what she could find based on availability and her budget. In this case having the university reach out directly to newly admitted community college transfer students, specially those who are not local would be beneficial to the student, because they can learn about all on-campus and off-campus university sponsored housing options specifically with the community college transfer student community in mind.

As we saw from the experiences of the participants some continued to have challenges after they were admitted that could have been prevented or minimized if the university had established a transfer receptive culture. For example, Catarina and Katia were under the

impression that there was some type of group or organization who supported the transfer student community at TSU. As mentioned earlier part of practicing a transfer receptive culture requires that the university provides written and web based transfer literature for students. This should also include updated information of the university sponsored group or organization specifically supporting transfer students on campus. Additional elements of a transfer receptive culture missing from the culture at TSU are academic residential summer programs which can support the adjustment of transfer students in both the recruitment and retention of students (Ackerman, 1991, as cited in Jain et al., 2011). An academic residential program would have benefited all students who participated in this study but Debbie would have probably benefitted the most since she had to meet certain pre-requisites to enroll in a Chemistry class as part of her major requirements. An element that is part of the transfer receptive culture (Hendel, 2011) that is also essential for community college transfer students during this process is “transfer student housing” reserved specifically for transfer students providing transfer students the opportunity to participate in campus life (Hendel, 2011). This would have benefitted students like Alana, who struggled to find housing and once school started also had challenges with socially integrating into university life. Institutional microaggression here is represented by the university lack of awareness and lack of action towards some of the challenges community college transfer students may face prior to transferring to the university. By assuming that since community college transfer students, have been in college prior to transferring and therefore they do not need the same type of support as traditionally first time college students, the university is continuing to devalue community college students. Instead of creating a sense of belonging towards their new university there may be a lot of uncertainties experienced by students before they arrive at the university caused by the lack of quality in the outreach by the university.

**“It was just like kind of such a freshmen orientation”**

Orientation was one of the events within the transfer process where the participants had mixed experiences, overall this was the event during the transfer process that students found needs to improve. Most of the participants had a positive experience and most made comments of either feeling out of place because they were older and surrounded by younger students or that they felt the orientation programming focused on traditionally aged college students. These are the experiences students described from being part of an orientation for transfer students:

Even though Matthew does not mention any specific events and or activities specifically for transfer students, Matthew describes having a good experience including meeting a friend who had attended ACC with him, who is now his classmate and study buddy. Matthew also mentions feeling out of place because he was surrounded by younger transfer students here is how Matthew describes his orientation experience:

It was good I felt a little out of place just cause I am older than everybody else. Um, it was fine I can't complain about anything there [...] Most of them were transferring from other TSU satellites. I did meet a few from ACC, actually, I met one of the guys I was taking classes with at ACC and now we're like best buds and we go to classes because we're on the same degree plan and everything so that worked out (Matthew, ACC).

From Matthew's description we can see that even though he felt out of place for being older than the majority of other transfer students he had a positive orientation experience. Matthew was the only participant who mentioned that he was able to make a connection with another community college transfer student transferring to TSU at the same time he did. Even though Matthew already had a relationship with this student from ACC, reconnecting with him during orientation was invaluable for both because they were able to support each other through their transition from ACC to TSU and during the academic year when they got together to study. Orientation played a role in reconnecting Matthew and his friend in the sense that they provided the place for

them to meet, but from the experiences of Mathew and the rest of the participants orientation did not support or facilitated community college transfer students making strong connections which can develop into the type of relationship Matthew and his friend were able to establish. The university needs to be more intentional with their orientation programming for community college transfer students, specially when it comes to improving the events and activities where students have the opportunity to purposefully connect with other students in an environment, that is conducive of developing friendships and a student support system.

Debbie, Catarina, Michelle, all had different experiences throughout the orientation events and activities but all mentioned that the programing was focused on traditionally age students. For example, Debbie seemed to feel like the university influenced her decision to attend based on placing a hold on her registration, meaning if Debbie did not attend orientation she would not be able to register for classes. Debbie describes her orientation experience as,

Oh yeah, and in fact the way that I read is that you had to come. I had to because I had a bar on my registration, so I had to come [...] It was specifically for transfer students. Overall it was positive, it was I think it was you know obviously it is geared towards people that are going come and live on campus and younger people (Debbie, ACC).

The way Debbie describes her orientation experience it appears that it was nothing more than to get that registration bar removed. Debbie does not describe any specific efforts by the university to make sure Debbie connected with other current or incoming community college transfer students at TSU or that she learned about specific resources for community college transfer students at TSU. Catarina talks more about the orientation programming and describes her experience with the events and activities including the way transfer students were addressed.

Catarina expressed that:

I had fun at that, yeah I liked it [...] they just kind of talked, it was like a brief like they just kind of talked to you about, oh this is how you prepare for college, like use your planner I remember they were telling us that, and I was like, that's obvious. I don't know,

it was just like kind of such a freshmen orientation I think like, like kind of [...] they introduced us to some of the faculty and people for our program (Catarina, HCC).

Catarina orientation experience described by her as “such a freshmen orientation” shows how the university undermined both the academic and social skills Catarina had developed as a community college transfer student. The university needs to realize that community college transfer students are not “freshmen” in both the academic and personal aspect of being college students. Community college transfer students come with a diverse set of life experiences under their belt, some which freshmen students have not experienced yet. One positive aspect of Catarina’s orientation experience was that she was able to meet some of the faculty and other people associated with her academic program. This is important because it allowed Catarina to make connections with her potential professors and or the people who would be able to support her once she began taking classes in the fall.

Michelle also came to a transfer student orientation and she did not feel that she got too much out of her orientation experience. Michelle described her orientation experience as:

I came to orientation right after I got in and yeah they didn’t really tell us anything. I mean they gave you options of which tours you could take but since I had already gone through the buildings, I was like I don’t really need to do it again so, [...] there wasn’t anything that said specifically this is for transfer student resource and so I think that’s why I feel I didn’t get too much out of it. Like I got my I.D card and everything but that was about it. [...] It wasn’t helpful really but and I think that was more because, they kept I guess addressing it, as if you were a brand new student (Michelle, North Vista College).

Similar to Debbie and Catarina, Michelle also expresses that although she was invited to attend a transfer student orientation, she felt like the orientation programming was directed more to the “brand new student” population. Michelle’s experience with transfer orientation continues to show the disconnection between the university and the community college transfer student population. Orientation is the first official event in which students participate as part of the university community and it establishes both the type of relationship students will have with the

university as well as their experience during their time there. As such, transfer orientation should be more than about campus tours and issuing student ID's, the university needs to develop a more purposeful and stronger transfer orientation programming, to ensure a seamless academic and social transition for all community college transfer students.

Out of all the participants Katia seemed to have made the most out of her transfer orientation experience. Although Katia mentioned that none of the presentations were specifically focused on transfer students, she expressed that they were good and helpful. This was Katia's experience with her transfer orientation:

But you know generally I thought that the whole orientation presentations they had here were really good and helpful. I went to a lot of the ones like the ones about using the public transport here, a lot of the ones that were just kind of practical advice for making the most of TSU. I thought that those were excellent but they were not specifically for transfer students (Katia, ACC).

Katia's overall transfer experience with the orientation programming shows that there is some type of support that transfer students would find helpful and would be able to benefit from. The big issue continues to be the lack of events, activities, and resources that the university has available for community college transfer students. The lack of transfer student programming is a deliberate act of disrespect to the community college transfer student community and to their specific personal and academic needs at TSU.

Alana and Catherine, were the two student's who did not have the most positive experience during their transfer orientation. For example Alana, felt that transfer orientation was too short compared to the freshmen orientation and that as a result she did not get nothing out of it. Alana described her transfer orientation as:

Orientation was the worst [laughs] my orientation was so terrible, yeah no we had a 30 minute meeting with our advisor [...] It was specifically for transfer students but it was a day and a half, were as normal freshmen students get three days, three full days and that's just not enough time. A day and a half is not enough time to get all the resources, like

both me and my friend were at the same orientation session and we walked away going “WHAT” “What did we just learn?” Nothing, nothing is what we learned (Alana, Del Mar College).

Alana’s transfer orientation experience highlights a key difference that up to now no other participant has talked about. Alana describes that one major difference between freshmen and transfer orientation is that, freshmen orientation lasts three full days versus transfer orientation lasts a day and a half, which is half the time. As a result Alana describes how she and her friend got nothing out of their orientation.

Catherine, had a similar experience in that she felt that the activities and information presented to her was not informative and or helpful. Catherine was also the most critical of all the participants about her experiences with the transfer orientation. Catherine was also disappointed in the student organizations at TSU during her interactions with them at the student organization tabling events during orientation. This is how Catherine described her experiences during the transfer student orientation:

Yes! And I did go to transfer orientation, yes it was just for transfers [...] It was horrible, it was one of the least helpful things I’ve ever participated in. It was very, the information was just not, they told you pretty much everything that you could read like in a brochure and then didn’t really explain to you things that you had questions about and there was a lot of I don’t I didn’t find it very beneficial and they didn’t I don’t know they tried I think they really did try their best but in my opinion it was, I did not have a good time (Catherine, Collin College).

Catherine describes her experience with the general transfer orientation as not having a good time for two reasons, first, Catherine describes the information she received as being general, something a student can get from a reading a brochure. Second, Catherine also felt that no one at the transfer orientation was able to answer the questions she had to gain a better understanding of her specific needs and or interests.

Catherine was also the only participant who talked about her interactions with the student organizations during the tabling events at orientation. Catherine describes this experience as:

as far as student organizations go, I was really disappointed because like I walked around campus and these groups would be tabling and they be like, Oh you know they'd tell you about their club and all this stuff and you'd be like oh yeah ok, and they'd be like oh well what year are you? I'd say I'm going to be a junior and they're like oh never mind only sophomores and freshmen can apply and stuff like that. I was really interested in joining the university senate and they went to all the freshmen orientations and they didn't come to transfer orientation, which I thought was pretty crappy and then there lot's of first year interests groups and first year organizations for freshmen but not a lot for transfers and so its kind of awkward because I don't know where to start because everybody else started as a freshmen (Catherine, Collin College).

Catherine's experience with these student organizations can be seen as an example of discrimination by the student organizations and the university student senate, towards Catherine for being a transfer student. Catherine also describes how there are a lot of first-year interests groups and firs-year organizations specifically for freshmen students but not for transfer students. Unfortunately Catherine was not the only participant that experience discrimination for being a transfer student. Later we will see another example of discrimination experienced by Katia with another TSU sponsored organization. As seen through the experiences of all participants, the current transfer orientation programing is not designed with the needs of community college transfer students in mind and is not representative of a transfer receptive culture. An important element of a transfer receptive culture is that the university offer a transfer orientation and not the shorter version of freshmen orientation. For example, Hendel's (2011) transfer receptive culture suggests that for the "transfer orientation" the university dedicate some time in providing specific information regarding the students fall course schedule based on the courses they have already completed at the community college (Hendel, 2011) including the academic culture they may need to adjust too.

As far as addressing some of the challenges Catherine and other students had with joining student organizations, there are a couple things the university should do to address this, first, the university needs to take a stand about making student organizations at TSU more inclusive of transfer students. Second, the university needs to open up or create specific positions in the student senate that can be occupied by transfer students. Finally, during transfer orientation the university needs to make sure they invite all student organizations to come out including those that cater to the transfer student community on campus. By doing this students will have the opportunity to learn about organizations they can join and organizations that can be of support to them while at TSU.

Orientation for the most part introduces students to the campus environment, here the institutional microaggressions are represented by how the university applied the same orientation model they use for freshmen orientation, for the transfer orientation. This is problematic seeing how the university automatically tried to fit the lives and experiences transfer students had with the one's prescribed to traditional college-going students, disregarding that community college transfer students as a group are very diverse in terms of lived experiences and backgrounds that may require specific guidance and support. Additionally, the university did not make an effort to expose students to specific resources for transfer students on campus. Finally, having transfer orientation be shorter than freshmen orientation by half, is also a sign that the university sees their commitment to transfer students differently than their commitment to their freshmen students. The message they are sending may be perceived that they place less value on their transfer students than on their freshmen students.

### **No Transfer Bridge or Transitional Programs**

As it has been documented earlier, making the transition from the community college into the university can be challenging for anyone. Another theme that came up during the analysis process, was the absence of transfer bridge or transitional programs sponsored by the university. Transition programs may provide students with an opportunity to get acquainted with the academic expectations of the university, expose them to some of the challenges they will face including some of the strategies they can apply to overcome them, and give them an opportunity to create or expand their social networks. The general feedback provided by the students who participated in this study was that, they were not aware of TSU offering newly admitted community college transfer students any type of transfer bridge or transitional program, to support them during their transition from the community college to the university. This is how the participants describe their experiences:

Matthew, Debbie, and Michelle did not have much to say about any type of transfer bridge or transition program for community college transfer students existing at TSU. Matthew was short with his reply saying, “nope never heard of it.” Matthew’s response may seem insignificant within his transfer experience but later on in our conversation Matthew revealed challenges he experienced during his transition that could have been prevented if the university had a transfer bridge or transitional program for community college transfer students. These challenges had to do with larger classes and not having one on one attention from professors in the classroom and the limited amount of tutoring available for community college transfer students who were married and had dependents. Debbie had a similar reaction saying, “I don’t know of any, hmmm.” From her response we cannot determine the impact of Debbie not having knowledge about any type of transitional program for community college transfer students at TSU. However during an email Debbie replied to check in, she revealed to me that she was

having academic challenges and was forced to drop one of the courses she was enrolled in during the fall. It affected Debbie so much that she was underperforming in her other courses and was under so much stress that she had to seek support from a counselor.

Michelle's experience was different than Matthew's and Debbie's because Michelle, described that aside from coming to a Transfer Orientation she also attended a "Transfer Day" event before she applied to TSU, in which TSU hosted prospective transfer students and gave them information about applying to TSU, resources, and a tour. Even after attending these specific transfer student events Michelle describes her experience as, "I actually didn't, [...] I don't remember them telling me that there was a program for transfer students." For Michelle it was frustrating to have attended both Transfer student focused events and not know about specific resources and support groups for community college transfer students. In our conversations Michelle revealed that one of the things that affected her transition was not feeling as if she was part of the university and with that also not being able to establish friendships other than befriending classmates when she had to work in groups.

Catherine and Katia did not seem completely sure if they had seen or heard about a transfer bridge or transition program for community college transfer students at TSU. Catherine seemed hesitant when she talked about her awareness with any type transitional programs for community college transfer students at TSU, she said, "I'm not I've not heard of any they might exist but I haven't heard of any no one told me about them if they do." For Catherine having access to a transfer bridge or transitional program may or may have not made a difference in her transition from the community college to TSU, seeing that he had attended a private university right out of high school before she decided to go to the community college and then transfer to TSU. Nevertheless Catherine like Matthew and Debbie did experience a different academic and

social environment in the classroom that she had to adjust to that could have been addressed by a transfer bridge or transitional program for incoming community college transfer students.

Katia on the other hand begins by saying she had heard about them but she was did not sound to be sure, at the end Katia says she remembers coming across some types of transitional program on a university website, Katia says, “So, I think there were and I think I’ve heard about them. I didn’t know of them, like I think they were advertised on TSU’s websites and all but I they weren’t really appropriate for me.” Katia’s experience reveals that there may be some type of transitional programs offered to TSU students but not specifically to address the needs of community college transfer students.

As demonstrated by the analysis regarding the experiences of the students this is another example of the lack of a transfer receptive culture by the university. Matthew, Debbie, and Michelle, community college transfer students would benefit from the university creating a type of transfer bridge or transitional programs based on (Jain et al., 2011) academic residential summer program described earlier. Establishing this type of programing would benefit the students in at least three ways, first, it will introduce community college transfer students to the academic culture of the university. Second, it would give them the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the campus and the resources available to them as students, and finally, it would allow them to connect with other transfer students and develop their networks. In this way their transition into the university would be less intimidating and would help alleviate some the academic, social, emotional, or psychological challenges that these students may face as community college transfer students during their first few semesters at the university. Based on Catherine and Katia’s experiences community college transfer students should not have to experience any type of uncertainty at the expense of the university specially once they have been

admitted. The university should be more purposeful and clear about the transfer student programming information that is posted on their university websites, by including up to date information regarding all programs, organizations, and resources available to the general student body including those specifically targeting the needs of community college transfer students. If the university does not have a dedicated website for transfer students this can be something the university can create for all incoming and current transfer students to go to, a central website to provide information, resources, and to connect the TSU transfer student community on campus.

Not having a transfer bridge or transitional program for community college transfer students its an institutional microaggression, seeing that TSU offers incoming freshmen students the opportunity to attend a “summer bridge” program. According to their website the program provides incoming freshman “with tools and resources to jumpstart their first year on campus” and students become familiar with college life, campus resources and more (See Footnote)<sup>13</sup>. This is clearly an example of a microaggression specially when taking into consideration some of the challenging experiences of the transfer students as they transition into the university, all if not most of these challenges could have been avoided and or minimized if the university had a transfer bridge or transitional program for community college students set in place. Does TSU assume that because community college students have prior college experience they do not need a type of bridge program?

### **Post-Transfer First Impressions as TSU Students**

Another theme that came up was participant’s reactions to the university culture at TSU during their first semester. First impressions are important for students to establish a sense of

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<sup>13</sup> For the sake of anonymity of the institution, the study retracts this source. For a copy of this and others sources retracted in this study please contact the author.

belonging and if they see themselves succeeding academically and socially. Generally the participants had a good first impression of the TSU campus, a few students described their impressions with the campus and the environment, others described their interactions with students and university staff, and others talked about the academic and social culture. Here is what they have to say about some of their first experiences as TSU students:

Even though Catarina, Katia, and Alana all had different first impressions as TSU students their experiences were related to each other because they had to do with their first impression with the campus environment at TSU. For example, Catarina was the only participant to describe her first impression regarding TSU's campus, she said, "yeah, I really loved the campus, I thought it was great, it was like the iconic classic university campus look to it, with the tower and the bells, the trees, it was just it is really idyllic looking idealistic I think and I really liked it" Catarina's first impression with TSU's aesthetics can be interpreted as a good indicator that Catarina feels comfortable in her new campus environment. In the long run this may translate into Catarina transitioning well and creating a place where she can succeed both socially and academically.

Katia also describes her excitement for being at TSU including her attitude about being a community college transfer student and not letting that interfere with her transition and integration into her new school, she shared, "well I was absolutely over the moon thrilled to my toes to be here. You know I didn't even, like I said I didn't have the mentality of being the transfer student, the misfit. I thought well there are all these other people who are new here, and I am new too" (Katia, ACC) Katia's account highlights two things, first, Katia shows her enthusiasm about being at TSU and second, Katia also describes how she negotiated being a transfer student, for Katia being a community college transfer student did not make her feel that

she did not belong at TSU with the rest of the students who were starting school at the same time she was, regardless if they were freshmen or transfer students. Katia's attitude about being a new student at TSU despite being a community college transfer student is one of the main reasons why she was able to have a positive experience transitioning from the community college to the university, even though she experienced some of the challenges her peers experienced.

Alana on the other hand, was the only participant who commented on a ritual celebrated by TSU where they "welcome" current, former, and newly admitted students the night before the first class, this was her experience:

[...] even like things "Gone To Texas," you know that was all solely focus for traditional freshmen students [...] Yeah, I attended, because it was marketed for both transfers and freshmen but when you got there, you quickly realized that it was not so much for transfers, um and that's depressing you know, cause I'd like to see success stories of transfers, but there's no one is seen, you know, no one says there's any transfer success stories and that's rough (Alana, Del Mar College).

From Alana's experience with this "homecoming" event we can see why Alana would feel unwelcomed as a community college transfer student and why she felt like she was not part of the TSU community. If community college transfer student's like Alana cannot see themselves through the success stories of students at this event how does the university expect them to feel welcomed or even expect them to feel like they can succeed at a university that creates this type of campus culture.

Part of a transfer receptive culture at the university relies on having the receiving campus developing an environment where community college transfer students feel that they belong and where they are encouraged to achieve at a high academic level (Hendel and Herrera, 2006). In Catarina's case, TSU's campus aesthetics can be considered a component of the transfer receptive culture because if students like Catarina feel good about how their campus looks then this may translate into community college transfer students being motivated to make friends and

do well academically at an institution like TSU. At the same time, even though Katia was able to feel confident about being around all the other newly admitted incoming students despite being a community college transfer student, the university is responsible for creating a campus environment where feeling confident as a student, is the day to day culture of the university that all students experience regardless if they come to TSU as a traditional or as a transfer student. Being confident about fitting in should not be a choice that students need to make it should already be part of the campus culture. Finally, creating this campus environment also involves events like the “homecoming” event described by Alana, where community college transfer students and their success stories are represented. By focusing on representing only the success stories of traditional freshmen students TSU is contributing to the creation of an anti-community college transfer student campus environment. At the same time TSU is disregarding the lived experiences that community college transfer students bring to campus (Jain et al, 2011). By acknowledging the success stories of students who come to the university through the community college, the university can gain from the cultural wealth community college transfer student bring with them to the university. This would support the creation of a more positive campus environment for all students regardless of how they were admitted to TSU.

Catherine, Matthew Debbie, and Michelle, all described their experiences with their new classroom environments. For example, Catherine, described her experience by comparing the academic culture at her previous institutions of higher education she attended to how it was different at TSU. Catherine describes her experience as:

Yeah, people are friendly all my professors have been really great, really intelligent and really dedicated to their field which I like, and I had a unique experience because when I went to a private university none of the teachers do research, so their primary goal is to teach and so I had really incredible professors that were really dedicated to their students and then I went to community college, it was like being back in high school and then I came here and so, I never had a T.A before so that’s kind of weird. I am not particularly

fawned of the fact that my professors don't actually read my papers, uh that's kind of weird to me but [laughs] as a whole I really like it and everyone is very nice and um very helpful" (Catherine, Collin College)

Like Catherine Matthew also talked about his experience with the academic culture in the classroom at TSU, in particular Matthew focused on the type of interaction he had with his professors at TSU versus his experiences with teachers at his former community college.

Matthew described his experience saying:

Well [clearing throat] it was a lot different than ACC I'll say that. I mean just to give you like a background, when I went to ACC one of the things I really loved about ACC was the class size and the teachers, they really seemed genuine or genuine you know, they wanted you to learn and they were happy to answer questions and stuff like that. Uh and the first semester here was uh kind of an eye opener that this is not going to happen, that's pretty much not how it's going to happen here. Classes were huge, instructors never really answered questions in class, is like if you want to answer questions come to the office hours (Matthew, ACC)

From Catherine and Matthew's experiences in the classroom we can see how coming from two classroom environments where classes are generally smaller, where the focus is on teaching and student learning allowing students to be able to have more interaction with their professors can be a "culture shock" or make the student feel like there is a disconnect between them and their professor once at TSU. At large public research universities like TSU the academic culture is different, classes can be as small as 30 students and as big as 300 students, depending the demand of the course and or impact on the students degree program this is why professors rely on their T.A's to interact with the students, including reading and grading their assignments. In addition, there are other elements that make the academic culture different at TSU versus a private university and a community college, is that in addition to teaching professors at TSU are required to do research and publish consistently in order to gain tenure. There are also responsible to mentoring graduate students pursuing Master's and Doctoral degrees, and to be involved in service through the university. This reduces the amount of time and attention a

professor can dedicate to undergraduates students to a limited amount of interactions in class and that is why professors hold office hours and invite students to meet with them there to make sure they have an opportunity to ask questions.

Matthew also mentioned that he disliked the lack of tutoring available for him as a non-traditional community college transfer student, who as a father had family responsibilities he needed take care of during the tutoring sessions. This is how Matthew describes his experience with tutoring:

Uh, yeah one of the things that I really disliked was all the tutoring that was available, pretty much all the tutoring that I know of that's available by the school, provided by the school is uh happens at night. Uh and so, a lot of the classes I was taking were difficult, I could've of used tutoring but I just can't do nights. You know I have to go home and take care of my family so, that's still a problem even now [...] I kind of took a hit with my grades, I had 3.97 at ACC when I transferred and so far at TSU I've got a 3.3 a 3.3. I get about an average half and half B's and A's every semester because the really difficult classes I just can't find help with" (Matthew, ACC)

Matthew's experience highlights two challenges that community college transfer students may experience during their transition from the community college to the university. The first one is known as the "transfer shock" (Hill, 1965 as cited in Laanan, 1996) meaning that a students GPA may temporarily drop during their first or second semester after they transfer from the community college to the university. Whether Matthew's drop in GPA was temporary or not I am not sure but at the time of our conversation Matthew shared with me that his GPA had dropped from a 3.97 to a 3.3, this is a significant drop in GPA. Second, Matthew's experience also speaks to TSU's lack of awareness regarding their community college transfer student's backgrounds and needs as students. As an older non-traditional community college transfer student who is married with a family, there are certain responsibilities that Matthew needs to take care of that traditional college aged students may not have.

For Debbie, working with students in a group setting was tough to the point it created

anxiety in her. Debbie described her classroom experience as:

One of the challenging parts and specially when your professors are encouraging you to study in groups and I overall even when I was 18-19 years old right out of high school I didn't like group work, I still don't like group work. But if you want me to break into a cold sweat, you tell me that we have to do a group project, because I will panic. So that has been the challenging part. Like for my biology class, we had to as part of an extra credit assignment, we had to find people in the class who we could study with and if we were going to be gone, we could get notes from them and that was anxiety inducing for me because I [...] I just you know everyone, its not like everyone knows each other but plenty of people see other people that they recognize you know through the dorms or the cafeteria, or maybe other classes, or even high schools they went to together and so that has been very very challenging" (Debbie, ACC).

As an adult who is in her late 30's Debbie's initial experience with the academic culture at TSU is important to highlight for two reasons. First, from Debbie's account she does not mention anything about her biology professor making an effort to create an environment where Debbie would feel comfortable working in groups in a classroom setting where the majority of the student population is anywhere from 14-18 years younger than her. Second, Debbie also points out why she continues to be apprehensive about group projects. For someone like her it may also be challenging to work in group projects because being an older community college transfer student who commutes does not give her the same opportunities to meet people like the majority of her classmates, who meet students and have established relationships from coming from the same high schools, living in the dorms, taking other classes together, or from interacting with each other through other student focused activities or events.

Finally Michelle, describes working with students who were significantly younger than her as experiencing a "culture shock," this is how Michelle described her experience:

I actually liked it, because I was lucky I had finished all my lower division classes, so I got to go straight into my major classes and so, it was all RTF all the time and it was great, the teachers were great and you know I didn't have any bad experiences class wise. I guess the only weird part was dealing with people that were younger than me. That, that was kind of like a culture shock almost kind of thing [laughs] because it was, there's a whole you know, they talk different and they, they're constantly connected to technology

and I am technology savvy but I'm not constantly on Twitter and Tumblr and I can go without being on those things so I am like, and it was constant and it was everywhere and every class they wanted you to be on a Facebook group and I am like, I don't want to get on Facebook all that much, I mean I want Facebook, but its not a necessity.

Michelle's experience shows how as a student in her early thirties she would experience a type "culture shock" given that the majority of the students she interacts with in the classroom are generally in their late teens or early twenties, making her one of the few if not the only student in her thirties in the class. For Michelle, being surrounded by a younger student population may be unusual seeing that when she was taking classes at her community college Michelle's was working full-time and going to school in the evenings, minimizing the opportunities of interacting with traditional college age student's who generally are full-time student's and take classes during the day. At the same time college student's who are part of this age group have been brought up in an era in which technology and social media have become an essential part of their day-to-day activities and practices in and outside of school, these are elements of their lives that may not be part of Michelle's day-to-day activities and practices.

The events experienced by Catherine, Matthew, Debbie, and Michelle, reveal that community college transfer students come into the university with a diverse set of backgrounds and life experiences, including a unique set of needs and or anxieties that the university needs to be aware of, understand, and be able support. As stated earlier a transfer receptive culture requires that the university create an environment where community college transfer students feel that they belong and where they are encouraged to achieve at a high academic level (Hendel and Herrera, 2006). Part of creating an environment that creates a sense of belonging is, first, having an understanding from the university that community college transfer students are very diverse as a student population. Second, anticipating the challenges that community college transfer students may experience during their first few semesters as a result of their unique

backgrounds and life experiences and create a plan of action that will minimize the challenges and ensure that the student has a good transitional experience. For example, Catherine's experience in the classroom with not feeling comfortable with interacting with a T.A and Matthew not being used to large classes and not being able to interact with the professor during lecture may be something that is insignificant to traditional college students but for Catherine and Matthew it may take them extra time to get use to the idea of having a T.A or being in larger classes and having limited interaction with their professors during class. From Catharine's and Matthew's experiences we can see how the academic culture in the community college classroom does not translate into the academic culture in the four-year university classroom and depending on the student this may impact each student differently which may result in positive and or negative experiences. TSU needs to acknowledge this by involving professors and T.A's in creating a classroom culture that understands this as essential for community college transfer students to feel that they belong and that they are encouraged to achieve at a high academic level.

In addition, for Matthew, Debbie, and Michelle who are in their early to late thirties and may have additional challenges with integrating themselves with the rest of the students in the classroom and feeling like they belong. Debbie and Michelle offered two perfect examples of this. Debbie not only came in to the classroom with feelings of anxiety regarding group projects but she also pointed out that it may be more challenging for her to find people she can work with seeing that the majority of the students have already interacted with one another and have established relationships from coming from the same high schools, living in the dorms, taking other classes together, or from interacting with each other through other student focused activities or events and she does not have these connections since she is a commuting student. For Michelle, it was interacting with younger students and student's relying on constantly being

connected on social media sites to work on group projects. In this case, one of the challenges is that students like Matthew, Debbie, and Michelle who are older students who commute, have no connections to campus or to student groups on campus like other students may have. Therefore it may be more challenging for these students to establish friendships or relationships with students. Professors and TA's at TSU, should be aware of this and should be prepared to facilitate student interactions that would encourage more positive individual and group collaborations.

The second part of this component requires that the university create an environment where community college transfer students are encouraged to achieve at a high academic level. As a parent Matthew seemed the most affected during his transition from the community college to TSU. He describes his GPA going from 3.97 at his community college to 3.3 at TSU, the main reason seems to be that there was not tutoring available that fit his schedule and as a result his grades suffered. Current student academic support programming at TSU is designed to fit the schedules of the majority of the student population at TSU, who are younger, go to school full-time, and have no dependents. TSU re-evaluate its academic support programs and should take the necessary steps to support community college transfer student's like Matthew who as a student with dependents has other responsibilities besides school, and does not have the flexibility in his schedule to make it to the tutoring sessions held in the evenings. Taking these students experiences into consideration will dramatically improve the transfer receptive culture for community college transfer students at TSU.

Through the students first impressions the institutional microaggressions here are represented by the social and academic environments community college transfer students were exposed to at TSU. For example, Alana's experience is speaks to the invisibility of transfer

students consciously created by the TSU. TSU has the ability of including transfer students in this event celebrated by the entire university community but they have not. In addition, expecting that their community college transfer students would automatically adapt to the university academic environment without giving them an opportunity to understand their new academic culture is also an example of an institutional microaggression, seeing how students like Catherine and Matthew responded to the idea of having larger classes, less personal interaction with their professors, having a T.A serve as one of the main resources for class related business or having to depend on office hours to speak directly with the professor. In addition, for Matthew it these new academic obligations significantly impacted his overall GPA, because there was no tutoring available that met Matthews needs as a university student who was also a parent. Here the university culture also assumes that all their undergraduate students are single and have no dependents.

### **Emotional Impact**

The transfer process is an emotional process for students too the following theme that came up was “student’s emotional impact.” Transferring from the community college to TSU, affected students differently based on their personal experiences. During this process students experienced disappointment, self-doubt, frustration, emotionally ran what they describe as the “gamut”, a dislike for academics, and a couple of students felt disconnected from the university student community. This is what they had to say about how the transfer process from the community college to UT impacted them emotionally:

Katia felt hurt and disappointed after she was rejected by the Deans Scholars Honors Society to be part of their program because she was a transfer student. Katia described her experience as:

So let me tell you a disappointing story. So do you know the Dean's Scholars Honors Society? Well that's a society, its mainly geared at College of Natural Science students, and if you make really good grades and are involved in research and meet a few other criteria, then you can join this and supposedly well they told me that transfer students could join, and I sent in my application and put a lot of work into it, got more letters of recommendation, wrote essays, and I really thought I was going to join it, because it's a real feather in your cap, it helps you get into grad school, it looks great in your resume, it also let's you make good connections here. So I get this letter back, saying that "we are very sorry" I'm just paraphrasing it here [...] "we are very sorry but, although you were one of the most qualified applicant's we have had this year, we cannot admit you to the program because, you are too far along in your education" Huh, how unfair is that, I tell you. I was pretty, I got to say, I was, I got my feelings really hurt by that, cause I felt I was being cut of an opportunity simply because I was a transfer student, not a freshmen" (Katia. ACC).

Katia, felt she was discriminated against by the policies and practices of an organization who encourages students to achieve their highest academically, because she was a transfer student. During our conversation Katia shared that this event was the one that made her decide that she will not feel less than or made feel different because she was a community college transfer student at TSU. This event could have set Katia on a different path if Katia was not so resilient, resourceful, and had the support of her mother who had a college education. Policies and practices of this nature do not represent a transfer receptive culture, because it penalizes students who come to TSU via the community college route. TSU and specifically academic organizations who promote high personal and academic student achievement need to re-evaluate their policies and practices to be inclusive of community college transfer students, who aspire and pursue reaching their full academic potential.

Alana, on the other experienced a rough transition so rough that she has developed self-doubt, to the point that she has contemplated the idea of dropping out of school. This is how Alana describes the emotional impact she ha experienced through this process:

Wow, its been so hard, its been really hard. Just thinking that I don't know what I am doing constantly, that's reeaally hard just not having like goals or plans or not knowing if I am going to have enough time to do all the things I want [sic] it's, its been really, really

hard. There's been a lot of nights when I'm like maybe I should drop out [laughs], go work on a cruise ship and I think about it everyday, literally dropping out and that's just not how it should be, you know you shouldn't have to think about dropping out everyday (Alana, Del Mar College).

It is evident from her experience that Alana had a rough transition. As a first-generation college student she was looking for more guidance and since it was not available to her she became overwhelmed with doubts and ideas of dropping out. As Alana repeatedly states, "this is just not how it should be," transferring to a university such as TSU should not have to be full of doubts and or the idea of dropping out the first semester. From Alana's experience we can see that TSU may not be adequately prepared to offer the support community college transfer students may need from their university. Experts on developing a transfer receptive culture suggest that universities like TSU, create support programs based on a "pedagogy of excellence" model which include key components such as, academic counseling, peer tutoring, and reciprocal learning techniques that are grounded in the belief that all students have the right to an education, have the capacity to learn, the potential to excel, and are "at-potential" rather than "at-risk" (Bermeo, 2007; Lumina Foundation, 2004, as cited in Jain et al., 2011). Taking this into consideration TSU needs to create or strengthen their support programs to be able to better support their community college transfer students and make sure they complete their bachelor's degree.

For Catarina, she expressed frustration not only because she was a senior taking sophomore level-courses with younger students but also because she expressed that her teachers had a certain perception of her, that did not validate her lived experiences as a community college transfer student. Catarina described her frustrating experience saying that:

Yeah, it is kind of hard sometimes, because the Art teachers still classify me as a sophomore, because I'm still taking sophomore level classes, because I didn't come in as a freshmen, its really and I am a senior now but its just, they're still surprised when I tell

them, oh no like I'm a senior, they're like what, like your not a sophomore like all the other people? It's like no [emphasis] But it's just, I think that's hard and then always being around people younger than me, its kind of strange or its just not strange, its just I guess I can't if I wanted to go out for drinks with these people I can't and its just like if I wanted to I don't know. I can tell like people are going through this like the younger people, people just a few years younger than me are going through different things that I've already gone through, so its just kind of like I don't I guess it's a maturity level thing. [...] It's frustrating you know because you know, because I feel like they have this idea of me being a sophomore but it's like no I've gone through, I've already gone through that, I've gone through so much more than a sophomore, like I am senior (Catarina, HCC).

From Catarina's experience we can see how this can be frustrating as a community college transfer student who already has completed classes that are considered lower-division classes at the community college. The fact that she is a senior and still taking sophomore level courses may give her professors and classmates the impression that Catarina is not as knowledgeable as they are and as someone who may lack experience in their academic major. Catarina's experience with her professors and classmates reveals how the lived experiences of community college students may be disregarded and not taken into account within a classroom environment that seems to privilege the knowledge and experience of traditional college age students. One of the key components of creating a transfer receptive culture at a four-year university is that the university acknowledges community college transfer students lived experiences and recognizes the intersection with community and family (Jain et al., 2011). Although Catarina's experience in the classroom does not allow us to analyze her lived experiences in relation to how these intersect with community and family, it is important to highlight that the classroom environment created by her professors attitude failed to recognize Catarina's lived experiences as a community college transfer student. At the same time the professor may of have prevented the rest of the students in the class from gaining from the knowledge and skills Catarina developed through her lived experiences, as a community college student. In order to create a transfer

receptive culture, TSU as a university needs to take a more active role in recognizing community college transfer students and the value they bring to the university and to the classroom.

Debbie, was the student who experienced feeling what she describes as a “gamut,” of emotions. At the beginning she describes feeling accomplished for being at a university like TSU, then she describes the stage when she became doubtful about her decision to pursue a higher degree. At the end Debbie describes that even with the highs and the lows she is happy to be where she is at in her life.

“You know what its, I’ve been telling everyone its been harder that any full time job I’ve ever had but I also love it because this is really the first time in my life were I’ve allowed myself to, first, take huge risks like this first of all and then to really learn how to think and really just learn, there are so many things I am learning right now. Like I said before I wish I can learn more of it faster, but you know I really, when I moved down here, in April 2007 and I knew I was going to come here, I didn’t know when but I knew I wanted I just knew, like okay this is where I am going this is where I am going and you know now that I am here is like I know I am meant to be here and I love it and I don’t want to go back to the real [laughs] I don’t want to but its, it really its ah, it’s a labor, a labor of love I guess you can say, it’s made me emotionally I’ve you know run the gamut like, a couple of days ago I just said, you know this is a huge mistake I should have never done this blah, blah, blah and those are after the times when something like you know, I am having a rough time getting something maybe I didn’t get a good grade on the test, I didn’t you know its, the highs and lows you know there have been times where I’ve made like I said, I’ve made a huge mistake, but you know other times I can’t believe I’m here, you know I am very happy here” (Debbie, ACC).

Debbie’s feelings especially those of doubt may be normal for older adult non-traditional community college transfer student. For Debbie, it may be difficult to accept her new identity as a full-time university student seeing that for the majority of her life Debbie was a full-time worker until she moved to Austin in 2007 when she continued to be full-time worker and became a part-time student at her local community college. As mentioned earlier part of creating a transfer receptive culture at the university involves the development of supportive environment focusing on financial and academic needs of community college transfer students, on the academic side this support primarily relies on the “pedagogy of excellence” model (Bermeo,

2007; Lumina Foundation, 2004, as cited in Jain et al., 2011), which places the emphasis on the academic aspect of the student identity by requesting that the university provides students with academic counseling, peer tutoring, and reciprocal learning techniques (Bermeo, 2007; Lumina Foundation, 2004, as cited in Jain et al., 2011) and not on the emotional aspect of the student identity, which may influence the way in which students like Debbie perform academically. If TSU decides to adapt the transfer receptive framework in order to evaluate their institutions transfer culture, they need to keep the emotional aspect of this experience in mind to better serve the needs of their community college transfer student population.

Matthew was the only student who spoke about his experience with academics in detail and in particular with the testing practices and how this had impacted him emotionally. Matthew describes his emotional experiences with academics saying that:

“The one, the biggest emotionally difficult thing for me here has been the tests. Uh and maybe just this major I’m not really sure, but the very first semester I came here, I took intro to electrical engineering, which it was so obviously a weed out class, every test the average was 40-45%. I mean that was the average, like nobody was even passing if they didn’t have a curve. It was ridiculous and they made it clear that you know the bottom 2% or whatever in the class weren’t going to make it, I mean cause they have, they had the ability to just curve it to whatever they wanted. So you knew that somebody like twenty people or whatever were going to fail the class, even if they were just doing just a little worse than everybody else and that was just, it was it put you in the situation were you’re not even competing against the material, you are competing against your fellow students, which I didn’t find fair whatsoever, and to be honest about half the classes I take are like that, their intentionally really really hard, with and I mean I understand the material is hard but it is the way they test. Which is kind of a weird thought process, I mean I don’t know it doesn’t make it enjoyable, you know. [...] I think I got like a 55 on my last test and people around me were like, ah I got a 30, in the back I’m like yes! [laughs] the more people do horrible the better my grade is going to be, even though I only got like a 55, the more people that do horrible can bump me up to an A’ in the class, its just so weird, such a weird feeling”  
(Matthew, ACC).

Matthew’s account shows how oppressive and dehumanizing academics can be and how this can have an emotional impact to the point were being a student and pursuing a college

education is not something enjoyable, examples of this can be seen in how Matthew describes his experience. First, Matthew describes this class as a weed out class suggesting that only the strongest will survive this ordeal. Second, Matthew describes feeling that instead of competing against the material he had to compete against his classmates, in order to make sure he passed. Finally, Matthew talks about that if it wasn't for the grading curve no one would pass, making it clear that there is someone who controls which students do well and pass and which under perform and fail. To a certain extent it can be seen that the professor is the one who controls their future, seeing that their emotional well being and how they are able to respond to their personal and academic challenges depends on how they are affected by this experience. The academic culture practiced in this classroom is the opposite of what a transfer receptive culture stands for, in relation to the creation of a campus environment where students feel like they belong and where they feel they are encouraged to achieve at a high academic level (Hendel and Herrera, 2006). In order for community college transfer student's like Matthew to achieve academically at a high level and complete their bachelor's degree at TSU this needs to be incorporated into the university's culture and practices with all students regardless from where they come from.

Catherine and Michelle were emotionally impacted in similar ways, they both felt continuously disconnected from being part of the TSU student community even though they both participated in university sponsored groups and or events. They both associated feeling they were not part of the TSU student community because they did not have friends. Additionally they both associated not having friends to the disadvantage of coming in as transfer students and not having their freshmen or sophomore years to make friends. Catherine felt disconnected from the TSU student community for several reasons including, not being familiar campus, being unfamiliar with the language used by student's, including not familiar with the chants at the

football games. When it came to making friends in class Catherine described it as being weird and or challenging. This is how Catherine describes her emotional experience during the transfer process:

Yeah, I definitely don't feel as part of the group as I feel like everybody else does, I definitely kind of feel like an outsider mostly just cause I don't know where anything is, people use all these acronyms that I have no idea what they're talking about, or like the first football game and everybody knows all the chants and stuff and I have no idea what's going on [...] I definitely feel kind of lost a lot of times, just cause I don't really know anybody and I feel like I am not, I feel like it's a lot harder to meet people as a transfer because by the time you are a Junior pretty much everybody already has their friends, and so it's a lot more difficult to try to make friends at this point but thankfully I have friends who already go here, it would be a much different experience. Its hard because its like I really I would like to make friends but I don't really know how, like in class its just kind of strange, I don't know (Catherine, Collin College).

Even though Catherine mentions she was thankful to find friends she already knew who went to TSU, Catherine describes that one of the challenges about being a community college transfer student at a four-year university that may have an emotional impact on a the students transfer process, is making friends. For students like Catherine integrating themselves socially into the university may be a challenge because they do not have the established social networks they had at the community college (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). In addition, Catherine used two keywords to describe more about her emotional experience during her transition into TSU that stood out, they were “outsider” and “lost.” By feeling like an outsider in a university were you are suppose to spend the next two to three years of your life to complete your bachelors degree, students may feel as if they are not accepted or that they don't belong with the rest of the student community. Further, feeling like you are lost can only add to the already negative feelings you have developed about this new environment specially when as a community college transfer student you are the minority amongst the rest of the students.

In describing her experience Michelle, says that even though she considers herself a TSU student she does not feel being part of the TSU community, this is an interesting personal analysis provided by her. She justifies feeling this way because she does not have friends or a group of friends to call her own.

Ah, it makes you feel pretty lonely cause I didn't really feel like, I don't know I mean, I'm definitely feel like I am a TSU student but I don't feel like I'm part of the like TSU really community kind of thing because I don't have groups of friends till this day. I know the people I know is because I have them in classes and its not, I don't really have like friends still, and that was really hard for me because I left home with all my friends and all my family all his family (referring to her husband) and so we were happy there (Michelle, North Vista College)

Michelle associates not feeling as if she is part of the TSU community because up until the time of our meeting she still had not been able to make friends. One of the reasons this may be is described by Townsend & Wilson (2006) who revealed that for non-traditional age students like Michelle social integration was easier at the community college because there were other students like them who worked and went to school, whereas at the university the majority of the students Michelle went to school with were full-time students. But for Michelle there may be other factors associated with feeling lonely or as not being part of the TSU community. Not only was Michelle a community college transfer student but she was also a Latina in a predominantly White institution (PWI), which as a student of color may experience lower levels of integration and higher levels of alienation and discrimination at PWIs (Nettles, 1988; Allen, 1992; as cited in Flores, 2010) versus the experiences of the majority of the students at a PWI. Michelle also talked about joining and participating in the University Catholic Center, a place where she thought she would be able to meet people who she could form friendships with, this is how Michelle describes her experience:

[...] like I joined the UCC and I was thinking, oh maybe we'll meet some friends over there we met some people but they've all been grouped up already, they all knew each

other for so long, and so I am like we are still those people that people just say hi to but we are not really their friends. Like I don't have friends that I can just go and hang out with, because everybody else, either lived with someone, they were on campus together you know and so, it was really hard I mean I would call home crying to my parents and I'm like, this sucks, I am like I'm all alone out here and I mean I know we're together but his at work and he is not here on campus, and so I'm like, I hate this cause I'm like at least when I was there I could go see my family, my friends and here is like we have no one (Michelle, North Vista College).

From this experience we can see Michelle's emotional frustration developing after she decides to join the UCC for the purposes of making friends and still not being able to find people who she could have a meaningful friendship with. Michelle describes that she was no more than the people would greet and say hi to but it was never more than that. One of the other reasons Michelle felt alone and discouraged about not being able to develop meaningful friendship relationships at TSU, was because this was the first time she left home. When Michelle moved to go to TSU, she left her family and everyone else she knew back home. Her family and friend's were Michelle's biggest support system when she was going to school at her local community college, and even though she was busy with a full-time job and school she could always see them, something she couldn't so easily do being at TSU.

Catherine's and Michelle's experiences are two unfortunate examples of what a transfer receptive culture does not look like. One of the things that TSU is in desperate need of creating is a visible community of transfer students on campus, so that all of these extra set of unspoken challenges community college transfer students face can be broken down and they can fully embrace and participate in the TSU student community. A good start can be that the university sponsors a "Transfer Day" or a "Transfer Week" one of the activities during this event can be that all transfer student's wear a shirt or a piece of clothing that identifies the community college they transferred from. In this way student's can connect with other student's who may have transferred from their community college this can be an event were students instantly make

friend and feel included in the TSU student community. Having this event will not solve all the challenges caused by the university's of lack overall support for community college transfer students, but it is definitely a step in the right direction. It would give community college transfer students the feeling they are welcomed by the university community and it will develop a campus environment where students feel they belong.

The emotional impact described by the participants and their personal experiences shows the different types of institutional microaggressions experienced by community college transfer students at TSU. For example, Katia's membership rejection by the Dean's Scholars Honors Society, automatically disregards her accomplishments for being a transfer student. Alana, Debbie, and Matthew could have been reassured by TSU and by their professors to make them realize that they belong and would succeed at TSU. Catarina and her experiences as a community college transfer student were invalidated by the professors in her program when she was perceived as a underclassmen. Finally, Catherine and Michelle's experiences with making friendships speaks to the lack of a visible transfer student community on campus, something the university has not created yet. Together these student experiences describe the microaggressions students experience through the environment created by the university.

### **Support by TSU**

The final theme that came out during the analysis of the student interviews was, "support by the university" to the community college transfer students during their time at TSU. Overall students had different experiences with the support they were able to receive from the university. For example one student was not able to identify any type of support provided to her as a transfer student, one other student mentioned the screening process he was put through before he could see an academic advisor, one student described the lack of emotional support she received from

an advisor, and a few students reported that they were supported either through by the faculty or staff who are part of the university or by university sponsored support organizations. These were their experiences:

Debbie, was one of the students who could not name any type of additional support she received by the university as a transfer student. Debbie said, “uh, I mean really, nothing additional I mean I am sure, yeah um I really cant’ think of any” Even though at first Debbie was unsure later on in our conversation, Debbie mentioned to me that she had only met with her advisor once at orientation to get her registration bar lifted and that she would be meeting with him again regarding her registration appointment for the Spring semester. From my experience in talking with Debbie and other students, these meetings with advisors are done at the beginning and at the end of the fall semester for the purposes of checking the students degree progress and to plan for the following semester. But if nothing drastically happens with the student in between these two advising periods there is limited or no communication between the advisor and the student and there is limited to no support provided by the advisor to the student.

Matthew, on the other hand describes a frustrating experience he had to endure every time he wanted to see an advisor. Matthew describes his experience with academic advising as :

Academic advising was ok, um they have a really good screening process, were they basically, [laughs] I know it’s intentional but and you can get by it but, they have at least this is for engineering right ECE, they have their engineering academic or their office and you go in and there’s a front desk with whatever student has that job at that time, and you have to get an appointment through them for one of the advisors, and they will try their best to answer your questions before they let you see an advisor. Which is, I mean I understand that a lot of times that they can probably answer the question, but sometimes I just want to talk to an advisor [laughs] so let me through would you, you know and in fact I don’t think I’ve ever actually gotten through. I think I’ve been there three times and like I’ll just talk, they’ll just keep talking and eventually I’ll just either accept what they’ve given me or I’ll just give and just go, yeah. It seems weird I mean their there, to their suppose to be there for you right so, why is it so hard to get to them (Matthew, ACC).

From Matthew's experience we can see how this happening to him three times would be frustrating and even more because Matthew never actually had the opportunity to speak with an advisor face to face. At the end Matthew eventually ended up accepting what the student worker told him or just gave up and left. Although we do not know if these practices described by Matthew are the way advising works for all engineering students at TSU and by all advisors. It may be that the student worker does just work as a screener for the advisors but when a student like Matthew attempts to see an advisor three times and can't this is problematic. No matter how good the student worker is, he is never going to be trained or have the experience to handle the questions like an advisor would, and specially with specific questions students like Matthew may have as community college transfer students. What if in one of those times a student worker misinforms the student and that negatively impacts his or her academic career.

Catarina described trying to get support from an advisor which was not very helpful for her, this is how Catarina described her experience

I mean I would try to like meet up with one of the advisors and talk to them, and it was kind of difficult because, well the first one about transferring and the first one, she kind of didn't really have any feedback about it, she kept asking me questions and it wasn't really helpful [...] it's the advisor that you are able to talk to in the SSB, and I was telling her about how it's kind of hard to make friends here as a transfer student and she was, she kept asking questions, so it didn't it wasn't really helpful, so I don't know their services are here, and they want to help you but I really feel like they don't know how in a way (Catarina, HCC).

As we can see from Catarina's experience she was not able to find the social emotional support she needed as a community college transfer student from the advisors she meet with. From this event it appears that Catarina tried explaining to the advisor that she was a transfer student and how she was having challenges in making friends to what the advisor kept asking her questions, without really helping Catarina with her situation. Catarina's experience describes the importance of training advisors to be able to meet the needs of every student population on

campus and most importantly because there is a growing number of community college transfer students who come to TSU with different backgrounds and different needs. As we saw with the experiences of Debbie, Matthew, and Catarina interacting with their perspective advisors, these interactions do not reflect the type and quality of the support services offered by a university with an established transfer receptive culture for their community college transfer students. A transfer receptive culture requires that the university establishes support programs for community college transfer students that meet both the academic and the psychological needs of the students.

Catherine, Michelle, Katia and Alana, all had similar experiences in that they felt they were supported either by the faculty or staff who are part of the university or by university sponsored support organizations. This shows that although the support for community college may not be consistent throughout TSU, there is some type of support for community college transfer students. Catherine, describes the support she has been able to get through her advisor Catherine describes her experience saying:

I've been really lucky I have a really great advisor and she's been super super helpful, but if it weren't for her like I've talked to other people, who their advisor just really don't care, they never talk to their advisor, and I can't imagine [...] she sends out emails several times a week and then, her and I talk occasionally she'll email me specifically to talk about something, she helped me get an internship and helped me work on picking up a second major and all that kind of stuff (Catherine, Collin College)

From Catherine's experience with her advisor we can see that it has turned out to be a positive advisor/student experience. Not only does her advisor send out the general emails but she also make an effort of maintaining personal communication with Catherine. In addition, Catherine seemed very happy that her advisor helped her secure an internship and helped her pick up a second major.

Michelle describes the support she has been able to receive through an advisor outside of her department, who is a former community college transfer student herself.

[...] half ways through I thought about doing a double major with Mexican American Studies, and that advisor, she's great and I could ask her anything and she was actually a little bit more helpful, yeah and she was helpful because she was a transfer student, yeah so when she was telling me about her experiences when she got here [...] I usually I don't even go talk to her about academic stuff as it is other things and she was super helpful and she would tell me her experiences and say you know its okay, when I would feel kind of down about like, you know I don't really know anybody, she's like oh don't worry about it, and she was married at the time too that she transferred so that made it like we kind of connected at that level too and it was nice getting to have at least someone that I could talk to (Michelle, North Vista College)

For Michelle she had a different experience than Catherine and her advisor, early during our conversation Michelle described that she did not find her advisor at TSU helpful or approachable. As a former transfer student Natasha was able to support Michelle outside of academics by supporting her in an emotional way, by listening and sharing her own experiences as a married Latina transfer student and by reassuring her that everything was going to be okay.

Katia was one of the only students who was able to speak about three types of support she received from TSU. These were Katia's experiences:

So as far as support goes, I can put in a lot of good words for their tutoring center here, its just as good if not even better than ACC's and I'd say that its better than ACC's, because I think they have more tutors, the problem at ACC's was that had a few tutors who were excellent many of them were PhD's themselves but they were often quite overwhelmed with how many students they needed to help. Here they have more per customer and I mean even though they are students themselves their pretty good, I've never been led a stray (Katia, ACC)

Katia mentions tutoring as one of the support offered by the university, she compares the tutoring service at TSU with the services at her former community college. Katia highlights that the tutoring services provided by TSU are as good or better than her previous college because they have more tutors so they have the capacity to support more students. This is a great service that all transfer students can benefit from. Katia also mentions getting support for students with

disabilities, she said, “another good resource I’ve used quite a lot is the Student Services Building (SSB) and the various stuff they have there. Yeah so I’ve used their Student Disabilities, the services for student with disabilities, because I have an anxiety disability when it comes to taking exams. This type of support for Katia recognized as fundamental to her academic success and her emotional wellbeing. Even though Katia was able to get the support she needed at TSU, it was not as easy to find as it seems. During our conversation Katia made it a point to tell me that the reason she found support was because she was constantly looking for it herself, Katia mentioned in several occasions that in order to find the resources and support she needed she used the university listservs and the listservs from various university organizations as a main way of keeping up not only with support services but also with events, activities, and other resources available to transfer students at TSU. While Katia was able to gain academic and emotional support, TSU needs to improve the ways in which they make these services known to transfer students, they need to find better ways to outreach to students.

Finally, Alana was one of the only student’s who spoke of getting consistent support from her advisor from the beginning of her transition into TSU. Alana, said this about her experience with her advisor, “my advisor, he’s been great! I’ve emailed him literally so many stupid questions, and he’s been so kind about it, because I have no idea, college isn’t stressed in my family, and so I am figuring everything out by myself and that’s hard and he’s been really great resource (Alana, Del Mar College). For Alana being a first-generation college student who moved away from home to pursue a college degree at TSU has been a challenging experience, specially emotionally. Having this type of support for her has been a positive experience amongst a lot of the uncertainties Alana has had to endure. Additionally, Alana was the only transfer student who shared about gaining support from a scholarship organization, “[...] my

scholarship organization has been great as well. There's a foundation organizer and her name is Leslie and she's just the greatest. But from her and my advisor that's really all I've done" (Alana, Del Mar College). One of the challenges faced by Alana and the majority of the other transfer students was gaining financial support. Alana, gaining financial support in a form of a scholarship was a great accomplishment and a huge burden off her back. Alana, was very happy with being able to find this organization because not only was she supported financially but she was able to gain new friends through former and current scholarship recipients, including the foundation organizer Leslie who had been very supportive of Alana.

Alana's experiences were unique from the rest of the participants for two reasons, first, everyone else had shaky relationship with their advisors from the beginning of the academic year. These relationships either continued on, or students decided to seek another advisor, or at the time of the interview they had not met enough times to be able to evaluate their relationships. Second, Alana was also part of a scholarship organization which offered her financial support in addition to general support as she needed it. Katia, had a disappointing experience with the Dean's Scholars Honors Society, who although qualified denied her support and membership because she was a community college transfer student. In addition, from field notes taken in one of my conversations with Michelle, she also expressed the non-existent scholarships for both older adult TSU students and transfer student's in general.

Current financial support programs at TSU do not reflect the support needed with community college transfer students in mind. A financial commitment for transfer students is demonstrated through the establishment of scholarships and other financial aid opportunities specifically for transfer students and reentry/nontraditional students (Jain et al, 2011). TSU needs to work with their financial aid and scholarship department to create a specific scholarships for

older adult students and or a scholarship for community college transfer students, this would ensure that community college students transfer to and graduate from TSU. In addition, even though there were examples of how TSU as an institution and or individuals who are employed by the university were supportive to community college transfer students, there are still examples of institutional microaggressions. For example, overall the support that community college transfer students had access to was limited, not easily accessible, and the quality in support was lacking, including the knowledge of transfer student needs by advisors. This is a disservice to transfer students that can have an impact on their academic and personal levels.

### **Summary Of Findings**

The research question outlined in chapter one was: What is the Transfer Culture for Community College Transfer Students at TSU? Based on the thematic analysis I conducted on the data I collected for this study I found that the transfer receptive culture for community college transfer students at TSU is limited to non-existent. This was evident though the themes that developed through the analysis process during the students pre-transfer and post-transfer experiences these themes included; outreach by TSU before being admitted; No outreach by TSU once admitted; it was just like kind of such a freshmen orientation; no transfer bridge or transitional programs; first impressions as TSU students; emotional impact; and support by the university.

Even though the transfer receptive culture at TSU for community college transfer students is limited it is important to point out that there were some examples of support either by faculty or staff employed by the university or by organization or support groups sponsored by the university. For example, Catherine had support from her advisor not only did her advisor maintained constant communication with her she also helped Catherine secure an internship and

helped her pick up a second major. For Michelle was able to find emotional support from Natasha, a staff member for the Mexican American Studies program at TSU and a former community college transfer student herself. Additionally Katia described getting support from the tutoring services provided by TSU and from the services for students with disabilities office. Lastly, Alana was able to gain full support from her advisor since the beginning of her time at TSU and she was the only transfer student who shared about gaining support from a scholarship organization, both financially and through the foundation organizer Leslie. Equally important, this study also revealed that despite community college transfer students enjoying certain privileges for being White, they were victims of institutional microaggressions inflicted by the university for being transfer students. Based on these findings it is critical that the university improve the outreach, orientation /transition programs, academic, social, and financial support services, as well as support the creation of a transfer student community on campus in order to provide a transfer receptive culture for current and future community college transfer students at TSU.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

The central question guiding this research was: What is the Transfer Receptive Culture for community college Transfer Students at Transfer Student University?

To introduce the study I outlined the significance and background of the study. I described the enrollment, transfer rates, and degree attainment for students who use the community college as an entry point into higher education system in the state of Texas. The numbers revealed that 53% of students entering an institution of higher education enroll at a community college (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2013). Of the students who start at community college 25% eventually transfer to a four-year institution within six-years (Texas Public Higher Education Almanac 2014). In addition, the most updated report of the Texas statewide bachelor degree graduation rates for community and technical college cohort of first time entering undergraduates shows that of all community and technical college students entering as undergraduates in the Fall of 2004, only 13.4% graduated in 6 years (<http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/DocFetch.cfm?DocID=2300>). These numbers are important to understand because they show the current state in higher education for students who start their undergraduate degrees in the community college and how the public flagship universities in the state of Texas, like Transfer Student University can work together with community colleges statewide to improve the number of community college students who gain admissions to and graduate with a four-year degree. This study is important for two reasons first to date the majority of studies regarding the transfer function have looked at this phenomenon though the perspective of the community college (Bahr, Toth, Thirolf, and Massé, 2013), and second this study is the first to look at the institutional culture necessary to transfer to one of public flagship university in the state of Texas.

Within this section I also gave background and context of the study highlighting how timely the study was because of current policies and programs set in place at TSU, prioritize the admission and enrollment of traditionally age students who do not typically use the community college as an entry point into higher education but who are still consider transfer students because of the policies and programs set up throughout the state and university. For example, the top 10% law, implemented statewide in 1998, guarantees admission to all Texas seniors who graduate in the top ten percent of their class. (Niu, Tienda, & Cortes, 2006), discriminates against students who rely on the community college as a pathway into higher education. In addition, university programs such as the Freshmen Transfer Program (FTP) an internal transfer program within the TSU university system and the Freshmen Transfer Program through Co-Enrollment (FTPCE) a partnership between TSU and ACC the local community college, allow students who are Texas residents and eligible for automatic admission under the state's top 10 percent law, but who do not qualify under the new automatic admission policy for TSU, start their undergraduate careers at either another institution within the TSU university system or at one of the local community colleges and transfer to TSU once the students meet their perspective requirements.

The section concluded with my problem statement which argued that there is a need to look into the institutional culture for community college transfer students at TSU, one of the public flagship universities in Texas, since there is an overall lack of institutional commitment by Transfer Student University towards their transfer students and more specifically to transfer students coming from Texas community colleges, as reflected in a significant difference between the drop out rates between first-time transfer students and first-time freshmen. I concluded the by outlining the purpose of the study which was to (1) understand the institutional culture for community college transfer students at TSU. (2) contribute to a body of literature that examines

the institutional culture necessary for community college students to transfer to an elite university such as Transfer Student University.

For this study I reviewed the three bodies of literature that supported and framed my study. The first body of literature looked at the characteristics of community college students. Through a review of various studies I showed that the majority of undergraduate students in the United States attends a community college. In addition, community college students are more likely to be first-generation, low-income, and adult learners. (Malcom, 2013). I also showed that there are multiple factors for enrolling in a community college, for Hispanic and White students, the main reason supported by these students was to prepare to transfer to a four-year college or university (Nora and Rendon, 1990). I also highlighted the degree aspirations for full-time freshmen attending both public and private 2-year college across the nation. Revealing that about 25% of students at both public and private two-year colleges aspired to earn a baccalaureate degree (Laanan, 2003). The last thing I highlighted in this section was some of the personal and institutional barriers community college students deal with during the transfer process. Personal barriers included having limited financial resources (McDonough, 1997, as cited in Zamini, 2001), lack of academic preparation (Stewart, 1988), and for Latina/o community college student's the most significant barrier to transfer is that they are overwhelmed with balancing multiple roles and responsibilities outside of college while attending to their academic roles as students (p.243, Ornelas and Solorzano, 2004). Institutional elements that became barriers for undergraduate student matriculation and retention at the four-year university were campus climate and culture (Zamini, 2001).

The second body of literature looked at studies that described the experiences of community college transfer students in four-year universities. In this section, I revealed some of

the social and academic challenges that community college transfer students may face once they transfer to the four-year university. For example, community college transfer students may experience challenges integrating themselves socially once they are in the university setting (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). In addition, they may also be stigmatized for being transfer students (Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston, 2010), and for some transfer students it may also affect their identity. (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004). Academically, Townsend & Wilson (2006) revealed that former community college students also had challenges with academic integration. Their participants reported feeling disconnected from their professors at the university, whereas at the community college they were able to have more one-on-one access to their teachers and build a closer relationship.

The last body of literature focused on studies that provided examples of an affirming transfer culture models leading up to my theoretical perspective. In this section I provided three models that reflect an affirmative transfer culture. All three models aim to address the institutional barriers and strengthen the transfer function from the community college to four-year universities and each of them provide elements that contribute to an affirming transfer culture. For example, Hendel and Herrera (2006) offered seven elements and three intervention points along this process to ensure maximum student success. There are four elements that stand out from their model they are: provide high quality instruction, including innovative and research-based pedagogies; develop intensive academic support programs based on models of “academic excellence” (e.g., academic counseling, peer tutoring, and reciprocal learning techniques); create an environment of belonging in which students feel stimulated to achieve at high academic levels; and establish strong community and family linkages that foster intellectual stimulating, secure, and culturally rich environments for students on and off campus (p.5). I

addition their three intervention points during this process is also noteworthy, these points of involve the participation of two-year and four-year faculty and student service professionals in specific and coordinated ways. They are, (1) establishing consistent communication with students their first-year at the community college. (2) on-going commitment from faculty from the two-year and four-year institutions working to identify the essential academic preparation needed to help students make the transition from the community college to a four-year institution. (3) the intervention of counselors and other student support personnel at two-year and four-year institutions who are critical gatekeepers of information about transfer. (p.5).

In the second model Hendel (2011) reports that experts say that creating a transfer receptive culture requires that the faculty and staff at four-year colleges and universities connect students with the university campus culture. They provide four key elements to accomplish this task, these four elements are: transfer orientation, transfer centers, transfer skill courses, and transfer student housing. In the third model Hendel (2012) describes an emerging transfer culture model that continues to show the importance of an institutional commitment by two- and four-year institutions to provide the resources necessary for students to transfer and earn the baccalaureate degree. The transfer-affirming culture is made up of five elements some of the key elements are, envisions transfer as a shared responsibility between community colleges and four-year institutions; views transfer and attainment of the bachelor's degree as expected and attainable; and leverages the social capital that students bring to college in service to their educational goals. Finally, in this section I introduced my theoretical framework by first providing a background on Critical Race Theory in education (Solórzano, 1998), including the five tenets that form the basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of a critical race theory in education. I also described CRT in education influence on the transfer receptive culture

model applied in this study. Additionally, I introduced the theoretical concept of microaggressions (Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000) to show that although the majority of my participants were White and enjoyed a certain degree of privilege, they were victims of institutional microaggressions for being community college transfer students.

I also discussed the qualitative research methods I utilized in this study, the site of the study, and my positionality. My methods included a one on one semi-structured interview with each of the participants. To recruit participants I posted a recruitment flyer on the Know Events announcements page, a university wide events calendar put together by the university communications which is distributed via the university's email newsletter to students, faculty, and staff. After all data was collected and transcribed I went through a highly selective process of coding where I looked for reoccurring themes. My coding process involved me selecting text data, creating common categories, and labeling or naming these categories (i.e. TSU presence on campus, TSU outreach once admitted, etc.). Through this thematic analysis I ended up with seven themes; TSU presence on campus; TSU outreach once admitted; it was just like kind of such a freshmen orientation; no transfer bridge or transitional programs; first impressions as TSU students; emotional impact; and support by the university. The site of the study was Transfer Student University, located in Central Texas. To established the context of the site and the current transfer culture, I provided student demographics that included enrollment by type of student who transferred to TSU and I also included the number of transfer students who dropped out versus the number of freshmen students who dropped out after one year of being at TSU. To provide context about the campus culture regarding community college transfer students, I presented one example from the prospective transfer students website and one example from a news article from the university's newspaper. I concluded with my positionality explaining how

as a former community college transfer student I was influenced on the way I put together the study and analyzed the data. The next section of this chapter discusses the key findings which expand on the findings discussed in chapter four to include all relevant data discussed throughout the study for a complete evaluation reflecting the transfer receptive culture proposed by (Jain et al., 2011)

The five elements of a transfer receptive culture, are divided by efforts that are pre- and post-transfer are as follows:

Pre-transfer:

1. Establish the transfer of students, especially nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students, as a high institutional priority that ensures stable accessibility, retention, and graduation.
2. Provide outreach and resources that focus on the specific needs of transfer students while complimenting the community college mission of transfer.

Post-transfer:

3. Offer financial and academic support through distinct opportunities for nontraditional=reentry transfer students where they are stimulated to achieve at high academic levels.
4. Acknowledge the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family.
5. Create an appropriate and organic framework from which to assess, evaluate, and enhance transfer receptive programs and initiatives that can lead to further scholarship on transfer students (p, 258).

I will now continue to evaluate the TRC at TSU for community college transfer students using the five elements below:

**Pre-transfer:**

1. Based on the current transfer policies and practices at TSU non-traditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students are not a high institutional priority. Current university sponsored transfer policies and practices, target high school students who originally

applied to TSU to be considered for freshmen admissions, but who missed being part of the top 10% of their graduating class and therefore were not offered automatic admissions into TSU.

There are currently two guaranteed pathways through transfer admission set in place at TSU. The first is the Freshman Transfer Program (FTP). FTP expands the admission options available to freshman applicants to TSU, by allowing them to begin their post-secondary education at another TSU system university. Once the student fulfills the FTP requirements as a freshman, he or she can transfer to TSU to complete their undergraduate degree. Additionally, this year TSU partnered with the local community college to offer a similar program through co-enrollment. . Freshmen Transfer Program through Co-Enrollment (FTPCE) targets students who are Texas residents who are eligible for automatic admission under the state's top 10 percent law but who do not qualify under the new automatic admission policy for TSU. FTPCE asks students enrolled through their program to complete their core curriculum within two years and maintain a certain GPA, to then be able to transfer into TSU. One of the major challenges with both programs is that not every student is eligible and or can apply to be part of FTP or FTPCE, TSU offers participation to a selected group of freshmen applicants and not traditionally community college students who are generally, nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students.

2. From the experiences of the community college transfer students who participated in this study there is evidence to suggest that the current outreach and resources offered by TSU to address the needs of community college students who may aspire to transfer to TSU, are weak to non-existent. The voices of the student's describe experiencing major challenges in getting access to information about transferring to TSU is echoed across the board and is represented by the following expression provided by Katia who when asked about TSU outreaching to students

at her campus expressed that, “Hmm I don’t recall any that were specifically for TSU. I remember that most of it, was research that my mom and I did on our own, just looking things up on the internet and reading forms and advice and stuff like that” (Katia, ACC). In general student’s expressed that they were the one’s that needed to be pro-active about learning the details about the transfer process and several went on to say that either they had to constantly be looking for information of the TSU website, call the admissions office and those offices particular to their programs of interest to get support, a few even shared that they personally went to the university to get the information and have their questions answered. Student’s also discussed the lack of visibility TSU had on their campus, including the overrepresentation of other local and state universities on their campus. In addition, older adult and working students expressed their frustration regarding the lack of outreach services they had access to during the evening schedule.

Another critical element of the outreach and resources for community college transfer students during the pre-transfer stage is orientation. The majority of the students who participated in an orientation for transfer students had a negative experience and those who had a good experience also expressed that although they had enjoyed their orientation experience, the activities and topics discussed were not helpful to them as transfer students.

Alana was one of the students who described her experience at transfer orientation as being the worst and terrible. This is what she described as her overall experience:

Orientation was the worst [laughs] my orientation was so terrible, yeah no we had a 30 minute meeting with our advisor [...] It was specifically for transfer students but it was a day and a half. Were as normal freshmen students, get three days, three full days and that’s just not enough time. A day and a half is not enough time to get all the resources, like both me and my friend were at the same orientation session and we walked away going “WHAT” “What did we just learn?” Nothing, nothing is what we learned (Alana, Del Mar College)

Alana's experience reveals that there is a lack of quality in the orientation organized for transfer students. Other students also expressed their disappointment with the quality of information they received, one student actually said that the information she got from this event seemed as if she could have gotten it in a brochure. She also added that the students involved with the orientation could not explain the things she had questions about. Finally students also revealed that even though they were part of a transfer student orientation they were not exposed to resources specifically for transfer students.

Catarina on the other hand was one of a few students who like the transfer student orientation felt that the topics of discussion and activities were geared towards the younger or the freshmen student population. Here she describes her experience:

I had fun at that, yeah I liked it [...] they just kind of talked, it was like a brief like they just kind of talked to you about, oh this is how you prepare for college, like use your planner I remember they were telling us that, and I was like, that's obvious. I don't know, it was just like kind of such a freshmen orientation I think like, like kind of [...] they introduced us to some of the faculty and people (Catarina, HCC)

Catarina's experience reveals that the university does not take into consideration the level of maturity and or the specific needs community college transfer students have or need during their transitional period into the university. Other students had similar experiences one described feeling out of place because he was older than most students and the other got the sense that during her transfer student orientation the focus were younger students and those students who were going to live on campus.

### **Post-transfer:**

3. One of the limitations of this study is that I did not ask my participants about their financial aid status or about financial aid offered by the university. However there were two participants that brought up the topic of scholarships. Alana, said she received support through her

scholarship organization, so it is fair to suggest that transfer students may be eligible for certain scholarships at TSU. Michelle, on the other hand said that discussed with me that she asked about scholarship opportunities for older adult community college transfer students and she was told that there was none she also said that she looked for other type of scholarships she may be eligible for and could not find any. Based on these two experiences there needs to be an evaluation regarding financial aid opportunities for all community college transfer students in order to be able to assess where TSU may need to improve.

In terms of other distinct opportunities for academic support that guarantees community college transfer students high academic engagement and achievement none were reported by the students at TSU. There were several examples of situations when students would have benefited from additional academic support. For example, Matthew expressed frustration over the lack of tutoring services for older adult community college transfer students, who could not make the tutoring sessions offered by his department and the university, because as a father Matthew had family related responsibilities. As a result Matthew's GPA went from a 3.97 at his community college to a 3.3 at TSU, this is a significant event were Matthew would have benefitted from the extra academic support.

4. Given the experiences of the participants in this study TSU as a university has not done a good job of acknowledging the lived experiences that community college transfer students bring with them to the university. Outside the classroom, Alana felt a disconnect between her and the rest of the TSU student community, when she participated in "homecoming" rally at the beginning of the year, were the whole student body gets together and are exposed to success stories from current and former TSU students. Alana felt left out because there was no representation or even mention about current or former transfer success stories at TSU, the transfer student experience

was not valued in this event. In the classroom Catarina felt the professors did not acknowledge their lived experiences because the class they were enrolled in was designed for under classmen, therefore the transfer student was automatically perceived as not knowledgeable and or as less experienced. Katia and Catherine were kept from participating in student organizations because they were transfer students, by having this stance the organizations not only devalued the students lived experiences but also the experiences they brought as community college transfer students, which together would be an asset to the students who are part of the organization and the to the organization as a whole. Additionally, TSU did not consider students lived experiences and the intersectionality between community and family. This was evident through the experiences of Matthew seeing how the tutoring schedule did not fit in with his schedule and responsibilities as a father, as a result his GPA was the most affected. In this instance the university made Matthew chose between his responsibilities with his family and tutoring, instead of offering Matthew other tutoring options to meet his needs as a student.

5. During the finishing stages of this project I learned about and became involved with a group of transfer students and student allies who were forming a Transfer Student Board with the goal to develop policies and practices that will focus on improving the external transfer process and overall experience for all students transferring to TSU. Over the next year, the board plans to develop a report made up of research, data, and successful programs that address the current issues that transfer students face, making recommendations for resources and programs TSU can develop and implement for their transfer student community in the near future. With this TSU is moving in the right direction, in being able develop a framework to assess, evaluate, and enhance transfer receptive programs with their transfer student community in mind.

This study begins to describe the transfer culture at a Texas public flagship university. Findings for this study also assert some of the work of scholars who are experts in the field of higher education and or that work with this population. In general the experiences of the participants during the transfer process reflect the findings revealed by (Townsend & Wilson, 2006) who focused on three areas, the transfer process, efforts of the university to assist community college transfer students, and student perceptions of the university versus the community college, in an effort to look at factors affecting the academic and social integration of community college transfer students. The majority of the students interviewed at TSU, were pro active in getting information via the university websites about transferring to TSU, looking up specific courses that would transfer, and the application. In addition, students felt that the university could be more intentional with their transfer orientation programming, by guiding them better and offering resources specific to the needs of community college transfer students. In the next section I will discuss if the data collected to answer my research question was consistent with each other and why.

In answering my research question, “What is the transfer culture for community college transfer students at Transfer Student University?” I found that giving the population of interest the different kinds of data collected through student interviews were consistent with each other. I was able to find patterns in attitudes from female/male community college transfer students at TSU. Most importantly I found that the attitudes represented within community college transfer students translated into their responses when I interviewed them. The results were consistent with the established literature, specifically when describing the experiences of community college transfer students at four-year university. This study makes one important contributes to the study of community college transfer students. First, this study contributes to the CRT

transfer receptive culture framework by including an analysis of how the four-year institutions actions or inactions towards community college transfer students are examples of institutional microaggressions, based on the fact that they are transfer students. In addition, this study helps us understand that regardless of the students racial, gender, socio-economic status, and class, community college transfer students are discriminated against for being transfer students.

To conclude my thesis I discuss the limitations of my study, directions for future research, and most importantly the implications of the study.

### **Limitations & Directions For Future Research**

The experiences of the seven community college transfer students in my study cannot account for the experiences of community college transfer students at private or liberal arts colleges/universities and/or a Minority serving institution. Transfer Student University is a research I predominately White university. The experiences of community college transfer students may be different and/or similar at these other institutions. For example, it would be interesting to look at the transfer receptive culture for community college transfer students at a private university, seeing that generally private universities may have access to more financial resources, that would be able to provide the support community college transfer students need to succeed.

In addition the study heavily focused on the experiences of White female community college transfer students. It is also necessary to explore the experiences of women of color who transfer to a university like TSU, more in depth. Similarly, there was a limited representation of male participants. In general the transfer experience for male students needs more exploration, giving the lack of male representation across ethnic/racial backgrounds who participate in higher education this is important to look at what institutions like TSU are doing to provide male

community college transfer students with better opportunities to transfer and succeed at their university.

The study also focused entirely on the transfer receptive culture for community college transfer students and disregarded the transfer culture for students who participate in the university's sponsored "transfer programs" such as the Freshmen Transfer Program (FTP) and the Freshmen Transfer Program through Co-Enrollment (FTPCE). It would be interesting to see the differences and similarities between these three groups of transfer student populations, seeing that the FTP and FTPCE are programs that are sponsored by the university and therefore may offer their students more support from the beginning.

Also, the transfer receptive culture was evaluated based on the experiences of students and did not consider the perspective of the university's administrations, staff, or faculty. It would be good to see how the university's personnel perceives the transfer receptive culture for community college transfer students at TSU. How do they rate their outreach services for potential community college transfer students? How do they rate their transfer orientation? How do they rate their transitional support programs? How do they rate their academic and social support programs? How do they see the transfer student community on campus? These are key questions to be answered by the university's stakeholders.

Lastly, I feel strongly about pursuing further research on the transfer receptive culture for male community college transfer students who transfer to four-year college or university. Based on my experience for this study one of the challenges was finding male students to participate. It would be interesting to see what four-year colleges and universities are doing to increase the access to and graduation rates of male community college transfer students.

## **Implications**

## **Policy Implications**

One major policy implication of this study points to the university prioritizing the access to community college students who are not part of the current transfer programs like the Freshmen Transfer Program (FTP) set in place with other TSU System institutions which currently takes 1/2 of the admission slots allocated for general transfer students (1,800 of 3,600 slots) (THECB, 2010). This automatically decreases the chances of traditional community college students gaining admissions to TSU. TSU should prioritize the active recruitment of community college students who are first-generation, low-income, and adult learners (Malcom, 2013). By TSU prioritizing the recruitment of these student populations the university would benefit from the wealth of knowledge these students bring to the university.

## **Programatic Implications**

Since student's expressed that they were the ones who were pro-active in learning about the transfer process including having to constantly look for information on the TSU website, having to call the admissions office and/or offices particular to their programs of interest, and personally going to the university to get the information they needed. TSU needs to establish a presence of TSU outreach staff and recruiters at more community colleges in Texas. This would allow potential community college transfer students the opportunity to engage with TSU staff early in the transfer process to ensure students are prepared to transfer. community college students who want to transfer to TSU.

Also, seeing that there was a disconnect between the students and the university from the time the students were admitted to the time they started classes in the fall. Once admitted the university should organize a phone banking event, were TSU transfer students can have the opportunity to call the newly admitted transfer student and welcome the student and answer any

questions they may have about transitioning into the university. The outreach staff should be made up of former community college students, who can support and inspire potential.

Given the limited amount of financial aid and scholarships for community college transfer students, TSU should allocate separate funds to provide financial aid in form of scholarships to community college transfer students. In addition, seeing how students struggled to find academic support that was supportive of their schedules and responsibilities, TSU should establish a transfer center on campus. Here potential community college transfer students, incoming transfer students, and current transfer students, can come in and find the support they need. Support will be available through tutoring, academic advising, and counseling. This center will also be in charge of all new transfer student programming, such as orientation and transfer bridge programs. The center should be run by university transfer staff, transfer advisors, transfer counselors and most importantly current transfer students at TSU.

Finally, seeing that the students who transferred to TSU had a challenging experiences were the university did little or nothing to acknowledge their lived experiences that community college transfer students including recognizing the intersectionality between community and family. TSU needs to support the creation of a transfer student community on campus that will recognize these principles. The university can accomplish this by including the participation and recognition of transfer students experiences and successes at their annual homecoming rally. In addition, they can encourage student organizations including student government to open up their membership to transfer students. Finally, TSU should develop specific support services for community college transfer students who are parents. Students who are parents should not have to sacrifice being with their families while trying to pursue a college degree.

In conclusion, I would like to say that even though there is a lot of work to be done at TSU I am hopeful that the newly created Transfer Student Board by current transfer students at TSU continues their work to improve the current transfer culture for current and future TSU transfer students.

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