UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITIES OF ADVISING TRANSFER STUDENTS IN AN INSTITUTION-DRIVEN SYSTEM

by

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ABSTRACT

PAUL STEVENON HOLLIDAY-MILLARD. Understanding the complexities of advising transfer students in an institution-driven system. (Under the direction of DR. MARK D'AMICO)

Nationally, while the majority of community college students indicate a desire to transfer to a four-year college or university, many of them fail to do so (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011; Hossler et al., 2012; Jenkins & Fink, 2015; Shapiro et al., 2013). Since the transfer process has become more complicated (Bragg, 2017), many states have developed statewide articulation systems to help mitigate issues related to credit efficiency and to streamline the transfer process (Anderson, 2018). However, transfer students are still taking longer to graduate and have to manage issues related to credit mobility, including excess at graduation and loss of hours and applicability during transfer (Hodara et al., 2017). To help us understand how transfer students are academically advised for the transfer process, this qualitative study explored the experiences of community college academic advisors who advise transfer students in their pursuit of earning a baccalaureate degree. It also offers a rare study of the academic advising process from the perspective of community college academic advisors and how they interact with transfer policy on a day-to-day basis. This study draws upon interviews with 12 community college academic advisors across the state of North Carolina to further comprehend how they experience their statewide articulation system when advising transfer students. The findings from the study detail how community college academic advisors cope with and navigate student, campus, and system challenges and complexities. Implications of the study require that community colleges consider how to organize academic advising on their respective campuses, determine how to improve interventions and programs to educate transfer students on transfer policy and process, and address gaps in North Carolina's Comprehensive Articulation Agreement.

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my partner, husband, and best friend. Jordan, I could not have completed this without your help, guidance, love, and support. Simply put, you have been my “strength and stay” these past four and a half years.

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Statement of the Problem

The landscape for transfer students seeking a baccalaureate degree is becoming more complex (Bragg, 2017). First, due to enrollment and funding changes, the mission and goals for higher education are changing. Second, students from more diverse backgrounds are seeking a baccalaureate degree and this increasingly diverse population of transfer students are faced with challenges as they enroll and transfer to a four-year university to earn that degree. Third, the majority of transfer students who transition from a two-year institution to a four-year institution are not earning a baccalaureate degree (Bragg, 2017). While most community college students indicate a desire to transfer to a four-year college or university, approximately 25% end up transferring to four-year universities and only 20% eventually earn a baccalaureate degree within six years of transferring (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011; Hossler et al., 2012; Jenkins & Fink, 2015; Shapiro et al., 2013).

During the 2015-2016 academic year, 49% of students who earned a baccalaureate degree attended a community college in the past 10 years and of those degree earners, 63% attended a community college for three or more semesters (National Student Clearing House Research Center, 2017). Furthermore, during the 2016-2017 academic year, 38% of undergraduate students attended a community college and in fall of 2017, 34% of undergraduate students attended a community college (Ginder et al., 2018a; Ginder et al., 2018b). While postsecondary enrollment is down (National Student Clearing House Research Center, 2019) due to community college's relatively low cost of attendance and easy access, community colleges will continue to attract a share of high school graduates (Cohen et al., 2014). Additionally, as the demand for a college educated workforce grows, the community college is becoming an essential

entry point for higher education as the nation is expected to produce fewer high school graduates between 2014 and 2023 (Peace & Demarée, 2016). While we may see growth between the years of 2024 and 2026 (especially across the South), much of that growth will shrink after 2025 and will see smaller high school graduating classes between 2027 and 2032 (Peace & Demarée, 2016). These demographic shifts will challenge four-year institutions to consider new ways to attract new students to enroll and attend their institution, and many will consider transfer students as their most viable option. These changes in community college enrollment make the transfer function a vital component of American higher education to be studied and to understand.

While research demonstrates that advising has important benefits for community college students (Bahr, 2008; Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2018; Dowd et al., 2013), community colleges and academic advisors are faced with many challenges when working to support transfer students. Not like students at four-year institutions whose goal is to graduate with a baccalaureate degree, students at community colleges can have a variety of short- and long-term educational goals (Kirkner & Levinson, 2017). These goals may include the following: completing of an associate degree, earning a certificate, transferring to a baccalaureate degree granting institution, and taking a course(s) for personal fulfillment or to gain valuable job-related skills (Hagedorn, 2010; Wyner et al., 2016). The wide range of potential educational goals of community college students, coupled with less than adequate resources to meet the student demand to see academic advisors, make it particularly challenging to design effective academic advising services (California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force [CCCSSTF], 2012; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Kirkner & Levinson, 2017).

Another challenge faced by community college academic advisors is credit mobility, or the process of transferring credits from one institution to the next (Hodara et al., 2017). Nationally, students who transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution lose 26% of their credits, and, for students who transfer between two-year institutions, they lose 74% of their credits. (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017). Additionally, Monaghan and Attewell (2015) found that 40% of community college students were not able to transfer the majority of their college credits and another 15% were not able to transfer any credit to their receiving institution. What is potentially becoming clear, while state articulation systems are initially designed to reduce credit loss and preserve credits as students transfer between institutions, they actually do little to streamline the process of transferring credits beyond general education requirements and can contribute to credit loss (Taylor & Jain, 2017).

Issues related to transfer advising and credit mobility will continue to rise as the transfer function in U.S. higher education continues to expand and become more important (Cohen et al., 2014). Hodara et al. (2017) postulate that one reason why so many community college transfer students do not earn a baccalaureate degree is due to the process of transferring of credits from a students' sending to their receiving institution. In their study, Hodara et al. (2017) grouped statewide articulation systems into 2 + 2, credit equivalency, and institution-driven systems and found that issues related to the transfer of credit and credit loss existed across all system types. States categorized as 2 + 2 systems have created pre-major pathways so that students can complete the same coursework at any community college and transfer it to any state university major ready, credit equivalency systems have established some pre-major transfer pathways that allow transfer students to transfer major ready at any state university, and institution-driven systems are guided by statewide articulation agreements but pre-major transfer pathways are

developed or driven by individual institutions instead of a statewide policy (Hodara et al., 2017). These systems may not be as effective because transfer students are not selecting a major and destination institution early in their community college career and institutions face a lack of resources to provide transfer students with personalized support throughout the transfer process (Hodara et al., 2017). In this complicated web of articulation agreements and constantly trying to meet students where they are, some community college academic advisors find themselves juggling multiple articulation agreements which can cause them to inadvertently make mistakes regarding the appropriate courses to take when transferring (Hodara et al., 2017).

This issue is particularly important for North Carolina. In 2019, North Carolina announced and launched their first, statewide post-secondary attainment goal (Sorrells & Osborne, 2020). By 2030, North Carolina hopes to close its post-secondary education attainment gap by ensuring that two million North Carolina residents have a post-secondary degree or high-quality credential (Kinlaw, 2019). This is critical because only 49% of North Carolinians, ages 25 – 44, have some type of post-secondary education and to meet workforce development demands, 67% of the state's workforce needs to have a post-secondary degree or a high-quality credential (myFutureNC, 2019). While there are many pieces to this puzzle, one way to meet this attainment goal is by improving the transfer process from a North Carolina community college to a University of North Carolina System (UNC System) institution. Hodara et al. (2017) argues issues related to credit mobility or the process of credits transferring from a students' sending to their receiving institution can limit the ability of transfer students earning a baccalaureate degree. While issues related to credit mobility exist across all statewide articulation systems, institution-driven systems like North Carolina, may be more susceptible to this phenomenon. Since institution-driven systems only specify that four-year universities have to outline the courses

transfer students need to take in order to transfer, students in institution-driven states (i.e., North Carolina) may need more than two academic years to complete their baccalaureate degree due to the required additional coursework beyond the pre-major coursework taken at the community college. While North Carolina's Comprehensive Articulation Agree (CAA) has decreased the number of excess credits beyond 120; Worsham et al. (2020) found that on-average, CAA-qualifying students took a semester longer to graduate with their baccalaureate degree. As national and state policy leaders set new educational attainment goals, it is important to recognize the important role academic advisors play in disseminating and interpreting information for students to follow.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how North Carolina community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven articulation system and to identify any needs community college academic advisors must have to better support and advocate for transfer students. To conduct this study, the researcher sought to interview and capture the diverse perspectives and experiences of academic and/or transfer advisors who work in North Carolina community colleges. While literature exists on transfer outcomes related to completion rates, loss of credit, excess credit, and the applicability of credit, little research has been conducted on how academic advisors interact with these policy systems on a day-to-day basis. Furthermore, Hodara et al. (2017) recommends additional qualitative research at the local and regional level to uncover how these policies are interpreted and executed on the ground, for it could impact credit mobility. Studying the experiences of community college academic advisors may also help uncover hidden issues related to transferring, since academic advisors play a pivotal role in the transfer process and can serve as informers for transfer students as they seek

out accessible, accurate, and timely information regarding transferring (Taylor & Jain, 2017). The following research questions guided the design and implementation of the study:

1. How do North Carolina community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven articulation system?
2. What do community college academic advisors need to support transfer students in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree?

Policy Framework

As briefly explained in a previous section, the policy framework for this study was Hodara's et al. (2017) categorization of state-wide articulation systems. Hodara et al. (2017) grouped articulation systems into 2 + 2 systems, credit equivalency systems, and institution-driven articulation systems. While each articulation system is uniquely designed, the potential for credit loss exists in all systems. In institution-driven articulation systems, articulation agreements only guarantee the application of lower-level coursework towards general education requirements. However, how pre-major credits are applied to majors and how major-ready status is defined is determined by individual, four-year colleges, and universities (Hodara et al., 2017). North Carolina updated its CAA in 2014 to guarantee a 30-credit transferable common core and junior standing for students who complete a transferable associate degree, but currently allows UNC System institutions to determine major-specific coursework (Hodara, et al., 2017; The University of North Carolina System, 2020). Hodara's et al. (2017) policy framework and definition of an institution-driven system shaped data collection and analysis.

Overview of Research Methods

The pragmatic paradigm guided this basic qualitative study. Pragmatists are primarily concerned with the pursuit of actionable answers and in investigating common beliefs (Patton,

2015). The pragmatic paradigm and basic qualitative research design were well suited because the researcher sought to highlight how North Carolina community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven articulation system. Additionally, the chosen research design allowed the researcher to expose the needs of community college academic advisors when supporting transfer students in their transition from a two-year to a four-year institution. Finally, because articulation systems and how advisors interact with them is a complex process, qualitative research is more suited to answer these research questions since it allows the researcher to seek a more in-depth understanding of a sustained process impacting students and academic advisors (Tracy, 2020).

The primary source of data collection were one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with North Carolina community college academic advisors. Data analysis took place in two phases: the primary-cycle coding phase and then secondary-cycle coding phase (Saldaña 2016; Tracy, 2020). The constant comparative method was used in the primary-cycle coding phase to identify open codes while axial coding was used in the secondary-cycle coding phase to group codes together to create larger categories of codes or themes (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016; Tracy, 2020). Trustworthiness was ensured by employing the following methods: keeping a research journal, conducting member checks, and obtaining thick description. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2016; Tracy, 2020).

Significance of the Study

While North Carolina residents remain optimistic about their university and community college system, they have concerns related to the issues of credit mobility between schools and the applicability of community college credits toward a four-year degree (myFutureNC, 2018). According to myFutureNC (2018), 31% of North Carolina residents believe that students who

choose not to finish a four-year degree do so because of issues related to credit mobility. Additionally, 60% of North Carolina residents rate the ability to transfer credits earned elsewhere to a four-year college or university as very important when rating the overall quality of a four-year college or university (myFutureNC, 2018). The growth of transfer students also continues to rise. In fall of 2009, the UNC System saw 6,682 students transfer from the North Carolina Community College System (NCCC System) (UNC InfoCenter, 2019a). By fall 2018, the UNC System saw 11,218 students transfer from the NCCC System, a 67.8% increase in nine years (UNC InfoCenter, 2019a).

In 2014, North Carolina updated and approved its statewide CAA to include a 30-credit common core, but also allowed individual universities to determine major specific coursework needed for upper-level courses (The University of North Carolina System, 2020). Additionally, the CAA guarantees the transfer of Associate Arts (A.A.) and Associate of Science (A.S.) degrees with junior status (The University of North Carolina System, 2020). Since the CAA was updated, there still exists a wide distribution of degrees earned to no degree earned by incoming transfer students into the UNC System. In fall 2018, 34.8% of new transfer students earned an A.A. or an A.S. degree, 22.9% earned other Associates degrees, 32.5% earned no degree but enrolled with 30+ hours, and 9.6% earned no degree but enrolled with less than 30 hours (UNC InfoCenter, 2019b). Moreover, since there are 16 four-year institutions in the North Carolina system and approximately 80 programs at each institution, some community college advisors must have a working knowledge of approximately 1,280 articulation agreements (Hodara et al., 2017). Lastly, in the coming decade, more than two-thirds of jobs in North Carolina will require some type of post-secondary education, so it is important for community college students to have the opportunity to earn a baccalaureate degree (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018a). To address these

problems, this study will be able inform community college administrators and state policy leaders about the unknown issues that are faced by community college academic advisors when advising transfer students. Since community college academic advisors play a pivotal role for students in the transfer process, this study will be able to uncover potential issues related to how community college academic advisors access correct information regarding the transfer process.

Assumptions and Delimitations

Pragmatism, as a philosophical system, directs researchers to "seek practical and useful answers that can solve, or at least provide direction in addressing, concrete problems" (Patton, 2015, p. 152). Research questions in a pragmatic study are not "validating the nature of reality, getting at the essence of some phenomenon, generating grounded theory, or deconstructing social constructions" rather they are seeking to address a real-world issue with research findings that would ultimately inform action (Patton, 2015, p. 152). Conducting a study under the pragmatic paradigm assumes that a problem exists and that there are actions to take to fix and address the problem. The researcher also assumed that the participants in their study will respond to their interview questions truthfully, unencumbered by the researcher's positionality. To encourage honest and truthful answers to the interview questions, the researcher made sure that the participants understood all data was de-identified before being shared and that participation in the study was voluntary. Furthermore, through a semi-structured interview approach, the researcher used an interview protocol that elicits candid responses from participants free from judgement.

One delimitation of the study is the research site. Hodara et al. (2017) defines three states as institution-driven articulation systems. While Hodara et al. (2017) finds that North Carolina fits this definition, the researcher did not interview community college advisors from the other

two institution-driven states featured in their study. Furthermore, while Hodara et al. (2017) studied nine state systems, their proposed policy framework has not been applied to all 50 states. Therefore, we do not know if this institution-driven articulation system model is prevalent among other states or if it is only applicable to North Carolina, Texas, and Kentucky.

The researcher also decided not to expand the study to include academic advisors at public, four-year institutions and instead focused entirely on the experiences of community college academic advisors. It's important to note that these articulation systems not only impact faculty and staff at the two-year level, but also impact faculty and staff at the four-year level as well. Since the researcher serves as an academic advisor at a public, four-year institution, their interest is in understanding the experiences of academic advisors at community colleges. Due to the researcher's positionality, the researcher made sure to recognize the varied missions and purposes of community colleges and of the academic advisors who work there.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are widely used in this study. Definitions are presented here and will be repeated and expanded upon as needed in subsequent chapters.

Academic Advising. While there exists many approaches and definitions of academic advising, O'Banion (2009) offered one of the first definitions of academic advising in 1972 by writing that the process of academic advising should include the "exploration of life goals, exploration of vocational goals, program choice, course choice, and scheduling courses" (p. 83).

Developmental Advising. Considered as one of the earliest and foundational approaches to academic advising, developmental advising is defined as a "systematic process based on a close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational,

career, and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of institutional and community resources" (Winston et al., 1984, p. 19).

Appreciative Advising. Rooted in appreciative inquiry, the appreciative advising framework consists of six phases: disarm, discover, dream, deliver, and don't settle (Bloom et al., 2008). The aim of using this framework is to help students uncover their strengths and interests and working with students to construct plans to reach their educational goals (Bloom et al., 2008).

Strengths-Based Advising. Rooted in the idea that capitalizing on one's greatest strengths leads to greater success, strengths-based advising can be used by academic advisors to assess students' talents to help them envision future academic and career related endeavors and to determine ways students can leverage their strengths to overcome challenges they may be facing in their academic career (Schreiner, 2013).

Proactive (Intrusive) Advising. Formerly known as intrusive advising, proactive advising can be described as an intervention strategy that enables a student's advisor to become an active participant in their student's life. Originally described as a designed student intervention at the first sign of academic distress or difficulty using prescriptive and development advising techniques, proactive advising has moved forward to encompass the development of personal relationships with students that foster motivation and responsibility for their own academic success (Cruise, 2002; Earl, 1988; Varney, 2013).

Advising as Teaching. Just like it's the teacher's central role to facilitate learning in the classroom; with advising as teaching, it's the advisor's central role to facilitate learning so that students have knowledge regarding academic and student support resources, are aware of cocurricular opportunities, and through communication the advisor as teacher

demonstrates a genuine concern for their student and encourages their self-actualization (Drake, 2013).

Baccalaureate Degree Plan (BDP). Baccalaureate Degree Plans or BDPs provide North Carolina community college Associate in Arts (A.A.) and Associate in Science (A.S.) graduates a pathway to being admitted into a major and earning a baccalaureate degree from a North Carolina public, four-year institution (The University of North Carolina System, n.db.).

Bilateral Agreements. A bilateral agreement is a formal, written agreement between a college or university and a North Carolina community college for students who have earned an Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S) degree the opportunity to transfer and earn a baccalaureate degree (The University of North Carolina System, n.da.).

Uniform Agreements. A uniform agreement facilitates the seamless transfer of credit for students who typically study specialized degrees at a North Carolina community college and want to pursue the same specialized baccalaureate degree at a UNC System institution. While these agreements do not guarantee students admission into these competitive programs, they help to remove issues of course duplication and decrease time to degree (The University of North Carolina System, 2015).

Institution-Driven System. States with articulation agreements or institutional transfer pathways that "specify the lower division courses students need to take to transfer from a community college into specific programs at a four-year institution ready to complete upper division courses" (Hodara et al., 2017, p.340).

Credit Mobility. The process of transferring credits from a community college to a receiving institution (Hodara et al., 2017).

Faculty Academic Advisor. Individuals whose 50% of their time is spent on teaching and/or research and only a portion of their time on the direct delivery of academic advising services (NACADA, n.d.).

Primary Academic Advisor. Individuals whose 50% of their time is spent on the direct delivery of academic advising services (NACADA, n.d.).

Conclusion

This chapter drew attention to the challenges community college advisors face, the state of transfer in North Carolina, and national trends in credit mobility. Furthermore, this chapter provided the statement of the problem and research purpose statement, research questions, assumptions and delimitations, review of key terms, and the significance of this study. Chapter two of this dissertation will provide an in-depth review of community college advising, transfer students and outcomes in North Carolina, policy frameworks, and credit efficiency. Chapter three will detail the methodology and qualitative research procedures that will be used to conduct this study. Chapter four will present the findings of the study that includes the themes related to the two research questions. Finally, chapter five will describe the study's findings in relation to the literature, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to the explore how community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven articulation system and to discover the needs community college academic advisors have as they support transfer students in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. Two research questions guided this study: (1) How do North Carolina community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven articulation system? and (2) What do community college academic advisors need to support transfer students in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree? While literature on transfer completion rates, credit mobility, and transfer pathways is prevalent; research on how community college academic advisors interact with statewide articulation policy on a routine basis is missing. The goal of this chapter is to ground the study in existing literature on advising at community colleges, transfer outcomes, transfer pathways, and credit mobility as well as provide context on how the findings for this study were interpreted.

More specifically, the chapter presents a review of literature related to the issues community college advisors face when advising students at two-year colleges as well as a brief history of transfer policy in North Carolina. This chapter also discusses issues related to credit mobility, loss of credit, graduating with excess credit, and the applicability of credit while also providing an overview of the challenges and positive contributions of the transfer pathway movement. The following table outlines how this literature will be presented:

Table 1

Understanding the Complexities of Advising Transfer Students in an Institution-Driven Articulation System

Category	Sources

Transfer Advising	The History of Transfer (Bragg, 2017; Cohen et al., 2014; College Board, 2012; Michaels, 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012)
	Complexities of Community College Advising (CCCSSTF, 2012; Hagedorn, 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Kirkner & Levinson, 2017; Wyner et al., 2016)
	Benefits of Community College Advising (Bahr, 2008; CCCSE, 2018; Dowd et al., 2013)
	Issues in Community College Advising (Karp & Stacey, 2013; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2010; Orozco et al., 2010; Packard & Jeffers, 2013; Schudde et al., 2018)
	Strategies for Community College Advising (Allen et al., 2013; Cueso, 2012; O'Banion, 2009; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2010; Van Der Karr, 2018)
Transfer Students in North Carolina	North Carolina Transfer Policy (Anderson, 2018; NCCC System, 2016, The University of North Carolina System, 2020)
	North Carolina Transfer Outcomes (Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina & The State Board of the North Carolina Community College System, 2018; D'Amico & Chapman, 2018a; D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b; D'Amico et al., 2020; Giani, 2019; Hodara et al., 2017; myFutureNC, 2018; myFutureNC, 2019; The State Board of Community Colleges & Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina, 2015; Tippett, 2019)
Credit Efficiency	New Categorization of Articulation System (Hodara et al., 2017; Jenkins & Fink, 2015)
	Loss of Credit (Doyle, 2006; Fink et al., 2018; Monaghan & Attewell, 2015; Simone, 2014; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017)
	Graduating with Excess Credit (Cullinane, 2014; Fink et al., 2018; Xu, Jaggars, & Fletcher, 2016)
	Applicability of Credit (Fink et al., 2018; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 200)

Transfer Pathways (Baker, 2016; Belfield et al., 2017; Fink & Jenkins, 2017; Jenkins & Fink, 2016; Millard, 2014; Roska & Keith, 2008)

Transfer Advising

The History of Transfer

Since the beginning of American higher education, students have transferred from one college or university to the next, often in the pursuit of a baccalaureate degree (Bragg, 2017). The transfer function began as the demand for access to higher education grew as secondary school enrollments grew in the early 1900s (Cohen et al., 2014). The percentage of high school graduates grew from 30% in 1924 to 75% in 1960 with 60% of high school graduates entering higher education in 1960 (Cohen et al., 2014). Furthermore, in 1910, 5% of eighteen-year-olds entered higher education and by 1960, 45% of eighteen-year-olds entered higher education (Cohen et al., 2014).

Students who attend community colleges, do so for a variety of reasons: transfer to a four-year institution, learn new skills to obtain a better job, and to learn for one's own benefit (Cohen et al., 2014). Additionally, students who attend community colleges may be less academically prepared than students who attend four-year colleges and universities (College Board, 2012). College Board (2012) found that for students with two-year degree aspirations, their combined SAT composite score was 1226 whereas for students with four-year degree aspirations, their combined SAT composite score was 1433. While this is striking, we also know that high SAT scores are correlated with family income and reflect their socioeconomic status of community college students (Cohen et al., 2014; Michaels, 2006). Furthermore, while students at four-year institutions most likely live on campus, are enrolled full-time, are members of student clubs and organizations; a significant portion of students at community colleges are enrolled part-time so

that they can work part- or even full-time jobs while also juggling family obligations (Cohen et al., 2014).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012) 25% of all community college students had one or more dependents and many of these students were single parents. Furthermore, for community college students categorized as dependents: 28% of students came from the lowest economic quartile and 21% of students had income at or below the poverty level. Additionally, when first enrolled, 45% of community college students were working part-time, 33% were working full-time, 12% spoke another language other than English, and 45% were first in their family to attend college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Minority students also account for 42% of all nationwide community college enrollments and reflect the regions and communities they serve much more than four-year colleges and universities (Cohen et al., 2014).

Another major reason for the development of community colleges and the transfer function dates to the desire for "universities to abandon their freshman and sophomore classes and regulate the function of teaching adolescents to a new set of institutions" called junior colleges (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 6). Higher education leaders of the late 19th and early 20th centuries argued that universities could not ascend to a true research and professional university until they detached the first- and second year of coursework from their curriculum. While this function never came to fruition, community colleges made it possible for four-year colleges and universities to maintain their selectivity allowing them to grant admission to the students they wanted. The college going rate experienced many ebbs and flows as it continued to grow by the 1970s, stabilized in the 1980s, and grew again in the 1990s. By 2014, approximately 70% of high

school graduates enrolled directly into higher education, with 40% enrolling at a community college (Cohen et al., 2014).

Other claims have been made that led to the rise of community colleges beyond increased demands for higher education; a steady pipeline of trained workers to meet increased demands of businesses, raise the profile of communities by having a college integrated within the community, and directing marginalized groups of people to enroll in less prestigious vocational training programs (Cohen et al., 2014). Cohen et al. (2014) argued that while there may not be one singular reason responsible for the growth of community colleges, one does stand out and that is the United States belief "that all individuals should have the opportunity to rise to their greatest potential" (p. 10). Increasingly, the transfer function is becoming more complex while at the same time increasing access to populations of students who have not historically participated in higher education (Bragg, 2017; Cohen et al., 2014).

Since the formation of community colleges, community college enrollment represents more of the total enrollment in American higher education and a significant portion of that enrollment growth is from minority students (Cohen et al., 2014). In 1997, 46% of the community college population identified as a minority student, up 20 percentage points from 1976 (Cohen et al., 2014). In 2010, 42% of the community college population was made up of minority students and in some states, minority students represented 60% or more of their community college population (Cohen et al., 2014). Because of their low cost of attendance and ease of access, community college enrollment will only continue to grow by all student populations. In the next decade, community colleges will make up over 40% of students in U.S. higher education (Cohen et al., 2014).

Complexities of Community College Advising

From the perspective of the community college, success can have several definitions. It can include completion of an associate degree, earning a certificate, completion of a course, or transferring to a four-year college or university (Hagedorn, 2010). Wyner et al. (2016) explain that the short-term goals of community college students could be gaining specific and targeted job skills or personal fulfillment while their long-term goals could be earning a certificate, an associate degree, or transferring to a four-year college or university. In comparison to students attending four-year colleges and universities, two-year college students have a wide range of short- and long-term educational goals that make it particularly difficult to design advising services (Kirkner & Levinson, 2017). While almost all community colleges provide types of vocational training or workforce development needs that lead to applied associate degrees and provide non-credit educational opportunities; most community colleges share the common goal of providing the first two years of college instruction so that students can apply to transfer to a four-year college or university (Hagedorn, 2010). Community college leaders balance these needs often with less than adequate resources. Delivering such intentional advising services is challenging when advisor to student ratios is reported as high as 1,600:1 (Karp & Stacey, 2013) and in California (the largest community college system in the country), ratios range from 800 to 1 to 1,800 to 1 (California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force [CCCSSTF], 2012).

Benefits of Community College Advising

The value of advising in community college is that it helps students to set goals based on transfer and/or the career and technical track, develops an academic plan to help students meet those stated goals, and it holds students accountable to staying on track until those goals are met (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2018). According to the CCCSE (2018), 78% of community college students reported meeting with an academic advisor. Of that

78%, 47% reported being very satisfied with their advising experience while 44% reported being somewhat satisfied and 7% reported that they were not satisfied with their advising experience. Furthermore, students who reported meeting with an advisor were more engaged across all measures of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) benchmarks than their peers who did not meet with an academic advisor (CCCSE, 2018). CCSSE data also suggested that requiring advising equals better student success outcomes (CCCSE, 2018). The CCCSE (2018) also found that the content of advising appointments mattered. Most students surveyed who met with an advisor got advice about course planning and registration. An even smaller number of students had conversations about career goals, creating academic plans, discussing employment opportunities and demands outside the classroom. However, for students who had these in-depth conversations with academic advisors, they were more engaged across all measures of the CCSSE (CCCSE, 2018).

Empirical research also demonstrates that advising has important benefits for community college students (Bahr, 2008; Dowd et al., 2013). Bahr (2008) found that "direct, active, counselor-driven cooling out is not occurring in community colleges" (p. 726). In fact, advising was found to actively benefit a students' degree attainment (Bahr, 2008). Dowd et al. (2013) found that institutional agents or academic advisors are instrumental in assisting students "to traverse the two very different worlds of the community college and the selective college or university" (p. 22). For many students, academic advisors are seen as vital institutional agents that can either aid or hinder their success. In their study, institutional agents gave students permission to take on the identity of a college student and validated their collegiate identity development (Dowd et al., 2013).

Issues in Community College Advising

Karp and Stacey (2013) defined good advising as a multiphase process that takes place over long periods of time. Furthermore, Karp and Stacey (2013) believe that good advising takes place when community college advisors "integrate academic and career counseling by guiding students through an exploration of their strengths, skills, and interests, followed by a structured investigation into various occupations and careers that match these strengths, skills, and interests" (p. 1). Once this process is complete, advisors should develop an academic plan to help students stay on track to meeting their academic and professional goals (Karp & Stacey, 2013).

Due to financial restraints, many community colleges cannot afford to staff the number of advisors needed to provide this type of intentional and individual support for students. As a result, interactions between advisors and students can feel rushed and are infrequent (Karp & Stacey, 2013). Karp and Stacey (2013) explain that community college advising differs from the ideal in four ways: academic and career advising is often located separately and work towards different student outcomes; students are not assigned a single advisor and may be advised by different advisors that offer conflicting advice; advising sessions at community colleges tend to be infrequent, short, and advisors lack time to properly advise students; and the emphasis is on serving incoming students instead of integrating advising throughout the entirety of a student's college career (Karp & Stacey, 2013).

For many students, academic advisors represent their primary source for academic information (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2010). Packard and Jeffers (2013) found when students described negative advising experiences, they often described an advisor's lack of knowledge as an impediment to their success. Students described feeling frustrated when realizing advisors provided them with incorrect information and/or omitted critical information (Packard & Jeffers, 2013). Depending on the information and mistakes, this can severely impact a community

college students' path to transferring and earning a baccalaureate degree. Students also described some advisors as having a lack of resourcefulness which led some students to advise themselves or rely on other sources of information, such as their peers or websites that are not routinely updated (Packard & Jeffers, 2013).

However, the ease of access and usefulness of transfer information can be a complicated issue, as illustrated by Schudde et al.'s (2018) study of community college websites in Texas. Schudde et al. (2018) found that most community college advisors in Texas prefer face-to-face advising and therefore may invest less time and resources in developing a strong online presence. Additionally, due to the Texas articulation system, most community college advisors and students depend on online resources from universities to help themselves and students navigate transfer requirements and develop course plans (Schudde et al., 2018). For institution-driven articulation states like Texas and North Carolina, students cannot assume that their transfer credit will apply in the same way to degrees at different institutions (Schudde et al., 2018). Schudde et al. (2018) advocated for well designed, organized, and centralized websites to house transfer information. Schudde et al. (2018) argued for when colleges place "information online in an intuitive location, with adequate detail, colleges offer students the opportunity to understand transfer requirements" and a lack of attention to disseminating transfer information to all students may "exacerbate inequality" (p. 27).

Orozco et al. (2010) explain that barriers to advising also exist for minority students and first-generation college students who are unfamiliar with advising services. They also exist for non-traditional students who are balancing family, work, and school responsibilities. Orozco et al. (2010) found that White and Asian students are more likely to see an advisor than other minority student groups (i.e., Native American, Latino, and Black students). Beyond basic

educational planning and providing support beyond academics, minority students (in particular, Latino and Black students) described supportive advisors as advisors who accept their cultural background and who can relate to similar lived life experiences of their advisees (Orozco et al., 2010). However, only 15% of students interviewed reported having supportive advisors to go to; because of this, the hiring of diverse advisors who are "knowledgeable and skilled in understanding students from all backgrounds" is extremely important (Orozco et al., 2010, p. 729).

Strategies for Community College Advising

The evolution of academic advising has grown from when O'Banion (2009) originally suggested that the process of advising should include the "exploration of life goals, exploration of vocational goals, program choice, course choice, and scheduling courses" (p. 83). Now, academic advisors can use advising theories such as Developmental Advising, Proactive Advising, Strengths-Based Advising, Appreciative Advising, and Advising as Teaching as guides for their advising practice. However, when advising community college students, Proactive or Intrusive Advising has become a popular advisor technique (Cueso, 2012; Van Der Karr, 2018). Community college students consider academic advising more important than any other student support service and taking a non-intrusive approach to advising is dangerous to the success of community college students (Cueso, 2012).

Advisors help community college students navigate complex curriculums that lead to certificates, associate degree, or transferring to a four-year college or university. Furthermore, the open admission policy of most community colleges encourages the enrollment of students with various educational goals, different levels of academic preparedness, and admission of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Cueso, 2012). Thus, non-intrusive advising can leave

community college students on their own to navigate these complex systems and select courses for their educational plans. Cueso (2012) writes that "while consistent with the historic goal of promoting convenient college access (matriculation), the practice of registration without advising may confound the more important goal of promoting college success (completion and transfer)" (p. 137).

By adopting intrusive advising practices, community colleges are providing the type of institution-initiated support that community college students need to meet their academic and career goals (Cueso, 2012). More specifically, Cueso (2012) called for advising practices that require students to engage in thorough educational planning that helps them to clarify their goals and provides them a clear roadmap for transfer. In particular, Cueso (2012) calls for the following: user friendly checklists or worksheets that provide students course by course equivalency from two-year to four-year institutions; creation of websites for students interested in transfer that list general education and discipline specific course requirements in a clear and digestible way that students understand; and comprehensive educational plan that addresses experiential education opportunities, identify any personal challenges that the students in transition may encounter, and provide available campus resources that help transfer students overcome obstacles from the transition.

The most relevant challenges to advising transfer students are curriculum, credits, and planning; academic preparedness and transfer shock; and navigating a new campus culture (Van Der Karr, 2018). To transfer successfully, "transfer students must know the requirements of their first academic program, those of the transfer institution, and ways those curricular converge and diverge" (Van Der Karr, 2018, p. 86). To successfully review transfer equivalencies for advisement, Van Der Karr (2018) suggests that advisors first identify the course equivalencies

and second, determine how these credits transfer to their student's receiving institution. While the presence of direct equivalent courses is a good thing and something two-year and four-year institutions should strive for, there is no guarantee that courses will meet degree requirements. Van Der Karr (2018) explains that "the degree audit may reveal that of the 60 hours accepted for transfer, only 45 can be applied to the degree sought" (p. 87). Because of this, advisors need to guide students in understanding the difference between courses having a direct equivalency and courses applying to their degree (Van Der Karr, 2018).

Due to these complexities, community college advisors should help transfer students identify this information, assist with understanding the credit evaluation process, teach students advocacy skills, and how best to use resources at their receiving institution (Van Der Karr, 2018). Additionally, the earlier students can identify their career interests, assess their abilities, and connect them to career goals, the more effectively a community college advisor can advise a transfer student toward degrees that will transfer seamlessly. Early advising initiatives that focus on career development and exploration may enable advisors to lead academic planning conversations more effectively across institutions (Van Der Karr, 2018). While this is ideal, the challenge for advisors is to allow and "encourage students to work toward clarity on career goals while allowing them the time to make well-informed decisions and explore coursework that helps clarify goals" (Van Der Karr, 2018, p. 87).

Allen et al. (2013) found that advisors "must give all students accurate information about degree requirements and help them understand how things work at their institution with regard to timelines, policies, and procedures to successful navigate the educational landscape" (p. 340). Furthermore, transfer students desire that their academic advisors explain the intersection of their proposed plan of study with their goals in many realms, including academics, career, and life

beyond higher education (Allen et al., 2013). Pretransfer students rated two advising functions significantly higher than post transfer students, “advising that assists students in choosing among the various general education options” and “advising that assists students with deciding what kind to pursue” (Allen et al., 2013, p. 340). Allen et al. (2013) argues that the exploration of pretransfer degree options should run parallel to the exploration of baccalaureate degree options. Ornelas and Solorzano (2010) have the following six recommendations for academic advisors: academic advisors should provide students will all of the necessary information to make a seamless transfer; require mandatory advising so that students can develop an educational plan; establish transfer success courses that provides students with information and requirements needed to transfer to a four-year college or university, and information on financial aid, study skills, and time management; develop creative strategies to disseminate transfer information to prospective students; make visits to local high schools to educate high school students on college admission requirements and encourage students to take transferable community college course work while in high school; and perform outreach to students and their parents in communities to educate them on the transfer process.

Transfer Students in North Carolina

North Carolina Transfer Policy

North Carolina instituted a CAA in 1997. The CAA originally intended to expand access to traditional and non-traditional North Carolina students by creating a set of uniform policies that encouraged the transfer of community college credit to four-year institutions (The University of North Carolina System, 2020). Representatives from the UNC System and the NCCC System approved a plan to simplify the process of transferring community college credits between two-year and four-year intuitions in February of 1996 (The University of North Carolina System,

2020). In April 1996, representatives from the UNC System and the NCCC System created and approved the Transfer Advisory Committee (TAC) to "direct, coordinate, and monitor the implementation of the proposed transfer plan" (The University of North Carolina System, 2020, p. 14). The TAC worked with faculty from NCCC System and UNC System institutions to establish which community college courses in each discipline were acceptable for transfer at UNC System institutions and applicable to their general education. Additionally, the TAC also established pre-majors for academic disciplines that have significant numbers of transfer students. Left out of the CAA was the Associate of Applied Science degree that was deemed "not designed for transfer" and did not require statewide articulation (The University of North Carolina System, 2020, p. 15).

Due to changes in curriculum at UNC System and NCCC System institutions, the CAA underwent revisions and updates in 2014 (The University of North Carolina System, 2020). The 2014 revision of the 1997 CAA aimed to achieve the following: support general education requirements at UNC System institutions, establish a systematic process of maintaining accuracy of course equivalencies, and ensure that current information on articulation policy and agreements is universally accessible for students and advisors at UNC System and NCCC System institutions (The University of North Carolina System, 2020). Furthermore, the updated CAA states that students who earn an Associate of Arts (A.A.) or an Associate of Science (A.S.) at a North Carolina Community College (NCCC) prior to transferring to a UNC System institution will meet the institution's lower-level general education requirements (The University of North Carolina System, 2020). The CAA also states that additional course work may be needed at UNC System institutions beyond general education requirements to meet program and degree requirements for competitive majors. Additionally, students entering these programs may

need more than two academic years to complete their baccalaureate degree due to the required additional coursework beyond the pre-major coursework taken at the community college (The University of North Carolina System, 2020)

The CAA also definitively states that each UNC System institution will "develop, publish, and maintain Baccalaureate Degree Plans (BDPs) identifying community college courses that provide pathways leading to associate degree completion, admission into the major, and baccalaureate completion." (The University of North Carolina System, 2020, p. 9). Regarding the Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) and now the Associate in Fine Arts (A.A.F.) degree programs, the CAA states that A.A.S. and A.A.F. courses designated as a University General Education Transfer Component or UGETC will receive equivalent credit for general education courses at their receiving institution (The University of North Carolina System, 2020). For a course without this designation, the receiving institution will determine the equivalency of that credit and whether or not it counts towards general education, pre-major, or elective credit.

The updated CAA reinforces previous versions of the articulation agreement by encouraging the development of bilateral articulation agreements with these degree programs at the local level instead of at the statewide level (The University of North Carolina System, 2020). A bilateral agreement is a written agreement between a single UNC System and NCCC System institutions that work together to help students who have earned a terminal associate degree (i.e., A.A.S or A.A.F) earn a baccalaureate degree. These bilateral agreements exist outside of the CAA (The University of North Carolina System, n.da.). Since these bilateral agreements are outside of the CAA and are specific to individual NCCC and UNC System institutions, North Carolina fits the definition of an institution-driven system (Hordara et al., 2017). Beyond

bilateral agreements, there are uniform agreements. Uniform agreements were approved by the boards of the NCCC System and the UNC System and are intended to simplify the transfer process for students who study the specialized degrees at North Carolina community colleges and want to pursue that same degree at a UNC System institution (The University of North Carolina System, 2015).

In 2016, the NCCC System conducted a review of the 2014 CAA and provided key updates on statewide initiatives related to the CAA. The review found that while the CAA encourages transfer students to complete an A.A. or an A.S. degree, many transfer without one (The North Carolina Community College System [NCCC System], 2016). Since the development of ACA 122 – College Transfer Success course at NCCC System institutions, significant enrollment growth has been observed in that course (NCCC System, 2016). ACC 122 aids students in the development of their academic and career goals beyond the community college experience. In April 2015, North Carolina launched the UNC Transfer Student Success website to provide students and other stakeholders information on admission requirements, programs, degrees, course equivalencies, financial aid and scholarships, and general campus contacts and resources (NCCC System, 2016). Additionally, North Carolina developed and implemented a UNC Data Dashboard designed to present students, campus and state policy leaders, and the public access to UNC System data on key performance indicators.

By December 2015, all UNC System Baccalaureate Degree Plans (BDPs) were completed and published (NCCC System, 2016). The aim of BDPs is to create a clear transfer pathway by outlining courses students need to take at a NCCC to facilitate timely degree completion (NCCC System, 2016). Ideally, by the time a student completes their associate degree, students' will fulfill all general education and program requirements of their receiving

institution. While North Carolina made headway in addressing challenges faced by NCCC System and UNC System institutions, there are still some existing challenges in the transfer process (NCCC System, 2016). The report states the following challenges: encouraging students to complete an associate degree prior to transfer, creating a process for communicating changes in BDPs to UNC System institutions, and using new and existing technology to help students with credit articulation and degree completion.

As of 2018, North Carolina still has in place a statewide articulation agreement that consists of a transferrable core of all lower-division courses and the statewide guarantee of accepting a transferrable associate degree from an NCCC System institution (Anderson, 2018). However, unlike some states, North Carolina's CAA does not consist of a statewide reverse transfer policy and a statewide course numbering system. Nationally, states are focusing energy and resources on improving transfer policies to increase student completion rates in a number of ways. This is evident by the research completed by Anderson (2018) that found at least 30 states now guarantee the statewide transfer of an associate degree and requires a transferable core of lower-level courses. Furthermore, 17 states implemented reverse transfer credit policies and 22 states allow reverse transfer credit through programs outside of state policy while continuing to examine ways to ease the transfer process to increase baccalaureate attainment levels (Anderson, 2018).

North Carolina Transfer Outcomes

North Carolina and its institutions have a long and growing history with transfer students and the transfer process (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b). In fall 1986, 2,339 students transferred to a four-year university compared with 10,264 in fall 2016 (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b). Furthermore, 56,000 students, or 31% of all students, in the UNC System in 2016 were transfer

students upon entry, and most of them transferred from the NCCC System. Additionally, 84% of all NCCC transfer students transfer vertically—two- to four-year institutions—while 16% of community college transfer students transfer laterally—two- to two-year institutions (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b).

In 2016, 38% of transfer students who enrolled at UNC System institutions earned 30 + credit hours but did not earn a degree, and students who enrolled with a transferrable associate degree represented 31% of transfer students (D'Amico, & Chapman, 2018b). Between 2007 and 2016, students who transferred with a transferrable associate degree increased 118% and students who transferred with the non-transferrable or the terminal associate degree (A.A.S. and A.A.F) increased 134%. While students transferring with an A.A.S. or A.A.F. saw the greatest percent gains between 2007 and 2016, this subpopulation represents 18% of all two- to four-year transfers (D'Amico, & Chapman, 2018b).

While North Carolina can be considered a transfer friendly state in regard to the sheer numbers of transfer students its institutions of higher education support, the state lags in two key community college performance indicators (D'Amico, & Chapman, 2018b). First, North Carolina's transfer-out-rate, which measures the "percent of community college students who successfully transfer within a six-year period" (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b, p. 2) is at 24% compared with 33% nationally (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b; Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Second, North Carolina's transfer-out-bachelor's completion, which measures the "percent of students who transferred successfully and earned a bachelor's degree within six years of starting at the community college" (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b, p. 2), is at 40% compared to 42% nationally (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b; Jenkins & Fink, 2016). These figures are important and should be worrisome to higher education leaders in the state. While the percent North Carolinians with a

baccalaureate degree or higher is close to the national average of 30%, North Carolina still falls short of its workforce development needs (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b; United States Census Bureau, 2016).

While the overall attainment level in North Carolina is near or at national levels, disparities still exist in the state (myFutureNC, 2019). In 2016, North Carolina had for the first time more adults with an associate degree or higher (42%) than adults with a high school diploma or less (myFutureNC, 2019). While this statistic is praiseworthy, much of this attainment level is driven by in-migration—people from other states moving to North Carolina (Tippett, 2019). Between 1990 and 2017 in-migration fueled much of North Carolina's growth, which also fueled increases in the number of North Carolinian adults with a postsecondary degree (Tippett, 2019). Seventy percent (974,600) of the 1.4 million new residents that moved to North Carolina between 1990 and 2017 with a postsecondary degree were born outside of the state (Tippett, 2019). To improve the baccalaureate attainment levels of North Carolina transfer students transferring from a NCCC to a UNC System institution, the state must address issues that exist in its transfer pathways. Furthermore, the four-year attainment discrepancies between certain student subgroups should be of concern for state higher education leaders. While the 31.5% of the white subpopulation in North Carolina holds a baccalaureate degree or higher, only 19.4% of the Black subgroup and 13.5% of the Hispanic/Latinx subgroup reaches that level (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b).

Also troubling is that community college transfer students who graduate with a baccalaureate degree from a UNC System institution do so with excess credit, and when compared to non-transfer students at UNC System institutions, NCCC students have lower graduation rates (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b). Giani (2019) found that students in North

Carolina lost on average 4.9 credits or 7.2% of their credits. Some students experienced extreme credit loss by losing all their credits at the point of transfer, while one student lost 158 credits, the highest in the state (Giani, 2019). While some students experience varying degrees of credit loss, most students (72.6%) did not lose any credit in the transfer process (Giani, 2019). With that said, a small percentage of students lost at least 28 credits or 39.7% of their credits (Giani, 2019). The rate of credit loss also varied across racial and ethnic groups. The rate of credit loss was the lowest for American Indian students at 0.7% and for White students at 6.1%. The rate of credit loss for Black and Asian students was 10% and for Non-resident alien students was 12% (Giani, 2019). Giani (2019) also found that the rate of credit loss was higher for older students at 8.2% compared to younger students at 6.7%. Additionally, Black students lost 33.1% (the highest among all subgroups) of their credits compared to 24.3% for White students (Giani, 2019).

Interestingly, Giani (2019) found that students without any post-secondary credentials only lost 6.1% of their credits compared to transfer students with an A.A. or A.S. who lost 7.4% credits or 6.9% of their credits at the point of transfer. In regard to the type of credential, the students with the highest percentage of credit loss were those who transferred with certificates (12.4%) and those who transferred with an A.A.S. (14%) (Giani, 2019). Additionally, D'Amico and Chapman (2018b) also found that the earlier a student transfers, even without a transferable associate degree, a transfer student will graduate with less excess credit. The findings from Giani's (2019) study and the work of D'Amico and Chapman (2018b) suggest that in North Carolina, the earlier a student transfers, the more efficient path they have to earning a baccalaureate degree.

While the CAA provides A.A. and A.S. degree earners the opportunity to transfer to a North Carolina community college with junior standing with completion of general education requirements, the CAA does not provide any guidance for A.A.S. degree earners. Therefore, students pursuing a A.A.S. degree from a North Carolina community college have to rely on bi-lateral agreements created by partnerships between an individual UNC System institution and a North Carolina community college (Osborne, 2020). Bi-lateral agreements are written together, with a NC Community College and a UNC System institution that help students who have earned a technical A.A.S. degree transfer seamlessly to earn a baccalaureate degree (The University of North Carolina System, 2020). Since bi-lateral agreements are primarily institution-driven, students at those institutions can transfer seamlessly (D'Amico et al., 2020). However, for students not at those institutions, transferring can be complicated and cumbersome (D'Amico et al., 2020). As of 2015, there exists 107 bilateral agreements in North Carolina, but with A.A.S. degree earners on the rise in North Carolina and no clear and consistent transfer policy across both state systems and public institutions, these degree earners can fall victim to transfer inefficiency (D'Amico et al., 2020; The State Board of Community Colleges & Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina, 2015). Giani (2019) found that A.A.S. degree earners lost on average 13 credit hours when transferring and D'Amico and Chapman (2018b) found A.A.S. degree earners completed 142 credit hours toward a baccalaureate degree whereas A.A. and A.S. degree earner completed 137 hours toward a baccalaureate degree.

In 2018, in collaboration with Gallop Poll, myFutureNC conducted a survey of North Carolina residents to assess the public perceptions of education in the state (myFutureNC, 2018). When considering why students may not finish community college, 38% of respondents cite the transferability of credit (myFutureNC, 2018). Additionally, 86% of North Carolina residents say

that the ability to transfer credits from a community college to other colleges and universities as well as the percentage of graduates who are employed after graduation are important or very important in rating the overall quality of a community college (myFutreNC, 2018). While North Carolina residents remain optimistic about their public universities and community college system, they have concerns related to issues of credit mobility between schools and the applicability of community college credits toward a four-year degree (myFutureNC, 2018). Thirty-one percent of North Carolina residents believe that students who choose not to finish a four-year degree do so because of issues related to credit mobility, and 60% of North Carolina residents rate the ability to transfer credits earned elsewhere to a four-year college or university as very important when rating the overall quality of a four-year college or university (myFutureNC, 2018).

In their evaluation of higher education in North Carolina, respondents to the Gallop Survey make clear that credit mobility is an important issue to them and to the success of higher education in North Carolina. Addressing the gaps in the transfer process is important since there are 16 four-year institutions in the UNC System and approximately 80 programs at each institution (Hodara et al., 2017). In an institution-driven system like North Carolina, some community college advisors have to have a working knowledge of approximately "1,280 articulation agreements" (Hodara et al., 2017, p. 341).

Credit Efficiency

New Categorization of State Articulation Systems

North Carolina is not alone in experiencing issues with credit efficiency regarding transfer pathways and state articulation agreements. While 80% of community college students indicate their desire to transfer to a four-year university and earn a baccalaureate degree, only

25% transfer and only 17% earn a baccalaureate degree within six years (Jenkins & Fink, 2015). A new category of state articulation systems highlights the inefficiencies in some state systems and draws attention to how they impact the practitioners who work with students on a routine basis. Hodara et al. (2017) developed a new categorization of state articulation systems utilizing a variety of methods: studying policy documents and legislative statues, conducting phone interviews with higher education system offices and college staff across 10 different states, and making site visits to two-year and four-year campuses in Tennessee, Texas, and Washington to collect data.

Hodara et al. (2017) grouped state articulation systems into 2+2 systems, credit equivalency systems, and institution-driven systems. Systems categorized as 2+2 systems "specify all lower division courses for nearly all majors so that course credits are applied to programs of study consistently across the system" (Hodara et al., 2017, p. 338-339). In 2+2 system states, these pathways allow transfer students with an associate degree to meet all lower-level general education requirements and all pre-major requirements before transferring (Hodara et al., 2017). Examples of states with 2+2 systems are Florida, Tennessee, Georgia (University System of Georgia), New York (SUNY – State University of New York), and California (CSU – California State University system). In using the Tennessee Transfer Pathway program, participants said that it was a seamless process to transfer because the program provides students with a clear idea about program and degree requirements at four-year institutions (Hodara et al., 2017).

Credit equivalency systems "contain policies for ensuring that lower division general education and *some* pre-major courses transfer and are uniformly applied to program requirements at all campuses across the system" (p. 340). In credit equivalency systems, four-

year institutions have some leeway in "specifying lower division major course requirements for all or some majors; students transferring with an associate degree may not always enter major-ready for upper division coursework" (Hodara et al., 2017, p. 340). Examples of states with credit equivalency systems are Ohio, California (UC-University of California system), Washington, and New York (CUNY – City University of New York) (Hodara et al., 2017). In Ohio, the state system specifies some pre-major courses for all majors, and in the New York (CUNY system), they specify for some majors. In California (UC system) and in Washington, pre-major courses are specified for a subset of certain majors (Hodara et al., 2017).

The third category are institution-driven systems, and they are articulation agreements or institutional transfer pathways that "specify the lower division courses students need to take to transfer from a community college into specific programs at a four-year institution ready to complete upper division courses" (Hodara et al., 2017, p.340). Examples of states with institution-driven systems are Texas, North Carolina, and Kentucky (Hodara et al., 2017). Like discussed earlier, in North Carolina the CAA includes junior status for any student who transfers with an associate degree from an NCCC while also meeting the 30-credit common core at UNC System institutions. However, individual UNC System institutions "determine any major-specific coursework" (Hodara et al., 2017, p.341). One community college advisor in Hodara et al.'s (2017) study said that to advise students for transfer correctly, they had to keep track of approximately 1,280 articulation agreements.

Hodara et al. (2017) found that the potential for credit loss persists across all state systems due to student uncertainty. In their research, they found that students were uncertain about their intended major and destination institution (Hodara et al., 2017). Additionally, across all states and articulation systems, students delay choosing a major and transfer destination early

in their community college career or they change their mind (Hodara et al., 2017). Furthermore, students may accumulate credits that do not apply their degree program at their destination university if they delay or change their major selection, are unsure of where they want to transfer to, or decide to pursue a liberal arts degree (Hodara et al., 2017).

Another theme Hodara et al. (2017) found is concerned with advisor capacity. Due to the complexities of transfer advising and juggling multiple articulation agreements in some states, advisors may inadvertently make mistakes about which courses to take for transfer. In many state systems (especially institution-driven systems), community college advisors struggle to find information pertaining to university degree program requirements and, if found, the information may be out-of-date (Hodara et al., 2017). Hodara's et al. (2017) policy framework and definition of an institution-driven articulation system will guide the researcher in the selection of participants and in the interpretation of the experiences of community college academic advisors advising in this type of system.

Loss of Credit

One form of credit efficiency is the loss of credit. Loss of credit can be defined as the number of credits that are not accepted at another college or university (Fink et al., 2018). The three following studies draw attention to this by using data from the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Beginning Post-secondary Students (BPS) longitudinal survey. Simone (2014) found that only 32.4% who transfer or who are co-enrolled in another institution were able to transfer all of their credits. However, 39.4% of students lost all their credits through the transfer process while 28.2% lost some of their credits (Simone, 2014). The U.S. Government Accountability Office (2017) found that credit loss varied by transfer direction. Students who transferred vertically, two- to four-year institutions, lost an estimated average of

26% of their credits (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017). Students who transferred laterally, two- to two-year institutions, lost an estimated average of 74% of their credits (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017).

There also exists a wide range of credit loss across institutional type, direction of transfer, or transfer path (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017). The most common transfer path are students transferring from a two-year public to a four-year public school, and they lost an estimated 22% of their college credits (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017). Another common path is for transfer students to transfer between two-year public institutions, and they lost an estimated 69% of their college credits (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017).

Students who transferred by means of nontraditional paths lost the most credits through the transfer process. Students who transferred from a two-year private for-profit institution to a two-year public institution lost an estimated average of 97% of their college credits and in the reverse, students who transferred from a two-year public to a two-year private for-profit institution lost an estimated 95% of their college credits (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017). One result of credit loss is students taking additional coursework at their destination institution that can limit a students' financial aid eligibility and result in additional costs to the federal government (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017).

Using the same BPS longitudinal data, Monaghan and Attewell (2015) estimated that approximately 14% of transfer students in their study enrolled at their institution as a brand-new student because their destination institution accepted less than 10% of their community college credits. With that said, 58% of community college students in Monaghan and Attewell's (2015) study brought over 90% or more of their college credits to their destination institution and the remaining 28% of transfer students lost anywhere between 10% and 89% of their college credits.

Furthermore, Monaghan and Attewell (2015) found that students who lost credits during the transfer process were less likely to graduate. Students who have all or almost all of their credits accepted have graduation odds more than 2.5 times greater than students with less than half of their credits accepted. Students who have between half and 89% of their credits accepted by their destination institution have 74% higher odds of graduation (Monaghan & Attewell, 2015). Doyle (2006) found that of students who had all their credits accepted at their four-year institution, 82% earned a baccalaureate degree within six years. For those who only had some of their college credits accepted, 42% earned a baccalaureate degree within six years, while 36% were still enrolled and another 19% left higher education all together (Doyle, 2006).

Graduating with Excess Credit

Graduating with excess credit can be "calculated as the total number of credits earned or attempted by graduates beyond those required for a particular degree" (Fink et al., 2018, p. 3). Fink et al. (2018) found that graduating with excess credit is associated with the following factors: taking smaller proportions of 300-level courses and larger proportions of 100- and 200-level courses; taking 100-level courses in any subject immediately after transferring to a four-year institution; and, in one state, a significant association was discovered between being Black, male, and placed in developmental education with attempting more excess credits. Additionally, many students were not able to complete 100- and 200-level courses to move on to 300- and 400-level courses by the time they earned 60 credit hours. These 300- and 400-level courses were often their major courses (Fink et al., 2018). Fink et al. (2018) argue that this can be mitigated by advising that encourages students to decide on a major early and by encouraging students to explore their fields of interest. In conjunction with this type of advising, students would be taking 100- and 200-level courses that are required for their intended major so that

immediately after transferring and earning 60 credits, they are able to take their major specific coursework.

In using data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Cullinane (2014) finds that excess credit accumulation extends time to degree by one term. By the time community college transfer students graduate from a four-year institution, they attempt seven extra credits compared to native students (Cullinane, 2014). One explanation, Cullinane (2014) argues, is that institutions require students to retake coursework because courses are not accepted by the student's receiving institution. Cullinane (2014) also found the fewer courses a student takes, the more likely they are going to finish on time. The average number of credits at the time of graduation for native students is 142 credits and the average number of credits at time of graduation for transfer students is 150 credits (Cullinane, 2014). Xu et al. (2016) found that vertical transfers earned 10 more credits than native four-year students and 16 more credits than necessary to complete a traditional four-year degree. In comparing baccalaureate attainment and labor market outcomes of transfer students and native four-year college students in the state of Virginia, Xu et al. (2016) found that vertical transfers took longer to graduate.

Applicability of Credit

While related to the phenomena of credit loss and graduating with excess credit, the applicability of credit is often ignored or not adequately studied (Fink et al., 2018). The applicability of credit refers to how a receiving institution accepts transfer credit and either applies that credit toward general or elective credit or the students' major (Fink et al., 2018). While the applicability of transfer credit is the most accurate measure of credit transfer efficiency, researchers rarely use this as a measure to study transfer outcomes due to the difficulty in mapping out student transcripts to program requirements (Fink et al., 2018).

However, in June 2001, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board released their Transfer Issues Advisory Committee Report. The report found that on average, transfer students from a two-year college transferred in 51 semester credit hours (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2001). Of the 51 semester credit hours, 42 (83%) were accepted and 36 (70%) were applied to the students' degree (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2001). At the time of this report, Texas considered vocationally, or occupationally related courses taught by two-year colleges to be technical, and all courses taught by four-year universities to be academic. In Texas, some universities accepted and applied these technical courses to degrees while other universities did not. Additionally, universities across Texas classified these technical courses as lower-level or upper-level differently across the state (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2001).

Transfer Pathways

To mitigate the issues with credit efficiency and create a more seamless process for transfer students, many states and universities have developed partnerships between two-year and four-year universities. These pathway agreements aim to provide guidance to students and community members on the best routes to obtain a baccalaureate degree. In a review of state legislation regarding transfer articulation, Roska and Keith (2008) found that the primary concern is the preservation of credits by state articulation policies. The preservation of credits prevents duplication of credit, repetition of courses, and saves state dollars. Roska and Keith (2008) argue that the goal of states is a modest goal— "to preserve credits earned at any public institution" in their state and not necessarily address the systemic issues affecting transfer (p. 243). Furthermore, in their review of state legislation, they found the focus of these articulation policies to be centered on helping students transfer from two- to four-year institutions (Roska &

Keith, 2008). Roska and Keith (2008) found that statewide articulation policies "appear to standardize the transfer process, but at the same time they reduce flexibility, which may be particularly crucial for students who earn a large number of credits in community colleges" (p.246). Roska and Keith (2008) conclude that ultimately, even the best state articulation systems encounter challenges: "…students may take some courses that do not transfer. And students may take a long time to complete a bachelor's degree, or not complete it at all, for many reasons other than the loss of course credit" (p. 246).

Writing for the Education Commission of the States (ECS), Millard (2014) found great variation in state transfer and articulation policies. Millard (2014) found that 15 states have a statewide common course-numbering system that ensures a uniform system for numbering courses is used across all public higher education institutions in the state; 16 states have adopted statewide credit by assessment, which allows institutions to reward credit through tests or other types of academic evidence; 36 states have statewide guaranteed transfer of associate degree; and 35 states have implemented a statewide transferable lower-division core of courses that meets public institution's lower division general education requirements.

While more and more states are implementing transfer pathways, there is emerging research that these pathways are not entirely successful in producing more college graduates. In their study, Jenkins and Fink (2016) found that only 14% of students who begin their career at a community college transfer to a four-year institution and earn a bachelor's degree within six years of entry. In states with robust transfer pathways and strong articulation agreements, only one in five community college students transfer and graduate within six years of entry (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Other key findings include that in most states students who come from a low socio-economic status (SES) perform worse on almost all transfer outcomes than students who

come from a high SES. Furthermore, institutional type, size, location, and mission of the community college were not factors that contributed to differences in transfer outcomes (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Jenkins and Fink (2016) conclude that institutional practices matter more in impacting the success of transfer students than the actual characteristics of an institution.

In Baker's (2016) analysis of California's 2010 Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act that established the Associate Degrees for Transfer (ADTs), similar results were revealed. ADTs are composed of a set of coursework consistent across all California Community Colleges and accepted by all California State Universities. Students who earned an ADT are guaranteed admission at junior standing and are given priority consideration when applying for high demand programs (Baker, 2016). Since its implementation, Baker (2016) found that the introduction of ADTs led to a significant increase in the number of associate degrees conferred in the departments that offered ADT degrees. However, the introduction of ADTs has not led to a significant increase in the number of students who transfer from a California Community College to a California State University.

There is also research that suggests that beginning your path to a baccalaureate degree at a community college may not be the most cost effective. Belfield et al. (2017) found that students are not taking the most efficient path to earning a bachelor's degree. Due to the high number of non-transferable credits that transfer students accumulate, in two states, "this inefficiency added between 15-30% to the number of credits attempted per bachelor's degree" (p. 19). Belfield et al. (2017) write that "excess credits are caused either by students' misunderstanding the requirements for their program or by colleges' inadequate advising and enrollment management systems" (p. 20). They also argue that non-transfer credits "are more likely to be caused by misalignment between community colleges and the four-year system" (p.

20). While the research has established that reform is needed to improve transfer pathways, Fink and Jenkins (2017) studied successful two-year and four-year partnerships and identified three common practices that contribute to successful transfer pathways: provide intentional and intrusive transfer advising, prioritize transfer policy, and ensure that program pathways are clear and consistent and aligned with high-quality instruction practices.

At institutions that make transfer policy a priority, Fink and Jenkins (2017) found that leaders at high-performing partnerships communicated how transfer is a vital component of their institutional mission, collected and analyzed data to make informed decisions and to build awareness on the transfer student experience, and invested resources to ensure transfer students are successful. These institutions also created clear programmatic pathways that were aligned with high-quality instruction (Fink & Jenkins, 2017). These successful partnerships also established major-specific pathways that clarified course sequencing, major and course prerequisites, and connected students to extracurricular activities so that transfer students could seamlessly transfer to the four-year institution with junior standing and in their desired major (Fink & Jenkins, 2017). Additionally, faculty at these two-year colleges focused their teaching pedagogy on how best to prepare students for the academic rigor at four-year institutions while also regularly improving program maps with formal channels of communication to share changes (Fink & Jenkins, 2017).

Lastly, Fink and Jenkins, (2017) found that these partnerships provided tailored transfer advising. Tailored transfer advising is important on two fronts—community colleges and four-year colleges and universities. Community colleges in these high-performing partnerships prioritize helping students with not only navigating the transfer process, but also with helping students explore majors and transfer destinations early and often. This helps to ensure that the

courses taken at the community college will be applicable to the degree pursued at the four-year institution (Jenkins & Fink, 2017). On four-year campuses, advisors and support staff provided their community college counterparts and prospective transfer students with detailed information about the admission process, financial aid and cost of attendance, and course requirements. Also, these four-year universities also provide a robust on-boarding process for new transfer students that includes regular meetings with advisors (Fink & Jenkins, 2017).

Conclusion

The history of the transfer function in North Carolina, a discussion of credit efficiency, and a review of community college advising is presented in this chapter. While the literature presents a thorough review of issues related to credit efficiency and student expectations of advising, there exists minimal literature related to the experiences of community college advisors advising state articulation systems. Little research is available regarding the roles and perceptions of community college advisors and how they perceive the state articulation system they advise within. Further research is needed to look at the issues faced by community college advisors; including what do community college advisors perceive as needs when serving students in an institution-driven articulation system, what are community college advisors' perceptions of advising in an institution-driven articulation system, and what strategies do they use when advising in an institution-driven articulation system.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This study sought to explore how North Carolina community college advisors experience the institution-driven system and what community college academic advisors need in order to support transfer students as they pursue and transfer to earn their baccalaureate degree. The purpose of this chapter is to address the researcher's paradigm, methodological rationale, and research design used to conduct the study. Additionally, included in this chapter is the researcher's positionality, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis techniques, methods to ensure trustworthiness, and limitations. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How do community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven articulation system?
2. What do community college academic advisors need to support transfer students in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree?

Research Paradigm

Simply put, "a paradigm is a way of looking at the world" (Mertens, 2015, p. 8). Understanding a researcher's paradigm is useful in understanding how a researcher makes decisions regarding their research and how they construct knowledge (Mertens, 2015). One basic belief of the pragmatic paradigm is that researchers "gain knowledge in pursuit of desired ends as influenced by the researcher's values and politics" (Mertens, 2015, p. 11). Patton (2015) describes pragmatism's core inquiry question as: "what are the practical consequences and useful applications of what we can learn about this issue or problem?" (p. 152). Pragmatists, according to Patton (2015), focus on the "nature of experience," "outcomes of action," and "examine shared beliefs" (p. 153). Following a pragmatic framework, qualitative research involves the

search for action-oriented answers and less adherence to a pure qualitative inquiry (e.g. phenomenology) so that researchers can make decisions regarding research methods when opportunities and situations emerge while conducting research (Patton, 2015). One desired goal of this study is to influence the practice of academic advising at community colleges while also revealing the struggles and successes of advising transfer students in an institution-driven system. Most often associated with the pragmatic paradigm is mixed methods, but because the pragmatic paradigm aims to "match methods to specific questions and purpose of research" (Mertens, 2015, p. 11), the researcher chose a basic qualitative research design to answer their research questions.

Methodological Rationale

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "we conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored" (p. 45). Furthermore, qualitative research is useful in obtaining a complex understanding of an issue in which details "can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in literature" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 45). Qualitative research is a beneficial methodological approach for it provides more than just a snapshot of a complicated issue affecting students; it offers an "understanding of a sustained process" that needs to be explored (Tracy, 2020, p. 7). In particular to this study, a qualitative research design was suited for it allowed the researcher to expose how the institution-driven system works for and against community college academic advisors and the implications it has on their professional lives (Patton, 2015).

A basic qualitative research design was selected for this study for it seeks to understand the complexities of academic advising transfer students in an institution-driven system while

offering actionable solutions to a real-world problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Researchers engaging in this type of study are interested in understanding "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" with the primary goal to "uncover and interpret these meanings" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24-25). Basic qualitative research is in search "for practical understandings and wisdom about concrete, real-world issues" that "inform action" (Patton, 2002, p. 152). While one of the strengths of this research design are "actionable findings," pragmatism is heavily influenced by the values of the researcher (Patton, 2015, p. 157).

Researcher's Role and Positionality

In qualitative research, the researcher is the tool or instrument used to collect and analyze data. Therefore, the role of the researcher is vital to the interpretation of data and success of any qualitative study. In this study, the role of the researcher was developing the research questions, choosing a methodological approach to conduct the study, recruitment of participants, interviewing participants, transcribing data, analyzing and coding data, and presenting the findings of the study. Because of this unique role, the potential of researcher bias to influence methods and data analysis was present. To prevent this, the researcher used several levels of trustworthiness as well as was conscious of my positionality.

I am a white, cisgender male, that identifies as a member of the LGBTQ community that has more than ten years of experience in higher education administration. Throughout my young adult life, my family placed a high level of importance on earning a baccalaureate degree. I earned my baccalaureate degree from a small, suburban, religiously affiliated liberal arts college and my master's degree from a state flagship university in the Southeastern United States. I have worked in the functional areas of academic support and academic advising and have specifically

focused my work in supporting the transition of transfer students and other marginalized student populations into the university environment. I was first introduced to the plight of transfer students while serving as the Coordinator of Transfer and Special Student Population Services at a state flagship university. It was there that I understood why higher education considered them the 'forgotten student population.' Furthermore, I have consistently worked at institutions with large populations of transfer students because these institutions are large, state-funded universities with a mission to support the students in their state and local community. In my work to support and advise transfer students, I have come to understand the issues that impact their path to graduation.

While I am not a transfer student and I have never been a community college academic advisor, I have seen firsthand how inadequate, state-articulation policies impact baccalaureate degree completion and complicates academic advising at community colleges and four-year institutions. I also recognize that my experience working at four-year universities and for competitive degree programs has shaped my perspective of the work of community college advisors. The aim of my research is to highlight these inefficiencies and offer alternatives in state policy and academic advising practice. I recognize that my lens is rooted in the four-year university environment. Due to this, I will make sure to recognize and incorporate the varied missions of community colleges and how that impacts the work of community college academic advisors.

Protection of Human Subjects

There were minimal risks for the participants of this study. To protect the identity of the participants, the names of all people and any references made to a specific community college in the NCCC System and a public, four-year university in the UNC System in the interview

transcripts were replaced with pseudonyms. Furthermore, all data was stored on password-protected networks that only the researcher and their dissertation chair have access to. The interview protocol (Appendix A) consisted of questions that pose a minimal risk to the safety and security of the participants as well. The questions ask participants to reflect on their experiences of working with transfer students in a specific articulation system and do not consist of any personal questions that ask participants to reflect on anything other than working with transfer students. Additionally, through the recruitment process, the purpose of the study, voluntary nature of the study, and the ability of participants to drop out at any time was explained to the participants. Finally, the interview protocol, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques were approved by the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's (UNC Charlotte) Institutional Review Board (IRB) before data collection began and the researcher did not deviate from those approved research procedures.

Sampling Criteria and Techniques

Patton (2015) defines purposeful sampling as "selecting information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated" (p. 264). Since selecting information rich cases is at the heart of qualitative research, there exists several purposeful sampling strategies. For this study, criterion sampling (Patton, 2015) was used to determine information rich cases. Criterion sampling is the process of setting up parameters on who can and cannot be included in the research study (Patton, 2015). Participants in this study had to meet the following criteria:

1. Self-identified as community college academic advisor;
2. Employed as an academic advisor at a North Carolina Community College (NCCC);

3. Served as a community college academic advisor for at least one academic year;
4. Advise transfer students on a routine basis.

Once initial community college academic advisors were identified, snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was used by allowing initial participants to nominate additional participants for the study. Additionally, the researcher worked to ensure that they were recruiting participants from a wide variety of institutional types. Representation from rural, suburban, and urban community colleges is important because geographic proximity to UNC System institutions may either limit or help a community college academic advisor gain access to important curriculum information. Participants were recruited virtually or face-to-face through personal networks, as well as through the College Transfer Program Association of North Carolina (CTPA) listserv. Since there is no set number of participants for a qualitative study, the primary goal was to reach the point of saturation. Reaching the point of saturation or redundancy is when no new insights are observed or heard (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To reach the point of saturation, the researcher was engaged in ongoing data analysis throughout the data collection process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After the point of saturation was reached, no new participants were enrolled in the study. The researcher reached the point of saturation after 12 participants were interviewed for the study.

Site of Research

North Carolina was chosen as the research site for the state and its institutions have a long and growing history with transfer students and the transfer process (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b). In fall 1986, 2,339 students transferred to a four-year university compared with 11,218 in fall 2018 (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b; UNC InfoCenter, 2019a). Furthermore, 56,000 students, or 31% of all students, in the UNC System in 2016 were transfer students upon entry,

and most of them transferred from the NCCC System. Additionally, 84% of all NCCC System transfer students transfer vertically—two- to four-year institutions—while 16% of community college transfer students transfer laterally—two- to two-year institutions (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018b).

North Carolina is also considered an institution-driven system (Hodara et al., 2017) and in 2014 updated and approved its statewide CAA to include a 30-credit common core, but also allows individual universities to determine major specific coursework needed for upper-level courses (The University of North Carolina System, 2020). Furthermore, North Carolina residents have concerns related to credit mobility (myFutureNC, 2018). According to myFutureNC (2018), a majority of North Carolina residents believe the ability to transfer credits from a students' previous institution to a four-year university is very important. Furthermore, 31% of North Carolina residents believe that students who do not complete a baccalaureate degree, do not because of issues connected to credit mobility (myFurtreNC, 2018).

Data Collection Techniques

Interviews were the primary source of data collection for this study. To recruit participants, the researcher used their personal networks for virtual or face-to-face recruitment and the CTPA listserv to email potential participants. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire (Appendix B) that asks if they advise transfer students, for their contact information, if they wish to be a part of the study, role on campus, and for information related to the advising structure on their campus. The answers to the questionnaire were used to determine if they met criteria for participation, to set up a time for the interview, and provided helpful information related to the administration and organization of academic advising at their institution. In order for the participants to speak candidly about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, interviewees chose the interview method and site (face-to-face, virtual, or phone).

An interview guide was used; however, a semi-structured (Tracy, 2020) approach was also used for the interviews to allow the researcher to ask follow-up questions of their participants. In advance of the participants' interview, the researcher sent the interview protocol to the participants for their review. The interviews were recorded, and audio or video recordings of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher with the help of an online audio transcription service. Transcripts of the interviews were uploaded to Dedoose; an online, secure, data analysis software. Participants of this study received a copy of the transcript of their interview and were given the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy and provide the researcher feedback on their initial research findings. Participation in the study was confidential and participants and any community college or four-year institution named were assigned pseudonyms.

Instrumentation

The primary source of data collection were semi-structured interviews (Tracy, 2020). In comparison to other interview methods, semi-structured interviews are less formal and allow for emergent themes (Tracy, 2020). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allow interviewees' "complex viewpoints to be heard without the constraints of scripted questions" (Tracy, 2020, p.158). While semi-structured interviews allow for researchers to learn what their participants believe to be most important as it relates to the research questions, less structure could mean conversations that are "more complex and meandering" (Tracy, 2020, p. 158).

To keep the researcher and interviewee on track, an interview guide was used and served as the primary instrument for the study. An interview guide is not necessarily meant for the interviewer to ask every question verbatim, but rather as a tool to stimulate conversation (Tracy, 2020). The interview guide consisted of three sections: introduction, advising transfer students, and comments on the institution-driven system (Appendix A). The interviews lasted between 40

and 90 minutes. To conduct member checks, participants spent approximately 30 – 60 minutes reviewing transcripts and initial themes.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis process began early on with the organization of data and how it was maintained. While data was not directly interpreted during this phase, it should be noted that the organizing process can be considered an analytical process (Tracy, 2020). For the purposes of this study, data was organized chronologically for it was helpful in showing the trajectory of the researcher's analysis, "illustrating how the data were collected and interpreted over time" (Tracy, 2020, p. 212). After the data was organized, the researcher immersed them self in the data by thinking, listening, and reading and re-reading the data collected (Tracy, 2020).

The coding process consisted of two cycles, first cycle coding and second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016). First cycle coding is predominantly understood as the initial coding phase where first-level codes are developed (Saldaña, 2016; Tracy, 2020). The focus of developing first-level codes is identifying what is present in the data; first-level codes are descriptive and illustrate the basic processes and activities in the data (Tracy, 2020). During first cycle coding, initial coding or open coding was used to analyze five transcripts to develop a codebook. Once the codebook was created, the codebook was used to analyze to all remaining transcripts while being open to adding potential new initial or open codes (Saldaña, 2016). Throughout all coding processes, the constant comparative method was used to review codes and to revise them to fit new interpretations of the data (Charmaz, 2014; Tracy, 2020).

Coding began with initial coding or 'open coding,' to break down the data into distinct parts while examining them for similarities and differences (Saldaña, 2016). The goal of initial coding was to be open to all possible theoretical directions suggested by the researcher's

interpretations of the data (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). Initial coding aligns closely with Tracy's (2020) desire for researchers to immerse themselves in their data for it is an opportunity for the researcher to "reflect deeply on the contents and nuances" of their data (Saldaña, 2016, p. 115). During this phase of coding, 505 codes were identified. Sample open codes were transfer students taking wrong classes, transfer students view advising as a transaction, transfer process is a negotiation, math requirements vary from institution to institution, and students are resistant to make a decision.

Second cycle coding consists of the researcher using "first-level codes coupled with interpretive creativity and theoretical knowledge to generate second-level codes" (Tracy, 2020, p. 226). Saldaña (2016) argues that the primary goal of second cycle coding is to reorganize the data to develop a "smaller and more select list of broader categories, themes, concepts, and/or assertions" (p. 234). The coding technique used during second cycle coding was axial coding. Axial coding is the process of rebuilding data that was fractured or split during first cycle coding phase into conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). During this phase, the 505 codes identified during open coding were reorganized into 39 codes. Sample codes were CAA loopholes, challenges with math requirements, advising tools, advising in ACA 122, and CC advisors creating that "aha" moment. In addition to identifying second-level codes, the researcher identified groupings, themes, or patterns in the data (Tracy, 2020). In axial (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016) or hierarchical coding (Tracy, 2020), codes are redeveloped or grouped together into larger conceptual categories which allow the researcher to refine their codes and their hierarchical categories. During this process, these 39 codes were re-grouped into the following four, conceptual categories: community college academic advisor needs, structural challenges in the system, structural challenges on campus, and student/environmental challenges.

As referenced in chapters one and two, Hodara's et al. (2017) policy framework assisted the researcher during this process as the researcher created conceptual categories from the codes created during first cycle coding. The researcher used this policy framework to understand the ways in which the institution-driven system either encourages transfer or complicates the work of community college academic advisors. Furthermore, this policy framework assisted the researcher in their thought process when they created higher level codes during second cycle coding of the data analysis.

Analytic memos were also kept as part of the data analysis process and allowed the researcher to think freely about the connections of codes and their meanings (Saldaña, 2016; Tracy, 2020). Coding and analytic memo writing are concurrent processes that force the researcher to be reflexive and think critically about the research being conducted, challenge the researcher's own biases and assumptions, and recognize the extent to which the researcher's choices, feelings, and actions shaped the research process and findings (Saldaña, 2016). Two other tools were also used to help synthesize data: negative case analysis and loose analysis outline (Tracy, 2020). Searching for a negative case analysis is a process when researchers are "actively seeking out deviant data that do not appear to support the emerging hypothesis, and then revise arguments so they better fit all emerging data" (Tracy, 2020, p. 228-229). Negative case analysis discourages the researcher from cherry picking data that answers their research questions and ignores other points of view (Tracy, 2020). Finally, the researcher created a loose analysis outline that notes "the primary research questions/foci and the potential ways the emerging codes are attending to them" (Tracy, 2020, p. 229).

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher used strategies that addressed the credibility of the study, consistency of findings, and transferability of their conclusions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To address issues of credibility, the researcher asked participants to conduct member checks. Member checks were optional and were used to verify the accuracy of transcripts as well as to solicit feedback on emerging themes and categories by the participants. Reliability or consistency of findings refers to the extent to which results of a study can be replicated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since in qualitative research we cannot guarantee that our results can be replicated, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest researchers create an audit trail of how they arrived at their conclusions. For this study, the researcher developed an audit trail by keeping a research journal on the process of conducting this research. In their research journal, the researcher cataloged their reflections, questions, and decisions they made regarding all data collected. To further ensure trustworthiness, the researcher sought a review and an evaluation of the interview protocol by two content experts. Additionally, in fall of 2019 the researcher conducted a pilot study with two participants. After the pilot study, adjustments were made to the research questions to ensure they were congruent with the purpose statement and literature review. Furthermore, edits were made to the interview protocol and questionnaire as well.

Finally, to address issues of transferability, the researcher developed a thick description, a "highly descriptive, detailed presentation of the setting and in particular, the findings of a study" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 257). When used as a tool to address transferability of a study, thick description consists of a thorough description of the findings with support of evidence in the form of participant quotes from interviews, documents, and/or filed notes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To obtain this thick description, the researcher gathered information to reach the

point of saturation, where no new information is found to understand the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, Hodara's et al. (2017) study currently categorizes only Texas, North Carolina, and Kentucky as institution-driven systems and their broader framework has not been applied to all 50 states. While these three states all have a transfer going culture, the findings of this study cannot necessarily be applied outside the three, since there are nuances in every state articulation system that impact how students and community college academic advisors understand, interpret, and interact with state-wide articulation policy. Furthermore, the characteristics of the participants were varied. Some participants identified themselves as primary or faculty advisors while others described themselves as a hybrid of an administrator and academic advisor. Additionally, while all academic advisors worked at a community college, not all worked at rural or urban community college. Some of the locations of the community colleges could be defined as rural, urban, and even suburban. Second, pragmatism has its limitations. Patton (2015) writes that "pragmatism is not value-free," therefore "the very definition of a problem to be studied involves values about how the world might be better" (p. 157). Since pragmatism is not value free, it was important to explain how pragmatism informs the research process and for the researcher to practice reflexivity so that researcher's bias will be isolated (Patton, 2015).

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview and summary of the methodology used in this basic qualitative study to better understand how community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven articulation system. Presented in this chapter was the methodological rationale

for choosing a basic qualitative design and why it is situated within the pragmatic paradigm. A discussion then followed detailing the researcher's positionality, protection of human subjects, sampling techniques and criteria, data analysis procedures, steps to ensure trustworthiness, and limitations of the study. Next, chapter four will discuss the researcher's findings.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how North Carolina community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven system and to identify the needs community college academic advisors have to better support and advocate for transfer students earning a baccalaureate degree. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do North Carolina community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven articulation system?
2. What do community college academic advisors need to support transfer students in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree?

This chapter summarizes the study procedures and presents the findings of the study. A total of 12 North Carolina community college advisors were interviewed from 10 community colleges across the state. By the end of the analysis process, it became clear that community college academic advisors experience student challenges, have to navigate a variety of organizational and advising challenges and complexities on their respective campuses, and are faced with statewide-system level challenges and complexities that can derail a student from transferring to a baccalaureate degree granting institution and earning a four-year degree. While some of the challenges most likely exist for all community college academic advisors, some may be unique to states with institution-driven systems. Additionally, community college academic advisors offer a glimpse into their transfer advising appointments and concrete steps that community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, and state policy leaders can take to improve the transfer process.

Procedure Summary

Analysis began by using open coding to analyze five transcripts to develop a codebook. Next, the codebook was applied to all transcripts while being attuned to potential new open codes (Saldaña, 2016). Through this process codes were consistently reviewed to determine if codes needed to be combined or split (Holley & Harris, 2019). Next codes were grouped together, and categories were developed through axial coding (Saldaña, 2016). Categories and sub-categories were then organized into a logical structure with supporting evidence to develop themes and research findings (Holley & Harris, 2019; Saldaña, 2016).

Participant Summary

A total of 12 North Carolina community college academic advisors participated in this study. Four of the participants identified as men and eight identified as women. Each participant met the study criteria of being employed at a North Carolina Community College and having advised transfer students for a minimum of one year. In the sample, participants were interviewed from several parts of the state and represented a wide variety of North Carolina economic distress indicators. On an annual basis, the North Carolina Department of Commerce, classifies the state's 100 counties based on levels of economic well-being (North Carolina Department of Commerce, 2020). Each county is assigned a tier with tier one being the most distressed, tier two as the next level of distress, and tier three as the least distressed. Table 2 provides a brief description of participants with key descriptions.

Table 2

Participant Summary

Pseudonym	Years at this C.C.	Economic Distress Indicator(s)	Role on Campus	Assigned Caseloads	Advising Model
Liz	9	2	Primary Advisor	No	Decentralized

Kevin	9	2/3	Faculty Advisor	Yes	Hybrid
Mark	16	2	Faculty Advisor	Yes	Hybrid
Sarah	10	1	Administrator that spends 33% of time directly advising students	Yes	Hybrid
Samuel	3	3	Primary Advisor	Yes	Hybrid
Patrick	6	2/3	Faculty Advisor	Yes	Hybrid
Lesley	22	1/3	Faculty Advisor	Yes	Hybrid
Amanda	13	1	Primary Advisor	Yes	Decentralized
Kimberly	16	1/2	I advise during the summer when faculty are off campus, and I help advise new students.	No	Decentralized
Lindsey	5	3	Dean but I do advise	No	Hybrid
Erin	10	1	Primary Advisor	Yes	Hybrid
Sarena	4	1	Primary Advisor	Yes	Hybrid

Findings

Through the participants' interviews a set of complexities and unique challenges emerged that North Carolina community college academic advisors have to navigate when advising transfer students. Academic advisors are faced with a variety of complexities and challenges on three fronts: students, from their campus, and from the system level. On each of these three fronts, academic advisors are tasked with meeting students where they are while also balancing competing priorities at the campus level and being experts in all components of the transfer

process. What results is an overlapping and overwhelming experience to be everything for everyone (students, campus constituents, and system constituents). Table 3 provides an overview of primary themes, subthemes, and a description.

Table 3

Experience of advising in an institution-driven system

Primary Theme	Subthemes	Description
Student challenges and complexities	• Helping students see the big picture • Community college academic advisors creating that "aha" moment • Skill development • Community college student characteristics • Advising the undecided transfer student • Student issues and concerns	This theme represented the complex ways academic advisors advise community college students so that they can transfer successfully.
Campus challenges and complexities	• Advising model • ACA 122 • Training and professional development • Academic advising challenges	Campus challenges and complexities characterized the organizational obstacles that negatively impact academic advising at community colleges.
System challenges and complexities	• Communication • Relationships with UNC System institutions • Curriculum alignment	System challenges and challenges showcased how the state-wide approach to transfer unnecessarily makes the job of being an academic advisor more difficult.

Experience of Community College Academic Advisors

On the question of how North Carolina community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven system, they experience challenges and a variety of challenges and complexities on three fronts: student challenges and complexities, structural challenges and

complexities on campus, and system challenges and complexities. While student and structural challenges and complexities may not just be unique to community college academic advisors in North Carolina, experiencing them along with system challenges and complexities may be distinctive to them and other institution-driven systems. The convergence of these three challenges on North Carolina community college academic advisors present them with a set of challenges and complexities that they must navigate and can potentially interfere with a students' desire to earn a four-year degree.

Student Challenges and Complexities. Helping students navigate the different components of the transfer process in North Carolina is a critical duty of community college academic advisors. While challenges and complexities exist on academic advisors' campuses and in the state-wide articulation system in which they work, they also face important and significant challenges when working with the students they advise. The academic advisors interviewed for this study were acutely aware of how important it is to marry academic and career goals to ensure transfer students were on the right path for a successful transfer. Furthermore, they balance not only the diverse student population that attends community colleges but also their diverse interests and concerns regarding continuing their post-secondary education at a four-year university.

Helping Students See the Big Picture. A few of the community college academic advisors discussed the importance of helping students see the big picture, of encouraging students to explore potential majors and careers. Sarah emphasized that it is important to treat "every student holistically, individually and in really thinking about their big picture" when advising them. While there may be a desire to encourage students to decide on a transfer pathway early, even during their first semester, Mark believed the first semester is not the time to

make students “choose a thing they don’t wanna choose…I think the first semester really should be about letting them explore.” Mark hopes that students “take ACA 122, go to the student success center, take some time to figure out what they wanna do, take an English, a math […] If they have an interest in business, I'll put them in a business class.” For Mark, it is important for his students to align their potential academic and career interests with appropriate coursework.

Samuel takes this approach one step further by encouraging his students to “engage the professionals” when discussing potential majors and careers “so that students not only have a clear path, but [that] they also understand the value of what they're doing right now.” Not only is it important for Samuel to get students on the right path, they also need to “see how the courses that they're in, fit into the broader picture, and are going to advance them towards their goal.” Like Samuel and Mark, Kimberly also helps her students see the big picture by utilizing BDPs and university websites. Kimberly explains that “the BDPs are good because I can take this and I can move forward but they still [have] to go to that website to get an even clearer picture” and it helps students “to see that it actually is a means to an end.” These advisors emphasize that it is not only important to advise students for the right path, but to encourage them to consider how their academic and career goals intersect, while also helping them see themselves as students on four-year colleges and universities.

Community College Academic Advisors Creating that “Aha” Moment. Several advisors spoke about the importance of providing that “aha” moment for their students to see themselves living and studying on campuses in the UNC System. Kevin and his institution worked hard to provide that “aha” moment for community college students via the Transfer Club him and two advisors established and serve as advisors for. Kevin and the other advisors “invite all of our students to it” and “at that meeting, we vote on which university we'll go visit that

semester.” Kevin and the other advisors also try to build community among the students via a service project; “we also vote on what a service project we want to do. Usually we do something with animals. So, we'll go to the Duke Lemur Center, we'll go to the Big Cat Rescue, we've gone to the North Carolina Zoo.” Additionally, the advisors spend time building rapport with students so that they can best support them in their educational goals:

> and then we'll go around the room and get to know all of our students' intended majors, and so when we're visiting these universities, we can go straight to those departments and talk to someone there. So, they get their questions about the programs directly answered. We'll also set something up with someone in admissions. So, they'll give us an informational session, and then a campus tour with the student.

Beyond community building, the Transfer Club facilitates monthly workshop meetings on topics that their students want. For example, they offer workshops on “filling out the common app, writing the college essay, navigating financial aid, and we've had former graduates come back and talk about the transfer experience.” Kevin, who works on a branch campus of a larger community college describes the club as “wildly successful.” While Kevin’s institution has tried to facilitate similar clubs on the other branch campuses, the faculty and staff to support a club was lacking. The inspiration for creating this club came from Kevin’s Dean who believed that helping students have their “aha moment” when they walk onto a campus is crucial to the role that academic advisors play in the transfer students experience. Since the club’s inception, Kevin has personally “witnessed students walk onto campus and say, ‘This is where I want to be.’” Kevin spoke fondly on advising the Transfer Club and taking students on campus visits to various UNC System institutions. On one campus visit, a “psychology teacher at the end of the day said like, ‘I felt like you were their dad, taking them to each of their meetings.’” While

Kevin agreed with the description, he also found these experiences rewarding; “and yeah, it did kind of feel like that. But it was fun, I enjoyed it.”

Sarena also described facilitating opportunities for transfer students to see themselves on four-year colleges and universities. In conjunction with other UNC System institutions nearby, Sarena took students on campus tours “to give students a real sense for what it was like to transfer.” These off-campus excursions were so popular that Sarena and her institution were looking to expand these types of opportunities in future semesters. Even though Erin’s, Sarah’s, and Kimberly’s campus did not offer these types of opportunities for their students, they understood the significance of helping students see themselves as successful transfer students. Erin spent time asking her students questions like; “Where do you see yourself in..." and then “encourages them to go and visit a whole bunch of colleges” so that they can have “that feeling when you step on to the campus.” Erin mentioned her desire to organize campus tours with the local four-year colleges and universities and that it would “help the students make the decision about whether or not this is the right place for them.” Kimberly also tried to convince her students that transferring is more than just ensuring classes transfer from one campus to the next by encouraging them to schedule campus tours; “you know, you can see this, you see this sheet of paper where it has all these classes and everything but then when you go to the actual [school] where it's all like, whoa, it really is there.” Sarah also described seeing the value in these types of conversations as well in building resilience for the transfer process:

> it's more about getting them to role play being a college student, and then we can refine it from there, but just helping them grow. And sometimes failing is the best thing we can do for those students, because it helps them to understand what they need to do, and they see be more ready. So, failing is not a bad thing for me. I don't worry about that

> because the students really grow in their character when they're not successful in a class. So again, it's just all part of the process.

In addition to building character and helping their transfer students see themselves as successful students at UNC System institutions, a few academic advisors also believed that developing skills related to advocacy and research went hand in hand and are important competencies to have post-transfer.

While some community college academic advisors sought intentional ways to provide students that "aha" moment for their students, others hit roadblocks in offering those opportunities. Liz, described not being able to provide that holistic advising because students come to advising sessions:

> very disengaged and asking no questions, as they seem more concerned about things outside of school or they have their hearts set on a particular institution and suggesting other transfer possibilities is out of the question. Very rarely are students open to discussing their transfer options during an advising session.

Even though Kimberly tried to provide this type of holistic advising during her appointments, she also shared that her students face difficulty when picking a "path" to follow. She theorized that her students are so concerned about job security that they "want to have so many options so regardless of what happens [after graduation] that they can't say that I didn't finish it and I didn't do it right." Lesley, who also serves as the ACA coordinator on her campus, also acknowledged that "students are really unsure of making a decision." On Lesley's campus, they work hard in ACA 122 and in their advising appointments to help them understand why it is important to begin thinking about the transfer process, but she and others encounter "avoidance" from their students. In regards to ACA 122, one of Lesley's students dropped her section because it "gave

her too much anxiety. She just couldn't handle being put on the spot.” Lesley shares with her students that, "yes, you ultimately have to give me a plan. You ultimately have to give me a portfolio that shows me how you're going to work towards that. But I don't hold you to it.” Lesley believes that students on her campus just “do not like to be sort of tied into it or I don't know if they just don't want to face their future.” While Liz, Kimberly, and Lesley all faced issues when helping their students see beyond their community college career; all recognized that their students needed to have that so-called “aha” moment, but lacked the interest from their students and resources from their campus to provide that opportunity for them.

Skill Development. A few advisors also spoke to how valuable it is to develop certain skills that their students can use post-transfer. Teaching students how to do their own research on different colleges and universities was a skill mentioned by several academic advisors. In Erin’s appointments, “when talking about the universities, I try to let them lead the conversation” and “then I try to show them versus telling them.” Erin’s students “always want to know which school has the best program for X” but she does not “answer that question because I say, ‘Well, this school is very popular for this program, but that school, those faculty members may not be the right fit for you.’” Instead of telling her students where to go, Erin informs them that "you will get a great education at any of our 16 colleges” and attempts to show and “teach them to do these sorts of things on their own.” Kimberly also related her approach to advising as advising as teaching and spoke about how she also spends time with her students developing or teaching certain skills. In Kimberly’s appointments, she is “about teaching, helping students to be more independent” and wanting “them to be able to look at this and understand themselves. I just think it's better for them that way, especially if they're looking to transfer because once you go to the four-year, everybody doesn’t always give you that handholding” approach. This is important for

Kimberly because she believes her students should be in “control of how [they] are going to complete [their] journey” and expresses concern as well for she believes “not every school is teaching students how to be successful when they leave. And I want my students to be successful.” Samuel also takes a similar approach when advising his students and describes letting his students “observe me actually doing some research.” For Samuel, this accomplishes two goals; “number one, I'm hopefully giving them some information about the career that they think they wanna do. But number two, they're seeing that it's possible to go out and do that kind of research, and one important resource form where to do it.” Modeling this behavior is important for Samuel’s students because it shows them “how they can do it for themselves.”

Related to teaching their students on how to conduct research and take ownership of their academic journey, Amanda specifically mentioned teaching her students how to advocate for themselves during the transfer process and at times, how challenging it can be. For Amanda, “teaching those advocacy skills can be […] for young people, that [can] be scary for the first time” and argues that “two years obviously isn't enough [time] to do that.” Lesley also spends time teaching her students advocacy skills in her ACA 122 class. In her classes, Lesley tries “to get them to understand that there are times, where the admissions people just automatically say, ‘Here's the credit you're going to get.’ And so, if you file an appeal, you're not a troublemaker. You're not causing a problem.” What Lesley explains to her students is that “you're just basically going back and saying, ‘Hey, can you look at this again?’ And then the, usually the admissions people take it to the department, and the department looks it over.” While skill development was and is an important part of their duties, often the type of skills needed to be developed depended on the type of student academic advisors were working with.

Community College Student Characteristics. The art of balancing the need to get students on the right path while helping them understand how their academic and career goals overlap can compete with managing the diverse needs of community college students. What clearly emerged from the interviews was that there was no set type of a community college student. For Sarena, some of her students:

> are pretty focused, they know what they want, they understand, you know, long term career goals. Then we have a large majority of our students are adult students. And a lot of them they just really want a degree, and they are not sure if they definitely want to transfer, and then if they do wanna transfer, they're not sure where they wanna transfer to. So, I would say we have some people that are really together and others that are just kind of a little bit all over the place.

Like Sarena, Samuel and Patrick categorized students into these similar camps. Samuel describes the students he works with as falling into three groups: "the students who have a very clear idea of what they want to do, and it's realistic," "the students that have a very clear idea of what they want to do, and I'm not saying it's unrealistic, but they are definitely not on that trajectory," and "students that don't really know what they want to do." Patrick's students "fall into two types of categories, the prepared student and the I don't know student." While some academic advisors experience a wide variety of student expectations, some like Sarah work with many students who "already come with some kind of awareness of what they want to do and where they want to go" and students who have just graduated high school who plan on transferring to a UNC System institution. Lesley, like many other community college academic advisors, has students from early and middle colleges and a growing "dual enrollment population from three high schools in her county" that she has to advise and support on top of her typical transfer population.

In speaking with Amanda and Lindsey, there may be stark differences in how campuses approach diverse student populations based on where your college is located and how well funded it may be. Lindsey, who works at a large urban community college and in a county with an economic distress indicator of three, described her experience in much more matter-of-fact terms than Amanda and emphasized the need to "just" meet them where they are:

> Well, I think you just have to meet students where they are, just kind of adapt to what their needs are... so it's just really trying to establish that relationship and stick with that student. Willing to work with them, meet them where they are, what their current needs are, kind of make sure you have access to different resources that they may need academically, or you know, life.

Amanda, who works at a rural community college and in a county with an economic distress indicator of one, described this differently. When asked, how do you balance the unique needs of your students, Amanda responded, "I don't know, honestly." In an effort to meet students where they are, Amanda began visiting ACA classes to come to them instead "having them sit out and wait for somebody to come talk to them […] but that's hard to balance when you have some that have no idea and some that know everything." Amanda spoke to the struggle of advising those who understand the concept of transferring with those students who do not understand the process and having to "walk them through" it. The transfer process is even more complicated for some of Amanda's students who don't have support at home; "so if the support is not at home and nobody's talking them through the process then when they come see me, it's like, this is the first time he was talking about it." For students that attend Amanda's community college, it is more than likely than not that "this is their first college experience, and it could be the first college experience of anybody in their house" and it may force Amanda and her colleagues "to

overload them as much as possible with support and structures so that they can continue to go on" and transfer.

Liz, another community college academic advisor, even went as far to say that her "students are not usually encouraged to be active participants in their own education, perhaps even starting in high school." According to Liz "students don't typically do prior research on majors, career options, financial aid, etc. before they walk into our institution. Thus, they can't properly advocate for themselves. Much of the time, they expect the staff to make decisions for them." Without blaming the student for not being prepared, Lesley shared a similar sentiment with Liz in that students may not come prepared to make decisions regarding their possible majors and careers. Lesley says, "I see a lot of just avoidance" and mentions a student dropped her ACA 122 class because the "class gave her too much anxiety…she just couldn't handle being put on the spot" to decide, even when Lesley reminded her students that this is required for an assignment and the point is to teach them the tools to explore. For Lesley's students, they "do not like to be sort of tied into it […] they just don't want to face their future." Balancing the unique needs of community college students can be challenging for academic advisors, even more so if they are undecided on where they want to transfer to and eventually study.

Advising the Undecided Transfer Student. As Erin described, advising undecided transfer students at the community college level is a "challenge" for it not only involves advising for potential majors but also advising them about the transfer process and the particulars of UNC System institutions. Additionally, like Lindsey, some community college academic advisors described this type of student as "probably more of the norm." For many community college academic advisors, advising undecided transfer students meant leaning into the content of ACA 122 or aiding students in career and major exploration to varying degrees. For Erin, she separates

students into two categories, those who have not enrolled in ACA 122 and those who have completed ACA 122. Erin's response to undecided transfer students who have not completed ACA 122 is; "hold on. Just relax. The ACA class is going to help you with the career exploration." If students have completed ACA 122 and are still unsure, Erin "might sit them in front of a computer and work with them through these career exploration type tools [and] as far as deciding what university to go to, [she tries] to see what [she] thinks their match will be." Erin also spends time "reinforcing the college fairs" so that her students can actually speak to UNC System institution representatives. While Kimberly may start off asking students basic questions like, "what do you want to do", like Erin, she also leans into ensuring her students enroll in and complete ACA 122. Kimberly explains that what she likes "to do is to start those students off with English, ACA [122], and a few [other] transfer classes [to] get their feet wet to see how things are going." These classes can help her students "think about what it is they want to do." Kimberly's approach, like others interviewed, is to "start them off with just these huge general education classes. So, they can move either way. If you choose to transfer, you're good. If you choose not, you are still good because these classes" can transfer to other programs.

Liz described her process as asking basic questions; "what do you despise, subject-wise, and what do you like, to try and get my wheels turning so I can help them." While Liz mentions referring her students to the career counselor on staff, she asks her students questions about "their interests [so I can] really try to figure out what their dislikes are" and "trying to think in my mind like what is the best path and what are the best courses based on what they're telling me." Because students are not active participants in their own education, Liz feels that she has "to think on my feet" because sometimes "students don't give me a lot of information to work with." Lindsey's approach also involves a similar line of questioning:

> So then you just kind of talk about like well what are your interests, what are you good at, where are you currently working, what do you enjoy about that? What courses, then kind of maybe looking at their high school transcript like what courses did you enjoy? Which courses did you hate? You know, what do you enjoy, what don't you definitely don't want to do.

Since "our transfer degrees are very general" in the North Carolina system, Lindsey alludes that it allows her to focus on "exploring why are you saying you want to transfer? What are the reasons you want to transfer?" and "if their reasoning seems like they still want to transfer then [explaining to them], well these are the four different transfer degrees" you can earn to transfer to a UNC System institution.

Lesley takes a similar approach by "at least trying to figure out what they're thinking. So are you thinking education? Are you thinking something business? Are you thinking health sciences?" Once Lesley can determine one of those interest areas or as she calls them "clusters", it helps her determine "whether to put you in accounting, economics, or whether to put you in anatomy or education." Identifying one of these "clusters" is helpful for Lesley since "the first year pretty much will be standard." For example, Lesley can make sure her students are in "two English's"; "have at least one science"; for Math, "I'll put them in stats because that's pretty much good for anything"; and she can guarantee that all of those courses will transfer. While many of the others may rely solely on their intuition and experience to advise undecided students, Amanda also relies on a variety of online resources to help her. In her appointments with undecided transfer students, they "do a lot of online stuff" to help students narrow down options. Amanda may ask her students to complete "virtual transfer tours online" and "explore a couple of colleges" online before their next appointment.

Instead of infusing career and academic advising, some community college academic advisors spoke about referring students back to ACA 122 and the assignments designed for that course while others spent time referring students to an office of career services. Erin specifically mentioned that "they do a lot of career exploration" in ACA 122. At Erin's campus, ACA 122 has a major assignment dealing with career exploration" where students "go out and we have them take career assessments […] and then we have discussions with them about their results and they write reflective journals about their results." Liz spoke about referring her students to the "career counselor on staff" and emphasized that her students are "just not ready to make the decision" and that "they don't want to make the decision, they're not ready to decide." While Liz refers her students to the career counselor, she also described her career advising constitutes "taking what knowledge I have and kind of coming up with something for them." Lindsey also spoke about referring students to "career counseling where they can do career assessments" on her campus and encouraging her students to make "follow up appointments with them." For students who are unsure of their major or career, Samuel also refers students to their "dedicated career counselors."

While some advisors spoke about referring students to separate offices of career advising or counseling on their campuses, some advisors described a more integrative approach to career and academic advising. Mark admitted that in his appointments, he does not "really dive into a lot of personal interests unless they give me that information." While it seems counter intuitive to not engage in students' personal interests when discussing academic and career goals, Mark does spend time discussing career educational goals in conjunction with the career services office on his campus. For his undecided students, he encourages his students to complete "career assessments to assist them in picking a career." On his campus, "students can take [the] Myers-

Briggs or other tests that can assist them in understanding their career interests." Once students have an idea of what career they want to pursue, Mark begins "talking about the type of classes that are needed, the type that is needed to graduate with that degree."

It seemed that on Kevin's and Patrick's campus, they had the most intentional and integrative approach to career and academic advising. Kevin explained that all students complete the "RIASEC exam" when "filling out their admissions application." The RIASEC exam is "divided up into six different categories: [realistic], investigative, [artistic], [social], experimental, and creative." Each "heading breaks down into say 20, 30 different careers that the students might be interested in." Patrick explained that this process was designed in conjunction with their institution's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Once the student completes the exam, their "results are made available to all the advisors" and are used in their appointments with their students to help decide on a potential major and career path. Once Kevin receives his students' RIASEC exam results, he directs students to online resources based off of their scores "where it'll give [them] the salary information [and] a summary and a video of someone in the field that they can watch." Additionally, in tandem with the RIASEC exam, Patrick explained that their institution administers a "small survey that we have integrated with it" and based off of their results, students "might get referred to what we're calling a developmental faculty advisor that helps to do some career counseling with the student." Infusing academic and career advising proved to be challenging for some academic advisors, especially for those who did not have institutional support. However, providing students with this important intervention also proved difficult at times because academic advisors also must juggle a variety of student interests and concerns.

Student Interests and Concerns. Students have varying interests and concerns when it comes to transferring to a UNC System institution. Many of the questions received by advisors from transfer students center around finances and transferring college credit. Besides being concerned with not going "far from home," Liz emphasized that the "financial piece is probably [the] number one" question or concern that she hears from students while Kevin explained that students "want to know about the credits, they want to make sure that the courses they're taking will transfer. They ask about finances; they ask about scholarships and opportunities like that." Like Kevin, Sarah, Sarena, Lindsey, and Lesley also mentioned that their students are primarily concerned with how their credits will transfer from one institution to the next. Lindsey alludes those students are so concerned on how their credit will transfer because transferring has gotten "trickier." Lindsey spends time explaining the difference between "transfer degrees and non-transfer degrees" or what are also referred to Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degrees. While these issues seem to be the most apparent questions or concerns raised by their students, some of their students do not know which questions to ask. For example, Lesley explained that she is not sure her "students know what to ask when they're here" and Liz describes her students as being "very disengaged and asking no questions, as they seem more concerned about things outside of school" and having "their hearts set on a particular institution and suggesting other transfer possibilities is out of the question." Liz explains that her students are "very rarely open to discussing their transfer options during an advising session."

Another tension discussed by two academic advisors was the desire of their students to transfer as soon as possible. Lesley explained that students are almost anxious regarding how their credit will transfer because "they don't really want to waste their time." Kimberly who advises at a rural community college in a county with an economic distress indicator of one,

speaks to how some of her first-generation college student advisees expect to be transfer ready after completing 12 credit hours. For Kimberly's first-generation college students, she also hears the following questions from her students; "will you go do my application for me," "will all these classes transfer," "will my money transfer over," "when should I apply for school," "will I have to take this over?" For Kimberly, she feels that it is important for her to spend extra time with her first-generation college students to help "them to understand the articulation agreements" and the transfer process for "they don't know where to start."

It is also apparent that some students are concerned about the basic mechanics of being a student at UNC System institution. Not only are Amanda's students concerned about cost and financial aid, but they are also concerned on "how do I choose housing, what kind of classes do I have to take, how big are the classes, where is the school [UNC System institution] located" and questions around required GPAs. Students asking questions is also an opportunity for Sarena to verify with her students how prepared and knowledgeable they are about the transfer process. For Sarena, questions from students serve as an opportunity for her to "double check that they are in a transfer program, because sometimes we'll have students in general education, which as long as they take classes, they will transfer, but I have to explain to them that associate of arts and associate of science are these package transfer programs." When Sarena gets questions regarding the admission process, she sees this as a chance to ask them "have you been to this campus" and "do you know anybody who's a student there" to help her and then "get a sense of how well they understand what all goes into the transfer process."

While the transfer of college credit and how to pay for college may be at the top of the list of questions and concerns of transfer students, Patrick and other community college academic advisors also hear from students that "they have an idea of what they want to do, but

are unsure of where they want to go" while Lesley and others expressed that students specifically choose the transfer and community college route because "they were unsure of what they want to do." What seems clear is that many of their transfer students "know that they want to transfer to a four-year" and as Liz articulates, "need a lot of hand holding" to help them get there. At the same time, transfer students want to know that what they are taking is worth their time. Lesley describes the balancing act that many community college students struggle with and therefore their academic advisor as well:

> a lot of times they have a family. Or they may even have a job that they're trying to hold onto. They've got bills and they're trying to come to school. […] and with things like say an ACA course. Which they don't quite understand why they need it. I think in a community college maybe, we just [need to be] all things to all people. So, you're always trying […] to appeal to the 14-year-old and the 54-year-old at the same time. So, I think maybe I don't notice some of that because I just do it all the time.

What is clear is that community college students lean heavily on the guidance of their academic advisor to help them make decisions regarding the transfer process and many may even expect them to make their decisions for them. While community college academic advisors have to balance a variety of student challenges and complexities, their job is even harder because of the organizational issues that exist on their respected campuses.

Campus Challenges and Complexities

How community college academic advisors interacted with the institution-driven system largely had to do with how prepared their respective campus is to meet the varying demands this type of system imposes. Each community college academic advisor interviewed for this study described a different model of advising at their institution and that the success of that model to

meet the needs in an institution-driven system largely depended on the time and energy of community college academic advisors and the leadership of that respective institution. Furthermore, it became apparent that the training and professional development that community college academic advisors receive is probably inadequate for the job they are asked to do. While two academic advisors described a robust approach to training and professional development, most of the community college academic advisors described a "sink or swim" approach. Even though academic advisors play an important role in helping transfer students in making intentional decisions during the transfer process, many rely heavily on ACA 122: College Transfer Success to facilitate many of the academic and major exploration conversations typically reserved for academic advising appointments. Beyond these, community college academic advisors face a variety of general advising challenges and complexities that range from transfer degree confusion, institutional pressure to move students through and to declare them as soon as possible, and students getting caught in development coursework.

Advising Model. In conversations with participants, it became apparent that the advising model on their campus dictated how they interacted with their students and the interventions used to support students in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. Furthermore, it became clear that some campuses were contending with the perception that academic advising was no more than a registration process and that it did not involve the exploration of academic, career, and life goals and how they all intersect. While it was a stated priority for almost all community college academic advisors to improve academic advising on their campus, in speaking to several of the participants, some campuses were in the middle of that process or negotiating organizational issues related to faculty advising and/or primary advising models.

Surprisingly, some of the participants disclosed that advising and registration are not separate processes. Liz explained that at her community college, “advising and registration are not separate” while Lesley admitted to advising “in preparation for registration” but have tried ways to separate the two with little to no success. In her campus’s attempt to move away from this model, Lesley explained that they have tried “to move away from that. We've tried to be able to meet with our advisees’ other times.” But due to “the nature of things and the fact that students don't have time to come in for optional meetings” it has never been successfully implemented. Even though registration advising is required at Lesley’s campus, in an attempt to meet students where they are, some of Lesley’s appointments happen over email or phone instead of being in-person (even before the pandemic):

> So, they can come see me. I've always been pretty open about, you know, if you want to just email me and go in there. Now we have self-service now with web advisor. They can go in and pick their classes and I can go approve them. If they want to email me or call me, and then go online and look for some stuff and then I can look at it with them, I'm happy to do that. So, I guess before virtual was, you know, everybody went virtual, I was happy to do that if they wanted to do that.

While some community colleges seem stuck with the transactional advising model, both Liz and Lesley see the benefits of other models and wish they could spend more time with students. Lesley emphasized that:

> we'd love to see them. Like I'd love it if once the semester started, my advisees came to see me, and we got to know each other before. That won't happen. They'll come to see me right before registration.

There also exists a variety of models in the community college system. Some of the advising models involved a transfer center with two to three primary advisors that served as experts in the transfer process and also collaborated with UNC System institutions for transfer visits. Even on those campuses, the majority of advising staff are still faculty advisors and the transfer center advisors either have a select group of students assigned to them or almost serve as secondary or supplemental advisors for transfer students. Some campuses have a first-year advising center, where Kimberly; a Director of Admissions, Retention, and Student Success oversees the Student Development office where "first year students come to student development, returning students can go to the advisor, the faculty advisors, which are throughout the campus." Then on some campuses, admissions may advise students through the admission process and pass students on to their faculty advisor once fully enrolled on campus.

Meanwhile at other community colleges, advisors explained how their campuses tried to steer away from the transactional advising model to varying degrees of success. On Mark's campus, the administration tried moving away from this model by emphasizing that "registration is the act of picking classes, and advising is providing that kind of career counseling, education counseling that's needed." What resulted was pushback from students for having to meet with advisors twice, once for advising and once for registration, "there was a pushback with students because they were complaining because they didn't want to meet with their advisors twice, you know? I got to say this, some students don't mind, but there was a big push back."

While it seemed unclear as to whether Mark and his colleagues still meet with their students twice, he described an advising process aligned with transactional advising and with some minor elements of developmental advising practices:

> What I tend to do is send an email out about two to three weeks before registration starts. I say, "Hey if anybody wants to meet with me early, let's meet. We can talk about how your classes are going." […] I'll say, "I can't register you for classes, but I can lift your hold, and I can build you a schedule in our information system", which is self-service. So, the day that it goes live, they can express register.

It seems clear that Mark tries to infuse other advising theory and practices into his appointment meetings by checking in with students on how their classes and education are going, but the appointment seems to focus primarily on schedule building. On Samuel's campus, advising is mandated every semester and alluded to similar issues in creating buy-in from students for academic advising. Samuel explained that "they do proactive outreach to encourage them to make an appointment. We try to really communicate, we're here all the time. We're not just here to pick out the classes for next semester."

One campus that seems to have made the successful switch away from the transactional advising model, is Kevin's and Patrick's institution. Both Kevin and Patrick described their institution's effort for advising redesign beginning with their QEP, My Academic Pathway. Kevin explained that while the "QEP itself [was not the catalyst], but what came out of it was that line, that distinction" between advising and registration. Through the development process of their QEP, Kevin's campus made:

> an effort to draw a line between advising and registration. So they come in for the advising, we map out what they're going to take, what their schedules are going to look like. But they actually have to go sit down on a computer and register themselves. And we'll have registration days in our computer labs where they can all go together, and someone will be kind of floating around helping.

This distinction is important for it keeps advising from becoming a “very bureaucratic meeting where a student pops by, and you build a schedule, and you send them on their way” and instead students “stop by and you sit, and you talk to them.” This distinction has allowed advisors to build rapport and trust with their advisees.

One reason why some campuses potentially struggled in departing from transactional advising could be related to the decentralized nature at some community colleges. Many of the advisors spoke as if their campuses either aligned with a decentralized or shared model, or somewhere in between. While this study does not advocate for one model over the other (i.e., centralized, decentralized, or shared), it seems that the model a community college can sustain has a large impact on the academic advising community college students receive. Related to the advisor model, some campuses spoke to the challenges faced around faculty advising and the need to incorporate more primary advisors or success coaches. These challenges are critical to the success of advising since a significant portion of campuses still use faculty to advise their transfer students. The most immediate challenge with faculty advising is that faculty are either nine-month or 10-month employees. Patrick explained why this structure can be problematic:

> We utilize a lot of nine-month faculty, even for our- our full-time faculty. So, when students are coming for that first semester, because, you know, when- when you had a student they'd say, "I want to go back to school." "Well when does school start?" "It starts in August." So, during the summer when students are going to be registering, getting advised for that first year, a lot of our faculty advisors are not available.

On Patrick’s campus and others, to fill the gaps in summer months, some colleges have taken to pulling in success coaches or staff from across campus to help with the advising demands. Mark explained that since most of their faculty are nine-month employees, their “success coaches […]

advise when it's the summertime or covering gaps in the schedule as breaks." Like Mark, Erin explains that "we're one of the few community colleges that does 10-month contract employees still" and while the department chairs are 12-month employees, "over the summer between them and the two Success Coaches we have now and me, we kind of just rotate monitoring the electronic email." For Erin though, department chairs can only help so much for "advising is an art and not everyone is skilled in that art," so Erin has a "very select group who she knows, will ask right questions" while monitoring email over the summer.

One advisor interviewed for this study also emphasized the strain that faculty advisors have in balancing their teaching demands as well as their advising demands. At Mark's institution:

> the average instructor teaches 18 contact hours, which is roughly six classes. If you're a science instructor or math instructor, that's a little bit different, especially science because you have lab hours. So, you may not teach, uh, six classes. It's going to be different based off the amount of contact hours that are there. The same thing with math, since math classes are traditionally four hours for math 152, 171, and on up. Your, your classes will be different. But roughly that. So, you don't get a course reduction. So, you're expected to, teach 100 plus students, and advise 30 plus in the university transfer program.

Mark further expounded that there are even differences between math and science faculty and their humanities and social science counterparts; "English faculty, they generally have a 24 cap. Science has a 24 cap, but humanities and social behavioral sciences have a 30 cap." For example, "if you're a sociology instructor, if I was teaching six classes and there were six seated classes, I could have 180 students plus 30 advisors" and if you are a "English faculty member and your cap is 24, then you do 24 times six, and you're looking at over 120 students, plus your advisor

advisees." No matter what subject you teach, for faculty advisors "it's really hard to dedicate yourself to your 30 advisees and your 100 plus students" in your courses.

Beyond course capacity, students on Mark's campus face issues scheduling appointments with their faculty advisor because "students want to come between nine and 12, but that's where the bulk of advising happens when [and] when teaching happens as well." When there is an open appointment between those hours, students "compete" over it; "you know, on a Tuesday, Thursday, I might only have one 11 o'clock spot available. So, they have to not fight over it, but they have to compete over that" appointment. If appointment availability is still limited, Mark resorts to advisement over email; "if neither of those work and they want to email me their schedule, and I'll ask them a series of questions in the email, propose a schedule that I can approve with some conversation over email." Due to these issues, Mark reaches out to his students early to convince them to make their appointment as early as possible and described this juggle of competing priorities as "constant transition and wearing multiple hats."

Amanda, who serves as one of the two primary advisors at her rural community college, argued that advising is "scattered" on her campus because "some faculty are very good advisors and some are not." Amanda further clarified by describing advising on her campus as "50/50 just okay" because faculty's "main function is obviously to teach." Faculty advisors on her campus:

> know their program and they know their courses but they may not necessarily know that UNC System institution has exercise science for people who want to teach PE but they also have exercise science to people that want to do clinical work or that they have students that need have to audition for, um, theater and music like months before the deadline.

Some of the advisors not only spoke directly to issues surrounding students receiving bad and inaccurate advising, but they also spoke to the tension of making sure students receive information while also recognizing the role of the faculty advisor. Like everyone else, on Kimberly's campus faculty are also nine-month employees and therefore have to think of creative ways to advise students when faculty aren't on campus. Kimberly, who serves as a Director of Admissions, Retention, and Student Success for her community college, explains how she negotiates with faculty before summer break:

> To make sure that we have buy-in, we tell them if you don't want us to advise your students, tell us and we'll let students know. But our school is about making sure if a student comes, they don't leave here without, without something.

On Sarena's campus, they noticed when students began with their "professional advisor" and after transitioning to their faculty advisors, they "were still coming to their professional advisor, the person who they had when they first started, the person who has been emailing them, checking up on them." Because of this, their community college:

> made a tweak so that students would stay with […] their professional advisor for, um, the duration of your time with the college. And once again, we felt that it will help build that relationship because the student met with the professional staff when they first started.

Erin described how their community college is in the middle of hiring success coaches to aid in the mentoring of their students while also providing them with academic support strategies throughout their time there. At first, faculty were resistant to the change for they felt; "is this one more thing I have do?" While some faculty described this addition to their advising model as, "thank you for taking one thing off my plate." Others were even more resistant for they saw it as a threat; "there are other people on campus who hold their programs very tight to them and they

didn't want to let go of control." Erin won faculty over by helping them understand "that they would still have control of the advising" and then they "became more acceptable of the idea."

While not as clearly stated as some advisors, there was a perception felt that many campuses desired a more centralized model with primary advisors, not faculty advisors. The consensus from many of the participants was that, as Mark clearly states, "being a faculty advisor is very difficult." For faculty advisors who have to balance their teaching loads and advising loads:

> We only get down in the weeds of advising a few weeks out of the year and we don't keep up with every agreement. It's difficult to balance teaching the number of students that I do and then advise students a few weeks out of the semester. Don't get me wrong. I advise students all year, but I'm talking about the advising and registration process. Also, it's hard to keep up with all the changes. I might be informed of a change in one semester but forget about it the following semester. It's a lot to keep up with. Remember, along with advising, I'm grading projects, designing online courses, designing assignments, and trying to improve my classes. It's a difficult balance.

Even though Mark clarifies that their institution offers some training sessions on BDPs, the CAA, the UAA, and the transfer process, he still "guarantees there's still some faculty members don't know about them. They have been told about them, but they don't remember them from semester to semester" and it is not to lack of preparation or desire to provide decent and accurate advising to their students. It is difficult for "a lot of our faculty advisors to go from one week from not really seeing that many students, then on October 30th, open registration, and you've got 10 people standing at your door wanting an appointment." Even though the advising models varied from campus to campus, the labor of community college faculty who also serve as

academic advisors for transfer students could be felt with many expressing the sentiment of Lesley who said, “faculty advisors don’t have really time to do that,” in reference for a more caseload management approach to advising because of their “own teaching load.” While the advising model had a large impact on the experiences of how academic advisors advised transfer students, it is not the only organizational structure and student intervention that impacts the day-to-day work of community college academic advisors.

ACA 122. Every participant spoke to how important the course, ACA 122: College Transfer Success was to the advising and major exploration process for transfer students. For many advisors, this course was the primary vehicle in which students received career and major exploration advising. Also, ACA 122 serves as the main tool to educate transfer students on the CAA and TAC.

Successes of ACA 122.When students are unsure of which universities they want to transfer to and programs of study to pursue, both Sarena and Lindsey encouraged their students to enroll in ACA 122. Sarena directed her students “back to the ACA class, College Transfer Success and says, when you take this class, it's going to help you narrow down where you want to transfer to” and Lindsey also encouraged “them to take the ACA class, because then it's a semester long class to explore.” Amanda explained that it is typically the first class a student should take for:

> it teaches them how to be a good student, teaches them about our resources on our campus, how to engage on your campus and why that's important, setting goals and then it talks about at the end of that class, it talks about the transfer process.

Erin emphasized that when “students take it seriously, it's one of the best courses they can take.” Erin admits that ACA 122 is taught differently across the state, but at her community college students are asked to complete a major assignment by completing career assessments:

> They have to go out and have to take career assessments and take more than one. Because it's amazing the way you answer one career assessment, you get a different result. And so, it gives them more options. Then we have discussions with them about their results and they write, reflective journals about their results in the career exploration [portion]. Then we have them, because most community college students will hopefully turn back to their community, and so based on their results, we have them look at local job opportunities so that they can see that, yes, you really can, you can really become a chemist and then you can get work in Greenville.

The course is so valuable (no matter degree type) on Erin’s and other campuses that many have the course required or is strongly encouraged for all students to take the course, “and so our ACA class, whether you're a transfer student or a terminal student, you take the same class.” And if students have taken ACA 122, Erin reassures them that this will help them clarify their academic and career goals:

> So, if they don't know what they want to do and they don't want to know what they wanna major in. If they haven't taken the ACA class, I tell them…Hold on. Don't, don't just relax. The ACA class is going to help you with the career exploration.

Additionally, on Erin’s campus it appears that the course is focused on ways to build transfer student capital by assigning students to interview someone in their career field and someone who attended and graduated from college:

> If you are a college transfer student, you have to find someone who's not a family member to interview who went to the college, your number one college after you explore colleges. And you are to talk to them about college life, [and]find someone who's majoring in the same field you're majoring in so that they can have that connection.

This assignment "seems to spark interest in students, [some] were like, I'm definitely going there. Or oh no, that is not for me." Erin discusses how this assignment and others "really helps them to explore," it is "tailored" to their interests and where they want to transfer to. Not only is this helping students prepare to transfer but as Erin puts it, "we don't want [students] to get too far into [their] semesters and then realize they are on the wrong path."

While Erin indicated students on her campus all take ACA 122, some campuses are moving towards that model or have found innovative ways to coordinate with Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs to encourage their students to also take ACA 122. Patrick noticed on his campus "a large number of their CTE students transferring to a four-year institution" which became problematic because these students were not exposed to the important transfer information ACA 122 covers. If CTE students are transferring, they are only "taking 115, they're not getting exposed to any transfer information, they're not getting that transfer credit [information and] they may not be as prepared as a UT student transfer." As the number of CTE students transferring to UNC System institutions grow, Patrick created "cohort sections of ACA […] by program area." By creating these cohort sections, Patrick argued that "it gives them a chance to have all of their new students together. They start building a community, and they're having somebody from that program teach that course that can really speak on what's available to them beyond our community college."

While the course teaches transfer students the skills necessary to be successful in college, some instructors also spend time preparing transfer students to advocate for themselves throughout the transfer process. Lesley explained that she tries to help them "understand that there are times where admissions people just automatically say, "here's the credit you're going to get." And so, if you file an appeal, you're not a troublemaker.'" Beyond teaching advocacy skills, Mark explains that ACA 122 is where students "learn about the CAA, the TAC, [they] learn about the UAA. And then on top of that, [they] learn about BDPs". Additionally, Liz, Lesley, Kevin, and Sarah described how ACA 122 has a prominent role in academic advising and planning. While students on Liz's campus may not get academic planning at their "initial meeting" with an academic advisor, developing an academic plan or plans is a requirement of their ACA 122 class. However, Liz admitted that the opportunity for students to discuss their two-year plans with academic advisors is very limited for there are only two academic advisors who are able to advise students to transfer at her community college. Liz disclosed that "we honestly don't do as many as we used to because we are a very small staff and the transfer population is 60% of our population, so there's two advisors to do two-year plans and they usually take about an hour."

Kevin, Lesley, and Sarah described how students' academic plans are reviewed by either their academic advisor or ACA 122 Instructor. On Kevin's campus students upload their plans to Aviso where they are then "sent to their faculty advisor who reviews it with them. And part of their ACA class is to set an appointment with their faculty advisor to go over that." Lesley, who is not only an academic advisor, but an ACA 122 instructor, described how the ACA 122 class nudges students to "look at university websites, look at the list of courses required, they do personality inventories and things like that. We ask them about, an urban setting versus a rural

setting." Furthermore, Lesley explained that the ACA 122 "instructor just reviews it [academic plans], but they have to be signed off on by the advisor […] So, the student has to be advised for the assignment."

Challenges of ACA 122. While many academic advisors speak favorably of ACA 122 and the benefits of this success course, there exist many challenges regarding the implementation and delivery of course content. One challenge that stands out is how ACA 122 varies from one institution to the next, especially for a course that is responsible for educating transfer students on transfer policy. While on some campuses students submit academic plans for review to their ACA 122 instructor or academic advisor, Amanda explained that on her campus students use the curriculum guides supplied by the community college system to plan out their courses; "So they have the community college system guides, I guess like a curriculum guide to help [students] plan the courses" and later alluded to the fact that "ACA fundamentally could look different at every institution that teaches it." Amanda's campus is not alone as Mark explained that the academic plans developed in ACA 122 "are not reviewed by advisors, however, we do tell them to take those plans to their advising sessions." Mark spoke to the institutional and student challenges that his campus faces with making such a requirement mandatory. First, some instructors "might teach 200 ACA people a semester" so it is unreasonable to require instructors to review each academic plan submitted by their students. Furthermore, some sections of ACA 122 are taught online at Mark's campus and some students and staff dealt with questions on how to arrange a meeting without coming into the office physically.

ACA 122 also faces challenges from the staff who teach it and from the advisors who advise for it. Kevin explained that while ACA 122 is "great, just like anything else, it depends on the instructor and their commitment to it." Kevin teaches at a branch campus of a suburban

community college and clarifies that at his campus, they “have a great instructor for that” course while alluding that it may not be the case at the other branch campus of his institution. Erin described how some advisors on her campus devalue the importance of the course and delay students from taking it until the end of their tenure:

> And they keep delaying them and then they can't graduate without it. And it's their very last semester. And they'll say, "Wow, I really wish I would have had those three semesters ago. I would have learned so much more. I would have known how to take tests. I would have figured out that I did or didn't want to do this career. Now that I've spent two years’ worth of time and money on it, I'm kind of stuck at this."

Furthermore, the content of the course has come under scrutiny on campuses across the system. Kimberly admits that ACA 122 helps students with “searching out schools, looking at the programs, and they do a portfolio that would show what they would do when they move forward,” but it is also “chock full of so much other stuff.” Because so many students take ACA 122, campuses have unintentionally approached it as “the class where you can just throw everything into, because you're going to get all the students.”

On Kimberly’s campus, ACA 122 has been so watered down that she described the class as consisting of “too many little things that you require of them, and you add other stuff to it. It's to me, it's almost the class that students take and don't really need.” Kimberly continues to say that the course has become “dumping ground for everything in the college. And it's a lot of work for one credit and the students feel like isn't necessary.” Due to the course content overload, Kimberly believed that it’s “probably the number one class that students withdraw from.” When asked as to why, Kimberly believed that the course is “too much work for just one credit,” “it’s more work required for that class than some of the actual core classes,” and that the course has

“lost its impact.” Even more troubling for Kimberly is that instructors are supposed teach “students about the CAA and all this, but it is at the point where they have no idea of what the CAA is” and should be “teaching them how to look at their transcript and to search for the other colleges. There are so many different little things put in there that they just don't get it."

Given the experience of Kimberly, it may be the case that some community colleges have recognized that the course content of ACA 122 needs to be modified. Like Kimberly, Kevin expressed that when ACA 122 was first instituted, the course “seemed to become like a catch all, like, we want this to be taught, let's throw it at the ACA.” When it was first instituted the course focused on “career exploration, major exploration, writing essays, study skills […] just everything that a college student needs, but there’s not enough instruction or time in their curriculum” to cover this content as well as transfer content. Over the last two to three years, Kevin’s institution has “done a better job of fine tuning and making it more geared towards academic planning.” Sarena also spoke to her campus taking steps to modify course content to better align with the needs of transfer students. On Sarena’s campus, they also noticed that there was still a large gap with students understanding the academic planning process and were able to develop course content to fill that gap:

> So we really worked hard to kind of revamp the ACA course at our college. One of the things that we did is that we introduced, because I worked with the ACA instructor to kind of introduce a new section on mass service, academic planning, because students were still kind of fuzzy about how to utilize that piece. We worked to revamped that. Also, we really try to let students know to take it seriously because sometimes they just don't understand that you need this because this is preparing you for the future.

While some campuses face challenges with course content, almost all campuses struggled with the timing and sequencing of students enrolling in ACA 122. Every community college academic advisor agreed and emphasized that their students should take ACA 122 their first semester and that it should be mandatory for all community college students. But none of the academic advisors described ways to ensure every student was able to enroll in a section of ACA 122 their very first semester and it appears only a few colleges have taken the additional steps to make it mandatory for all community college students, regardless of degree type. While ACA 122 is mandatory for all students on Kimberly's campus, because it's not required the first semester, some students learn of the CAA for the first time in their last semester before graduation; "we want students to take ACA in the beginning and we push them, but we have students now, Associate of Arts students, and ACA-122 is one of the last courses they take prior to graduation." Even at well-resourced community colleges like Lindsey's, they face challenges to ensure students can enroll in ACA 122 when they should take it and need it. While Lindsey wants students to take ACA 122 their first semester, at the time of the interview, all ACA 122 classes were full: "it's a graduation requirement. And so, we want students to take it their first semester but like right now all of our ACA classes are full." Lindsey explained the ripple effects that this can have on students and need for more sections of ACA 122:

> And so, for the next three weeks anyone that registers […] who really needs that course is not going to be able to take it. There's always never enough sections, […] so they want to add more sections and that's a priority with the new president but unfortunately some students aren't able to take it their first semester.

While there may be many benefits of having a course like ACA 122 to help educate students on the transfer process and build their transfer student capital, many campuses experienced serious

challenges in the delivery and course content of this course to make sure it's a fruitful academic endeavor for students and instructors. Like ACA 122, there exists a wide variety of effective and ineffective training and professional development opportunities for academic advisors at community colleges.

Training and Processional Development for Academic Advisors. While some campuses offer robust training and professional development opportunities for the academic advisors, some community colleges offer a "sink or swim" approach to training and professional development. Patrick and Kevin work at one of the few community colleges that offers a robust training for new academic advisors. Patrick explained that their advisor training consists of seven training modules in Blackboard (their Learning Management System). The topics of the modules consist of:

> the ins and outs of academic advising, ethics of advising, the nuances of the advisor/advisee relationship, learning about what resources are available for the student that the advisor can send the student to, career advising, [and] how to register students for courses.

Beyond these modules, advisors at their campus also "shadow an experienced advisor and reflect on their experiences." Kevin adds that they "have some case studies, which are pretty effective, where we'll hand the instructors or the advisor scenarios, and they have to act them out." Furthermore, their campus also provides an incentive for faculty and staff to complete the training. Faculty and staff on their campus are required to complete five to six hours of professional development every year and this "training counts towards that time."

At Samuel's community college they have also developed a comprehensive training system where they offer a "series of targeted trainings" throughout the year and that can change

from year to year. Topics include their “student information system,” they offer an open advising training lab where they practice “hypothetical student situations,” “appreciative advising training,” “round table discussions” where they use “prompts to guide the discussion,” a “new advisor training,” “refresher trainings […] at the beginning of each registration period,” and “developmental placement type training” to name a few. Beyond this training series, Samuel and his campus have also “developed an advisors handbook” and “brief users-manual that's a very stripped down [version of the handbook where] you can get your questions answered” reference tool.

In regard to specific training, Lindsey and her campus offer “a college transfer module that our advisors take and is a part of our advising training and that also faculty advisors do as well.” In addition to the transfer module, Lindsey’s Dean offers trainings on the “different transfer degrees and different changes to the CAA and different courses that are required.” Some advisors also mentioned attending the training and professional development opportunities sponsored through the UNC System office and attending trainings offered by individual UNC System institutions. Compared to the experiences of the academic advisors above, training and professional development at most community colleges could be described as either adequate or as Liz illustrated; “it was sink or swim when I started.”

Liz further admitted; “I'll be honest, I don't know that I have received any” training or professional development. While Liz’s experience may exist at the other end of the continuum, the level of training and professional development offered to community college academic advisors is far from perfect. On Amanda’s campus, the majority of advising is conducted by faculty advisors and when asked what type of training and professional development faculty receive, Amanda described it as “minimal.” Some of the training and professional development

centered around the train the trainer or a mentor/mentee model. Mark explained that; "what happens is you get some training from your mentor, you get some training from PD about Colleague and self-service, which are information software systems, but there's no one really to put it together." What seems to be absent from training and professional development on Mark's campus is a training curriculum for it appears that several gaps exist in their training:

> They are not trained about the CAA and UAA. They are trained in what classes transfer, but they are not provided the framework about why certain classes transfer, while others don't. They understand what transfers based on the College Catalog, but not the understanding of why it transfers.

Furthermore, Mark explained that "the mentor is not going be there when you start advising every student." The role of the mentor to show and teach new faculty advisors the mechanics of advising; "how to advise using the guidebook, requirements to graduate, and show them the system to register students." While the mechanics of advising are important, Mark alludes that it's "one thing to register a student yourself" versus "feeling comfortable doing that." Additionally, Mark's campus uses ACA 122 as a training tool to help fill in the gaps regarding the CAA. Their faculty "teach ACA, because that's the way they'll learn about all of the stuff," meaning the CAA. When Erin began her career as a community college academic advisor, the only training and professional development she "received was from her predecessor." Erin spoke highly of the "consistent" training from the UNC System office which she "shares with my advisors in a summary type of form."

The importance of training is not lost on many of the advisors interviewed and the amount of training needed to be a proficient and productive community college academic advisor. Lesley admits that if she didn't teach ACA 122 and only had to depend on the training

and professional development offered by the student services and advising center, she "would feel really lost" and discloses that many of the advisors on her campus do "feel really lost" due to the sheer amount of information needed to do that job well. Developing robust training is difficult because "there's so many changes, and so many universities, and so many different plans. You just can't keep up with it all." Because "most of our advisors are not members of CTPA. And most of our advisors are not going to those ACA conferences," Lesley has offered training and professional develop sessions on how to read BDPs, but overall acknowledges that "our in-house professional development is a little bit lacking." It is also important to acknowledge that almost all of the academic advisors mentioned that their campuses are aware of the training and professional development deficits that exist on their campuses. Even Lesley clarifies since advising is part of her campus's QEP, they begun offering trainings on "intrusive" and "appreciative advising." And through the member check process, Mark shared that beginning this fall, his campus had:

> instituted training sessions for all faculty regarding the CAA, the UAA, and how to use BDPs. It is required training for all Transfer Advisors. This allows advisors to understand the transfer process in more detail and understand why the programs are designed the way they are.

What is evident is that training and professional development is a mixed bag across the community college system with only a handful describing thoughtful and intentional training and professional development opportunities to meet the diverse demands of community college academic advisors.

Academic Advising Challenges. On top of the challenges associated with advising models, ACA 122, and training and professional development, community college academic

advisors experience a variety of general academic advising challenges. Some community college academic advisors spoke in length about transfer degree confusion. In particular, as Kimberly described it, students enroll at the community college "thinking if I'm going to do business administration, I should take business administration course here at your school so that if I transfer to a four-year, I won't have to take more classes." Kimberly and other advisors on her campus have to "explain to them [that] it's different. And then some of them will start off in an […] AAS program and then decide later they want to transfer." However, for students who are considering switching degree programs at the community college are:

> so far in it, they don't want to quit because of […] how long it would take me to get the associates. And you have to let them know, well you've been in this program [and] you have four more classes, and you [will] have your [applied] associate's. And if you want to go to the associate in arts or science, you're adding another year to yourself.

Due to these differences, community college academic advisors have to spend time explaining to students how some programs are not transferable. Sarena illustrated this issue for her students who are pursuing the Associates of Business which is not a transferable program covered by the CAA; "a lot of our students are in our business program, because our business program is not a package college transfer program […] I have to make sure that the students realize some of these classes may not transfer." Additionally, Amanda points out that some of her students do not understand the value in completing their degree before transferring; "most of the students don't understand the purpose of completing" and how it benefits them long term.

Lindsey describes the job of being a community college academic advisor as becoming "trickier." Lindsey clarifies that it is trickier because there is not "just one way to talk about transfer." In North Carolina, students with an Associate Arts or Science degrees can transfer to

UNC System institutions under the CAA; students can also transfer under bilateral agreements and uniform agreements. While these many different options may make it easier for students to transfer, it makes it "trickier" for community college academic advisors to explain. Lindsey detailed that being an academic advisor at a community college is "almost like you have to have a larger knowledge base because you have to know [and] keep track of all the different degrees, all the different ways students can transfer" while at a university "you're sometimes just like in charge of the eight different degrees that's in your college." Liz also shared a similar challenge. In order:

> to keep from getting completely overwhelmed when recommending courses – since no institution is the same – I've had to come up with a personal strategy for advising based on the things I have learned and read. Since advising and registration occurs at the same time at my institution, and our student traffic can easily overwhelm [us], there isn't time to research every institution and BDP when talking with a student.

Overall, Erin finds that "students do find it confusing when we ask them to choose a major on the college foundations website" because those students are thinking long term about transferring, "an associate of arts, associate of science, an associate of engineering really doesn't mean anything to them."

Additionally, it appears that some community college academic advisors have to contend with hidden requirements related to transfer by UNC System institutions. Mark detailed a situation in which a student was denied admission into a nursing program at a UNC System institution even though the student had a good GPA. According to Mark, his student "backloaded their program of study where she was taking three science classes at once. She was taking chem 2, microbiology, maybe anatomy and physiology at the same time." According to this UNC

System institution, students who are taking three science classes in their last semester pre-transfer, “they’re not going to be successful in all three or they’ll get a whole of bunch of Cs, which may not make them competitive to their program.” Once the student was informed of the admission decision “she moved microbiology to the summer. So, she took in the spring, one in the summer. And then she was going to wait a year to apply to nursing school.” Samuel also detailed a similar experience in which one of his students completed an Associate of Engineering degree but because the UNC System institution did not sign the uniform agreement they were going to evaluate his student’s transfer credit on a course by course basis. For example, the institution was denying credit for “Drafting 170, which was on the transfer course list.” In an effort to help his student, Samuel went back and “found a way that that student also met the Associate in Science, which was covered by the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement, so we awarded that student the Associate in Science, which the UNC System institution does have to recognize, so they couldn't deny the course.”

Two community college academic advisors spoke to developmental course issues that students face before even enrolling in transfer equivalent courses. Erin says students “can get so bogged down in the developmental courses and it becomes frustrating, especially if they don't pass one for we don't want them to lose hope.” Erin speaks to how she and the advisors on her campus “try to give them classes that are of interest to them to keep them going.” Mark emphasized that “the hardest people to actually advise for are people in transitional courses when they can't take college transfer courses.” Mark explained that “students in these courses do not meet the pre-requisites to take most college level courses” and “as a result, it is hard to find a full load for them until they can take college level math and English courses.”

Along with balancing the desire of students to take transfer courses and transfer as quickly as possible, some community college academic advisors are also balancing the needs of their institution with the needs of their students. Lesley described how she has to balance the desire of many of her students who "just want to get to the university as quickly as possible" knowing that completing the transferrable associates degree is most likely more beneficial for the student and their community college. For Lesley's students, "a lot of the times they may want to do just 30 hours here and then move on because their friends [are] already gone." A few academic advisors spoke about how their institution cannot keep up the demand for certain transferable courses. Patrick explained that with "introduction to ethics, it's like we just can't seem to offer enough sections of that. We have so many students that need it. And we just, sometimes we can't keep up with the demand." Furthermore, for smaller community colleges Mark explained that they have to be conscious of how they advise for course sequencing. Because Mark's community college is small, "they tend to offer more 100 level courses in the fall and more 200 level courses in the spring." Mark detailed how he explains that "if you're having to take these sequences" it's not only important to know "where you are in the sequence" but also to ensure students do not break the sequence because students can easily get off track.

Kimberly speaks specifically "to balancing the policy of the institution, but also balancing what the student really needs" and rhetorically asks; "we can bring all these students in and get this FTE, but are we going to get completers?" Kimberly describes how:

> we're trying to move students in and out, sometime we, we mess up their journey because we're trying to put them in this way and that's not what's going to work for them. I want them to control it, so that when they finish, when they graduate, I don't like to hear students say, look what you did, no baby, that's what you did. You finished it.

The pressure “to move students in and out” comes from “the more students you have in, the more FTE you get.” While Kimberly’s institution may be focused on the numbers, for Kimberly, our “students aren't just numbers they're individuals.”

Community college academic advisors also face a variety of caseload issues and potentially an over emphasis on advising in the students’ first semester, which is sometimes their only appointment with an academic advisor. Liz very clearly states that at her community college “students are required to see us first semester and they're not required beyond that” and “students can self-advise.” While on Mark’s campus, he and the other advisors may do more outreach than Liz’s campus, Mark explained the tension that “there are some people at the college that want us to meet with students for the first time and map out their two years.” Mark argues that the pressure to map out the first two years for students can create “problems and anxiety,” especially for small community colleges. At smaller community colleges, “sometimes [courses] aren’t taught every semester,” “sometimes there might only be one section,” some classes may “only be taught in the summer,” and students could “get closed out because they didn’t register early enough.” While in theory, mapping out courses for two-years sounds appropriate for students, some advisors run into the above roadblocks which makes degree planning difficult.

While many advisors interviewed for the study have assigned caseloads, it appears that many of them do not take a caseload management approach to intervening with students. Liz and the other advisors on her campus wish to see students more often, but their “office wait-times don’t always allow for relationship-building during the registration season, which lasts for several months at a time.” It is also evident that across all the interviews, caseloads ranged greatly from as low as “30” to as high as “200.” Lesley has 30 students on her caseload but “only has 10 who come to see her” and on Kimberly’s campus, most advisors who advise transfer

students have “no more than 75.” In discussing how often and for how long advisors meet with their transfer students, the only consistent model found across all interviews was mandating that a minimum, students are advised for the first semester. Beyond that, as Kimberly states, appointment length, how often students receive outreach, and the type of outreach is often “up to the individual” across some campuses. Along with the challenges and complexities felt on campus, community college academic advisors also have to balance challenges and complexities at the state-wide system level that have a large impact on the work they do for transfer students.

System Challenges and Complexities

This theme captures the frustrations felt by many community college academic advisors across North Carolina. While the 2014 revision to the CAA was mentioned by several academic advisors as making their jobs easier and more beneficial for their students, almost everyone spoke to how challenging and complex the transfer process has become. Regarding communication and the relationships community colleges have with their four-year partners, it could be best described as a mixed bag. At times, the relationships largely depended on the proximity of the two institutions while at other times, the proximity of a community college and their four-year partner had little to do in the success or failure of their relationship. Additionally, community college academic advisors also grapple with issues of curriculum alignment which make advising transfer students more complex than it potentially needs to be.

Communication. One of the most cited challenges across all interviews was centered around communication and the lack of consistent and reliable communication regarding transfer. While many of community college academic advisors freely admit that communication has been improved and changes to BDPs and curriculum happen around the time when the academic calendar changes, because the system is so decentralized and driven at the institutional level,

some academic advisors spoke about relying on website and other online communication tools as their main ways of getting transfer information. While some academic advisors feel comfortable reaching out to UNC System institutions and explained how many updates are shared from their respective Deans, almost all academic advisors spoke about the importance and value of websites and how they are used in their appointments with transfer students. Amanda described how in her appointments with students, they do "a lot of online stuff." Under Amanda's advice and guidance, she asks her students to view "transfer tours online" and "explore a couple of the colleges" online to help them determine their transfer options and this may be key for students at more rural community colleges to see themselves as students at a UNC System institution. Kimberly, who works at a community college with locations in counties with an economic distress indicator of one and two believed that having students map out their four-year plans is important but having them visit UNC System institution websites helps them gain an "even clearer picture" of what life is like at a four-year institution. It helps student realize "that [there] is actually a means to an end." Erin also encouraged her students to visit "different [UNC System institution] websites to look at stuff to help them figure out" transfer options.

While some advisors rely on this type of communication, some advisors shared how inconsistent UNC System institution websites are. Patrick finds himself frustrated because "every time he goes to their website it looks different" and he "can find something on their website one day, two days later I go and try to find it in the same spot and it's like, well it was just here." Community college academic advisors also rely heavily on websites and for some, it is their main source of information for BDPs. When asked, how to stay up to date on BDPs and other curriculum changes, Lindsey responded, "well, I hope their websites are up to date." Up to date websites are important for Lindsey because:

> you can't know everything and what all the requirements are everywhere. You have to look it up […] so the websites have to be accurate and they have to be user friendly and student friendly. Because there's absolutely no way that an advisor could keep track of all that.

For community college academic advisors, it also seems that there is a lot of assumption that the UNC System institutions are keeping their BDPs and other related transfer information up to date. Kevin shares that he "presumes [they] stay up to date on the Northcarolina.edu. Because you go there, and then you go directly to the university websites from there." When asked how Amanda stays up to date on changes to BDPs, she shared; "I guess I assume those are up to date. I hope that they are up to date."

Some community colleges, like Samuel's, have taken it upon themselves to create their online "resources so that it's easy to find the BDPs." Samuel also believed that UNC System institutions are "not building their website to provide me with information. They're building their website to try and get new students." Mark would most likely agree with Samuel and share that "it's information overload and universities need to understand that." He further explained that "I don't need a booklet" and should focus their communications on promoting "programs in a specific way and as community college advisors, we need to know about program changes, program GPAs, program requirements, new programs, and BDPs for the programs." For Mark, knowing that "they are building three new buildings is not my priority." Mark cares more about:

> what programs they are developing and the requirements for those programs [...]. I need to know how these programs will help our students at the College. I need to understand the road map to those programs so I can inform my advisees.

It is apparent that many, if not all, of the community college academic advisors interviewed rely on UNC System institutions to notify them of curriculum changes or updates to the BDPs. Then each community college develops ways to disseminate information across their campus. Sarah shared that she “depends on the universities to be contacting us because I've got a pretty full load” and further clarifies that this communication is “driven by the universities.” Once academic advisors receive new information, most of them share this information in informal ways. Kevin for example explains that he writes “a summary email that I send out to just my department, the math and science department. And so, any new information that I gain from these visits, I share with my colleagues.” Liz also explained that her Dean is “very detailed and she'll send us updates and things, if she hears about them” and that she also becomes aware of most changes “through researching for various students, we might see a change. Or we go to conferences occasionally” where she will hear about updates. Lesley also shared that professional development organizations and events has helped her to stay aware of transfer related information. The College Transfer Programs Association (CTPA) is “pretty good about sending things out and communicating with folks” through their annual conference and member listserv. While community colleges have to rely on UNC System institutions for up to date and consistent communication about BDPs and transfer, community colleges and their academic advisors also have to find ways to digest and share this information across their campus or campuses. Samuel details the burden this places on community colleges and how it forces some community colleges expend their resources to make sense of curriculum not even offered on their campus; “it's probably more than can, any one person can digest. Um, that's why we focus on the schools that our students preferentially transfer to.” Like communication, relationships

with UNC System institutions could be described as positive and helpful but also as a source of frustration.

Relationships with UNC System Institutions. Community college academic advisors have had both positive and negative relationships with UNC System institutions. Erin described her relationships with the institutions around her community college as “really close” and the admission representatives from the UNC System institutions as “very friendly.” While also wishing they gave her and her students more “one-on-one” time, Erin did say that they “give you all the information you need.” Liz also described positive relationships similarly to Erin in that when schools visit their campus, it is very beneficial to them and their students for they are “usually very willing to answer questions.” On Liz’s campus they host “two big transfer fairs a year, and roughly 30 schools usually attend. Roughly 150 to 200 students attend each” and “individual schools are welcome to contact us about separate visits as well.” Amanda also shared that the UNC System institution “representatives are really great. I mean, they are very involved. They're very responsive to students, they do large groups while they work on the individual stuff, so it's been good.” UNC System institution representatives were described by Kimberly as being “receptive and easy to talk to” and providing the “answers to questions they need.”

The advisor that spoke the most highly of UNC System institutions was Kevin. Kevin described his relations as “all positive” and shared that “every time I reach out to a university and say, hey, I want to bring some students by for such and such, they're very receptive.” In his praise of UNC System institutions, he also mentioned that some “are going above and beyond to support transfer students.” For institutions that go above and beyond, Kevin says “they actually have a department dedicated to transfer students” and within that department “they’re focused on

helping those students make the transition, whether it be housing, or social life, or whatever, they're there for that first semester when they come in, to help them transition to being at their university." In comparison to universities without dedicated transfer centers, Kevin shares that universities with a transfer center give "great information sessions" and are better organized to "line up people to talk to them" when visiting their campus. It is probably important to share while serving as a faculty member and a transfer advisor at his community college, Kevin works at a community college with campuses in counties with economic distress indicators of two and three and his community college actively supports a transfer club on his campus by providing funding to make campus visits to UNC System institutions each semester.

Some of the advisors spoke highly of the institutions they work closely with. For example, Patrick explained he had "pretty strong working relationship" with Midsize Regional University for he coordinated a specific pathway program for that university. There was also sentiment shared by Amanda that some UNC System institution representatives understand the benefits of earning a two-year degree before transferring. Amanda shares that:

> the universities have tried to do a relatively good job of explaining why they should get the associates degree. So, like redirecting students here or communicating with them when they apply, you know, please consider saying at your community college and finishing up.

Samuel also spoke to the reciprocal relationship between his community college and UNC System institutions. At Samuel's community college, they "have an office space that's set aside, specifically, for the transfer admissions counselors to come in and, and have a presence in our Transfer Advising Center." The dedicated space for UNC System institution representatives

allows for serendipitous collaborations between them and Samuel's team of transfer advisors. For example, Samuel shares that at Rural Midsize University:

> they had a class in one of their BDPs that was not a transfer course. And so, I went to her, and I said, we cannot have this, we can't have our college transfer students take this course. And so, she went back to her folks, they updated the BDP.

The dedicated space to UNC System institutions at Samuel's community college helps to "creates opportunities for that kind of collaboration."

While there are many examples of positive relationships between community colleges and UNC System institutions, many of the advisors also shared several challenges with them as well. At the individual, one-on-one level, academic advisors described a mutually beneficial relationship. But some suggest that at the macro level that the UNC System is too segregated. Lindsey, who works at one of the largest urban community colleges in the state encapsulates this idea very well:

> Everyone I meet from the University; we have a great relationship and they really want to work with a community college… on an individual basis. I think as a system it seems like it's very segregated with the community colleges and the universities and there's not a lot of overlap.

Lindsey shares that the ongoing Math pathways project is one of, if not the first time, many "student services people [from both systems] were together talking about math or whatever. It seems like it's pretty separated I think." Lindsey shared that some "individual institutions […] are more transfer friendly [than others], most likely because of enrollment issues, they're "going to need community college students for enrollment."

While some UNC System institutions are transfer friendly, Lindsey also believes more universities in the system can develop more ways to become even more transfer friendly; “I think they [UNC System institutions] try to be somewhat transfer friendly and to try to continue that relationship but I think that could definitely be worked on.” For example, Lindsey lives and works in Raleigh and “I'm a [Large Research University] grad, so I love [Large Research University], but [Large Research University] is just not as transfer friendly. Like they don't have to be…they can be elitist I guess.”

This “segregation” or fragmentation also takes other forms, especially when it comes to communication. Amanda, who works at a rural community college in the eastern part of the state, described how “students who are going [transferring to schools] close by […] those schools are very, are much more responsive because they're familiar with our area.” However, “when we have students that want to go away […] to the central or Western part of the state, […] communication gets a little bit harder.” Amanda believes the difference lies in “the nature of the area.” For the schools nearby, “it’s very family oriented” and “it’s easier to make connections and communicate.” But when students want to transfer outside of their area, “follow-up is really poor.” Erin also spoke to the challenges of communicating to schools that are outside of their region. For Erin and like most of the other community college academic advisors, “most of the communications I have with different universities is through email.” While Erin sees participation from the surrounding colleges at her campus’s “college advisory council,” many of the universities do not participate and “it would be helpful if they did, because then we can make sure we are following the BDPs and things of that nature a little bit more closely”

Additionally, Patrick and Lindsey highlight the “segregation” that exists on individual UNC System institutions and how it either benefits or potentially further fragments the transfer

process. When Patrick does not receive a timely response from one of the UNC System institutions, he "reaches out to specific colleges [at a UNC System institution]" and "it's a much better experience." Lindsey counters that by speaking to the complexities and autonomy of specific individual colleges on UNC System campuses by explaining her hope for more collaboration at that level, "a lot of Universities have their colleges [and they have] their own autonomy which […] that's how they grow."

Beyond the fragmentation and segregation, many community college academic advisors further discussed communication challenges with the UNC System partners. Mark spoke to his current frustration where he "emailed an unnamed institution 10 to 12 days ago and I'm still waiting to hear back from them." For Mark, this lack of communication "impacts my ability to properly advise my advisees and it ultimately impacts the student." Mark further highlights the "compounding effect" this could have and asks; "how many other emails are not being returned?" Patrick details similar experiences, "if I am working with a student and I see something and I'm not sure, I do try to reach out to somebody at the colleges. Sometimes I get somebody and sometimes I don't." Because of these experiences Patrick wishes that "universities […] just review what they have available and see what they're missing." This is important for Patrick "because if we're providing this as a tool for community colleges to work with their students to get them where they're wanting to go, then they need to make sure that all of their programs are presented and available with all the correct information." The inconsistent communication and lack of established relationships with UNC System institutions poses challenges for academic advisors in delivering timely and up-to-date information for their students, but the lack of curriculum alignment between the community college system and their

public, four-year partners proved to be one of the greatest sources of stress for community college academic advisors.

Curriculum Alignment. The lack of curriculum alignment between the NCCC System and the UNC System proved as one of the greatest challenges faced by community college academic advisors. These challenges are acute in the following few key areas: math requirements for transfer, challenges with BDPs, CAA loopholes, and overall challenges with the transfer process. Math requirements are, as Lindsey describes, challenging because "some of the four-year institutions have a higher math requirement than is actually needed." Additionally, Lindsey explained that while "community colleges got rid of college algebra and now it all is pre-calculus, which is really supposed [for the] stem major, but some of the non-stem majors [at UNC System institutions] still have it as a requirement." For Lindsey, who serves on the math pathways planning group at her community college, explained that "students tend to not be successful in math, so I think if you just jump to pre-calculus where only 30% of those students actually pass it, where if they could take, statistics or quantitative literacy that has a lot higher pass rate" but then it may not benefit the student when they transfer to a UNC System institution.

Due to the importance of meeting and passing the correct math requirements, a lot rests on the academic advising that students receive at the very beginning of their tenure at a community college. If students receive incorrect academic advising for math requirements, Kevin's engineering transfer students are not in the correct math, the "student is probably going to be at the school for three years instead of two years, right off the bat." Kevin's advising for math is even more complicated due to structural issues on his campus; "the admissions advisors are their first contact, and sometimes the admissions advisor won't put in a student into a math class the first semester. I had three of those last fall […] so that's always an issue." Kevin

explained that with STEM programs, math requirements are “pretty straightforward as to what math classes they need,” but “if it's a degree like psychology, some schools will want statistics, whereas other schools will want college algebra.” For Kevin, he expressed the “need to work with the student to pin down what school they end up wanting to attend, so that you get their math right. Otherwise, they're going to be taking math courses as electives, and they generally don't like that.” Academic advising for math can be even more complicated because the transferrable Associate of Arts and Associate of Sciences degrees have different math requirements. Lesley explained that “you can get the associate degree with one math.” The associate in arts degree requires one math “and it can be math 143, which is like quantitative literacy, statistics, or pre-calculus.” On Lesley’s campus, “a lot of students will take the 143 but that doesn't actually transfer…no one wants math 143, except for like the education program at Rural Midsize University.” According to Lesley, students will “sign up for math 143 in that first semester. And then they find out that it's really not super helpful when beginning the transfer process.” Advising for math is even further complicated depending on where students score on multiple assessments for colleges that are still using them. For students on Erin’s campus, “if a student comes in and they don't place well on the placement test they then start out in the very beginning developmental math” level and “if they pass all of the math courses the way they're supposed to, it takes them two semesters” before beginning college math course work. Erin explained that can be dangerous for students for it places a financial “burden on students because it eats up their Pell Grant money.”

Another challenge discussed by community college academic advisors were the various CAA loopholes that they and their students have to contend with. Since some the majority of articulation is institution-driven, Lesley spoke to how one university may not accept a math

course and tell the student “somebody advised you wrong” when in reality the math course is a “perfectly good course for six other programs, but the department doesn’t want that” math. Lesley also shares other examples of course by course articulation issues, “business law at some [community colleges] doesn't transfer as their business law. It counts as a general elective” and how “Rural Midsize Regional University wouldn't take our backpacking for their backpacking.” For Lesley, it is “confusing to students when backpacking doesn't count as backpacking. And business law doesn't count as business law.” Additionally, Sarah highlighted that while the CAA is very beneficial for students who earn the transferable associate’s degree; “the comprehensive articulation agreement [CAA] is really only effective and guaranteed, if you finish that degree.”

Also highlighted in conversations around the CAA were navigating the nuances in pre-major admission requirements. Sarena referred to it as advising for these requirements as being “a little fuzzy trying to navigate what's the requirements for us versus what you need for when you move on.” It is confusing for Sarena because “the requirements for pre-engineering and just engineering don’t always match.” For example, “pre-engineering, you could take a communications class but it's not a requirement when you switch to engineering.” Liz shared Sarena’s sentiment but also admitted for the schools she advises for; requirements mostly line up; “I think the requirements can be so different. Some schools require a foreign language and a physical education course. Some don't. But for the most part, it's pretty similar, so I feel like that's how we continue to do what we do.” With that said, Liz clarifies “more uniform degree requirements between the public institutions would help.” Samuel agrees with Sarena and Liz as well and argues that “the number one loophole is that it says, a specialized program, may require extra hours to graduate.”

Samuel described in detail that “the problem is there's actually no objective criteria for what a specialized program” is. These specialized programs can “accept the 60 credits. They dump, you know, 30 of them, into some category that doesn't meet a degree requirement, and a student still has to take 90 or more hours at a [UNC System institution] to graduate with that degree.” While these issues may be more acute at more competitive UNC System institutions, Lesley described similar issues at other midsize to large UNC System institutions. Lesley shared that “if you want to go into business, for example…you can't get into the College of Business at Rural Midsize University unless you have a certain GPA in progression classes.” Because of this policy, some of Lesley’s students “get there and theoretically, you're a junior. You got your associate's degree. You take the classes they want you to take. But you don't have the progression GPA yet. So, you've got to take 12 hours of just stuff” to “make a certain GPA before you can apply to be in the College of Business.” Transferring GPA issues also exist for students who transfer to nursing programs, Mark shared that:

> if students are trying to get into a competitive program, a 2.0 is not going to work, they need to have a more competitive GPA. Public Research University for example, I think on their nursing application, says minimum to apply is a 3.0. But, you know, in reality, it doesn't get competitive until probably a 3.5.

Samuel also ran into an adjacent issue in which a UNC System institution uses Math 152 to screen off applicants; even though Math 152 [Statistical Methods] “is a math in the CAA, and it’s on the transfer course list, it's designated that way in the curriculum standard. But, rather than put it in their BDPs, they use it to screen off applicants.” For students who used “Math 152 to satisfy [their] Associates degree, they don't even get admitted” and when brought to the attention of that UNC System institution they told him “students can apply, but they won’t get in.”

At Public Research University's nursing program, Lesley discovered that for students who "took our biology 111 and 112, and you transferred to Public Research University's with the associate degree, they would count it as whatever your general biology is. Like a 2000 level class," but "if you took 111 and 112 at the community college and did not earn the degree, then it counted as a 1000 level class, and you still had to take the 2000 level class." The dilemma that Lesley was troubled by was "so if student A takes biology 111 and 112, and makes an A, but doesn't get the degree, they get lesser credit than student B over here, who made a C in that?" For Lesley, if a student "takes biology 111 and 112, it should just transfer in as whatever general bio is. It shouldn't matter whether you got an associate degree or not. It's the same class" and "to improve the CAA and the process, you'd have to clean up all these little things. But there's thousands of those little things."

Samuel and Lesley both questioned whether or not institutions are following the spirit of the CAA. Lesley emphasized that "there's too many loopholes" or "too many caveats." Lesley argued that departments may be "following the letter of the law, but not necessarily the intent of the law." For students who transfer without an associate's degree, they "don't have the associate degree protection so [UNC System institutions] don't have to give them credit for this." Samuel argues that for schools who "do not want to adhere to the spirit of the CAA, that's the loophole [specialized programs] that allows them to do it." According to Samuel, some UNC System institutions are just blatantly [in] violation of the CAA and they're arrogant about it, and they really don't care if they ever get a transfer student." Samuel describes in detail one encounter with Public Research University in which they published a BDP that "explicitly stated a maximum of 31 credits will transfer into this program" when the "CAA says you have to give 60 hours of credit." When brought to that University's attention:

> I said, so you're trying to tell me I need to tell a student that graduates from us, adheres to the CAA, that when they get to [Public Research University], they're going to have 90 some odd credits left to graduate, and she said, that's exactly what you tell that student.

Challenges with Baccalaureate Degree Plans or BDPs as they are referred to by community college academic advisors were a prevalent concern among several of the participants interviewed for this study. One consistent challenge that advisors face had to do with the actual design and layout of BDPs. While "some universities do a fantastic job" in designing their BDPs, Erin struggled in interpreting many of them because "every university does things differently." For example, Erin described that there exists a wide variety of formats and approaches to creating these important tools:

> some are in nice PDF files. And there is a table and it's like the community college class, the semester hours and then the university class or vice versa university then community college. Some are just Excel spreadsheets that they throw them together. And the writing is so small on the Excel spreadsheet, I mean, if you printed it out, it's hard to read and on your computer, you need to magnify to 200.

Liz described similar frustrations in reading and using the BDPs. For Liz, "there's a lot of text on them and I'm really just looking for bullet points" and wished that there was "less text on BPDs" and actually prefers the transfer guides over the BDPs because she "likes bullet-pointed information." Samuel indicated that it's plainly clear that "some of these universities have outsourced their BDP creation to people that don't have a good knowledge of a community college curriculum." This can be problematic because a "student following this BDP would not graduate from our college, because the BDP doesn't conform to our systems curriculum standard…so, you literally couldn't use that BDP." Some of the BDPs Samuel has struggled with

and could not use “included courses that are not on the transfer course list” or have “too few Social behavioral Sciences.” Samuel appreciates the specificity on some of these BDPs, but also has to balance his “responsibility to our students to advise them so that they'll actually complete our program too.”

Beyond the actual format of BDPs, some advisors expressed frustration over the lack of detail in the creation of the BDPs. Mark explained that “some [are] more defined than others.” According to Mark, “some schools will just put UGETC course, UGETC course, UGETC course.” While Mark offered that he believes this “gives students a lot of latitude” in choosing courses, from an advising perspective he wishes that “universities had more prescribed BDPs.” Not only would advisors appreciate more specificity on BDPs, but Amanda also believes “some students would prefer specificity” too. Mark explained that while choices may benefit students already enrolled at UNC System institutions, it “doesn’t necessarily work for community college students. They just want to know what they want to have.” Choosing “between Music 110 and Art 111, that's fine. But choosing between six fine arts electives” can get confusing for their students. Having too many choices leads students to come back to them and ask, “what's best for my major” when they may not be experts in that major curriculum. Additionally, some institutions do not list the courses beyond the associates degree which Lesley understands; “I understand that, you know, that [curriculum] may change. Or why does the student really need to worry about that?” But this runs counter to the expectations of advisors for they “try to make them do a four-year plan” during their time at the community college.

In speaking to the overall quality of BDPs, Lesley said it not only depends on the institution, but also “depends on the college and the department within the institution.” For example, because of Lesley’s proximity to Rural Midsize University, she mostly works with

students transferring to that institution. If Lesley has “a business student or a psychology or sociology student, those [BDPs] are really good.” Those BDPs provide Lesley and her students with the “courses they should take, which math they should take,” but “if I've got an education student though, the BDP is virtually worthless.” The education BDP only lists “basic gen ed stuff and some concentration courses…and then it just has a bunch of pre-major electives that they can't get here” which may inadvertently encourage students to transfer early without the associates degree. Lesley argues “it does students a disservice by making them go to the university earlier.”

In addition to the format of BDPs and how specific they are, some advisors also struggled in finding BDPs for degree programs and admit that key information is at times, missing from them. Lesley, who sits on a statewide board to improve the transfer process for community college students admits that while BDPs should exist for all degree programs, “some are just not even there” and to them can be “difficult.” Even though “supposedly you're supposed to have it for every single degree,” not all UNC System institutions comply. And for some UNC System schools, their specific colleges have only recently began compiling with the BDP policy; “Large Urban Resource University’s school of business for a long time they didn't have any BDPs, any transfer guides or anything like that on their website.” For Lindsey, who advised a student planning to transfer to the school of design at Public Research University on the day of our interview, described the challenges in advising that student without the proper tools:

> I met with someone today who wanted to go to the school of design at Public Research University and there's just not a great transfer pathway [for] that. And then explaining that to a student is confusing sometimes […] also they don't have BDPs for design or any of the transfer guides so then you have to go to Public Research University's website,

> look at the degree requirements and then break it down for a student. It can be very confusing.

As with Lesley and Lindsey, Patrick ran into a similar issue when he came "across a program that I know they have it there, but the BDP wasn't available." Patrick reached out to the system office and was informed they were "working on it, but I haven't looked for it recently, but the last time I did it was still not available and I had mentioned it about a year ago."

In speaking to many of the advisors about BDPs, one thing seemed clear, managing the sheer amount of information related to transfer is hard. Samuel described it as "probably more than any one person can digest." This is why at Samuel's institution they have chosen to "focus on the schools that our students preferentially transfer to. And then we handle it on an individual basis." For students who fall outside the normal transfer patterns, Samuel has to work individually with that student to develop a plan that works for them. He describes one such interaction with a student who wanted to transfer to a UNC System institution to study Marine Science:

> I worked with a student that wanted to go to Midsize Suburban Regional University for Marine Science. And, you know, in the three and a half years that I've been at Suburban Community College, I've only worked with one student that wanted that program. And I worked specifically with that student to come up with something that worked well for them. Now, I may never have another student entering that program, but I relied on Midsize Suburban Regional University 's resources, and my own knowledge of the transfer process, to build something that would work for her.

Many advisors also spoke to general challenges and complexities related to the transfer process in North Carolina. For instance, Samuel highlighted little things that keep community

college students from transferring successfully from their community college to a UNC System institution. There are “lots of little things, like Public Liberal Arts College has a, a disciplinary form that all students have to get signed by our VP of Student Services to indicate that they don't have a discipline problem.” While Samuel understands the purpose of such requirements, there “are a lot of little things a student has to do, administratively, to get from one to the other.” Some advisors also highlighted challenges with a community college students’ major choice and argue that the transfer process in North Carolina favors non-competitive programs over programs with additional admission requirements. For instance, Patrick said “we can get them to the door, but not necessarily into the program.” Patrick further explained that “they complete UT (University Transfer) transfer program, and they successfully graduate, they have the minimum 2.0 GPA, then they are able to transfer into a four-year institution within the UNC System. And in theory they should start as a third-year junior.” However, “the completion [of the degree] and the transfer does not guarantee them getting into the program that they desire.” Mark highlighted the complexities for students who are pursuing an Associates in Fine Arts or an Associates of Engineering:

> If you are an AFA student or an AE, that becomes a little bit more problematic. You're not guaranteed admission into those programs because it's under the UAA. So then, you know, for, especially for like AFA music programs, there's gonna be a secondary admissions process, and that's gonna basically mean, performing or auditioning. And that- that's very complex. I don't think that's a smooth transition that's there.

Since the transition may not be smooth for students pursuing a degree under the UAA, Mark “always tells students that if they're getting an AFA, to try to make sure they get an AA at the same time.” Mark hopes that his “advisors over at AE and the AFAs are having those courageous

conversations so that […] students are understanding the issues of getting admitted to the program." There also isn't much room for students to explore between different degree programs at Mark's community college. For AAS students, "they come in and they think; 'I'm getting a business degree or an accounting degree that transfers.' And for some reason, they're not learning that." While Mark admits that his community college has bilateral agreements, however their options are "very limited." For AAS students who decide to change their major to better align with their transfer goals "then they [would] have to go back and take all of their Gen Eds again." Mark enthusiastically remarks that "the transfer process is really great if you're an AA or an AS student who graduates. Anything past that, it's complex."

While only one community college academic advisor specially named the issues of loss of credit and graduating with excess credit, advisors were aware of adjacent issues that impacted those phenomena. Samuel expressed real frustration when he hears from his students who are "getting to the university and finding out that they'd done a great job with us for two years, and they still have two and a half or three more years left to go. So, I think that a lot of students experienced loss of credit." For students who do not earn the transferrable associate's degree, Amanda explained that "a school can [then] pick a part their credits basically." Lesley argued that while the 2014 revision to the CAA has improved the transfer process, "all of those silos, and all those different departments, and all those different colleges doing different things has made it fairly difficult" to transfer seamlessly no matter what the CAA has improved. Erin's students report back to her that "their classes do transfer, but what frustrates students is, is that we may follow the BDP for a UNC System institution. But when they transfer to that institution, the classes […] don't count for their major." Furthermore, opinions varied greatly on how helpful the TAC (Transfer Advisory Committee) was in hearing these and other concerns from

community college academic advisors. Sarah thought that "the TAC has been really supportive of building the relationship between the universities and the community college" while Samuel described the TAC as; "they just don't get back to me." For Samuel, members of the TAC exhibit poor communication skills and offer solutions, like creating a bilateral agreement that did not solve systemic problems.

In contrast, some advisors did share that the transfer process has improved and has especially improved since the CAA revision in 2014. Amanda understands the transfer process as "pretty smooth" especially for students who earn the transferable associate's degree. And before the 2014 revision to the CAA, Amanda described the transfer process as "real sketchy." Kimberly, like Amanda, offers a more nuanced view of the transfer process in North Carolina. Kimberly reiterates that the transfer process is "smooth," especially "if all the classes are taken as part of CAA" and if students have "submitted their transcripts, it should be smooth." According to Kimberly, some of her students may have to "redo some of the classes, but I don't know if its [because of] mis-advisement or just not understanding what the other school wants." Overall Kimberly describes transferring as an "intense process" and alludes that the majority of the problems exists "school to school," but believes "it's not a widespread thing" and "it happens to everyone." Another explanation that Kimberly offered is that she is "not sure if the community college has everything that the four years are looking for." Lindsey, who was a community college academic advisor in another state shared that many of her students "lost a lot of credits," but now "working in a state that didn't have it and now working in this [state], I think it [the CAA] does a good job." No matter the opinion, what was evident from all community college academic advisors was a real desire to do what is best for not only the student, but for both systems of higher education in the state. Sarah demonstrated this sentiment by describing the

"symbiotic relationship between the senior institutions [UNC System] and the community college" as a mutually beneficial relationship. It's in the best interest of community colleges to send their students to UNC System institutions and "it's in the best interest of the senior institutions to take [our] credits" and while there are tensions, there has to be a willingness to be in a "constant conversation between all of the parties involved, the community college, the student, and the university."

Needs of Community College Academic Advisors

Regarding the second research question, North Carolina community college academic advisors had very specific needs that they felt could address the shortcomings they experience at the campus and system level. Whether it was up-to-date, consistent, or accurate data; access to information was a crucial need that academic advisors expressed. They also gave feedback on how to strengthen the CAA and described their needs in relation to students, state policy, and their campuses to meet the ever-evolving demands of students and the complex transfer process. Table 4 provides an overview of primary themes and a detailed description.

Table 4

Needs of community college academic advisors

Primary Theme	Description
Consistent and reliable information	Consistent and reliable information characterized the need for not only reliable information, but information that was distributed consistently to community colleges.
Accurate and up-to-date information	Accurate and up-to-date information represented the need for UNC System partners to maintain their transfer information so that it could be used correctly and appropriately by their community college partners.
Data needs	Data needs was described as the desire by some academic advisors to have access to

	outcomes related to transfer so that they can design and make informed decisions regarding advising and programmatic offerings.
Improvements to the transfer process and policy	Improvements to the transfer process and policy spoke directly to the suggestions academic advisors had to improve the state-wide pathways, communication, and organizational issues.
Staff and student needs	Staff and student needs showcased the need for more academic advisors to engage in more intentional and proactive advising strategies.
Leadership and dedication of resources on campus	Leadership and dedication of resources on campus represented the need for stronger leadership at some community colleges to implement better interventions that serve students.

Several participants reported ways the transfer process could be improved in North Carolina and spoke to specific needs on and off their campuses that could improve their work with transfer students. Five immediate themes emerged from data analysis: consistent and reliable communication, accurate and up-to-date information, data needs, improvement of the transfer process and to transfer policy, and student and staff needs. An additional sixth theme was identified that highlighted the work that two community colleges, leadership and dedication of resources on community college campuses, have taken to improve transfer advising on their campuses.

Consistent and Reliable Communication. Three participants highlighted the need for universities to respond more readily, while one not only spoke to the need for a better response time, but they also spoke to needing more student interaction with universities and consistent information on BDPs. Patrick wished that universities “were able to respond more readily” while Mark expressed the need for regular contact between universities and his community college; “but I think good contact between the university and the college, I need to have a point person

that I can call or email that return my call within... or, or email within 48 hours, 72 hours." Erin took this need a step further by additionally advocating for more student interaction with universities as well as consistent information on BDPs:

> Well, I've already mentioned that it would be really nice if the local universities were in more contact with us. But they're so big. There's probably lots of community colleges that they would need to do that with, so that would be pie in the sky dream. That would be one of them. Consistent BDPs would be nice with specific detailed objectives. […] I would love to be able to take students to universities. And do a college tour with them.

Accurate and Up to Date Information. Like the theme above, three participants advocated for universities to determine ways to maintain their information so it's accurate and up to date while also considering ways to improve communication to their community college partners. Patrick needs the UNC System and its universities to determine ways that information "stays up to date in the system." For Patrick, this is important for he acknowledges "we made a really good step towards that with the advising toolbox being made available" and:

> now we need to make sure that, one, all the programs are available through the advising toolbox. And two, as we move forward, because both you and I know programs want to change. I think the universities do need to maybe just review what they have available and see what they're missing. Because if we're providing this as a tool for community colleges to work with their students to get them where they're wanting to go, then they need to make sure that all their programs are presented and available with all the correct information.

Sarah stressed that the need to keep information updated goes beyond just being good partners but as a way to encourage transparency and support the transfer process;

> I think really keeping those, the transfer plans updated. Transparency is what I need to be able to move forward. And just knowing that affirming that we're in it for the right reason.

Mark also encouraged universities to communicate "brief updates," and for them to provide a one-pager with relevant information regarding transfer:

> I would like to have a one page, like at the beginning of the semester... Like you can put in hyperlinks, like a PDF of just the most important things from the university, transfer dates, open houses dates, if needed, if any new programs are coming on.

Mark draws attention to the "flood of emails" and how easy it can be to miss information related to new programs of study at UNC System institutions. To prevent this, Mark suggests universities provide a "5,000-foot fly-by of what I need to know as a transfer advisor" and argues that "I don't need to know about [the] new buildings being built."

Data Needs. Two community college academic advisors distinctly mention data needs and access to data could help improve the work they do at community colleges and help to better prepare community college students for transfer. Sarah believes it would be good to:

> know how many [NCCC System] students transferred to [UNC System Institution] …How many have finished, you know, zero to 24 credits or zero to 29 credits? How many had completed 30 to 60 but didn't graduate. Um, how well did they perform versus the native students? Um, you know, are we awesome in our English program and terrible in our X program? […] data that showed how many students go at, you know, that the number of credits that they transfer broken down by ethnicity, age, gender, you know, all of that dashboard kind of stuff, so that we could really do more analysis at how well we

> are doing. […] How many, you know, what percentage of the students that we send you to graduate, and how long does it take them?

Like Sarah, Lindsey also emphasized the need of data for it could potentially help her and her community college improve their approach to working with transfer students:

> I think probably um, maybe more data on like who's transferring. The more accessible data on like how many transfer students they have. Different maybe broken by major […] So then we can kind of see like where students are transferring and how successful they are in transferring.

Having access to this data could help Lindsey and her team identify where the issues are in the transfer process to identify which "credits aren't counting." Furthermore, there was a real sense for some that "having a commitment from the Universities to encourage students to finish their associates."

Improvements to the Transfer Process and Policy. Improving North Carolina's transfer process and policy emerged as a dominant need among seven community college academic advisors. First, Lindsey desired a stronger commitment from universities to encourage students to complete their associates degree before transferring:

> A lot of times universities are like yeah just come over when you get 24 credit hours or 30 credit hours. But kind of like having a commitment to transfer and finishing I think would help as well.

Another important issue that emerged from participants was the need to solve issues related to BDPs, the main tool that community college academic advisors use when degree planning with transfer students, and consistency among programs across North Carolina. Erin expressed the need for BDPs to have "consistent formatting at the university level" and realized the uphill

battle that could be, “but then you'd have to figure out how to get them all to agree on one format, which would be a problem, I'm sure.” Mark draws attention to the fact that not every program has a BDP and like Erin, a uniform format:

> I would enjoy having are BDPs for every program, and they're not... they don't have BDPs for every program. I would also like to see every university have a uniform format of BDPs. I want to see every college have the same layout or similar layout. I think they would assist advisors at a community college greatly. I would also like to see BDPs for every program.

Samuel also acknowledged that the format of BDPs can be problematic and proposes “that the university representatives who build the BDPs to be trained in the community college curriculum, so that the BDPs will, you know, adhere to the curriculum standards,” for after all “we have to adhere to the state curriculum standards, so making sure that those matches would help tremendously.”

Inconsistencies don’t only exist in actual BDPs but also in the requirements for admission at UNC System institutions. Liz highlighted that admission “requirements can be so different across universities.” While “some schools require foreign language and a physical education, some don’t” and called for “more uniform degree requirements between public institutions.” Community college academic advisor Lesley also called for “a little bit more uniformity between the universities.” Lesley admitted that she did not know what that looks like and it is a complicated issue and spoke to the organizational issues that exist on university campuses; “it depends on the university, and then the department within that, or the college within that university, and then the department. And so I think there's just not a lot of uniformity on the other end.”

While Liz and Lesley highlighted the inconsistencies at the baccalaureate level, Sarena draws attention to the inconsistencies that exist at the community college level and believes that there could be better alignment of A.A.S. degrees and the transferrable A.A./A.S. degrees. Sarena says:

> I think some of the inconsistency is really on the community college side. For example, business administration. I think it would be nice if the system office would create a package degree for certain programs like business administration where the students that want to transfer.

Sarena further explained that students who are interested in and are studying "criminal justice but our criminal justice technology [program] is not that package four year [program], that package is not as if you go in off for the four-year life because it's the associate of applied science." Building more 2 + 2 or packaged programs, especially for popular programs like business administration and criminal justice could "take out some of the guesswork out from our end because […] it's just a matter of if you see that a majority of your students are transferring with a business degree, I [can] just build a package transfer business degree."

Advisors even suggest policy changes to the CAA and ICAA. Samuel wishes we had a "more robust articulation agreement with a little bit more teeth" and a "more responsive Transfer Advisory Committee." Lesley also saw the need for more clarification at the macro level for a clearer understanding of how credit transfers from a community college to a UNC System institution:

> But I don't know that there's a whole lot of detail on how people transfer different things. I don't know whether [UNC System institution] could put out a list that said, "This course will transfer for these departments. But not for these." You know? That kind of

> thing. Like is Math 143 a statewide course? Or is it an elective? And what departments does it count as an elective for?

Lesley also argues that it's time for the CAA to go even further in giving guidance on how credits should transfer; "we've got a good 30 some hours of UGETC courses. I really wish we could move on to the next level. And have a little more uniformity in how these things will be transferred."

Staff and Student Needs. Among participants there was also a real desire for not only more staff on some campuses but for more intentional engagement with transfer students on their own campus and from UNC System institutions. Liz spoke to both as equally important. For Liz, the number one need is a "bigger staff or a secretary" and figuring out how "to do more things for the students to try and get them to engage" on campus. Kevin strongly believed that UNC System institutions should revamp their transfer visit where universities "would invite the entire state to come, descend on their campus and learn about it." Like Kevin, Amanda also believed UNC institutions should prioritize making their campuses more accessible, but through a point of contact that understands the issues that some community college students face. Since community college students have been "with us for two years, they're comfortable asking us questions or divulging information that they're not comfortable divulging to people that they don't know." Additionally, students "come here and they build a relationship with us and then we send them off to university to handle all these things that they're not accustomed to" like housing and finances. For Amanda, the point of contact would ideally "help them bridge those gaps so that when they're transferring from here, there's a point of contact at some point."

Kimberly also spoke to the desire spend more intentional time with transfer students, "I would love to have more time with the students. That way you can get to know a little bit more

about them and you can help guide them a little bit better." In addition, Kimberly understands what additional staff and resources, like a transfer center, could do to support transfer students in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree and provide the proactive advising transfer students want:

> I would love to be able to have the transfer center where we can have them in there and we could have more time to, okay, this is where you want to go. Let's do this application together. [Otherwise, I'm not] able to, I would love to be able to follow them from the beginning to the end which is not always possible.

Leadership and Dedication of Resources on Campuses. While all community college academic advisors expressed concrete needs to make their jobs easier to support transfer students, two campuses stood out as potential benchmarks for other community colleges to emulate. What was evident in speaking with these three participants was that their campuses and campus leaders at the top saw the importance of supporting transfer students and knew academic advising was a key element in supporting their transfer students' path to earning a baccalaureate degree. At Suburban Community College, located in the western part of North Carolina, Samuel described their pathways project where they have "33 different specific structured curricula" that were developed by himself and other faculty and staff. Samuel described the benefits of their pathways project as a more efficient way for students to select one of the pathways which then lays out each course, semester by semester, in which they need to take.

To accomplish their pathways project, department chairs at Suburban Community College reviewed "plans at various universities, […] looked at what universities our […] students primarily transfer to [and] built our, we built our pathways based on that." Additionally, Samuel and his team recognized the need for a "maintenance plan" to monitor and make updates to their 33 pathways. The maintenance plan consists of a

> committee that […] every academic year, reviews the pathways, just like we review the curriculum, or the curricula across the whole college. And we, if, you know, sometimes the BDPs change, we'll change our pathway to match it. Sometimes we have a pathway that's, no s-, you know, we just don't have much interest in that pathway, and it doesn't make sense to keep it. That's rare that we'll actually end that pathway. A lot of times we have, you know, we expanded from 16 pathways to 33, because we had students requesting pathways that we didn't have. So we had a lot of students who wanted to do social work. We didn't have a social work pathway, so we created it.

When asked why they don't use the BDPs and instead use their homemade pathways as their main tool for transfer advising, Samuel described the main reason as wanting a "pathway that would serve multiple BDPs." By using the UNC System dashboard Suburban Community College was able to identify where their students are transferring to and developed a "psychology pathway that will work for [three UNC System schools]."

At Suburban Community College, in the middle part of North Carolina, about an hour south of a large metropolitan area, Patrick and Kevin spoke to how their institution's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) helped to develop resources and mechanisms to support transfer students. Suburban Community College's QEP, My Academic Pathway, focused on advising in three specific areas: admissions, new student orientation, and first-year experience courses. One hallmark of My Academic Pathway is that "students […] complete an assessment of interest and career decision readiness [when admitted]. And then based off their responses, [they are] directed or referred to different supports [on campus]." Furthermore, My Academic Pathway stresses the importance of "taking their first-year experience course [ACA 122] within the first two semesters to help get introduced to the idea of academic planning [and] making sure they're

aware of campus resources and help refine their program and career decisions." Finally, as a part of My Academic Pathway, students "receive advising focused on individual academic pathways, what their career goals [are], and then to receive assistance for goal completion."

Other hallmarks of the changes taking place at Suburban Community College is the implementation of a post advising appointment survey that is administered through Aviso Retention, an academic advising software that identifies at-risk college students for early intervention. In fall 2018, Patrick shared of the 324 surveys completed, only "one percent of the students who responded did not understand the role of an advisor" and "80-89% said they talked about career goals within that advising meeting." It is also apparent at Suburban Community College academic advisors are encouraged to try new strategies to support students. Whether it is serving on a committee designated to improve advisor training and communication on campus or partnering with Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs to determine if their students should be enrolling in ACA 122, academic advisors at Suburban Community College are encouraged to be problem solvers and collaborate across their campus. With this renewed emphasis on student success and implementation of new resources and services, according to Kevin, Suburban Community College has become even more "mission driven" than it used to be.

Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of participants, study procedures, and data analysis. Three themes describe the experience of advising in an institution-driven system: student challenges and complexities, campus challenges and complexities, and system challenges and complexities. The three themes also include subthemes that expand upon the broader theme. These subthemes help to portray a complete picture of academic advising in an institution-driven system. Six themes express the needs community college academic advisors have to support

transfer students in their pursuit of baccalaureate degree: consistent and reliable information, accurate and up-to-date information, data needs, improvements to the transfer process and policy, staff and student needs, and leadership and dedication of resources on campus. In chapter five, a summary of the study will be provided as well as a discussion of findings in light of the conceptual framework and literature reviewed. Limitations of the study will be presented as well as implications for practice, policy, and research. Finally, chapter five will also include a researcher reflection, conclusions, and summary of the chapter.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Introduction

The present qualitative study aimed to understand how North Carolina community college academic advisors advise transfer students in an institution-driven system. Furthermore, it sought to name the needs of community college academic advisors when advising transfer students. While most community college students indicate a desire to transfer to a four-year college or university, approximately 25% eventually transfer and only 62% of those students successfully earn a baccalaureate degree (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011; Hossler et al., 2012; Jenkins & Fink, 2016; Shapiro et al., 2013). Whereas there exists literature on transfer outcomes related to completion rates, loss of credit, excess credit, and the applicability of credit; there exists little literature on how community college academic advisors interact with transfer policy on a day-to-day basis when advising transfer students. Because of this gap in literature, this study sought to detail how North Carolina community college academic advisors experience this institution-driven system and identify their needs when advising transfer students. Chapter one introduced the purpose of and research questions that guided the study:

1. How do North Carolina community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven articulation system?
2. What do community college academic advisors need to support transfer students in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree?

Chapter two introduced relevant literature around three primary focus areas (a) transfer advising, (b) transfer students in North Carolina, and (c) credit efficiency. This chapter also introduced the conceptual framework that state-wide articulation systems can be grouped into 2 + 2 systems, credit equivalency systems, and institution-driven systems (Hodara et al, 2017).

Chapter three presented the research methodology used to complete this study. This basic qualitative study was informed by the pragmatic paradigm by searching for actionable answers (Patton, 2015). I also presented my positionality by acknowledging my relationship to the topic and how I was an outsider on the research topic. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit 12 participants (Table 2). Data was collected via an electronic SurveyShare form and one, semi-structured interviewed via video conference technology. Transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose for data analysis. Chapter four presented findings of the study in detail and as they relate to the research questions. In chapter five, a summary of the findings is provided as well as discussion of limitations and recommendations for practice, policy, and research. The study concludes with a summary of chapter five.

Summary of Findings

Regarding the first research question, how do North Carolina community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven articulation system, three broad themes emerged from the analysis: student challenges and complexities, campus challenges and complexities, and system challenges and complexities. Turning to the second research question, what do community college academic advisors need to support transfer students in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree, six broad themes emerged from the data analysis: consistent and reliable information, accurate and up-to-date information, data needs, improvements to the transfer process and policy, staff and student needs, and leadership and dedication of resources on campus. These results suggest that while there may be some positive elements to advising in an institution-driven system; the work of helping students decide on a path, advising students for that path, and supporting them through the transfer process is impeded by this state-wide

articulation system that potentially favors well-resourced community colleges and UNC System institutions.

Experience of North Carolina community college academic advisors. Findings in this section answered the research question: how do North Carolina community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven articulation system? Three broad themes emerged from the participants interviews.

Student Challenges and Complexities. Participants described a variety of challenges and complexities when advising transfer students. They spoke to helping their students see the "big" picture and helping them have that "aha" moment while also developing skills to be both academically and socially successful at their next institution. Community college academic advisors also highlighted the diverse student characteristics they had to balance with their students' varied issues and concerns regarding the transfer process.

Campus Challenges and Complexities. How their community college was organized and delivered academic advising services to their transfer students had either negative or positive impact on academic advising. Many participants spoke to how their advising model either enhanced the student experience, or more often detracted from it and made their job harder than it needed to be. Furthermore, unknown to the researcher, many of the academic advisors detailed how integral ACA 122 was in facilitating and educating prospective transfer students about the transfer process. And lastly, academic advisors described a variety of academic advising challenges that complicated their work.

System Challenges and Complexities. Not only did organizational challenges exist at the campus, but they also exist at the system and state level. Several academic advisors described how North Carolina's institution-driven system unnecessarily makes the work of academic

advisors at the community college level harder than it needs to be. These challenges present in how institutions across the system communicate to one another, how well established their relationships are with one another, and the lack of curriculum alignment between two- and four-year institutions.

Needs of community college academic advisors. Findings in this section answered the research question: What do community college academic advisors need to support transfer students in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree? Community college academic advisors spoke in length about the need for consistent and reliable information as well as accurate and up-to-date information. Academic advisors described this need as balancing the need for their four-year partners to update their transfer information regularly while also distributing it regularly in a consistent and reliable fashion. The need for data and for improvements to the transfer process and policy was also a crucial need detailed by participants. Many of the academic advisors described not knowing how to access data regarding transfer outcomes to help them and their campus make informed decisions. Furthermore, they also expressed the need to improve the transfer process and policy by finding ways to better align curriculum, communication, and organizational issues.

Finally, while distinct, the remaining two needs are related: staff and student needs and leadership and dedication of resources. Almost every academic advisor mentioned that they were short staffed and needed more staff to meet the growing demands of their students. While some campuses found ways to improve the academic advising on their campus through strong campus leadership and dedication of resources, many of the academic advisors at rural community colleges described their lack of resources as one of the main reasons they could not adequately address the needs of their students.

Discussion of Findings

The major findings of this study illuminate the complex web of articulation agreements, student concerns, and institutional priorities that North Carolina community college academic advisors must navigate in an institution-driven system. This section discusses these findings through the institution-driven framework and Hodara's et al. (2017) broader framework while arguing that an institution-driven system places an undue burden on North Carolina community college academic advisors and the students they serve.

Experience of Community College Academic Advisors

While community college students' primary source for academic information related to transferring are most likely academic advisors (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2010), their experience of academic advising can be hindered due to personal challenges and complexities. What became apparent is that community college academic advisors interact with students who have a variety of demands, unique needs, expectations, and life experiences that can make advising for transfer students difficult. Many academic advisors described their students falling into a variation of these three camps; students who know where they want to transfer to and its realistic, students who know where they want to transfer to and it's not realistic, and students who have no idea what they want to do and where they want to transfer to. Assisting students in determining how their academic and career goals intersect, selecting the correct transfer path, and being a successful college student, was at times, all in competition with one another. One academic advisor even described having to begin with defining the concept of transferring before detailing transfer options. These experiences reaffirm the need for a more intrusive advising approach (Allen et al., 2013; Cueso, 2012; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2010; Van Der Karr, 2018) so that students receive the guidance and support they need to be successful.

However, the ability to provide an intrusive approach to advising is difficult for community colleges with less resources. Furthermore, some community colleges still have a faculty advisor model where they balance not only the needs of their assigned advisees, but the students enrolled in their courses. Advising models were also described as either hybrid or decentralized which further inhibited the ability to provide sustained, intrusive, and coordinated advising (Cueso, 2012; Karp & Stacey, 2013). This study affirmed that on most community college campuses, academic and career advising services are segregated and rarely interwoven with each other, advising sessions are short and infrequent, and academic advisors lack the appropriate amount of time and bandwidth to sufficiently advise students for transfer (Karp & Stacey, 2013).

At the institutional level, one key finding is the role ACA 122: College Transfer Success plays in the transfer process. Every community college academic advisor spoke to how vital a role this course plays and how much they lean on this course as the main tool to educate students on transfer policy, academic and career exploration, and academic requirements. Much, if not all of the literature on transfer advising strategies center on actual advising practices and models to improve the academic advising experience (Allen et al., 2013; Cueso, 2012; Karp & Stacey, 2013; O'Banion, 2009; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2010; Orozco et al., 2010; Packard & Jeffers, 2013; Schudde et al., 2018;Van Der Karr, 2018) and not on transfer seminars or academic courses that teach transfer policy and prepare students to transfer to a four-year college or university.

Even as community college academic advisors struggle to advise transfer students, North Carolina has made great strides in simplifying its articulation system with updates to the CAA and the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU), most recently in 2014

for the CAA and in 2021 for NCICU (Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina & The State Board of the North Carolina Community College System, 2018; The Council of Independent Colleges, 2021.). However, a key characteristic of an institution-driven system is that pre-major pathways are set by individual institutions (Hodara et al., 2017). Individual universities in North Carolina are required to set baccalaureate degree plans which are supposed to detail for students and their advisors, the courses needed to transfer successfully from one institution to the next (Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina & The State Board of the North Carolina Community College System, 2018). While in theory, this approach seems to outline the pre-major requirements needed to seamlessly transfer to a UNC System institution, in practice this study reveals many gaps and complications that academic advisors must navigate to properly advise their students.

Community college academic advisors detailed a patchwork of admissions requirements that they advise for; communicate different math requirements across the system, sometimes for the same major just at two different universities; read BDPs; search for BDPs; and at times still comb university websites or contact admission representatives for clarity on how best to advise transfer students. Additionally, academic advisors described several CAA loopholes that allows UNC System institutions to set their own major requirements without little or any oversight. Van Der Karr (2018) argues to advise a transfer student successfully; “transfer students must know the requirements of their first academic program, those of the transfer institution, and ways those curricular converge and diverge” (p. 86). In other words, it is not only important to communicate what the transfer requirements are, but to explain for students how credit applies to their degree program (Van Der Karr, 2018). The ability to clearly communicate these nuances to students, along with identifying their career interests and helping them develop advocacy skills and

college success skills, is a tall order to ask any community college academic advisor, especially one that works in an institution-driven system.

Academic Advisors' Needs

These needs of community college academic advisors illustrate the shortcomings of an institution-driven system and additional time and resources needed to fill the gaps in the transfer process for students in North Carolina. While the CAA has a 30-credit hour universal core, it allows UNC System institutions to determine pre-major course and admission requirements. This framework has initiated the proliferation of BDPs for majors at all 16 UNC institutions and forces students and their advisors to determine their major and destination institution by the end of 30 credit hours (if not sooner) at a community college. Because of this system, a patchwork of BDPs and pre-major requirements (both curricular and admission) exist across UNC institutions. Since North Carolina's system is so segregated, at the core of community college academic advisors' needs was consistent and reliable communication as well as accurate and up-to-date information. Like in North Carolina, Texas (another institution-driven system) community college academic advisors and their students depend on online resources to guide them and their students in understanding transfer requirements and developing academic plans (Schudde et al., 2018). However, when vital transfer information is not logically placed on university websites with enough detail, this can increase inequality and access (Schudde et al., 2018).

This study affirms that finding, especially for community college academic advisors and their students who live and work in rural parts of the state. Some academic advisors described relying on a variety of online resources to tour campuses and learn about degree programs either because of their proximity to four-year colleges and universities or because they do not have the resources to take transfer students to tour campuses in-person. While many, if not all, of the

academic advisors described four-year colleges and universities visiting their campus, academic advisors were keenly aware of how important it was to help transfer students have that "aha moment" so that they can see themselves as successful transfer students. Only one community college clearly articulated how they achieve that for their students while others wished they had more time to spend with their advisees to help them explore campuses and degree programs. Since articulation in North Carolina is institution-driven, it can feel segregated and depending on the information available to students and their academic advisors, mistakes can be made. Depending on the advising mistake, it can severely impact a student's path towards graduation (Packard & Jeffers, 2013). In describing negative advising experiences, Packard and Jeffers' (2013) found that it was the academic advisor's lack of knowledge of crucial academic and transfer policy as their main impediment to their success. Because of the segregated system that is a trademark of an institution-driven system, this system may unfairly impose an undue burden on North Carolina community colleges and their advisors to not only be experts in their own curriculum, but in the curriculum of UNC institutions while balancing the diverse needs of community college students and organizational challenges on their campus. While it is ultimately the students' responsibility to know their curriculum and path moving forward, having unnecessary obstacles in place that limits access to crucial information unfairly puts the community college academic advisor and student at making a damaging mistake.

Limitations

While a statewide sample was sought after and obtained, the experiences of the 12 academic advisors interviewed cannot apply to the experiences of every community college academic advisor; however, saturation was achieved and the findings provided systematic insights that should contribute to broader understanding about the transfer advising experience.

Furthermore, this study examined the experiences of community college academic advisors in an institution-driven system of statewide articulation and therefore cannot apply to states who are characterized as a 2 + 2 system or a credit equivalency system. Furthermore, only two advising models were present in the sample: hybrid and decentralized and all interviews were conducted using the virtual platform, Webex. While this enabled the researcher to recruit participants from all over the state, interviewing participants virtually did not allow the researcher pick up on any non-verbal cues that would otherwise be observed in-person. Finally, the focus of this study centered on the CAA and while it was not the intention to disregard agreements such as the Independent College Articulation Agreement (ICAA), which supports the students transferring to NCICU institutions, very few community college academic advisors mentioned working with their NCICU partners.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The experiences described by participants illustrates the need for change in how advising is organized at individual community colleges and at the system level, the state of North Carolina needs to address the challenges associated with curriculum alignment and work to find ways to provide consistent and reliable access to resources and information related to the transfer process.

How Academic Advising is Organized at Community Colleges

Community colleges need to give careful and deliberate consideration to how they develop and organize academic advising on their campuses. This study found that advising models consisted either of a hybrid or decentralized model with a mix of primary and faculty advisors. Good advising at community colleges happens when academic and career goal setting is integrated; students get to explore their strengths, weaknesses, skills, and interests; and are

helped to understand how their strengths, weaknesses, skills, and interests inform their decision-making progress when choosing a career (Karp & Stacey, 2013). This study detailed one community college who matches this definition of good advising. On Kevin's and Patrick's campus, students complete the RIASEC exam when completing their admission application. RIASEC stands for realistic, investigative, artistic, social, experimental, and creative. At the conclusion of the exam, students are given a list of potential careers that align with their RIASEC code. These results are shared with their assigned academic advisor and are intentionally used by academic advisors in their appointments where they can discuss salary information of potential careers and watch a summary video of a career they are interested in. These exercises help not only build rapport between students and their advisors, but Kevin and Patrick both explained that it helps guide them in assisting their advisees to make informed choices regarding their transfer path. While changes like this require resources and a structure to support, improvements to information like this could limit the ping-pong effect that some community college advisors described. With appropriate technology and training on career advising, a model like this on community college campuses would be one step closer to ensuring that academic and career advising are interwoven.

ACA 122: College Transfer Success

In tandem to addressing the advising model at community colleges, serious attention needs to be given to ACA 122: College Transfer Success. Since ACA 122 serves as the main tool to educate transfer students on the CAA, community colleges need to strongly consider removing course content that detracts from students understanding of the CAA and other transfer policies. Academic advisors believe that the original intent of the course has been watered down and is referred to as the "kitchen sink" because it is "chock full of so much other stuff." While topics

such as financial literacy and well-being, academic success strategies, and Title IX are important to the success of students, community colleges should strongly consider adding that content to orientation or self-paced modules that they have to complete before graduation. Administrators are drawn to adding information to ACA 122 because all transfer students have to take this course to complete their associate's degree.

Additionally, consideration should be given to the timing of when students take this course. Because one of the outcomes of this course is for students to understand the CAA and North Carolina's transfer policy, completing this course during the first semester of a student's community college career should be made a priority to ensure they understand their various transfer options. While some campuses have been able to require this course early on in their students' tenure, some campuses cannot, therefore some students learn about the CAA in their second semester or even in their last semester before transferring. This is challenging, even for well-resourced community colleges since they have to find qualified faculty to teach the course. However, dedicating resources to this endeavor is clearly in the best interest of transfer students so they can make educated decisions about their academic path well before their last semester of study at a community college. If none of these options are feasible, community colleges could also consider focusing their attention on re-defining the advisor and student relationship. Many academic advisors expressed frustration over the fact that their students do not view advising and registration as separate processes. Finding ways to encourage students to visit their academic advisor for holistic advising and discussion about their academic and career goals could also ease the burden on ACA 122 by moving some of that content into individual academic advising appointments.

System Level

At the system level, both the UNC System and the NCCC System, there are steps that they can take together to improve this transfer process for students and community college academic advisors. As the state of North Carolina seeks to reach its 2030 attainment goal of two million more individuals with a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential by the end of this decade (Steering Committee of myFutureNC Commission, 2019), shifting away from pre-major pathways set by individual institutions and moving towards a true 2+2 model, as defined by Hodara et al. (2017), would be a helpful strategy in reaching the attainment goal. While moving to a true 2+2 model may take time and action from the North Carolina legislature, both systems could focus on developing more uniform agreements that are in high demand across the state. Currently, the UNC System has uniform agreements for early childhood education, engineering, fine arts, and nursing while NCICU and the NCCC System just approved uniform agreements for psychology and sociology. More uniform agreements like these in other high demand programs like business and criminal justice, could help ease the work of community college academic advisors and make it easier for their students to facilitate an easier transfer process between North Carolina community colleges and UNC System institutions. Sarena explained that popular programs like criminal justice and business administration are not transferrable associate degree programs. Students in these degree programs can transfer to a UNC System institution, but since they are not transferable associate degrees, general education cannot be waived, and they run the risk of taking courses over again to meet four-year degree requirements. Since there has been movement to develop more uniform agreements to address statewide needs, the state needs to consider establishing more uniform agreements for other high demand majors across the systems.

The state also needs to take steps to close loopholes or gaps in the CAA and find ways to create a consistent and uniform format for BDPs. In section five, under part three of the CAA (The University of North Carolina System, 2020); it states that:

> requirements for admission to some major programs may necessitate additional courses not available at the community college. Time to baccalaureate degree may be impacted for students entering such programs, and students should plan accordingly (p.7).

Furthermore, it articulates that "due to degree requirements in some majors, additional courses at the UNC institution may be required beyond the general education courses and pre-major courses taken at the community college" (The University of North Carolina System, 2020, p.7). While some of the academic advisors interviewed for this study referred to this as a loophole, in actuality, this is a clearly articulated gap in articulation policy that makes it harder for academic advisors to do their job effectively and necessitates the need for all 16 UNC System institutions to create a plethora of BDPs for students and their advisors to follow. These two clauses of the CAA enable UNC System institutions to pick and choose which courses they want to count towards their degree programs which can and often leads to confusion about math requirements and admission requirements for some degree programs. In practice, UNC System institutions have to accept all 60 credits of a students' associates degree but because of the specialized program clause described above, they can apply those 60 credits in whatever way they want forcing some students to complete extra hours beyond the 120 to graduate with a four-year degree.

To aid students and their academic advisors in choosing the correct courses and the right major requirements, UNC System institutions have to create, update, and maintain a set of BDPs. The CAA (The University of North Carolina System, 2020) states that:

> each UNC institution will develop, publish, and maintain Baccalaureate Degree Plans (BDPs) identifying community college courses that provide pathways leading to associate degree completion, admission into the major, and baccalaureate completion. Students who complete the AA or AS degree and the degree plan tracks published by a UNC institution, and who are accepted into that institution and into that major within four years of initial enrollment at the community college, will continue into that major at the UNC institution with all courses fulfilling lower-division general education and other degree requirements (p.7).

While this is intended to help academic advisors in selecting out courses for community college students to take, it assumes that academic advisors and their students are only interested in transferring to their UNC System institution in their region. While that may be the case for some community college students, many are interested in transferring to UNC System institutions in other regions of the state (D'Amico et al., in-press). Furthermore, some institutions may have several if not upwards of 100 BDPs at their own institution. Hodara et al. (2017) found that one North Carolina community college academic advisor has to have a working knowledge of over 1,200 articulation agreements. As Lesley and others describe how complicated this system is, they argue that while institutions and departments may be "following the letter of the law, but not necessarily the intent of the law." Instead, UNC System institutions have created their own inconsistent BDPs with varying degrees of detail that academic advisors and students have to interpret. Asking UNC System institutions to follow the same format for BDPs with the same

expectation of detail, while removing the specialized program clause in the CAA, would be a great first step to putting transfer students and the community college academic advisors at the center of North Carolina's articulation policy.

Recommendations for Research

To understand more fully how academic advisors experience not only transfer policy but other state and university system policies, further research is needed. Recommendations for research include how students come to understand and interact with transfer policy and who benefits from an institution-driven system.

Students' Understanding and Interaction with Transfer Policy

This study centered the experiences of community college academic advisors, a voice in transfer literature that can be overlooked. While the contributions from this study provided important insights into how academic advisors interpret and communicate North Carolina's transfer policy to students, attention needs to be given to how students receive and understand transfer policy. For example, almost all academic advisors spoke about the importance that ACA 122 plays in the transfer process, but research detailing how effective an intervention like ACA 122 is in helping students understand transfer policy is needed. Most transfer student focused research centers around transfer student engagement, credit efficiency, retention rates, and graduation rates; but more research is needed to understand which interventions helps transfer students comprehend transfer policy, especially in complex statewide articulation systems.

Who Benefits from an Institution-Driven System

While this was not the focus of this study, it became apparent that a divide existed between community colleges in more rural regions of the state compared to community colleges in or near urban centers. There is also additional research to support this finding. D'Amico et al.

(in-press) found that the majority of transfer students who transfer vertically, do not follow their primary feeder patterns. While community colleges in urban areas may benefit from strong, local partnerships with UNC System institutions; many community colleges in rural areas of the state have more wide-ranging transfer destinations for their students (D'Amico et al., in-press).

Some academic advisors at community colleges with economic distress indicators of two and three, alluded to more resources at their disposal and having leadership willing to invest in organizational change that benefited students and their staff. Those academic advisors at community colleges located in counties with an economic distress indicator of one, the most distressed counties in the state, spoke to feeling overwhelmed and described advising as disjointed and unorganized. Knowing that transfer students are most likely going to consider transferring to a UNC System institution outside of their region, researchers and state policy leaders to need to consider how they can study and support the transfer process more holistically from a varied institutional lens and consider how diverse forms of student identities (socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, etc.) intersect with the transfer process (Jain et al., 2020). Furthermore, to help relieve the strain on community colleges with less resources, more research is needed to explore and ask the question, who does this institution-driven system serve and what policy mechanisms can be put in place to level the playing field for students studying at all 58 community colleges?

Academic Advisors Experience at Four-Year Institutions

The primary focus of this study was on community college academic advisors, the advisors that prepare transfer students for a successful transition to a four-year institution. However, to gain a full understanding of how an institution-driven system works on a day-to-day basis, more research is needed to understand how academic advisors at receiving institutions

experience the institution-driven system. Understanding the experience of academic advisors at our four-year partners may reveal new challenges and gaps in the system, especially in how actual course credit from North Carolina community colleges is interpreted and applied to four-year degree programs.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand how community college academic advisors interact with North Carolina's institution-driven system. Two research questions guided this study:

1. How do North Carolina community college academic advisors experience the institution-driven articulation system?
2. What do community college academic advisors need to support transfer students in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree?

Regarding the first research question, data analysis gleaned three broad themes: student challenges and complexities, campus challenges and complexities, and system challenges and complexities. In relation to the second question, six broad themes emerged from the data analysis: consistent and reliable information, accurate and up-to-date information, data needs, improvements to the transfer process and policy, staff and student needs, and leadership and dedication of resources on campus.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide/ Protocol

Introduction

- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and how long you've been an Academic Advisor?

Advising Transfer Students

- How would you describe the students you work with?
    - Potential follow up: How do you balance their diverse needs?
- Tell me about your meetings with students who plan to transfer?
- How do you work with these students to determine potential universities for transfer?
- What are the typical questions students ask you to determine their transfer options?
- Can you describe how you map out courses for students who plan on transferring?
- When mapping out courses for those students, what tools do you use (i.e. Transfer Guides, BDPs, course catalogs, websites, etc.)?
- Can you describe the overall quality of this tool or tools? Were they useful, not useful?
- What is your approach to advising a student who may not be sure of their future major or university to which they intend to transfer?

Institution-Driven System

- What is your understanding of how the transfer process works for students in North Carolina?
    - Potential follow up topics: ACA 122, Independent CAA, Bilateral Agreements, Uniform Agreements.
- Can you describe your interactions and relationships with universities?
- How do you stay aware of the agreements and baccalaureate degree plans?
- Can you describe the training and professional development you received or receive on these various types of agreements and transfer pathways?
- What do you need to better support transfer students as they pursue a baccalaureate degree?

Wrap Up Question

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience advising transfer students?

Additional probing questions will be asked for clarification and depth as needed for primary questions.

Appendix B

Questionnaire

Name: _____ Institution: _____
Job title: _____
Total number of yeas in this position: _____ Total number of yeas in at this institution: _____

Phone Number: _____
Email: _____

Preferred method of contact:
- Phone
- Email

Preferred method for interview:
- Face-to-Face
- Virtual (skype)
- Phone

Role on campus:
- Primary Advisor (Individuals whose 50% of their time is spent on the direct delivery of academic advising services)
- Faculty Advisor (Individuals whose main responsibility if teaching but who also spend a portion of their time advising students)
- Not listed, please specify:

Do you have assigned caseloads:
- Yes
- No

Please select the campus-wide approach to academic advising on your campus:
- Decentralized
- Centralized
- Hybrid
- Not listed, please specify:

Please select the academic advising model in your office, center, or unit:
- Drop-in only model
- Appointment only model
- Hybrid (drop-in and appointment)
- Not listed, please specify:

Is there anything else you would like to add about yourself, role on campus, and/or advising model?