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**ON THE WIDENING TRANSFER ASPIRATION-ACHIEVEMENT GAP:  
CONTEXTUALIZING THE TRANSFER INTENTIONS OF COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE STUDENTS IN NEW MEXICO**

**BY**

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**BACHELORS IN HISTORY**

**THESIS**

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Eileen Florence Maestas.

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the character and potential changes of transfer intention to attend four-year institutions among community college students in New Mexico. Since the early 1970s, national transfer achievement rates have declined in spite of high transfer aspirations resulting in a widening national transfer aspiration-achievement gap. Given that initial education expectations are often unmet, I study how the variability of students' development and maintenance of transfer intentions may partly account for the gap. This project, designed as an inductive descriptive study, pursues one central research question: What does transferring mean to students? This question elicits more inquiry: How does a student's intention to transfer vary due to underlying socio-cultural processes? Within the respective institutional and demographic contexts, what are the most salient processes at the student level? Do these processes differ in nature or outcome when accounting for different intersections of gender, race and ethnicity, or socio-economic status? Using concepts from Multicontext theory and Social and Cultural Capital theories, I evaluate the descriptive and exploratory findings of a local survey-interview study on community college students' transfer intentions. Beginning with insights gained from two social capital indicators and three cultural capital indicators, I found diminishing (and heightening) of transfer intentions associated with these five socio-cultural processes,

along with other unexpected processes that emerged during the course of my research. My primary finding is that student transfer intentions behave dynamically, are more fragile and recently-formed than expected, and exhibit outcome patterns linked to social and cultural experiences while at the community college. These experiences, as colored by the students' accounts, feature interactions of identity and student culture, emotional and morale support, differing "comfort-levels," and the delicate interplay of financial, family and educational priorities. Finally, I aim to generate theoretical discussion on this relatively under-researched phenomenon—with wide-ranging social mobility implications—which this study shows to be an integral function to narrowing the transfer gap at the individual level.

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## Chapter 1

### The Empirical Puzzle of Low Transfer Rates

Past research indicates that community college student transfer rates to four-year degree programs in the US have progressively declined approximately 8% since the 1970's (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Horn & Skomsvold, 2011)<sup>1</sup>. This decline contrasts with a traditionally high national transfer aspiration rate of nearly 80% among beginning two-year students during the same period (Skomsvold, Radford, & Berkner, 2011)<sup>2</sup>. Beyond this overall transfer gap between intention and achievement, other transfer achievement disparities appear when sorted by gender, socio-economic, and race-ethnicity groups. This is exemplified by a 25-percentile difference of transfer achievement rate between the highest and lowest race-ethnicity group and an eight-percentile difference between the overall transfer rate and that of first-generation college students (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011). Nonetheless, the focus of interest is the contemporary puzzle of an 81% national transfer aspiration rate, for which the five-year outcome of achievement is 21% (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011). To this end, I investigate the historical trends in transfer aspiration and achievement rates using reliable data to estimate the scope, variance and historical character of this phenomenon on a national scale.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the data from the three most recent waves of the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS), collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education. These cohorts belong to the first-time college enrollment years of 1989-90, 2003-04, and 2008-2009. I chose this data because it is the only national study that *begins* with students that are first entering postsecondary education (Stull, Morse-Kelly, and Rigsby, 1995). Other studies miss potential transfer students that do not enter post-secondary schooling straight from high school, such as GED-holders or those that worked a year or more between high school and college. According to Stull *et al.* (1995), there are three other primary national, longitudinal datasets including the National Longitudinal Study of High Schools (NLS), High School & Beyond (HS&B), and National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) that also offer similar structural information.

<sup>2</sup> The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data source defines transfer aspiration as BA and above educational goals upon arrival at the community college.

The last three waves of the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS)—funded by the U. S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)—provide nationally representative, longitudinal data on two-year to four-year transfer rates. The national transfer aspiration data are collected from first-time postsecondary two-year enrollment cohorts of 1989-90, 1995-96, and 2003-04 (Skomsvold *et al.*, 2011; Horn & Skomsvold, 2011). The BPS study operationalized transfer aspiration as respondent's educational goal of BA and above. (See Figure 1 below.) The transfer achievement outcome of these three cohorts was measured five years later, which is correspondingly, 1993-94, 2000-01, and 2008-09 (Horn & Skomsvold). (See Figure 2 below.) The following data points indicate a declining transfer achievement rate contrasted with increasing transfer aspiration rates (Skomsvold *et al.*, 2011; Horn & Skomsvold, 2011):

- In 2003-04, approximately 81% of all beginning two-year students stated an educational goal of achieving a bachelor's or an advanced degree (Skomsvold *et al.*, 2011).
- The national student transfer aspiration rate has risen from 71% to 81% between 1989 and 2003 (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011).
- 21% of the beginning 2003-04 cohort of two-year college freshmen transferred within five years (Skomsvold *et al.*, 2011).
- The national transfer rate declined from 23% to 21% between 1990 and 2009.

Figure 1. Transfer Aspiration Rates of All Beginning Two-Year Collegiates (1989-2003)

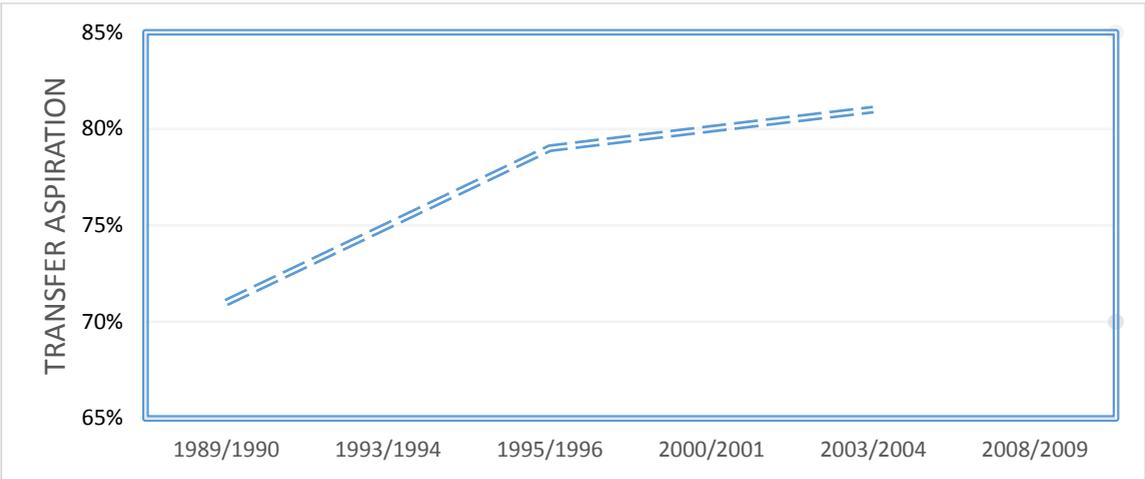
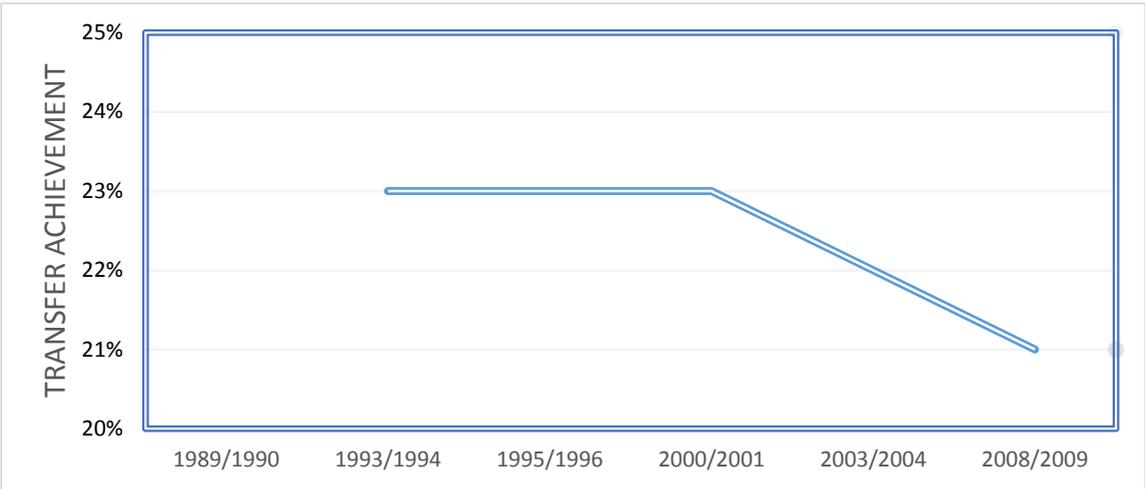


Figure 2. Transfer Success Rates of All Beginning Two-Year Collegiates (1994-2009)



Given the widening gap between transfer aspiration and achievement outcomes, my research question asks, on a cognitive and cultural level, what transferring means to the student, and whether an academic identity plays a role in transfer intentions. Further, how does a student’s intention to transfer vary due to underlying socio-cultural processes? Net of social structural factors, these processes may play a significant role in a student’s transfer intentions and subsequent chance of transfer success—an outcome that could begin to narrow the gap between national transfer aspiration and achievement rates. I

define transfer intention as a student's day-to-day and long-term pro-transfer conscientiousness, decision-making, and prioritizing. If it is found that these transfer intentions vary due to socio-cultural processes and experiences, it then follows that a student's transfer-track priorities will begin to compete differently with non-transfer priorities—especially when faced with economic or other structural constraints. To understand how these processes might affect a student's priority system, i.e., transfer intention, I focus on the cultural meaning that a student attributes to transferring and how this meaning changes during college. I operationalize “cultural meaning” by using concepts from Social and Cultural Capital models (Coleman, 1988; Bourdieu, 1973) to study the varying roles these processes play toward student transfer intention. Finally, I seek to identify qualitatively salient socio-cultural processes that might shed light on the divergent transfer rates and trajectories between gender, socio-economic, and race-ethnicity groups outlined below.

Disaggregated by gender and measures of socio-economic status, all groups have increasing transfer aspirations. (For aspiration rates sorted by gender and socio-economic status, see Figure 3 below.) Male students have higher transfer aspirations than female students with rates of 84% and 80%, respectively (Skomsvold *et al.*, 2011). Students in the lower quartile of household income indicated aspirations of 84%, while first-generation college students (parental education of high school or less) indicated aspirations of 76% (Skomsvold *et al.*, 2011). Transfer achievement rates by gender and socio-economic groups indicate wide variation. (For rates sorted by gender and socio-economic status, see Figure 4 below.) Male students' transfer achievement rate has decreased precipitously from 28% to 22% since 2001, while female students have reversed an achievement decline

by increasing transfers by two percentile points since 2001 (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011). Students in the lowest quartile of household income have improved the transfer rate from 20% to 22% between 1994 and 2009, while the achievement rate for first-generation college students has declined from 18% to 14% (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011).

Figure 3. Transfer Aspiration Rate Sorted by Gender and Socio-Economic Status (1989-2003)

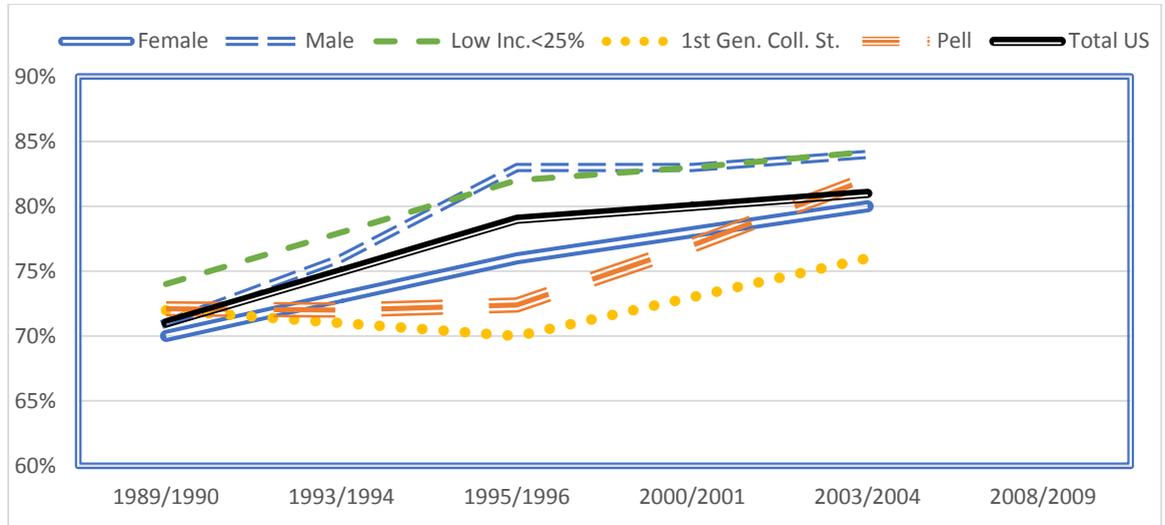
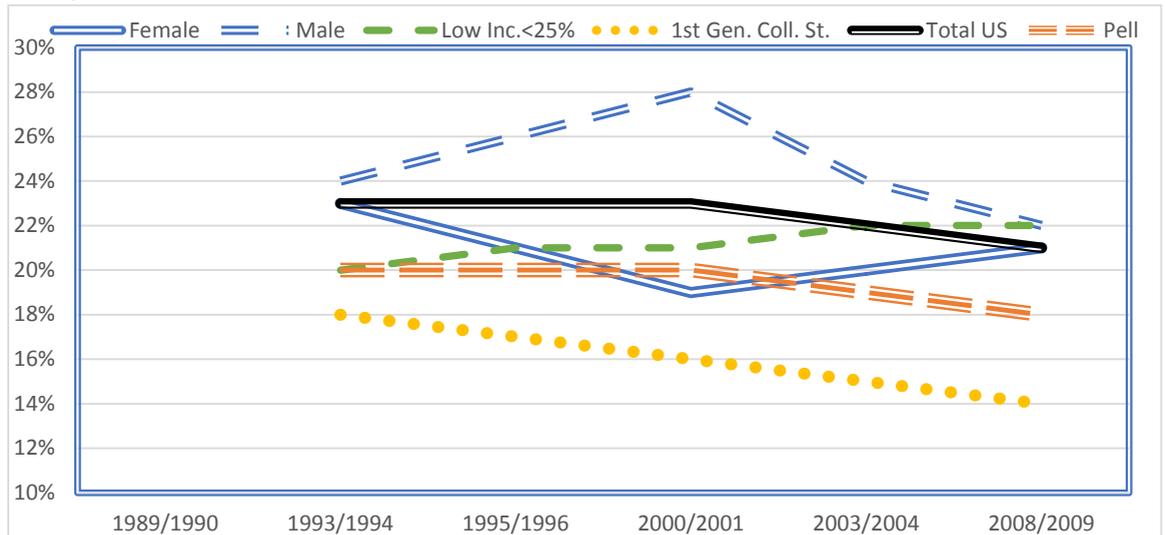


Figure 4. Transfer Achievement Rate Sorted by Gender and Socio-Economic Status (1994-2009)



Sorted by racial and ethnic groups, all transfer aspiration rates cluster within a few percentage points and each is currently increasing (Skomsvold *et al.*, 2011). (For aspiration rates sorted by race and ethnicity, see Figure 5 below.) The African American rates were the only transfer aspiration rate to decline between 1989 and 1995, then increasing by 10 percentage points between 1995 and 2004. Disaggregated by race and ethnicity, transfer achievement rates follow widely differing trajectories despite similar transfer aspiration rates (Skomsvold *et al.*, 2011). (For achievement rates sorted by race and ethnicity, see Figure 6 below.) For example, White student transfer rates have remained stable at just under 25% since the early 1990's (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011). African Americans are the only group that reversed their transfer decline during the same period, raising it 3% since 2000, while Latino/a student transfers into four-year programs from community colleges declined by 6% since the early 1990's (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011). Both African American and Latino achievement rates have both converged to approximately 16% each by 2009 (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011). Asian American statistics were only recorded from 2000 onward, and those transfer rates have remained stable at just over 30% since 2000 (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011). Native American data only became available in 2009 (due to previously small sample sizes), and their rate of transfer measured at 6% (Horn and Skomsvold, 2011). Data indicate inter-group achievement gaps persist, most notably among Latino, African American and first-generation students.

Figure 5. Transfer Aspiration Rate, Sorted by Race and Ethnicity (1989-2003)

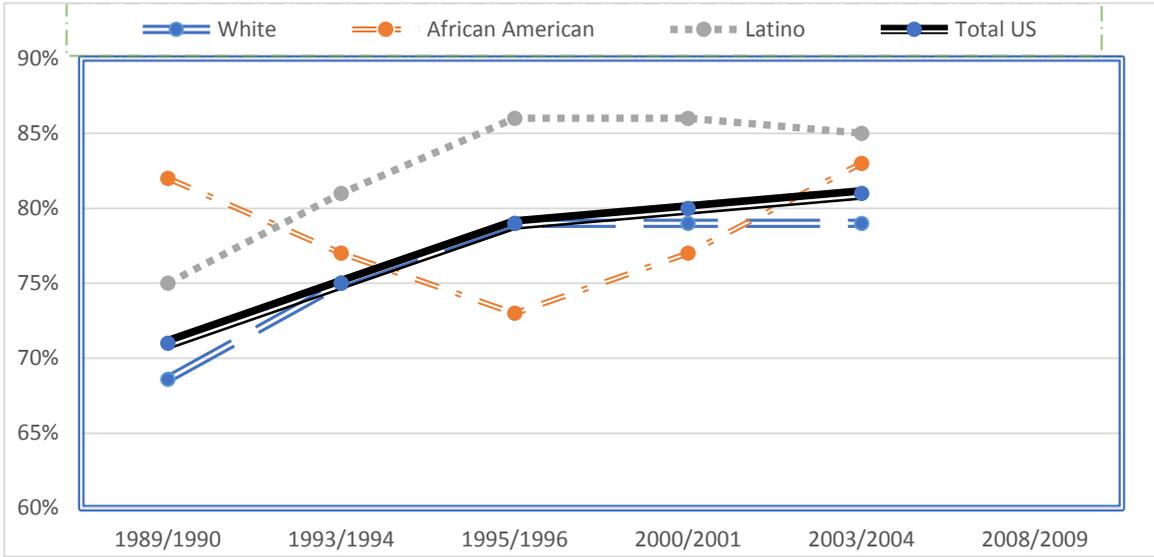
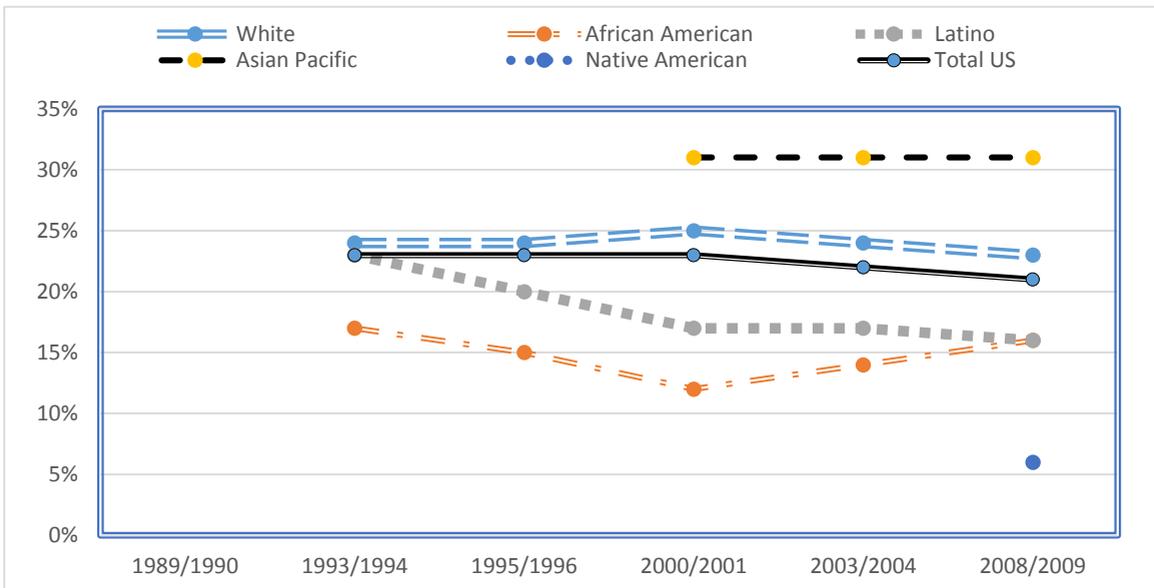


Figure 6. Transfer Achievement Rate, Sorted by Race and Ethnicity (1994-2009)



Groups disaggregated by gender, race and ethnicity, and socio-economic status indicate comparably high transfer aspirations, yet widely varying transfer achievement trajectories. Although not the focus of the project, these group-sorted particularities of the transfer aspiration-achievement gap suggest that cultural factors may play nuanced roles

between groups. Further, attention is paid to discover underlying factors contributing to certain disparities, especially for African American and Latino/a and first-generation college students whose aberration is most notable. These insights guide my investigation of the nature of student transfer intentions and how they may vary, by group, due to socio-cultural processes.

### **Literature Review**

Wide availability of quantitative data and increasingly accurate statistical modeling techniques help produce the contemporary emphasis on social structural explanations for the transfer aspiration-achievement gap in question. These structural analyses range from macro-level studies of inadequate institutional resources (Dougherty, 1992) and rising demand for vocational programs (Grubb, 1991) to individual-level issues like student background (Nora & Rendon, 1990), pre-college preparation (Wang, 2012), academic performance (Crisp and Nora, 2010), or financial concerns (Dowd and Cheslock, 2005; Dougherty, 1994). Others cite the long-standing role since the 1920's of the "junior college" that focuses on semi-professional and technical vocations (Dougherty, 2001, p. 408; Brint & Karabel, 1989). However, these structural explanations do not tell the whole story. Dougherty (1992; 1994) finds a consistent, unexplainable "eleven to nineteen percent" lower likelihood to earn a Bachelor's degree among those starting at the community college, other factors held constant (p. 204). Dougherty calls it an "institutional effect that cannot be explained by student characteristics" (p. 192). However, Dougherty passes over student-centric issues by taking a top-down analytic approach from the institution, without further analyzing "student characteristics" beyond structural behavior. While acknowledging the driving constraints of social structural

factors like institution- and student-level resources and needs, my research focuses on the potential transfer students' response to these structural factors. I argue this response is continually shaped and reshaped by the student's socio-cultural interactions during the "college experience" and in turn bears directly on student transfer intentions.

Burton Clark is the first author to outline the unstable nature of student transfer intentions with regard to the national transfer aspiration-achievement gap (1960; 1980). His term "cooling out" denoted students' loss of initial transfer aspirations, for which he cites the community college institution's benevolent neglect of low-performing students (Clark, 1960, p. 574). Grubb (1991) cited an institutional culture that fostered "milling around" at the community college, which led to reducing the level of expectation to transfer (p. 213). Institutional culture can also weaken student transfer intention if an air of low expectations is shared by the faculty. In a 1985 nationally representative survey of community colleges, among the faculty specifically teaching transfer-related courses, only 34% agreed with the statement: "First time freshmen in community colleges should be encouraged to earn, at the very least, the baccalaureate degree" (Dougherty, 1992, p. 197). While the institutional notion of transfer "cooling out" was coined, others began to analyze "cooling out" at the individual level (Baird, 1971, p. 160). Baird (1971) categorizes students' increasing or decreasing transfer aspirations as "coolers, warmers, or stayers" (p. 164). The author's study found that "[transfer] aspirations are apparently affected by experiences ..." and that they are volatile during early college semesters (Baird, 1971, p. 171). This variability of a student's transfer intention and level of commitment begs the most direct research question of this thesis project: what exactly are these salient social-cultural experiences and processes associated with changes in student transfer intention?

Recent sociological research has continued to apportion considerable attention to structural questions, with limited attention to social-cultural processes. Using regression analysis, Alexander, Bozick and Entwisle's (2008) research on Baltimore youth's four-year college expectations indicates that decreasing transfer expectations are due to structural life course events, such as a family-related priorities and job demands. At the same time, the authors' findings contradict Burton Clark's (1960) "cooling out" predictions while further discounting the role of socio-cultural interactions with regard to transfer decision-making. Goldrick-Rab and Pfeffer's (2009) study on the trend of reverse (4-year to 2-year schools) transfer students finds that transfers from four-year schools are differentiated by socio-economic status. The authors used parental education, parental income and other measures to estimate socio-economic (dis)advantage. Students with higher socio-economic advantage are more likely to engage in a lateral transfer from a 4-year to another (usually less-select) 4-year college. The move from a four-year to a two-year program is more common among students from lower socio-economic categories. The article does not address the topic of two-year to four-year transfer, however its quantitative methodology offers insightful structural explanations on the effects of student background and behavioral variables. This structure-heavy tradition corresponds to Lee and Frank's (1990) seminal structural analysis of students' progression from two-year to four-year programs. The authors use pre-college academic advantage, academic enrollment, socio-economic status, and other structural factors in explaining the low transfer achievement rates (Lee & Frank, 1990). Their accounting of socio-cultural factors is limited to "community college behavior" that employs academic curriculum difficulty and performance, semester-hours earned, full-time attendance, and employment

status (Lee & Frank, 1990, p. 181). Given that the majority of literature passes over this potentially critical element in student transfer success, this thesis contributes to the non-structural, qualitative discovery and analysis of these processes.

Much of the community college and education-specific literature focuses on institution-level concerns to explain low transfer rates. Institutional topics include dissatisfactory advising clarity, inefficient credit transfer agreements, and community college resource limitations (Packard, Gagnon, & Senas, 2012). Eagan and Jaeger (2009) assessed the effect of the increasing proportion of part-time faculty at the community college from 52% in 1987 to 67% in 2003. The study found that “for every 10% increase in students’ exposure to part-time faculty instruction, students tended to become almost 2% less likely to transfer” (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009, p. 180). One study that employed interview, focus group and survey data found three prominent factors detrimental to successful transfer outcomes, including advisement quality, access to financial aid, and “social and cultural issues that impacted the pursuit of their college degree” (Gard *et al.*, 2012, p. 836). The reference to “social and cultural” issues is limited to one issue, which is respondents’ struggles with lack of family encouragement due to their family’s preference that they work (Gard *et al.* 2012). Ornelas and Solorzano’s (2004) qualitative study on the transfer ambitions of Latina/o community college students in California finds common patterns of perceived institutional barriers, student self-doubt, and “cultural deficit thinking” (p. 242). The impressive study used in-depth interviewing and focus groups of students, counselors, faculty, and administrators. However, only two paragraphs are devoted to students’ perceptions of socio-cultural experiences and processes, which included student frustration with advising misinformation, student attitudes of “wishing to

prove them [society] wrong” by succeeding, role model responsibility for younger siblings, and degree of family support (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004, p. 238). Most of the article, however, is based on the perception and reports of counselors, faculty, and administrators about students’ socio-cultural interactions. My thesis extends the extant transfer literature by focusing on the student’s perception of the college experience rather than observing from an institutional, top-down viewpoint.

Transfer-specific theory must be sufficiently nuanced to explain both the usual attrition issues common to any higher education study, yet also socio-psychological mechanisms unique to community college students. There are five primary reasons why 4-year university persistence theories are not easily translated to the community college population. First, the *pro-active* task of transferring from a two-year school into a higher, more difficult setting is a unique challenge that entails entirely different socio-cultural mechanisms than university persistence, which is fueled by the academic “inertia” of enrollment. Second, the community college population and setting is different in socialization and social networking processes (e.g., fewer academic clubs and campus events, and commuter versus residential campus). Third, the cultural and socio-economic heterogeneity of the population exceeds that of four-year schools based on its open-admission design. Fourth, the potential transfer students’ attrition process *precedes* traditional campus “climate” explanations (e.g., University culture shock). Fifth, community college research must account for new, unstudied cultural interactions between new student population groups and the school’s academic culture and climate (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). For example, classroom debating over a point may be perceived as “healthy, academic critical dialogue” or may be alternately perceived as “argumentative”

and “combative” from other cultural perspectives (Tannen, 2000, p. 7). Implicit within these interactions are potential patterns of intersectionality such as gender-race or race-class interactions. With respect to the above five points, a reliable community college analysis needs to distinguish the structural, cultural, and learning-context interactions embedded within a campus climate (Ibarra, 2001; Peterson & Spencer, 1990). For instance, how much of the student’s perceived college experience is moderated by cultural compatibility? How might informal campus friendships and even interactions with formal advisement experiences play a role in potentially helping to “redefine”—whether in a positive or negative way—the meaning of transferring for the student? To what extent are differing communication and cognitive learning styles accommodated, and would such a barrier interfere with future transfer intentions (Ibarra, 2001)? There is evidently much work remaining toward qualitatively explaining the black box of student transfer intention. Given the limited attention to socio-cultural mechanisms that potentially contribute to the gap between transfer aspiration and successful outcomes, my thesis aims to explore and identify these mechanisms in the inductive spirit of “the discovery of theory from data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1).

### **Theoretical Framework of Project Design**

The inductive epistemological design of my project uses an Interpretive research framework to organize an explanatory model, operationalize concepts like ‘trust’ and ‘intention,’ and simplify analysis. Conceptual tools from Interpretive theory facilitate analysis of a student’s cultural meaning system, which helps shape transfer prioritizing. Further, I use these principles in the research design to capture the “meaning” that students attribute to transferring, which is the key to answering the central research question. The

common feature between Interpretive theory and Interpretive research design, according to Maxwell (2005), is that, “[the] focus on meaning is central to what is known as the ‘Interpretive’ approach to social science” (p. 22). These tools include Cultural Capital-based theory (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Bourdieu, 1986/2011), Social Capital theory (Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 1997), and Multicontext theory (Ibarra, 2001; Cohen & Ibarra, 2005). The Interpretive approach addresses the psycho-social processes that drive individual-level student actions and intentions in their interaction with social structural forces. This approach accounts for “the complex dialogical relationship between institutional practices and individual actions” (Lynch, 2006, p. 89). The challenge to understanding this relationship is capturing the dynamic and responsive intentions of the student interacting with the institution. Mehan (1992) succinctly describes Interpretive theory’s utility:

Ethnographic studies in the Interpretive tradition have made three interrelated contributions to theories that attempt to account for social inequality: (1) cultural elements have been introduced into highly deterministic macrotheories, (2) human agency has been interjected into theories accounting for social inequality, and (3) the black box of schooling has been opened to reveal the reflexive relations between institutional practices and students' careers. (p. 1)

The role of theory is to simplify the complex phenomena of the above-quoted “agency” by exposing the underlying, reflexive psycho-social and internal reactions, along with contradictions that resolve themselves in haphazard, yet patterned ways. In this way, the analysis and understanding of agency—in this case, student transfer intention—is

viewed in the light of cultural interactions within a social structural context, which in this case is the community college. I use the terminology and conceptual logic of social and cultural capital models to organize my project analysis around five empirically measurable processes to set a baseline of shared experiences by which to compare student transfer intentions. Student meaning and priority systems, cultural perceptions, and other subjective measures related to “transferring” and “bachelor’s education” are imperative to accurately understanding the impact of social and cultural experiences, net of structural forces, on student transfer intention.

An apt beginning point to approaching a student’s culture meaning system is by acknowledging that culture is “not merely a pale reflection of structural forces; it is a system of meaning that mediates social structure and human action. Social actors no longer function as passive role players, shaped exclusively by structural forces beyond their control” (Mehan, 1992, p. 1). The five “arranged” socio-cultural mechanisms facilitate the project’s organizational analysis of cultural interactions, yet the exploratory spirit of this thesis expects new, emerging socio-cultural phenomena that invite innovative sociological analysis. To this end, my *post hoc* analysis consists of finding social and cultural patterns not originally specified by the project design. I incorporate Interpretive principles from both capital-based theories and Multicontext theory to triangulate a better understanding of how students—each with unique priority systems—make their day-to-day and long-term academic decision-making, which then defines their level of transfer intention. In this way, I designed the project methodology to study the students through the social and cultural meaning that they assign to transferring.

**Social Capital and Cultural Capital theories.** Capital-based explanatory models are commonly used approaches in higher education research. My dependence on the measurement utility of the models is no exception. Based on the concept of “capital” accumulation, on the one hand social and the other cultural, the student’s expectation and value system is more readily studied in terms of accruing and profiting from a collection of resources. Social capital measures the amount and quality of resources, in both actual and potential terms, which are exchanged within a community or any network (Coleman, 1988; Bourdieu, 1986/2011). Shared expectations, informational channels, and a normative structure exemplify three forms of social capital (Coleman, 1988). Cultural capital, on the other hand, refers to the learned “informal academic standard, a class attribute, a basis for social [and self] selection, and a resource for power ...” (Lamont & Lareau, 1988, p. 156). Contrary to generalized measurements of culture, like art and “symphony concert” preferences (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; DiMaggio, 1982, p. 193), most researchers have reformed cultural capital theory into relative terms, with regard to the dynamic, multi-modal nature of status groups and standards. Narrower yet, I strictly exclude any non-academic use of the two theoretical toolkits. Examples of academic-related social capital, beginning with an academic group “membership,” include reciprocity in class preparation, insider information on transfer bureaucracy, and shared transfer expectations and mutual trust (e.g., with peers, instructors, and advisors); these span a continuum between formal and informal relations. I use academic group membership and academic group trust as two indicators of social capital acquirement. Three indicators I use to measure academic-related cultural capital include long-term transfer planning and commitment (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985); second, short-term pro-transfer academic habits, know-how and strategies

(Bourdieu, 1973); and third, academic familiarity and comfort-level (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). These facets of *academic capital* empirically capture the unique and complex features of the social and cultural processes that potential transfers encounter.

Social Capital theory refers to the quantity and value of the social resources that each individual member of a group holds in relation to other group members. Stanton-Salazar (1997) refers to social capital as “forms of social support inherent in a young person’s interpersonal network ... [determining] access to institutional privileges and resources” (p. 5). As the student’s solidified relations in a group lead to new and helpful resources, social capital accrues profit and multiplies in value for both the member and the group (Coleman, 1988). For instance, information channels, mutual expectations and reciprocity, and trust-building yield many more resources to the group member than the effort applied toward network membership. First, I’m interested in the degree to which a student achieves a central place in academic-related social groups, in both informal and institutional terms. This is exemplified by the proportion of college-going friends and time spent socializing in academic settings. Second, the measure of student perceptions of “trust” within academic groups yields another dimension of academic-related social capital (Coleman, 1988, p. 102). These trust-building interactions include the spectrum of formality, with instructors (outside class), mentors, advisors and administrators. I would expect a high measure of these two social capital concepts to indicate greater access to valuable, yet easily overlooked, resources like reciprocity in class preparation, informed advice on transfer bureaucracy, and shared expectations of transferring, etc. Therefore, acquisition of academic social capital through community college relations should strengthen the student’s transfer resolve and outcome.

The cultural capital model is useful toward operationalizing the meaning of transfer as it relates to how a student self-identifies (through long-term planning), behaves (through academic strategies and habits), and culturally adjusts within academic settings (through confidence and comfort-level). DiMaggio (1982) finds that measures of cultural capital mediate between the student's family background and academic outcomes. He also found higher grades and educational attainment were associated with high measures of cultural capital<sup>3</sup>. However, unlike the cultural capital usage based on Weberian status culture that characterizes Bourdieu (1986/2011) and others (Lee & Kramer, 2013; DiMaggio, 1982), my analysis uses strictly academic-related reference to cultural capital. First, long-term academic planning and commitment is an earned attribute of academic cultural capital that also reveals future self-identity as a university graduate. This would aptly measure how—including contextual origin and qualitative outcome, i.e., how long and how much—a student has internalized and concretized the meaning of transfer and pursuit of a bachelor's degree. Second, learned academic habits, know-how, and strategies are an attribute that measure how the meaning of transfer is reflected in a student's day-to-day activities. These daily acts—exemplified by number of homework hours, seeking help if needed, advising habits, full-time enrollment, and strategic course selection—each reveal how pro-transfer roles and activities are not only “prioritized” but also practiced on a daily basis. Third, academic-related cultural capital should yield a high comfort level in classroom discussion, familiarity with academic writing, language, test-taking, and other academic standards and settings. Nonetheless, many of the aforementioned habits and frames of

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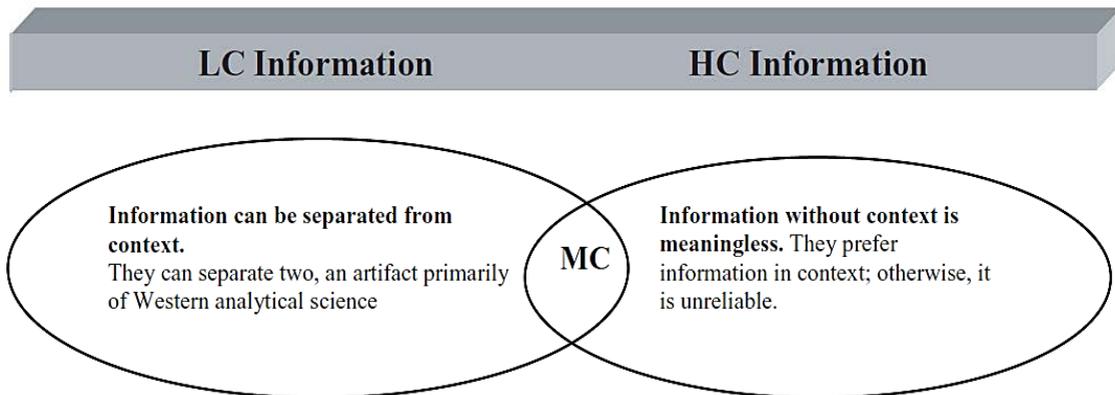
<sup>3</sup> The definition of cultural capital in the studies of DiMaggio (1982) and DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) are based on a modal high culture/middle class culture distinction. My study's academic use of cultural capital does not draw on issues of Weberian class status, as that is a separate aspect of Cultural Capital theory.

thinking may not be obvious to the student, whether in possession of academic capital or not. For this reason, cultural capital theory is useful toward appraising even apparently non-rational explanations for why a student, initially aspiring to a bachelor's degree, chooses an alternate route.

**Multicontext theory.** Given the exploratory design and the *post hoc* expectation that new socio-cultural patterns will emerge from the findings, I employ a third analytic model to focus on the cultural underpinnings of these processes and how they are interpreted. Congruent with the framework of the capital-based theories, Multicontext theory (Ibarra, 2001) introduces a rudimentary analysis of a student's cultural meaning system, which corresponds to the student's preferred modes of learning, cognitive awareness, and communication. These rudimentary cultural modes help determine how socio-cultural processes and messages are interpreted and may reflect nuanced cultural interpretations of what transferring means to the student. This rudimentary appraisal of student cultural meaning systems around transferring can be realized by returning to anthropological roots. Based on anthropological (Hall, 1965) and psychological (Ramírez & Castañeda, 1974) grounding, Multicontext theory helps interpret cultural patterns of group behavior based on learned meaning or value systems (Ibarra, 2001). The theory bases the concept of identity by an individual's cultural context, by which culture in its fundamental sense is defined as learned cognitive patterns based on clustering of group behavior and value systems (Hall, 1965; Ibarra, 2001). In this way, cultural context defines how the individual perceives time and space, and by extension, interprets new cultural encounters with people and institutions. Each group's unique cultural interaction of these two primary contextual perceptions, i.e., space and time, then produce differing

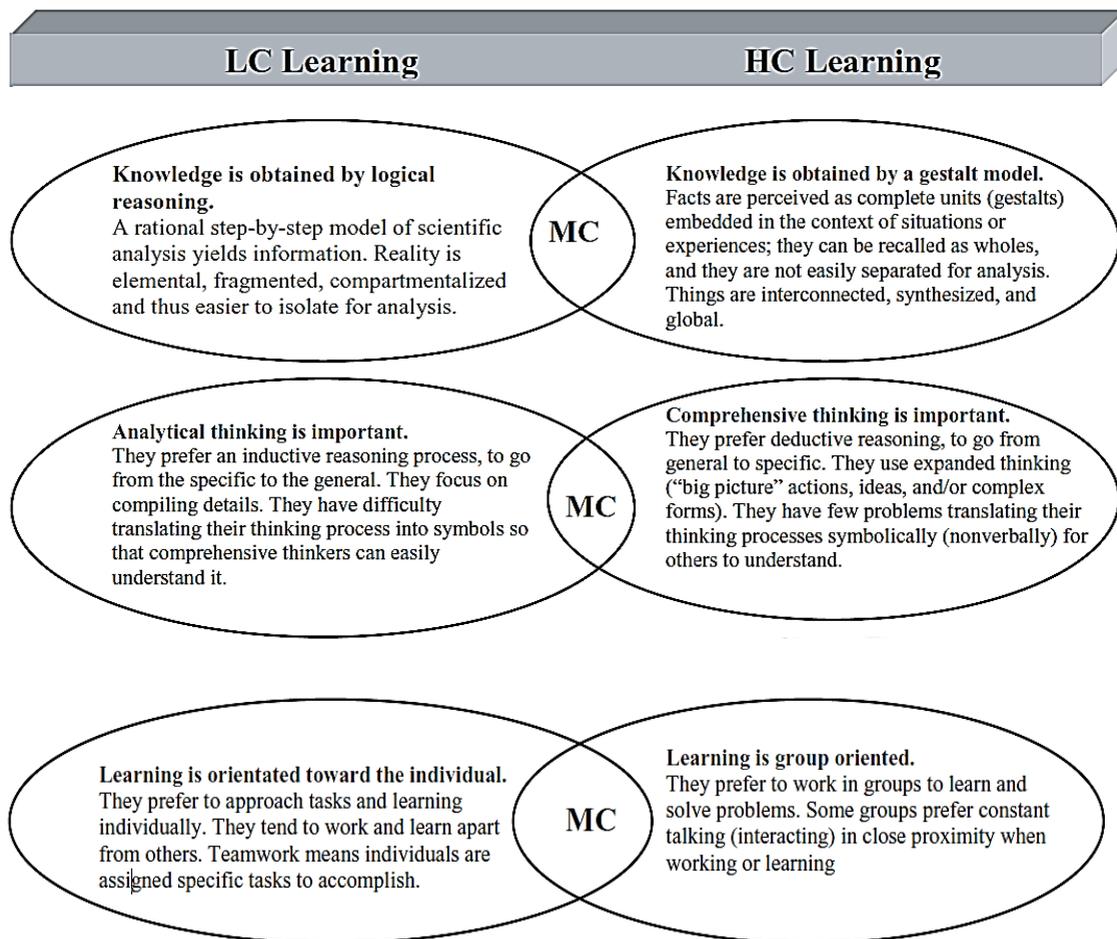
and unique modes of learning and meaning systems (Ibarra, 2001). Whether conscious or not, these different cognitive patterns follow uniquely stylized cultural learning and communication modes and problem-solving strategies (Ibarra, 2001). Anthropologists and other scholars identify differences between global populations on a spectrum between “high-context” and “low-context” (Hall, 1965; Ibarra, 2001). (See Illustrations 1 and 2 below.) In succinct and polar terms, low-context individuals tend to interpret and communicate by discrete, analytic information bits whose meaning is implicit within the parts of the message, with less need for further contextualization; high-context individuals interpret and communicate by continuous, interdependent information bits whose meaning is explicitly dependent on surrounding context (Ibarra, 2001). This continuum of analysis becomes relevant to not only explain human behavior—e.g., learning and pedagogy, peer and institutional socialization, and formation of meaning and priority systems—but also to identify and explain socio-cultural processes that are not easily reducible to traditional categorical groups like gender, race and ethnicity and socio-economic status. Multicontext theory’s terminology and categorical analysis of cultural meaning systems directly translates into, yet does not depend on, the diversity of groupings whether by gender, race and ethnicity, or socio-economic status.

Illustration 1. Low-Context (left), i.e., Field Independent, Prefers Analytic Information Transmission; High-Context (right), i.e., Field Dependent, Prefers Applied Information



Source: Ibarra, 2005, p. 21.

Illustration 2. Low-Context (left), i.e., Field Independent, Analytic Learning Processes; High-Context (right), i.e., Field Dependent, Applied Learning Processes



Source: Ibarra, 2005, p. 22.

In addition to anthropological insights, the other side of Multicontext theory employs cognition and communication principles of psychologists Manuel Ramírez III and Alfredo Castañeda (1974). These principles assert that the unified culture of a pedagogy and setting invariably transmits unique communication signals that are interpreted differently, i.e., uniquely, depending on the signal “setting” of the learning group (Ibarra, 2001; Ramírez & Castañeda, 1974). The psychology equivalent of the above-mentioned context continuum of learning patterns is based on measuring *cognitive awareness* between “field independent” (low-context) learning and a “field dependent” (high-context) learning. These concepts are inextricably linked to processes of learning, awareness, and the process of developing priority and meaning systems. They also illuminate how the student perceives the institutional culture, and academic culture generally, as much as how its messages are learned and internalized by the student. The widely varying direction and inflection of transfer rates by gender, socio-economic, and race and ethnicity on a national level may offer clues, but not necessarily categorical solutions, to help explain instances of dissonance between the student’s meaning of transferring and the messages about transferring that the institution communicates.

Given that national data indicate variations of achievement between groups, it is tempting to settle for socio-cultural explanations that appear latently through static, traditional group categories. Yet even categories within categories—such as differing Latino ethnicities—scarcely improve explanatory power. Rather, I use Multicontext principles to identify a more dynamic, fundamental manifestation of culture at work, by which students self-identify in specific ways and respond in specific ways that are

increasingly fluid and decoupled from traditional categorizations (Ibarra, 2005). In this way, cultural and behavioral patterns of *Millennials*, for instance, are translatable in the same way as behavioral patterns of any other group or intersectionality of groups, whether by gender, socio-economic status or race and ethnicity. In like manner, working-class values and priority systems, i.e. culture, also exhibit characteristics readily explained through an academic-related Multicontext analysis. The immediate implication of this is a more acute understanding of cultural elements that could potentially cause problems for students' transfer aspirations. Multicontext theory reads categorical, and thus symptomatic, indicators of dissonance and reliably translates analysis into evaluating the *underlying* cultural and cognitive predispositions at play. Therefore, my study—limited in a nominal degree by a small sample and even smaller subsamples by group—is effectively strengthened using Multicontext tools that do not depend on traditional categorical groupings. By gaining access to “below-the-surface” cultural machinations at play among the diversity of students in their college context, the “meaning” of transfer—and the intricate, unique value system in which it resides—can now be explained in terms of a common denominator, within the Interpretive framework of analysis.

Given the wide variation of community college potential transfer populations, for which I outlined five reasons why traditional university-persistence theories are limited in their applicability, I use a strategy of triangulation of three Interpretive approaches that provide a tenable bridge between empirical observations and a sound explanatory framework. By broaching the question of what transferring means to students and how that meaning is linked to transfer intention, this project attempts to make sense of how student transfer intention varies due to underlying socio-cultural processes and

experiences. More importantly, the project retains an inductive, exploratory design because the *a priori* theoretical framework is not necessarily tied to the *post hoc* interpretation of the findings. In this way, I expand the degrees of freedom to interpret and potentially generate theory about the processes that play out during the student's years between the initial transfer aspiration and eventual academic outcome.

## Chapter 2

### Contextualizing the Methodology and Sample

To test the theoretical utility of employing social and cultural capital principles in my transfer analysis, I designed a mixed methods study of a community college located in a medium-sized city in New Mexico. This year-long project collected student information using the logic and terminology of social and cultural capital models while preserving an inductive research design. To implement the design, I acted as principle investigator under faculty sponsorship, gaining the necessary Internal Review Board (IRB)—also known as Research Ethics Board (REB)—approval from the University of New Mexico (UNM) (UNM IRB 13-223) in October of 2013 and separate approval from the IRB office at the pseudonymously named, “Southern Community College” (SCC) (IRB SCC090613) in September of 2013. The study, entitled, “The Role of Academic Cultural Capital on the Transfer Aims of Two-Year Collegiates,” officially opened in October 2013 and closed in July 2014. The “soft” opening began in March of 2013 for planning, preliminary field-work and note-taking, and informal interviews with administrators and advisors from both SCC and the primary transfer destination, “feeding school,” which is a public, four-year University for which I also preserve anonymity, calling it, “Tech University” (TU). I asked the advisors about their general observations of potential transfer students and any observed patterns of behavior or attitude that might affect their academic intentions. The common observation was that potential transfer students felt a perceptual chasm between their past college experiences and their expectations about the upcoming university experience. My design of the questionnaire and interview protocols, sampling strategy, and overall timeline and project specifications were completed by May of 2013 allowing

me to apply in the same month to the respective IRB offices for project approval. After the approval process was completed, the questionnaire was administered using a semi-random, convenience sampling technique at the college main campus. I administered and collected survey questionnaires in six waves, at different times and locations, between early October and late November of 2013 with assistance from two department graduate colleagues.

Students were approached at various socializing locations like the cafeteria and in front of the library and the popular student services building—a public area characterized by outdoor socializing beside picnic tables. The criteria for inclusion restricted the student sample frame to first-time college enrollees and, upon inquiry, those reporting interest in transferring to a four-year college. Interviews began the following semester in March of 2014, with the final interview occurring in July of 2014. The study officially closed July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013. Transcription and coding ended in April of 2015. I designed the project to not stray from its objective to explore, identify, describe, and analyze social and cultural elements of students' community college experience playing a potential role in student transfer intentions. Accordingly, I designed a 45-point survey questionnaire (10-15 minutes) covering attitudinal data and social-structural information, along with a follow-up, semi-structured interview protocol designed for an hour length to gain further probing insight directed by the interviewee's previous survey responses.

The survey data (N=108) provides over 90 demographic, behavioral and attitudinal variables, which are mainly based on Likert and other ordinal scales that included questions on transfer expectations, advising and academic habits, and self-appraisals about academic aims and confidence levels. (See Appendix B on page 70 for survey questionnaire.) After coding the survey responses, I conducted descriptive analysis of the

sample frame. Among the 108 students surveyed, 38 volunteered for a later interview, and ten were paid (\$15 cash) for an hour-long interview, which I conducted at pre-appointed times in a reserved library conference room on the main campus of the public two-year institution. During the process of contacting the 38 volunteers by telephone to confirm interest in the interview (five to nine months later), conversations were brief but enough for longitudinal enrollment information. In contrast to the enthusiastic and high response rate of the survey-taker recruitment, the interviewee recruiting was not without challenges. Some students were never contacted due to changed telephone number or no answer, while others no longer had interest in scheduling to interview. A few students missed the interview appointments or called to reschedule at the appointment time. I digitally recorded seven of the ten interviews and transcribed the students' words to inductively study potential patterns of socio-cultural mechanisms affecting transfer likelihood. (See Appendix C on page 77 for interview protocol guide.) The interviews—one to two semesters after survey administration—shed light on the sequential nature of college experiences and how processes play out that potentially affect transfer decisions.

Data was collected based on two social capital variables of academic group membership and trust, in addition to three cultural capital variables including long-term transfer planning and commitment, academic know-how, and finally academic familiarity and comfort-level. These concepts help articulate complex measures like levels of “comfort” in college settings and the “shared expectations” among peers to transfer to a university. Demographic, social-structural, and attitudinal data are collected from 20 survey questions. (See Table 1 in Appendix A on page 66.) The remaining 25 questions are divided into five primary indicators of academic capital. (See Tables 2 and 3 in

Appendix A on pages 67 and 68). First, informal and formal academic membership inclusion is measured by social-academic integration, i.e. school friends, clubs, time spent on campus (social capital). Second, trust in academia is measured by informal or formal mentorship and advising (social capital). Third, the meaning and value attributed to a four-year degree is measured by long-term conscientiousness in transfer planning and commitment (cultural capital). Fourth, academic motivational confidence is measured by short-term conscientiousness in study habits (cultural capital). Fifth, academic cultural confidence is measured by facility and comfort level with academic language, computing and organizational skills, critical dialogue skills, and writing and research skills (cultural capital). Each of these five indicators of academic capital are operationalized by approximately five questions each.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the SCC Population Sample**

“Southern Community College” (SCC) is located in an urban setting in New Mexico and enrolled almost 27,000 students, of which one third (N=8,292) were full-time students, in the fall of 2014. Approximately 22% of SCC students transfer to four-year programs, which is analogous to the national rate of 21% in 2009, according to the college’s data management office<sup>4</sup>. The average age of students is 27 years old, yet 58% of students are below 26 years of age. Females comprise 56% of students. Because New Mexico is a majority-minority state, it is not surprising that Latinos comprise the majority of the total SCC student population with 47% (N=12,734), while White, non-Hispanics comprise 31% (N=8,309). Native American students comprise 7% (N=1,848), African

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<sup>4</sup> The source for this information comes from both the preliminary informal telephone interview with a representative from the SCC Office of Planning and Effectiveness, in addition to other publicly available SCC information from the college website, which is not cited to protect anonymity. Additional disaggregated transfer-related information requiring permission from SCC was not collected.

American students comprise 3% (N=767), and Asian and Pacific-Islander comprise almost 3% (N=636). Those self-reporting mixed-race comprise 2% of the students (N=611).

Official socio-economic data were not publicly available nor requested. Other than age, I aimed for the SCC sample's demographic statistics to be at least moderately proportional to the SCC population, which would mean about six in ten students is female; five in ten students are Latino, three in ten are White, and about two out of ten SCC students would be represented by Native American, African American and Asian American/Pacific Islander groups. Compared with the overall SCC population average age of 27 years, my sample frame should be expected to be between 18 and the early twenties because 58% of the SCC population is 25 years old and younger and the criteria of inclusion centers on first-time college enrollees.

Many social structural features of the SCC sample (N=108) appear unique to the community college, such as the number of students that are first-generation college enrollees. (See Table 1 in Appendix A on page 66.) Many students in the sample also face challenges like full-time work, parenting, or the perceived financial challenge of transferring. Demographically, the SCC sample is comprised of 51% (N=55) Latino, 27% (N=29) White, 7% (N=8) African American, 7% (N=8) Native American, and 5% (N=5) Asian/Pacific Islander or other. There are 59% (N=44)<sup>5</sup> female students and the median student age is twenty years (mean age=21.3 years) for all survey participants. The students sampled have fewer kin and extended family with college degrees than expected. The median response about non-nuclear families was "few or none have [university] degrees or are currently pursuing one." The average parental level of education is 12.3 years. Among

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<sup>5</sup> As mentioned in the methodology section, gender data is available for 72 of the 108 students in sample.

the 90 students reporting parental education, 73% (N=66) are first-generation college students<sup>6</sup>. The majority of parental occupations listed are non-managerial positions in the service industry. The modal point of the survey's "skipped questions" lies within the categories of parental education and parental occupation. The majority of students travelled out of state "once or twice" during high school. About one out of five students (N=22) speak a non-English language at home and 18% (N=19) report a physical or learning challenge. The average respondent reported the financial prospect of transferring to be a "big challenge." The population sample data indicate there is a comparative socio-economic, structural difference between community college students and typical university undergraduates.

Most students reported personal responsibilities that often included a balance of school work with a full-time job or parenting, which could have an impact on completing transfer in a timely manner. For example, each of the 18 student-parents indicated that they experienced some degree of parenting interference in meeting academic deadlines. However, 19 students who reported no children also responded in the following question that "parenting" interfered with their ability to meet academic deadlines. Among these 19 students, eight are male, six are female, and the gender is not known for the remaining four. This would indicate that "parenting" care for siblings, others' children, or elder care are potentially underestimated challenges. This is probably an accurate finding because the anomaly did not occur with the analogous "work" and "work interference" questions. One 25 year-old, Native American male interviewee described non-parent "parenting" as

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<sup>6</sup> For the intents of this thesis project, I define "first-generation college" student by highest parental education reporting of 12 or 14 years, i.e., less than 16 years. This definition was corroborated in the interviews in which students viewed the university, four-year degree, not a vocational degree, as carrying "first-generation college" connotations.

being "... difficult helping my grandparents, helping my brothers ...". Regarding work responsibilities, 54 of the 108 students were employed and 70% of these employed students (N=37) work more than 20 hours per week. Most employed students indicated some work-related interference in their "ability to meet academic deadlines," with only 15% (N=8) indicating no interference. Only 7% (N=8) of the students sampled are married. The survey sample reflects the target demographic sample frame of the student population in question, i.e., first-time college students intending to transfer.

The interview sample, designed for sufficient heterogeneity and representation of both demographic and circumstantial characteristics, provides for a variety of descriptions of differing forms of academic social and cultural capital. (See Table 4 in Appendix A on page 69.) Four of the ten interviewees are female. Five interviewees are White, four are Latino/a, and one Native American. Most interviewees were in their early twenties. The interview sample included students that exhibited signs of "warming up" through detailed plans for transfer, and some of "cooling out" by enrolling in non-transfer credit courses or dropping out. Four of the interviewees were first-generation college students, and they each described a grandparent, parent or sibling that serves as an inspiration to achieve the milestone of a four-year degree. Two of the interviewees had dropped out of college to care for an ailing grandparent and, for one student, to also financially provide for a younger brother and single mother. Given the variation of background, circumstance, and level of transfer intention, the interviewee sample proved adequately heterogeneous to gain perspective from different viewpoints and intersections of interpretation.

Certain methodological limitations are noteworthy. The small sample size and semi-random data collection inhibit statistically significant inferential conclusions and

generalizability to other community college populations. The benefits of an in-person, campus-only survey recruitment invites elements of selection bias and other extraneous factors, yet the qualitative benefits of physical presence, though at a distance, helped confirm the authenticity of survey responses. For example, nearly all students spent at least ten minutes filling out the questionnaire, while about four students' surveys were discarded because I observed hurried, "rapid-fire" responses without pausing to read. Regrettably, gender information is available in 78 of the 108 survey cases because a technical error prevented its collection in the first few waves of survey data collection. The sample is comprised of those intending to transfer, yet the degree of social desirability bias (to participate) is an important concern. For example, some potentially undecided or vocational students may have agreed with the screening question—which stipulates an intention to transfer—in order to fill out the survey. There was no incentive or compensation offered for the survey-takers, yet most students enthusiastically agreed to complete the survey. Only one student did not complete the survey once begun. Validity threats like social desirability bias in respondent honesty were partially mitigated by, for example, informing participants that the survey and interviews are confidential with any identifying features removed. My presence and that of my colleagues was outside of range of the survey responses to further allay any survey-takers' privacy concerns. However, sensitive questions in the survey were routinely skipped over. For example, some students (N=18) skipped over the parental education section and a surprising amount (N=29) skipped over the parental occupation questions; in each case, about half of these students (N=9 and N=14, respectively) reported being dependents of their parents. Also potential survey instrument reliability threats may arise from inter-item inconsistencies in measuring

concepts, however, for future improvement, the later interview questions shed light on instances of unclear questionnaire wording.

The interviewee sample limitations begin with the small sample size. Further, it is difficult to qualitatively estimate the magnitude and scope of students' descriptions of their perceptions of "campus climate," or "level of difficulty." The insight of a panel discussion, which was originally planned but later discarded, would have overcome this blind-spot by the students' dialectical resolution of their relative perceptions into a more absolute characterization. Self-selection bias in the interview screening process also arose as an issue. On one occasion, it became apparent that one interviewee's motive was the monetary compensation. This person's information was not included with the interview results. The interview incentive of \$15 cash was balanced, and perhaps too low, as some students lost interest and motivation to schedule an appointment when contacted months later. The sample was not ideal as I unfortunately did not succeed in obtaining representation from African American and Asian American students. Preparation for the interview with the survey background information helped direct questions more coherently while probing transfer topics. The dual, nested sampling technique provided a fairly heterogeneous representation, along quantitative and qualitative dimensions, of the target population toward the goal of theory generation through exploratory and descriptive analysis.

## Chapter 3

### Fragile Transfer Intentions: Results and Discussion of the Survey and Interviews

Counterintuitive findings indicated transfer intentions that appear more recently formed and less internalized than expected. A surprising 55% (N=59) of the sampled students, when asked how long they planned to transfer, had decided during or after the first year at SCC. This indicates a higher than expected heightening of aspiration after arrival. This finding would corroborate some researchers' findings that "warming up" is more commonly found than "cooling out" during enrollment, until life course events determine otherwise (Alexander *et al.*, 2008; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Baird, 1971). The other 45% (N=49) of the sample had planned to transfer since high school. Student transfer intention in the sample was less committed than expected: Almost two out of three (N=68) students reported they would have little or no disappointment if they decided to postpone transfer and get an Associate's degree to begin working. This might be partially explained by a low level of the academic cultural capital measure of long-term transfer planning and commitment. Furthermore, the notion of transferring is a relatively recent priority for the 59 participants that decided on transfer after arriving to SCC. For this reason, socialization by peers and the institution, may prove decisive to "warming up" transfer intentions.

### **The Interplay between Financial, Career, and Family Priorities**

Many students expressed personal dilemmas and challenges that forced them to re-prioritize their academic work with other life obligations. One 22 year-old White interviewee, Amadeus, contemplated between postponing transfer to begin working or to stay on course to transfer. He said, "Everyone has a buying point ... I have a buying point.

Title is less important than money. But money is less important than being happy.”

Amadeus debated the merit of another two years to obtain a BS in radiology, as immediate money seemed to be a prominent rationale for him. Many students reported their family’s needs far above any academic priorities. Asked what typical challenges to prioritizing academic habits were, a 21 year-old Latino student, Cristobal, responded, “sometimes family things. It was actually like this past summer was when I took [time] off. So I had to quit going to classes because I was taking care of my mom and grandparents.” Cristobal cites the primary reason for stopping out is due to caring for his ill grandfather; he cited this care responsibility is what led to his academic difficulties, which led to academic probation and eventual desistance. While some students’ transfer desistance is abruptly catalyzed by a sequence of unfortunate events, others’ desistance happens with the mere passage of time.

One student’s long-term “meaning” for transferring languished with little event over eight semesters, until being replaced by a new financial “meaning” of a new pursuit. Anderson, a 24 year old White male became convinced that he will pursue a career in welding based on potential earning power because he has lost patience with his college studies. Although he still maintains confidence about entering a four-year program, he has become very skeptical about the practicality of pursuing a four-year degree after already spending four years at SCC. He said, “eventually I will get a four-year degree, but the question of what, whether four-year in business, a four-year in teaching, mechanical engineering, but at this point in my life especially spending four years here [at SCC], I’m ready to go out into the industry and make some real money. To progress. I will get four-year degree in something but after going out in the field.” Anderson’s dilemma portrays a

common theme among some students lured by settling for a two-year degree and high-paying job with limited mobility. Few recognize the small sacrifice of two years of further study in the *same field* learning organizational and baccalaureate skills leading to higher salaried, managerial positions. Anderson's qualitative portrayal confirms and explains the quantitative indications of students' fragile transfer intentions, measured as scarcely arousing disappointment for "postponing transferring to a later date." Anderson typifies how priorities gradually shift over time without the academic capital accrual of a firm, long-term commitment to transferring. Shifting priorities catalyzed by life circumstances generally threaten transfer intentions, yet in other cases the outcome is a strengthened resolve to transfer.

Charles, a 25 year-old Native American and first-generation college student, exemplifies a case of temporarily shifting full priority from his aspiration for a university degree to family concerns. Then, once resolved, he later returned to the community college to pursue full-time transfer credentials and eventually a bachelor's degree. Charles originally dropped out of school to care for his mother that had fallen ill. He explains, "my mother had gotten sick with breast cancer so I quit school and moved back [home]. That took up a big chunk of my life and then I got back into school when my younger brother finished high school." Charles clarifies that he worked for his tribal government to provide for his mother and younger brother until the latter graduated high school. Only then did Charles return to SCC. Both Cristobal and Charles are examples among the 19 non-parents identified by the survey sample as reporting some degree of "parenting interference." Some academic constraints are exogenous to the college so this project focuses on how underlying priority systems react to these external circumstances that

potentially catalyze change in a student's transfer intentions or behavior, and whether that change is lasting.

### **Subdued Peer Formation and Academic 'Membership'**

The first measure of social capital focuses on the degree of social and academic inclusion. (See Table 2a in Appendix A on page 67.) This is measured by time spent on campus, proportion of college friendships, attending social-cultural or academic events and joining academic clubs. Data indicate students at SCC spend, on average, 6-10 hours on campus per week, not counting classroom time. Classes do not meet on Friday allowing students to spend one to two hours per day on campus. These hours are only moderately spent socializing with friends, which ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> out of four among typical campus activities. "Computer lab for personal use" ranked second and "preparing for classes" ranked first. The students ranked the most accurate description of their closest friends as "having a degree or currently in college" and they ranked the least accurate portrayal as "having no want/need or confidence" to go to college. The second rank for most accurate portrayal of their friends is, "they want a degree but aren't able to pursue one due to work, family or other responsibilities." About a third (N=30) reported these friends as either first or second choice indicating a close proximity to best friends with "real-world" challenges (e.g., limited time, family) and "real-world" rewards (e.g., material goods, family). Given that non-college peers exert an external socializing pull (Tinto, 1973), I would expect a higher proportion of non-academic peers to negatively affect transfer intentions. Measures for participation in academic clubs and academic or cultural college activities were unexpectedly low. The students reported low participation with academic activities or clubs as only 16% (N=17) mentioned any such involvement. Those attending any social or

cultural events on campus in a semester counted for 28% (N=30) of the sample. One interviewee, Bree, a 21 year-old White female, remarked, “I don’t even know if we have any clubs here. But besides the sorority I don’t know of any clubs here [at SCC].” The academic cultural development of a student is hindered if new friends, and hence valuable informational channels, are not made. The solitary routine activities of “class preparation” and “computer use” indicated by the survey results exemplify the subdued opportunities outside of class time for social network formation. The measures of academic group membership indicate that a large proportion of students’ peers are college-going. However, I would expect inhibiting factors like few on-campus hours and rare extra-curricular involvement would hinder new peer network formation and opportunities for new academic-related social capital resources.

### **Mediating Role of Trust to Gaining Pro-Transfer Social Resources and Networks**

The second set of social capital questions measure students’ self-reported reliance on advice-seeking and mentorship through, for instance, formal “institutional agents” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) or informal college peers. (See Table 2b in Appendix A on page 67.) The measure of advice-seeking for career/education goals is based on seven available choices including SCC advisors, faculty, college mentors, parents, siblings, college friends, or non-college friends. The students ranked their parents first with a close second rank to SCC advisors. Third, fourth and fifth rank are clustered, which includes respectively, college mentors, siblings, and college-friends. This indicates that the role of trust in academic decision-making is dominated by parents, surpassing formal academic socialization from advisors and mentors. This is an intuitive finding given that almost half (N=59) report they are financial dependents of their parents, implying they probably reside

with their parents and would be pre-disposed to frequent parental advice-seeking. In contrast to this measure of “intensity” of trust through priority ranking, another measure of “frequency” of trust interactions through advice-seeking is found to be highest among college friends rather than parents or advisors. This indicates a mix of academic and non-academic socialization in long-term educational advice-seeking and goal formation. A second measure, inquiring about from whom the students “seek advice on course selection,” indicates a similar frequency-versus-intensity contrast. College friends’ advice on course selection is sought an average of 3.1 times per semester, while parents’ advice is sought an average 2.9 times per semester. Advice on course selection is sought from advisors a surprisingly low 1.8 times per semester. The observation that parents and college-friends count for greater levels of trust on *technical* advice than formal institutional agents indicates a dependence on potentially inaccurate transfer information, given that the average parental education is 12.3 years. In spite of the complexity of transfer and financial aid bureaucracy, the results show neglect of formal advisement and technical expertise in favor of parental and peer informal advice. Coupled with the earlier findings about students’ informal sources of goal-making advice, variable locations of trust may play a role in how students understand and feel confidence about the transfer process, the technical steps involved, and even its purpose.

The interviews revealed that trust appeared to mediate between students’ positive or negative experiences facing bureaucratic challenges as several students drew their emotional and organizational support from semi-formal sources like mentors and specialized-program advisors. Two common responses indicated a need for guidance in navigating the bureaucratic “paperwork” and a reliable source of moral support and

confidence. Three students mentioned one particular person or office that would become their “go-to” person or place with whom they felt comfortable, which were all forms of mentorship—both formal and “informalized” by, for example, program deprecation. One student, when asked about the transfer paperwork process, visibly sighed with relief and recounted how she has a place that she can take her bureaucratic problems. Bree is a first-generation college student that originally enrolled in an academic mentoring program in high school that focused on transition to college. According to Bree, this program was designed to help students with the application paperwork of entering college. However, Bree’s mentor gained her trust and is currently her primary source for advice and a secondary source of emotional support after her parents. Bree continues to maintain weekly informal mentoring contact. “I don’t talk too much with advisors here [SCC]. I have a mentor at TU [same mentor with new job at university] so she’s been helping me so I take her advice more important than most of my friends.” She said that she depends almost exclusively on her mentor for personal and bureaucratic advice. “They have another [tutor/mentor program] at SCC, but I stick with her [non-SCC mentor], I feel more comfortable ... even at her office, I feel comfortable with the others there. I just feel really close to them.” In her third semester of her second year, she said she’s feeling confident about beginning bachelor’s studies as soon as she can. Bree’s academic-group “membership” appears mediated by a trust-based relationship from which she gains tremendous pro-transfer social capital benefits—yet Bree did not form these trust bonds at her college SCC, whose formal advising she roundly dismissed.

Casey, a 20 year-old White female student had been accepted to TU and declined in favor of starting at SCC. She did not refer to any particular person that helped her in her

efforts, but only referred to her program as a source of reliable help and mutual trust. Casey became involved in this “Pathway” program beginning in high school that facilitates transfer to TU. To be eligible, one has to be first accepted into TU. In this way, the student will not have to reapply to the university later on if she chooses to first attend a community college. Participants in the program are eligible to begin enrollment at TU after earning 24 credit hours. Casey described the “office” as a haven for her to bring transfer questions about credits, course selection or necessary paperwork. Casey credited this program for allowing her to come to SCC where she felt more comfortable. Casey’s words carried a socially *inclusive* tone of trust and confidence, while others’ trust appeared equally strong yet less socially integrated.

Charles, the first-generation 25 year-old student, expressed less mutual trust with SCC advisors because of mixed experiences, “They looked at what program I was interested in, and that was it. I didn’t feel comfortable with that. I felt I wasn’t given the opportunity to be understood.” However, Charles said the transfer process for him was much easier because he knew several SCC administrators and advisors from whom he could informally seek advice. Charles was pleased to report that since the time of survey he had succeeded in transferring and was accepted into TU. He credited his success to the fact that he “knew the ropes” as a result of being an SCC work-study employee and he trusted those from whom he sought advice. He made extensive use of advising strategies and subsequently felt empowered, saying “I had thought it [transfer bureaucracy] would be difficult, especially my financial aid. I didn’t know how it would transfer. But it was easy, I just had to enter a code. All of my SCC credits transferred.” Evidently, formal institutional support offered the opportunity and support needed by some in the transfer

process, and trust continues to surface as a mediating theme for those developing pro-transfer advisory habits.

Other students did not seek formal advising and were consequently challenged by bureaucratic entanglements; these students also tended to develop a mistrust with respect to either the college or the “academic system” generally. Some students’ sense of trust was diminished because of their bureaucratic challenges and unwillingness to seek formal advising. Three students, Amadeus, Cristobal, and Esteban—ages 22, 21, and 23 respectively, interpreted the “red-tape” as a personal affront from SCC (and in one case, also from TU). Esteban, a 23 year-old Latino student insisted the colleges were, “making it more difficult than it has to be.” These students exemplified how “trust”—which is accurately captured by social capital as a networking resource—was not developed or internalized. Amadeus explained that he wasn’t comfortable with SCC instructors and advisors but would seek advice from a former high school teacher. When asked about ever needing information or advice, he said, “I’m in conflict there because I’m laid back [so] I would ask a student peer first, not a professor ...” He described that with SCC tutors, “it’s like ‘you did this wrong’ compared to something positive. Discrediting instead of something positive, I try not to go to tutors here, I like to go to someone I know, so I’d go to one of my old teachers from high schools. He sits there and *actually talks* [emphasis by interviewee] to you about your paper compared to someone else that butchers it and says ‘I’m doing too much.’” There are many levels of analysis yet to discuss later with respect to learning preference, context diversity, and the capital of a high academic comfort level, yet it is *trust* again that prominently features as a mediating role in developing meaningful

social ties, informal or formal, which ultimately stoke transfer intentions and guide students through challenging experiences.

Cristobal, Esteban, Anderson and Amadeus never formed bonds of trust nor a comfort level with formal advisement or the institution generally. In speaking with them, an apparent “us/them” attitude colored descriptions of their experiences interacting with SCC administrators, advisors, and tutors. Amadeus commonly framed procedural and bureaucratic interactions with SCC in terms of institutional opposition rather than one of institutional collaboration and patronage. His phrase-use of the term “conning” carries a semantic hint when referring to institutional actions that are misunderstood or enigmatic. For example, while explaining to me a strategy he had learned is necessary to pass a certain exam, he says, “the con about this test [is that you ...].” This implies the need for adaptive strategy or a “work-around” to accomplish certain tasks, which in theory should be perceived as transparent and openly privileged. I note that Cristobal stopped out, and Amadeus and Esteban expressed increasing doubt about the long-term worth of transferring. These students would benefit most from developing the academic capital of “long-term transfer conscientiousness,” without which a spontaneous internalization of academic self-identity leading to a renewed transfer intention becomes an unrealistic outcome without action or intervention.

Some students like Cristobal had dropped out of SCC between the time of survey and the interview. As previously noted, Cristobal’s series of misfortunes including his ailing grandfather, academic probation, lost eligibility for his work-study job, concurrent loss of financial aid eligibility, and finally withdrawal. He said he desperately wanted to continue in school, but he could not afford it. It was clear that Cristobal carried a lot of

resentment at the school because of the automatic loss of financial aid when on probation. He felt that the penalty only targeted students who were not “rich.” He mentions that a dominant academic motivation is the education of his peers, saying “not only my friends but people I grew up with, they got degrees and I want that so I don’t have to worry about the struggle all the time ...” The noteworthy element of Cristobal’s case is that he indicated little or no use of SCC advising because he felt it was always a “run-around.” The complexity of his case makes very plausible the argument that close advisement with an SCC advisor would have played a large role in realistically solving his predicament.<sup>7</sup> Esteban, a 23 year old Latino student, had an experience of deep frustration and anger at the “system.” Esteban had enough credits to transfer, but his scholarship had not transferred to TU. At the time of interview, Esteban was not sure whether or not the non-transferred scholarship was a bureaucratic error or if it would not carry over. He claimed that TU confused him further, saying, “They gave me the paperwork and they’re trying to get me to sign up for another loan...” He had not returned to SCC to sort out the confusion. He said this was due to his frustration at the institution. Both of these students had not accessed advisory resources, in terms of bureaucratic and financial navigation, that were available to them, and that would have potentially altered the outcomes. The interviews clarified that transfer preparation is necessarily an active academic pursuit during the first few years of college, rather than a more passive, inertial pursuit enjoyed by university first- and second-year students. Further, the findings indicate that transfer intentions are not easily maintained over time in the face of persistent challenges. If

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<sup>7</sup> SCC also offers a “life coach” advising program that provides help from an “achievement coach” that helps with non-academic issues like child-care or financial difficulties; Cristobal had not accessed this service at the time of the interview.

building trust through informal and formal ties is a mediating factor in strengthening transfer intention, then *trust* itself becomes a valuable commodity that the transfer candidate must either already possess or actively pursue, or, as it were, their intentions perish.

### **Students Arrive ‘Warmed-Up’ or They Must Pro-Actively Pursue Transfer**

Academic-related cultural capital’s measure of identity-formation through long-term planning and commitment complements from a different angle the social capital measure of academic identity-formation through group membership. The first indicator of academic cultural capital is measured by long-term conscientiousness about transfer planning. (See Table 3a in Appendix A on page 68.) The proportion of students that decided to transfer after arriving at the institution indicates that many did not develop a college self-identity and conscientiousness during high school. This helps explain why so many students “warm up” to transfer aspirations upon arrival to SCC. Approximately three quarters (N=79) had advised with an SCC advisor at least once about career and educational goals. Respondents indicated time spent choosing their major, the average of which is “a few hours deciding my major.” Indeed, most did not express an urgency or adherence to a timeline in their transfer intentions. This is exemplified by 41% (N=44) of the sampled students that chose “no, I am not in a rush” and another 38% (N=41) chose the next lowest response of “yes, I have a general timeline.” Only 21% (N=23) chose the two higher response categories indicating more specific timeline planning. Taken in sum, these measures indicate a modest self-identification with an academic future. Further, the recent and potentially weak internal commitment to a four-year college transfer implies a limited

accrual of academic cultural capital from parental and peer socialization during pre-college years.

The interviews allowed the students to express their rudimentary source(s) of motivation to pursue a bachelor's degree. Conversations with the students about long-term planning and commitment indicated that they identified with a four-year degree often because of family hopes and expectations as much as personal aspirations. It became evident from the interviews that some students felt they already possessed "something" by which they felt assured of their identity as "University students." For instance, Casey mentioned her admiration for her mother's MBA degree, her professional standing, and community respect. This admiration served as the primary source of inspiration for her to pursue a Master's degree. She said her motivation for a higher degree was the prestige of the credential because she felt it conferred power to help people [in the community]. Her admiration was couched in social capital connotations, as she saw herself in the future as a "networked" professional with clout and respect in the community. It is noteworthy that the long-term conscientiousness, i.e., meaning, she ascribes to the BA is directed at the family and community for its worth, while others may ascribe a different form of meaning, such as monetary or family achievement; others mentioned their motivations in terms of pioneering and exploration, while others mentioned empowerment and esteem-building.

Charles, a first-generation college student (second only to his older brother) told me his primary motivation to obtain a university degree was explorative. He said there were, "other things outside of the reservation that I wanted. I knew the only way to get there was education." The meaning that Charles ascribes to the BA is a ticket to opportunity. He also acknowledged his grandmother for initially introducing the expectation to attend a

four-year college. He mentioned that his grandmother had been among the Native American adolescents that were federally mandated to attend Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools. Some students painted an image of well-embedded commitments to transfer—indicating the academic cultural capital trait of long-term conscientiousness and academic self-identification learned from youth—while others earned a renewed academic commitment by alternate routes.

One first-generation college student, a 27 year-old White female who I will call Becka, recounts long-term commitment to a university degree since youth, but she sustained a challenged, circuitous pathway requiring sacrifice and perseverance. She said she grew up very poor and lacking food at times because her single-parent mother was frequently unemployed. No one in her family had a four-year degree. However, her grandmother had always insisted on her getting “a good education,” by which she meant a Bachelor’s degree. Due to her grandfather’s passing away, she received a moderate inheritance. She said that choosing education over plastic surgery was a difficult decision for her. She returned to SCC with leftover credits from her previous SCC attendance. This allowed her to transfer within a year to TU, and recently graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in English and a Psychology minor. Her first-generation college graduation, and the meaning it carried to her family, was the foremost motivation for her. Similar to Becka, Mikaela described academic struggles since childhood until she “turned her life around.” She is a 23 year-old White female and she mentioned falling into the “wrong crowd” in the past and started using illegal drugs. Her recovery was not academic-related, but was made possible by her family’s support. She said she had enrolled at SCC because it was the obvious choice for her. She had decided to enter into the counseling field to help

others in addition. She recently did transfer to a four-year college and is in her second year. She maintains contact with her SCC peers, and takes summer classes at SCC (from which her participation was recruited). It was not clear if she was applying those credits to her four-year program or if they were unrelated courses. I was not able to ask given the course of the conversation. Finally, the fundamental “drive” to transfer to a university in pursuit of a bachelor’s degree was frequently manifest in students in one of two ways: they either had an overwhelming reason or desire to transfer *or* they had developed a bond of trust with a college figure actively supporting and helping strengthen transfer intentions—not to mention helping to mitigate challenges arising from on or off campus.

**Pro-transfer habits and short-term conscientiousness.** The measures of academic-related cultural capital of “academic habits and strategies” were noteworthy in the indication of a strong academic work ethic. (See Table 3b in Appendix A on page 68.) Perfect attendance was reported by 44% (N=47) of those sampled, and 99% of the sampled students devote some time each week to homework for each class. Only one respondent answered “zero” hours among the 108 surveyed. The average student in the sample reported “3-4 hours spent on homework.” It is noteworthy that several interviewees expressed an “unmotivated” campus climate, yet the diligent study habits of those sampled indicate the opposite. A large proportion of students do not seek help when they feel they are struggling. The average response to the question on, “seeking outside-class time help from an instructor, study-group, or other if you felt you were struggling in a course” was “yes, but rarely.” Again, the students also ranked “class preparation” as the most common on-campus activity. Based on the descriptive data on high academic work ethic and habits,

it is reasonable to conclude a high amount of this measure of academic capital among the potential transfer students.

**Academic cultural confidence and familiarity.** The cultural capital measure of “academic ease” is measured by self-reported comfort level with academic language, computer use, critical dialogue skills, and writing/research skills. (See Table 3c in Appendix A on page 68.) The students’ comfort level in classroom participation was relatively high. The average response was “comfortable” when asked “how comfortable do you feel participating in classroom discussion?” Students’ comfort level with computers averaged at “I feel comfortable, and learning new software is easy.” There is less confidence about transferring. When asked about how confident they are about doing 3<sup>rd</sup> year and 4<sup>th</sup> year level courses, the average response was “somewhat confident.” The student’s expected test performance and term paper writing was rated lowest in confidence level. Organizational skills and classroom discussion were first and second highest in confidence, respectively. These results about current levels of confidence in addition to perceptions of upcoming university work give the impression of a modest level of confidence.

Intuitively speaking, the college setting at SCC should inspire a heightened academic self-identity that is strengthened by the informal ambience. However, the interviews indicated some students’ transfer intentions and comfort-levels reacted negatively to the informality. A few students felt an air of “academic complacency” from both peers and the institutional culture. A number of those interviewed described it as an air of low expectations. The theme also surfaced when some viewed the instructors’ lenient policies as a motivational hindrance. One interviewee, Casey, felt that she worked

harder in high school than at SCC. Asked if she felt well prepared by SCC, she replied, “Oh, not at all. Just because here there’re very laid back about homework and here if it’s late, it doesn’t matter, they’ll still take it, but I know it’s not like that over there [TU], I know at [TU] it’s a lot stricter.” Since the community college environment may potentially affect the student’s expectations, the college “climate” is an understated factor affecting student agency toward transfer. Further, the balance between professionalism and informality may be a challenging middle-ground to achieve for the institution and its cultural climate. In sum, these results elicit insightful processes including certain patterns of inhibited college socialization, high institutional trust, high work ethic and modest levels of academic confidence.

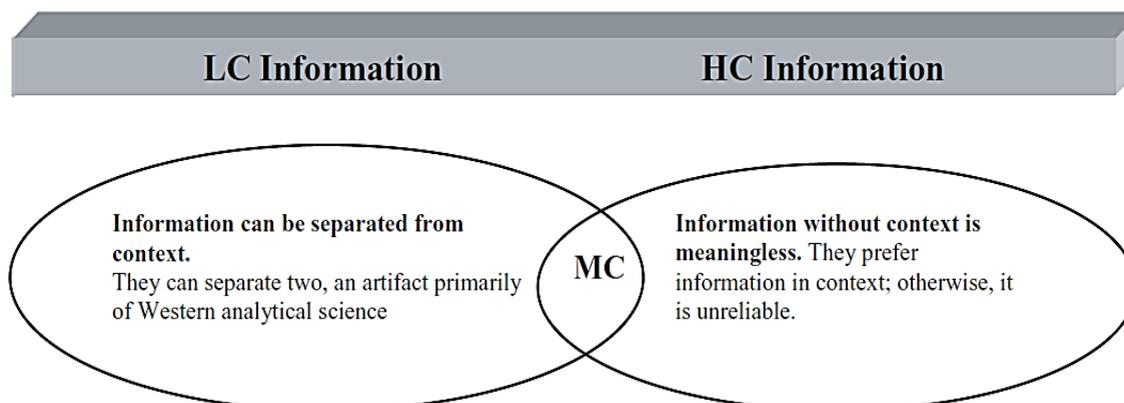
### **Emerging Phenomena**

The utility of academic-related capital theories toward identifying the form and content of socio-cultural processes raises new questions about their cultural foundation. One salient example is the widely varying student preferences for individual versus group work and the unexplainable aversion, among some, to large classrooms. Is it agoraphobia or is it a pedagogical dynamic? What are the underlying reasons why some students prefer the relaxed, “laid-back” college culture in contrast to the perceived “strict” university culture—or the polar opposite among other students? Do patterns and groupings of cultural preferences help explain student behavior based on their cultural background? Why did some female students adamantly insist on a more personalized, community-based introduction to postsecondary schooling? How could such widely varying sources of inspiration, between personal ambition and family- or community-related effort, work analogously toward the same transfer goal? Finally, might these answers help explain in

part the vastly divergent transfer trajectories between gender, socio-economic, and racial and ethnic groups mentioned in the introductory chapter? Faced with such questions, further discussion entails a uniquely cultural and psychological theoretical framework to ascertain the underlying socio-cultural processes, at the student level.

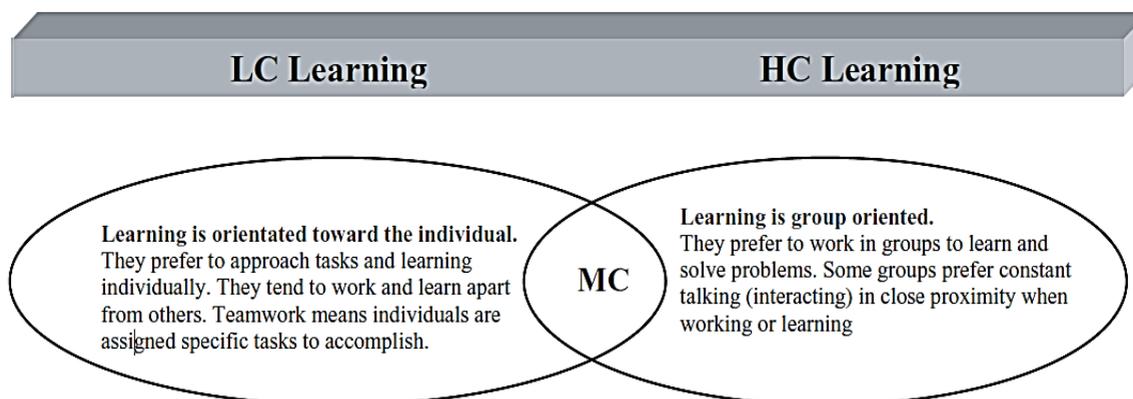
Multicontext theory explains students' varying learning and cultural preferences, in addition to communication styles, based on the student's cognitive patterns that lie somewhere in the range between field-dependent (high-context) learning and awareness to that of field-independent (low-context) learning and awareness (Ibarra, 2001; Hall, 1965). Context is defined by the degree to which social and contextual information is bound up with the meaning of socio-cultural, cognitive and learning experiences (Ibarra, 1999). According to Hall and Hall (1990), "The elements that combine to produce a given meaning—events and context—are in different proportions depending on the culture" (p. 7). Given the wide diversity of populations at the community college—coupled with complex intersections of gender, race and ethnicity, and socio-economic status—cultural context simplifies traits to a "binary continuum of cultural characteristics that we can use to identify and measure differences between various cultural groups" (Ibarra, 2001). By asserting that culture is the primary context for learning, Multicontext theory provides a reliable appraisal of underlying cultural predispositions, on the part of both the student and the institutional climate. The preference for "high-context" learning among some interviewees means a greater reliance on social and semantic context in the interpretation of meaning. (See Illustration 3 below.) This spectrum of processing information to make meaning is important to understanding how an idea or expectation about transferring becomes internalized, and thereby strengthens transfer intention.

Illustration 3. Low-Context (left), i.e., Field Independent, Prefers Analytic Information Transmission; High-Context (right), i.e., Field Dependent, Prefers Applied Information



Source: Ibarra, 2005, p. 21.

Illustration 4. Low-Context (left), i.e., Field Independent, Individualized Learning; High-Context (right), i.e. Field Dependent, Group Learning



Source: Ibarra, 2005, p. 22.

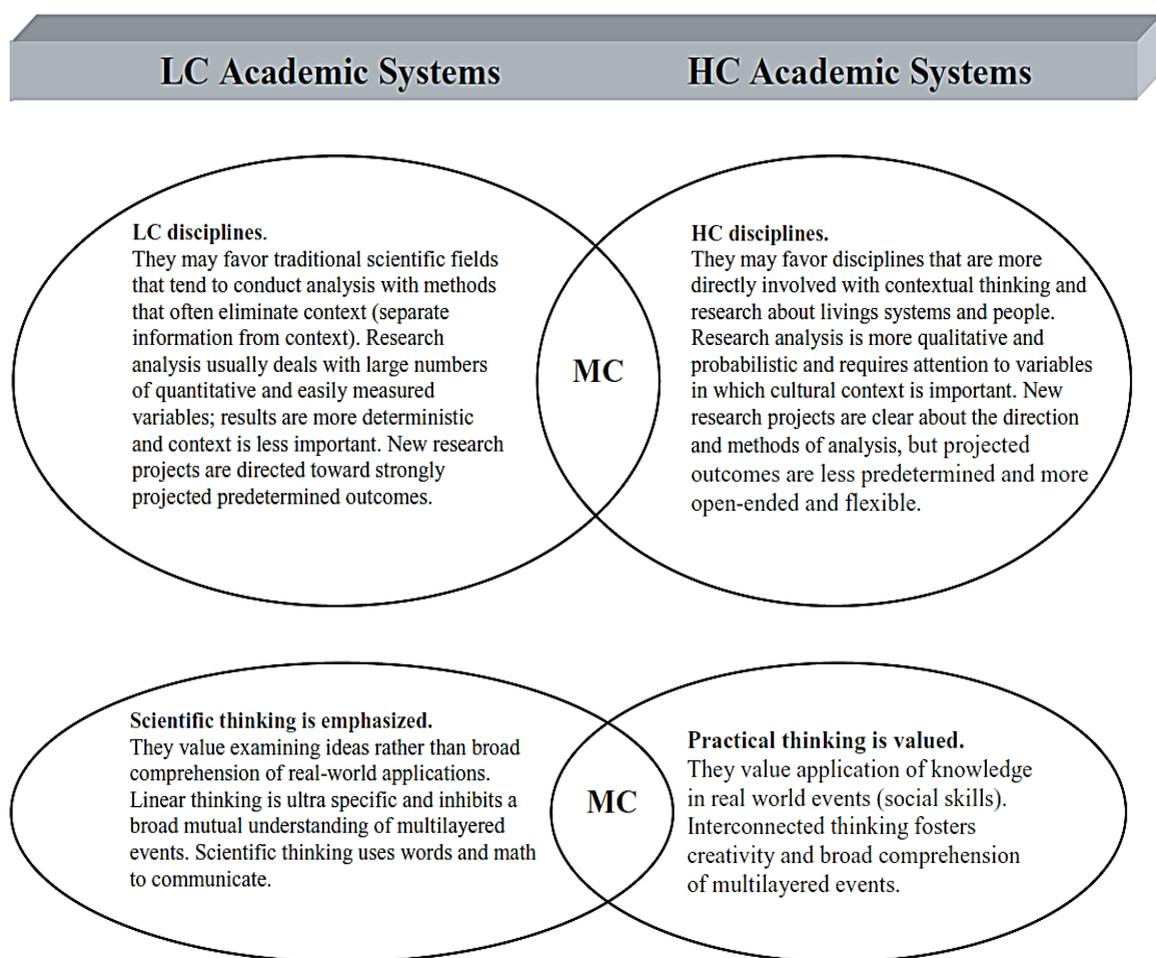
**Groups and Small Classrooms.** Bree points out that she chose to begin academic work at SCC because she did not feel comfortable in large classes, and so wanted to avoid the large lower-level introductory courses. High-context students learn more effectively in small, group-based classes that confer social meaning. (See Illustration 4 above.) Instead of treating information in discrete parts, meaning is derived once the information becomes integrated and linked to other relevant information in the student's life, whether in the

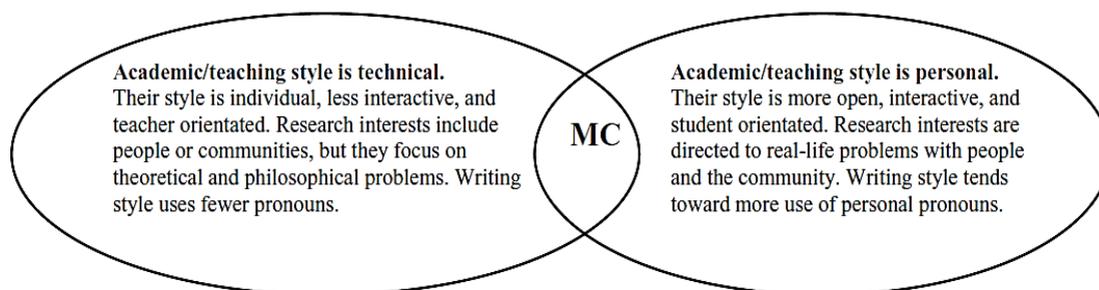
classroom or beyond. Bree's first sentences of her interview indicated her high priority of choosing a comfortable setting and teaching design. "My expectations [of SCC] were met; I got the small classes that I wanted." She was due to transfer the following semester (beginning her third year), and remarked that she was sufficiently acclimated [to college life] and felt comfortable about an imminent transfer. She still conceded that she expected TU's upper division classes to be small enough for her to feel comfortable. Casey also preferred to begin postsecondary schooling in a smaller environment. She described an initial hesitance of attending TU fearing that she might become "lost in the crowd." It is therefore not surprising that Bree and Casey both declined acceptance to TU in favor of starting at SCC for the express purpose of smaller classes. Some high context students, like Bree and Casey, depend on smaller classrooms and group-based activity to motivate learning. Others prefer to learn in individualistic settings in large classrooms.

**Learning Styles.** Cristobal exemplifies a low-context learning preference, remarking, "It's the fact of doing a group project. I get nervous. I'd rather work on stuff by myself." Likewise, some interviewees like Charles used a strategy of independently navigating bureaucratic challenges, while he accessed advising resources when needed. By the time of interview, Charles had succeeded in transfer while eschewing a dependence on the SCC counselors because of mixed experiences. These two students' low-context trait of independent learning and awareness is generally rewarded in larger, depersonalizing institutions, including university settings. The need to perceive, learn and work independently is a hallmark of large institutions, yet education theorists have traditionally characterized the modern research university design in terms of individualized, low-context learning (Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Ibarra, 2001). This

academic trait and other low-context traits include highly specialized, insular disciplines of study, especially in the sciences, so that the wider applicability to the community is less visible. (See Illustration 5 below.) By virtue of the fact that community colleges are inherently smaller and “community” oriented, whether by convention or design, the end result is that many high context preferences are accommodated.

Illustration 5. Low-Context (left), i.e., Field Independent, Linear, Technical and Analytic; High-Context (right), i.e., Field Dependent, Practical, Applied and Social Scientific





*Source: Ibarra, 2005, p. 23.*

**Mistrust of Academic ‘Credentialism’.** Three students expressed mistrust or disagreement with either the college “institution,” the inflation of the college degree value, and even the practicality of academic knowledge. The attitudes of some students were not completely committed to transferring and it was clear they had already begun to drift away from transfer commitment. On the worth of a four-year program, Amadeus felt convinced that he would never use the academic information from a four-year program in his career ambitions. He remarked, “my point of view is why am I going to spend four years in school and then I’m going to be retrained anyway.” How might students’ discrediting of the four-year degrees’ worth be alternately interpreted if viewed from another perspective? Would such a viewpoint be maintained if other kinds of knowledge were validated, like creative or practical, rather than academic knowledge? Amadeus argued that the “public’s” perception of knowledge does not correspond to the actual job market. He said that the contradiction is between “people’s idea of what’s important to know versus the actual field. Are you really going to use Civil War history?” Amadeus’ interest had recently become radiology and was increasingly doubtful of transferring to a bachelor’s degree in radiology. He mentioned that he was really interested in the health-care field and that “it’d be cool to read X-rays.” He also said he had not considered any convincing

reason to spend more time in school. In speaking with the students it became clear that the very understanding and meaning of *knowledge* differed for them than the message transferred by the college. From a contextual explanatory framework, high context modes of learning, i.e. applied and practical, are often interpreted as suited for two-year programs rather than academic-track. Vocational programs are more intuitively taught in “practical” terms with little theory, yet the essential theory side offers the managerial and technical elaboration that ensues for another two years. And, while practical vocations can be taught using hands-on or analytical approaches, so can analytic vocations be taught using hands-on or theoretical approaches. In this way, both low-context and high-context learners are equally accommodated toward learning theoretical principles essential to both applied and analytic vocations. Antonio, a 23 year-old Latino student began at SCC after graduating college and has been taking part-time classes on and off for several years. Although he says that he would like to transfer to a 4-year college, he has earned three vocational degrees for various interests. He says that he knows he could “easily transfer,” but hasn’t yet found a career path that would require a Bachelor’s degree. Antonio said, “there’s going to school to know and there’s going to school to do.” Both Amadeus and Antonio expressed some degree of preference for a more practical training or valued “practical” knowledge. From a Multicontext standpoint, the affinity for high-context individuals to prefer applied or practical learning rather than analytic learning helps explain how these students arrive at valuing what they learn and plan to do—even if that steers away from undergraduate study.

### **Summary of Findings**

The survey and interview findings yield insights that highlight unique features of community college students that are noteworthy to transfer analysis. Beginning with five measures of social and cultural capital, I highlighted potential explanations related to the central question of how socio-cultural processes are associated with transfer students' decision-making and intentions. These measures indicated a variety of differing coping mechanisms and strategic student-institution interactions. *Trust-building* proved effective through formal mechanisms of mentoring and advisement, while others' mistrust appeared linked to the failure of inclusion into formal support networks. The latter phenomenon helps explain the process by which misinformation over time may result in attrition if social capital information resources are not exchanged. Survey results indicated a high proportion of college friends; however, they were inconclusive on where the friendships form, whether before or after enrollment, or whether or not the peers were transfer-track students. Nonetheless, the interviews give the impression of a *subdued level of academic peer network formation*. Measures of *long-term transfer commitment* showed transfer intention to be recently formed and more fragile than expected. Indications of varying *academic comfort levels* include examples of heightened confidence and expectations of post-transfer success. Some felt they had "acclimated" and felt confident to move on to university work. Finally, the different *learned habits of strategy and academic know-how* varied between students, showing in several cases that mentoring provided key emotional and organizational support that helped students focus their transfer efforts and develop pro-transfer formal and informal social networks. The effectiveness of mentoring stands out among the formal trust-building interventions. I observed that either a student's long-term transfer commitment came from a pre-existing desire or reason to obtain a BA degree *or*

they were actively developing a bond of trust with a college figure that served as an emotional or informational focal point. A figure of trust plays a decisive role providing the “human element” of support and motivation to strengthen transfer intentions, while interrupting persistent challenges that arise. Beyond these five socio-cultural exemplars, new mechanisms emerged in various roles toward a student’s development of transfer identity, pro-transfer meaning and overall intention. Multicontext theory helped explain preferred learning and communication modes, specific academic settings, in addition to some students’ alternate definitions of knowledge and the meaning of transferring. Now, what do all of these theoretical observations mean to the researcher?

## Chapter 4

### Concluding Discussion on Context and Capital

#### **Reflections on Capital**

Cultural Capital theory and Social Capital theory, when converted into academic terms, help illuminate the cultural exchange between the erstwhile high school graduate and the new academic institutional encounter. Varying forms of the capital theories aptly portrayed the student's interaction with the prototypical academic organizational design and cultural climate. My academic capital analysis includes both the identification and evaluation of five "test" socio-cultural processes, alluded to at depth in the methodology section. More importantly, the "designed" observations of these specific phenomena provoked new, emerging socio-cultural processes that may play underestimated roles toward student transfer intentions. Further, my capital-based analysis compares with other capital theories like Yosso's (2005, p. 82) "community cultural wealth" analysis, whereupon a specific cultural priority undertook a currency of value and meaning to a particular community. This study's use of cultural capital multi-modal analysis proves robust in the realm of a new academic population and potential cases for intersectionality at the college. It becomes clear the key strategic objective is to maintain a balance between cultural analyses of the college's institutional academic culture and the nuances of incoming cultural elements of differing groups (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). Lee's (2013) use of identity transformation as the result of cultural capital transactions in the new university setting spends disproportionate time with the institutional culture, while scarcely discussing the incoming culture of the students. Conversely, my study spent disproportionate time with the students' cultural bearing rather than that of the institution.

A careful balance proves a difficult but apt strategy for future designs. DiMaggio's (1982) definitions of cultural capital's effect on academic achievement were defined by non-academic measures that contrasted the variables of "high-brow" against "middlebrow" activities. My definitions of cultural capital, on the other hand, were more pointed and academically-rooted. Finally, Aries and Seider (2005) use a sophisticated approach in identifying new forms of cultural capital as differentiated coping strategies. The insightful analyses focus again on institutional culture and are again based on status hierarchy, which is eschewed by my thesis' strictly academic design. Baxter and Britton (2001) poignantly summarize the theoretical dilemma of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that based cultural studies on a hierarchy of status culture, from which most studies have evolved:

We have argued that higher education, through its culture and practices, is a key site for the construction of new identities, which may conflict with other/prior identities ... For them [students], returning to education sets them on a trajectory of class mobility, which is experienced as a painful dislocation between an old and newly developing habitus [cultural disposition], which are ranked hierarchically and carry connotations of inferiority and superiority. (p. 99)

In contrast to varying references to status hierarchy, which is structurally correlated, my analytic use of capital narrowed all connotation to that which is academic and transfer related. In this way, my study design obviates the complex trappings of defending a certain standpoint epistemology because *academic capital* is free of non-academic value judgments. The neutral analytic approach proved adequately fit and

versatile for appraising such a diverse population, with widely varying cultural interpretations of status and what is genuinely valued.

### **Reflections on the Role of Context vis-à-vis Cultural Acclimations**

A problem is raised by the accommodation for high-context learners at SCC who enjoy small classes, group-based learning, and the community-oriented institution. The academic acclimation to the low-context pedagogical design of the four-year research university has yet to begin. Although several university courses use group-based pedagogical techniques, the atmosphere and expectations are nevertheless more isolating given the larger classes and the individual nature of undergraduate university learning. The university design at the 300- and 400-level of academic development requires the skill of low-context, individualized learning ability, without time for the transfer student to acclimate. This is a cultural learning design to which high-context students at community colleges have been exposed in a small degree at the two-year college. In my preliminary interviews, a senior academic advisor in charge of transfer-related issues at TU described the awe expressed by some SCC transfer students, saying they viewed the university with apprehension as being a “different world.” The interviewee remarked it is a mentality that the students carry that they may not “belong.” Multicontext theory explains the apprehension that might prompt high-context learners to mythologize, and therefore fear, a low-context learning environment to which they have not been cognitively introduced. The adaptation to both learning environments and constraints is a skill that offers numerous cognitive and pedagogical advantages. Such a multi-context individual would be adept at learning several forms of cultural and cognitive styles from different

environments complementary to those styles learned in upbringing. Ibarra (2001) defines the Multicontext construct as:

Reflect[ing] the characteristics of a growing number of people in our education systems today. They are bicognitive individuals, able to demonstrate flex by interacting selectively across cultural contexts and cognitive styles. They are equipped with a versatility that enables them to adjust or adapt at any time to a variety of activities, tasks, or social environments. (p. 65)

Learning both high- and low-context learning skills effectively overcomes present and *future* learning and communication incompatibilities in the classroom and on campus. The instruction of Multicontextual skills would obviate two transfer problems. First, this introduction (in whichever form) to the cultural and cognitive differences between high- and low-context would demythologize student-perceived expectations of university culture and academic standards. Second, Multicontextual learning skills teach transfer-track students the adaptive learning and communication skills needed in any social migration, especially to upwardly mobile academic settings. Effectively, this imparts both confidence and an “ambidextrous” and creative learning ability (Ibarra, 2001).

In a study involving Latina/o graduate students, academic difficulties involving information processing and “decoding cues” were due to culturally-based differences in upbringing (Cohen & Ibarra, 2005). The authors point out that context-heavy kinds of intelligence were equally important compared with analytic, decontextualized academic intelligence. In their study, the authors find additional forms of intelligence (e.g. creative and practical intelligence) were prioritized among Mexican American parents. This

corresponds to the capital-based theories, like those employed by Yosso's (2005) conceptualization of new forms of capital "community cultural wealth." These include "navigational capital" for bureaucratic challenges and "familial capital;" this means an engaged consciousness with community and kin well-being (p. 82). Stanton-Salazar's (1997) study of social capital analysis of Mexican American college intentions, begins to explain the origin and valuation of these different forms of intelligence through multi-modal forms of capital. Alternately, Multicontext theory's analysis of alternate priorities of intelligence—whether analytic, applied, creative, or other—can be rooted in anthropological and cultural explanations. Anderson, for instance, felt that knowledge learned in the university is usually never used in the "real world" because it's not practical. In their study on Latina/o graduate students, Cohen and Ibarra (2005) found that "the Latino contextual/cognitive learning conflicts may originate from beliefs, values, and perceptions of intelligence itself" (130). This might explain a higher valuation of the practical intelligence characterizing practical, vocational-track studies over the analytic, and hence decontextualized, intelligence of the academic transfer route. The contextual interpretation of many processes obviated the need to use conventional group taxonomies to understand differences of effects. In the *de facto* waning age of Affirmative Action, nuances of self-identification, optimal learning, and cultural group membership become increasingly relevant factors in cultural and cognitive analyses of academic outcomes like transfer success. This study's analysis of the student's day-to-day and long-term academic intentions, and related processes, broaches a modern cultural analysis of student transfer achievement and a new interpretation of how students maintain robust transfer intentions.

## **Future Inquiries**

Sociologists and education policy-makers have long recognized the need to improve the transfer rates of community college students into four-year programs. However, there has been less research beyond quantitative analysis or surface-level bureaucratic and organizational analyses. Qualitative data has also addressed the transfer issue, yet specialized community college theoretical frameworks have been rare and often dependent on four-year university theoretical models. This study has induced knowledge from observed socio-cultural micro-processes potentially serving to widen the gap between transfer aspirants and potential achievers. The findings indicate the plausibility of non-structural factors to help explain, for example, the 6% decline of Latina/o students between 1994 and 2008 (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011), along with that of first-generation students, renewing interest in potential unexplained socio-cultural processes. In like manner, the unprecedented success of females and African Americans to reverse their transfer achievement declines raises awareness to potential new strategies of success.

The descriptive and cross-sectional data presented in this thesis have opened up phenomena of interest for inferential research, in spite of only 108 cases. I plan to apply some multivariate analysis to better understand the association between transfer likelihood and the explanatory variables, in addition to testing any potential associations with elevated academic confidence as an outcome variable. Social and cultural processes were reducible to measures of context as defined by Multicontext theory, which obviates the usual symptomatic dependence on static categorizations like gender or race and ethnicity. Multicontext principles outlined an alternate explanation and outlines a potential solution for accommodating diverse cultural groups into the two-year college, while simultaneously

preparing for transfer. Emerging, salient processes may point to new answers toward improving transfer rate numbers, in as much as two-year to four-year transfer plays a decisive role in American social mobility. This project showed that non-structural elements of the transfer equation are an integral function tied to wider forces, which proved evident from the more realistic account based on student-level inductive inquiry.

In terms of social and policy implications, this study has uncovered avenues of potential impact. It has further indicated how community colleges can better transform possibilities in a culturally competent environment, conducive to maintaining high educational expectations and upward mobility. Stratification, it has been shown, continues upon arrival and throughout the community college schooling experience. The challenge, however, is to translate culturally-competent, individual-level studies into quantifiable and generalizable policy-ready terms. Potential implications of the research might help students recognize academic capital resources as key to developing network resources and confidence. Policy implications become apparent in reference to the under-recognized need for both high and low context pedagogy and an accommodating institutional campus climate. Theory generated from the interviews might also identify how institutions like SCC can overcome student passivity through pro-actively marketing the extensive pro-transfer resources available at the institution. Theory-driven initiatives can help develop transfer-related priority systems and decision-making strategies only through acknowledgement and validation of specific cultural needs and perspectives. This thesis aims to contribute to that theory.

## Appendix A.

Table 1. Survey Data, N=108; Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Data.

<b>Demographic Statistics</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Min/Max</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
Age	21.28	0/1	4.91
Male*	.41	0/1	.49
White	.27	0/1	
Hispanic	.51	0/1	
African American	.07	0/1	
Native American	.07	0/1	
Asian/Other	.05	0/1	
Physical/learning challenges	.18	0/1	.39
Reported financial independence (not on parents' tax reporting)	.46	0/1	.50
English language spoken at home**	.79	0/1	.41
Parental education	12.29	0/20	2.87
First-generation college***	.73	0/1	
Parents owned (i.e., not rented) housing while growing up	.57	0/1	
Amount of college of non-nuclear relatives	.89	0/3	1.09
Read non-school related books growing up more than 1 hour per week	.69	0/1	
Travel out of state during high school	1.32	0/3	.99
Marital status – married	.07	0/1	
Have children	.17	0/1	.38
Parents that reported interference	1.00	0/1	
Employed	.50	0/1	
Work more than 20 hours per week	.69	0/1	
Among those employed, perception that job interferes	.87	0/1	
Perception of the financial challenge of transferring	2.61	1/4	.92

Notes: \*Gender information, N=72; \*\*14 Spanish, 2 Keres, 1 Navajo, 1 Portuguese, \*\*\*First-generation=max parental education < 16 years, N=90

Table 2. Survey Data, N=108, Academic-Related Social Capital

<b>Academic-Related Social Capital</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Min/Max</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
<b>Identity-formation as academic “group” member</b>			
Academic activities or club involvement	.16	0/1	
Attendance at academic or cultural events on campus	.28	0/1	
Hours spent on campus per week, not including class time*	2.56	0/5	1.49
Time on campus ranking (1 = first rank)			
socializing with friends	3.32	1/5	1.52
preparing for classes	1.61	1/5	.99
extra-curricular activities	3.89	1/5	1.46
computer lab for personal use	3.18	1/5	1.55
Proportion of closest friends in college	3.04	0/4	1.10
Closest friends ranking (1 = most accurate description)			
Have degree or in college	2.71	1/5	
Want college yet cannot due to job, finances, or family	3.46	1/5	
No need, want, confidence to attend college	4.15	1/5	
<b>Trust in academic community</b>			
Would seek outside-class help if struggling	2.95	1/5	1.36
Frequency of appointments with SCC tutor	1.84	1/4	1.09
Visited campus-based tutor at least once	.44	0/1	
Advice for career/education goals (1 = first rank)			
Parents	2.64	1/7	
CNM Advisors	2.73	1/7	
College mentors	3.58	1/7	
Siblings	3.60	1/7	
College friends	3.68	1/7	
Advice for course selection (1 = first rank)			
CNM advisors	2.22	1/7	
Parents	3.35	1/7	
Instructors	3.46	1/7	
Mentors	3.59	1/7	
College friends	3.97	1/7	

Note: \*0=no time, 1=0-2hr, 2=2-5h, 3=6-10,... 5=15+

Table 3. Survey Data, N=108, Academic-Related Cultural Capital

<b>Academic-Related Cultural Capital</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Min/Max</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
<b>Long-term conscientiousness in transfer planning/curricular selection</b>			
How long planned transfer to 4-year*	1.85	1/3	.86
Have timeline on finishing transfer	1.88	1/4	.93
Time spent choosing major	3.91	1/5	1.25
Frequency of visits to university websites for transfer information	2.03	1/4	1.06
Frequency of appointments with advisement for transfer information	1.71	1/4	.94
<b>Short-term conscientiousness of pro-transfer habits</b>			
Absences per course, per semester (3 = 5+)	1.75	0/3	.76
Hours of homework per class each week**	2.01	0/3	.75
How often participate in class discussions***	1.99	1/3	.72
Campus-based tutoring appointment at least once	.44	0/1	
Visited faculty >1 per sem. about course selection	.34	0/1	
Visited mentoring >1 per sem. about course selection	.29	0/1	
<b>Comfort/academic setting</b>			
Comfort level participating in classroom discussion	2.90	1/4	.87
Self-perceived skill at using computers	3.67	1/5	1.09
Confidence in succeeding in 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> year university courses	2.81	1/4	.91
Confidence at university-level:			
Term Papers	6.45	1/10	2.44
Research	6.86	1/10	2.54
Test performance	6.57	1/10	2.50
Note-taking	7.66	1/10	2.44
Class participation	7.12	1/10	2.86

Notes: \*1=HS, 2=during 1st year at CC, 3=after 1st year; \*\* 0=0, ..., 2=3-4 hours, 3=4+ hours \*\*\*1=less, 2=same as others, 3=more than

Table 4. N=10; Interview Sample Characteristics

<b>Alias</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Gen.</b>	<b>Age</b>
Amadeus	White	M	N	22
Charles	Native	M	Y	25
Mikaela	White	F	N	23
Antonio	Latino	M	N	32
Bree	Latina	F	Y	21
Anderson	White	M	N	24
Casey	White	F	N	20
Cristobal	Latino	M	N	21
Becka	White	F	Y	27
Esteban	Latino	M	N	23

## Appendix B

## Survey Questionnaire

**1. How long have you planned to transfer to a four-year college?**

- I have planned to transfer since at least high school.
- I decided to plan to transfer during my first year at CNM.
- I decided to plan to transfer after completing my first year at CNM.

**2. Do you have a specific timeline by which you want to transfer your credits?**

- No, I am not in a rush and I plan to transfer when I'm ready.
- Yes, I have a general timeline by which I want to transfer.
- Yes, I have specific timeline by which I want to transfer.
- Yes, I have a specific timeline and I have already chosen the courses necessary along that timeline.

**3. How much time have you put into choosing your major?**

- I have not yet chosen a major, and I have not spent time on my decision.
- I have not yet chosen a major, and I have spent some time narrowing my decision.
- I have chosen a major, and I have spent very little time deciding my major.
- I have chosen a major, and I have spent a few hours (in reflection or consultation) deciding my major.
- I have chosen a major, and I have spent considerable time (in reflection or consultation) deciding my major.

**4. How often have you visited university websites to gain transfer/academic information?**

- I have not visited any websites to gain transfer/academic information.
- I have visited a website to gain transfer/academic information.
- I have visited multiple websites to gain transfer/academic information.
- I have visited multiple websites on many occasions to gain transfer/academic information.

**5. How often have you scheduled appointments with the advisement center about transfer/planning information?**

- I have not met with advisement about transfer/planning information.
- I have met once with advisement about transfer/planning information.
- I have met more than once with advisement about transfer/planning information.
- I have met more than once, over more than one semester, with advisement about transfer/planning information.

**6. How many hours of homework per class do you spend each week?**

- 0                       1-2                       3-4                       4+

**7. Have you ever made an appointment to work with a tutor at the Learning Center on campus?**

- I have not worked with a CNM tutor.
  Yes, between two and five times per semester.
- Yes, on average about once per semester.
  Yes, more than five times per semester.

**8. If you felt you were struggling in a course, have you asked for outside-class help from the instructor, a study-group, or other?**

- No, I never felt I needed any help in my courses.
- No, even if I was struggling I did not seek outside help.
- Yes, but I rarely asked for help if I was struggling in a class.
- Yes, I usually asked for help if I was struggling in a class.
- Yes, I always asked for help if I was struggling in a class.

**9. Which of the following most accurately describes your class attendance?**

- Near perfect attendance in all my courses.
  Average of 3 to 5 absences per course.
- Average of 1 to 2 absences per course.
  Average of 5+ absences per course. (if 5+, what is the usual cause?) \_\_\_\_\_

**10. How many hours/week did you read (outside of school/homework) growing up?**

<input type="text"/>	magazines	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
<input type="text"/>	books/e-books	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
<input type="text"/>	internet-content reading (not social-media, e.g. facebook, twitter)	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A

**11. Which high school did you attend/graduate from? If applicable, put GED next to high school name.**

**12. Did you enroll at CNM within a year of your high school graduation?**

- Yes
  No
  N/A-GED

**13. How would you describe your skill at using computers?**

- I really don't know how
  I feel comfortable, and learning new software is easy
- enough to get my assignments done
  I know more than most others that I know
- I feel comfortable with most computer software

**14. In general, how comfortable do you feel participating in classroom discussion?**

- very comfortable
  uncomfortable
- comfortable
  very uncomfortable

**15. How often do you participate in class discussions?**

- less than other classmates       same as other classmates       more than other classmates

**16. How confident are you that you will be successful in the 3rd-year and 4th-year level courses after transfer?**

- very confident       somewhat confident       confident       not very confident

**17. How confident are you that you are sufficiently skilled in the following activities for 3rd year and 4th year level courses, after transfer: (On a scale of 1 to 10, ten being most confident)**

<input type="text"/>	Term papers
<input type="text"/>	Research
<input type="text"/>	Test performance
<input type="text"/>	Note-taking and organization
<input type="text"/>	Class discussion participation

**18. How many hours do you spend on campus per week? (not including classes or campus employment)**

- Almost no time.       between 6-10 hours per week.  
 less than two hours per week.       between 11-15 hours per week.  
 between 3-5 hours per week.       more than 15 hours per week.

**19. Regarding that last question, how is that time spent? Rank each selection from 1 to 5, 1 being most prominent, 2 = 2nd most prominent ... 5 = least prominent.**

<input type="text"/>	Socializing with friends
<input type="text"/>	Preparing for classes
<input type="text"/>	Extra-curricular activities
<input type="text"/>	Computer lab for personal use
<input type="text"/>	Other (Please specify if ranked 1-4) _____

**20. Would you feel a sense of disappointment if you accomplished an associate's degree and decided to postpone transferring to a later date?**

- no disappointment       a little disappointment       considerable disappointment

**21. How many academic-related CNM activities or clubs are you involved with?**

- none       1       2       3       4       5+

**22. How often do you attend social or cultural events on campus, in a given semester?**

- none     
  1     
  2     
  3     
  4     
  5+

**23. Mark a "1" next to the statement that describes the majority of your closest friends. Then, rank the remaining selections from 2 to 5 to describe the rest of your closest friends. (Check N/A if a statement does not describe any of your closest friends.)**

<input type="checkbox"/>	They either have a college degree or they are currently working on one.	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<input type="checkbox"/>	They are planning to start working on a college degree in the near future.	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<input type="checkbox"/>	They want a degree but aren't able to pursue one due to work, family or other responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<input type="checkbox"/>	They don't feel they can do the work necessary to get a degree.	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<input type="checkbox"/>	They don't need/want to get a college degree.	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A

**24. What proportion of your closest friends are currently taking college classes?**

- Most     
  Some     
  a few     
  almost none     
  none

**25. During the past year, how many times have you advised with the following persons about career and educational goals? (not coursework advice or bureaucratic advice)**

<input type="checkbox"/>	CNM advisers
<input type="checkbox"/>	Faculty
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mentors from a college organization
<input type="checkbox"/>	Parents
<input type="checkbox"/>	Siblings and Relatives
<input type="checkbox"/>	College friends
<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-college friends

**26. How would you prioritize (take to heart) advice for your career/education goals from the following persons: (Most important = 1, next most important = 2 ... least important = 7)**

<input type="text"/>	CNM advisers
<input type="text"/>	Faculty
<input type="text"/>	Mentors from a college organization
<input type="text"/>	Parents
<input type="text"/>	Siblings and Relatives
<input type="text"/>	College friends
<input type="text"/>	Non-college friends

**27. During the past year, how many times have you advised with the following persons about choosing courses necessary to complete your degree or certificate?**

<input type="text"/>	CNM advisers
<input type="text"/>	Faculty
<input type="text"/>	Mentors from a college organization
<input type="text"/>	Parents
<input type="text"/>	Siblings and Relatives
<input type="text"/>	College friends
<input type="text"/>	Non-college friends

**28. How would you prioritize advice from the following about choosing courses necessary to complete your degree or certificate? (Most important = 1, next most important = 2 ... least important = 7)**

<input type="text"/>	CNM advisers
<input type="text"/>	Faculty
<input type="text"/>	Mentors from a college organization
<input type="text"/>	Parents
<input type="text"/>	Siblings and Relatives
<input type="text"/>	College friends
<input type="text"/>	Non-college friends

**29. Have you been enrolled at part-time status for 1 or more semesters in the past year? (not including summer)**

Yes  No

**30. Do you have any children, for which you share at least 50% responsibility (or you count as dependent for your taxes)?**

yes  no

**31. If applicable, how often do your parental responsibilities interfere with your ability to prepare for class or to meet assignment deadlines?**

never  rarely  occasionally  frequently

**32. If applicable, how many hours do you work per week?**

not employed  19 or fewer hours  20 - 35 hours  35+ hours

**33. If applicable, how often does your job interfere with your ability to prepare for class or to meet assignment deadlines?**

never  rarely  occasionally  frequently

**34. How much of a challenge is the financial aspect of transferring into a four-year program? (including estimated help from resources like loans, scholarships, parental support)**

Present little or no challenge to transferring  Presents a big challenge to transferring  
 Presents a small challenge to transferring  Presents the biggest challenge to transferring

**35. Are you classified as an independent or dependent? (dependent means you are on your parents' income tax)**

independent  dependent

**36. What is your marital status?**

never married  married  no longer married

**37. What are your parents' occupations? (If applicable, enter the most recent occupation)**

Mother

Father

**38. How many years of education have the following family members completed? For example, 10=tenth grade, 12 = H.S. diploma, 14 = Associates, 16 = four-year degree, etc.**

<input type="text"/>	Mother	<input type="text"/>	N/A
<input type="text"/>	Father	<input type="text"/>	N/A
<input type="text"/>	Sibling 1	<input type="text"/>	N/A
<input type="text"/>	Sibling 2	<input type="text"/>	N/A
<input type="text"/>	Sibling 3	<input type="text"/>	N/A

**39. Which of the following statements is true of your non-immediate family relatives (aunts, uncles, cousins)?**

- Almost all either have a college degree or are currently working on one.
- Most either have a college degree or are currently working on one.
- Some of them either have a college degree or are currently working on one.
- A few or less either have a college degree or are currently working on one.

**40. During middle school and high school years, have your parents owned or rented their home?**

- Owned                       Rented                       Both

**41. During high school years, how often did you travel out of state?**

- never                       once or twice                       at least once per year                       more than once per year

**42. What is your age?**

**43. With which of following groups do you most closely identify?**

- Asian                       Hispanic
- Black                       Native American
- White                       Other

**44. Do you have any physical or learning challenges that make it more difficult for you to succeed in school?**

- yes                       no

**45. Is English the language that is spoken in your home?**

- yes                       no

If not English, please specify

## Appendix C

## Interview Protocol

**Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Guide:  
Transfer Aims of Two-Year Collegiates**

The interviewer will begin each interview with a self-introduction. Next, the interviewer will provide an overview of the study and a description of the final report's purpose and eventual benefits. Next, the informed consent form shall be provided for discussion, review and signature before every interview. On the participant's form will be contained contact information for questions, concerns, or follow up information that the interviewee may want to provide. The interview will be semi-structured around a list of concerns that originate directly from the participant's previous survey data, and the concerns of the research design at that time. The interview will consist of 10 open-ended questions to increase the strength of measurement validity. The same set of questions will be asked of each participant in each of the twelve interviews in order to increase reliability.

**Open-Ended Questions:**

**1. Why do you want to transfer into a four-year degree program?**

**Probes:**

- Any childhood role-models?
- According to the survey, you've intended on a bachelor's since \_\_\_\_\_. What inspired you?
- You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ as the two most important persons with whom you've advised with about career/education goals and ambition. What is it about them that you trust what they have to say?
- Talk about the main costs and the main benefits of transferring to get a four-year degree.
- What's more important to you in getting a four-year degree: the status or the potential earnings?

**2. Tell me about your college experience. Do you like your classes this semester?**

**Probes:**

- Do you feel that the classes you're taking this semester relate to your overall four-year goal?
- You mentioned that \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are the two most prominent person with whom you've advised with about course selection, please elaborate.
- The courses that you need to stay on schedule for transfer, are they available and convenient?

-At which point did you begin to put long-term thought into your course selection?

**3. Each of us comes from a particular cultural background, in how we were raised. CNM has its own way of doing things, its own culture. How does it match with yours?**

**Probes:**

- For example, how do you like the college life?
- Do you feel that college life is changing your personality, and if so, for the better?
- What types of feelings does this create for you?
- Has a college situation ever occurred that you felt uncomfortable, either in the setting or with the people involved?
- Please describe what about the situation(s) made you feel uncomfortable?
- How often has this happened?
- About your closest friends, as you're going through college, are you hanging out more/relating more with college-going friends?

**Transition: Next, I'd like to ask you about your experience of stress and anxiety, first within the academic setting and then more broadly.**

**4. Everybody has a certain amount of stress and anxiety in life. Beyond everyday stress and anxiety, is academic stress a negative factor in your life?**

**Probes:**

- Have you felt anxiety during classroom settings?
- Expand upon how you manage stress.
- You mention in the survey that you usually turn to \_\_\_\_\_ if you're falling behind in a class. If that person is unavailable, do you manage just fine or does the situation cause stress?
- You mentioned in the survey that \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are two prominent concerns about post-transfer university expectations, please tell me more about that.

**5. On the subject of non-academic responsibilities, what are sources of stress in your life?**

**Probes:**

- Job: Coworkers, Subordinates, Supervisor
- School/life balance: Commuting, time commitment for homework and exam preparation
- Health: Medical Status, Sleep, Weight Gain/Loss
- Family concerns (however applicable: spouse, children, extended family)
- Financial aid: You mentioned this as a \_\_\_\_\_ challenge to transfer, do you stress about that?

**6. Can you give me an example of a stressful situation—either academic or non-academic--that has made you reconsider continuing on to transfer after you earn your associate's degree?**

**Probes:**

- Past or Recent Situation in class or on campus?
- Is this a reoccurring theme?
- How did you cope with the situation?
- Past or recent situation non-academic related?
- Is this a reoccurring theme?
- How did you cope with the situation?

**Transition: Next, I'd like to ask you about your level of determination to transfer, and about your level of confidence in dealing with the transfer process.**

**7. If you had to pick one reason why you might feel justified to take a semester off after you earn your associates, (in other words, delay your transfer) what would it be?**

**Probes:**

- You mentioned that you would feel \_\_\_\_ disappointment if you simply accomplished an associate's and decided to put off transferring to a later date, please elaborate.
- Is there anyone else in your life that is counting on you to continue on to transfer?
- How likely do you think it is that once a person takes a semester off from school after accomplishing an associate's degree that they won't transfer?

**8. In academic terms, do you consider yourself to be a confident person?**

**Probes:**

- What does being academically confident mean to you?
- When it comes to the school setting, how much do you *own* it?
- Have you grown in confidence since you began school at this campus?
- What sort of campus/classroom situations or activities can make you feel insecure about yourself?

**9. What are your impressions of university expectations and academic standards at a four-year school?**

**Probes:**

- Can you already envision yourself at the campus?
- Do you have UNM or other university friends that you can relate to university culture?
- How different do you think university academic standards are from CNM?
- Do you have the impression that there's a cultural gap between this school and that school?

**Transition: As we move toward wrapping up, I'd like to ask about how you navigate the academic world and the kinds of stress and anxiety we've talked about...?**

**10. You mentioned that \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are the two most prominent sources for career/education advice, can you tell me more about that?**

- Do you feel that the school has your best interests in mind?
- Do you have any instructors that you can relate to, that you trust?
- Do you think that campus thinking is or is not practical, real-world kind of thinking?
- In other words, would you trust someone "outside" of the academic setting?

**Closing Comments:**

- Is there anything we didn't discuss that you would like to add or to talk further about?
- Please remember to save my contact information in case you have any questions, concerns, or additional feedback you would like to share.
- I will be in contact with you next semester to schedule the next interview with you.
- Thank you for sharing your information and spending time with me.

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