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Dissertation Title: Community College Transfer Students:
A Private University Faculty Perspective

Abstract:

Faculty/student relationships have a significant impact on student retention and success (Tinto, 1975, 1993). However, little is known about how faculty perceive community college transfer students and how they make meaning of their interactions with these students. This qualitative, descriptive, ethnographic study describes faculty/student interaction and the ways in which community college transfer students are perceived by the faculty at one small, private, nonprofit, masters-level university. The research questions used for this study were designed to investigate the faculty's perception of community college students, the students' academic experiences and the faculty/student relationship.

The researcher gathered data during 12 in-depth interviews. The site was selected because of the limited research available on community college transfer students at small private colleges. An ethnographic design was used to capture the distinct cultural influences of the study site and to answer to the study's overarching research question: how do faculty perceive community college transfer students and the institution from which the student transferred? These findings can guide meaningful conversations on private, four-year campuses directed toward improving how faculty/student relationships, systematic transfer processes, transfer programs and campus culture influence community college transfer student success.

A thematic analysis of the interview data revealed four themes. The first, Student/Faculty Relationship: A Two-Way Street of Hesitation and Reluctance, describes how both community college transfer students, and the faculty that teach them, are hesitant and reluctant to work with

one another. The second, *A Balancing Act: Aligning Faculty and Student Expectations*, relates to the fact that what a faculty member expects of a student, and what students perceive to be expected of them, should align for the student to be successful. The third, *A Second Class Institution: The Community College as a Stepping Stone* describes how faculty perceive attending a community college as a stepping stone towards more prestigious goal of attending Queens University of Charlotte. Finally, the fourth theme, *Segregation: An Isolated Community College Transfer Experience*, details the ways community college transfer students are perceived as intentionally, and unintentionally, given a separate university experience, and the ways in which this segregation disadvantages these students. These findings are significant for both universities similar to the study site and for those that wish to understand the community college transfer student experience across institutional types.