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Exploring the Impact of the High School Cambridge Acceleration Program on U.S. University Students

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Preparing for College Success: Exploring the Impact of the High School Cambridge Acceleration Program on U.S. University Students
BY STUART D. SHAW AND MAGDA A. WERNO

Community College for All: How Two-Year Criminal Justice Transfer Students Perceive Their Educational Experience
BY ELIZABETH MONK-TURNER
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Heather Zimar, C&U Managing Editor, AACRAO, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 520, Washington, DC 20036; Tel: (607) 279–7829; E-mail: zimarh@aacrao.org
I’m frequently contacted by AACRAO members, and sometimes others, asking if I can point them to articles on particular topics. As work was in progress on this edition of C&U, I received a couple such questions. One person asked about transgender students and how institutions might best serve them. Another asked about best practices in monitoring course enrollment in required courses, particularly those with low enrollments. In this edition there is a Campus Viewpoint article pertinent to the first question, “Gender Pronouns: Recommendations from an Institution with Solutions,” but not the second question. I think both are terrific topics for articles and hope for future submissions!

In 91-4, we continue the series of articles on mentorship. We present three perspectives on mentorship, by Sharon Cramer, Christine Kerlin, and Wendy Kutchner and Paul Kleschick. I’m excited about the series, and I think these three articles build upon the good start!

In feature articles, Stuart D. Shaw and Magda A. Werno examine the impact of the high school Cambridge Acceleration Program on U.S. college and university students. Also, Elizabeth Monk-Turner and several colleagues examine how two-year Criminal Justice transfer students perceive their educational experience.

In two Research in Brief articles, Alexander Taylor, Rodney Parks, and Ashley Edwards write on serving today’s student veterans, and Matthew Fifolt, Jeffrey Burrowes, Tarrant McPherson and Lisa C. McCormick discuss strengthening emergency preparedness using hazard vulnerability analysis.

In three Campus Viewpoint articles, Kimberley Buster-Williams considers the topic “Optimism in Enrollment Management”; Brett Morris and Lisa Cox discuss “Joint Admission as a Transfer Student Pathway”; and Rodney Parks, Margaret O’Connor and Jessie Parrish describe the adoption of preferred pronouns at Elon University.

I hope that you enjoy this edition of C&U. I am always interested in hearing comments and suggestions from our readers. And, as always, I am looking for authors!

Jeff von Munkwitz-Smith, Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief
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PREPARING FOR COLLEGE SUCCESS:

Exploring the Impact of the High School

CAMBRIDGE ACCELERATION PROGRAM

on U.S. University Students

This case study sought to gain a better understanding of the impact of the Cambridge Acceleration Program on students’ transition from high school to college at one American university. The findings from an online questionnaire indicate that many participants develop a range of skills that are perceived as important in the context of university study. The program also facilitates the process of transition to an increased level of college demand.
Central to the growing debate about postsecondary education in the United States is the extent to which many students are underprepared for college-level study (Barnes et al. 2010; Barnes and Slate 2010; Camara 2013; Conley 2011; Kahlenberg 2010; Ravitch 2010; Rosenbaum, Stephan and Rosenbaum 2010; Symonds, Schwartz and Ferguson 2011; Zhao 2009, Zhao and Liu 2011).

Attention in the United States has focused on the capability of high school acceleration strategies to produce students who are able to advance directly to college-level courses (Clinedinst, Hurley and Hawkins 2013; Judy, Ebmeyer and Schneider 2015; Killgore 2009; Rubin 2014). Acceleration programs are one of the main policy mechanisms for increasing college enrollment because they can have positive effects on cognitive strategies, content knowledge, and learning skills and techniques, as well as on the affective aspects of students’ transition from high school to university education (Camara 2013; Conley 2010, 2011a, 2011b).

Recent research at Cambridge International Examinations (hereafter Cambridge) has sought to investigate the claims it makes for its international programs’ preparation of students for continued studies at U.S. colleges and universities. The credibility of the Cambridge acceleration program is reliant, to a large degree, upon the claims it makes about its curricula, the skills students develop, and, importantly, the research it has conducted to support such claims.

The current research explores the experiences, attitudes, and views of college students who completed the Cambridge program in relation to their transition and early experiences at one U.S. university.

THE CAMBRIDGE ACCELERATION PROGRAM

The Cambridge acceleration program includes the International Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced (A) Levels—a global set of examinations for sixteen-to-nineteen-year-olds. Cambridge International AS and A Level aim to develop learners’ knowledge, understanding, and skills in in-depth subject content and to encourage independent thinking; the application of knowledge and understanding to new as well as familiar situations; logical thinking and presentation of ordered and coherent arguments; and work and communication in English. In the United States, students can earn a Cambridge AICE Diploma by passing a prescribed number of Cambridge International AS and/or A Level examinations, including one from each of three subject groups: mathematics and sciences; languages (foreign and first); and arts and humanities.

The claimed skills developed on and the purported rigors of the Cambridge program relate closely to those factors (e.g., academic achievement, strength of high school curriculum studied) recognized by the National Association for College Admission Counseling as being important in admissions decisions (Clinedinst, Hurley and Hawkins 2013). The academic rigor of the Cambridge program reflects research by Rubin (2014), who surveyed 63 of the 75 most selective colleges and universities (defined as those with the lowest acceptance rates). In terms of academic ability, the most important aspect across institutions was the rigor of the courses taken (57 percent),
followed by high school GPA (27 percent). Rubin defines rigor as the most difficult courses available to students in their high school. Students taking these courses show their determination to challenge themselves and their eagerness to learn (Shaw 2011).

**BRIEF REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH**

With regard to the impact of acceleration strategies on college performance, the literature is mixed.

**Standardized Tests**

A large-scale national validity study of the revised SAT (incorporating an additional section in writing and minor changes to the verbal and mathematics sections) was undertaken by Kobrin et al. (College Board 2008). The study was based on data from 150,000 students entering 110 U.S. four-year colleges and universities in fall 2006 and completing their first year of college in May/June 2007. The writing section of the SAT was found to be the single most predictive section of the test outcome for all students. The analyses also found the writing section to be the most predictive across all minority groups.

Culpepper and Davenport (2009) studied a sample of 32,103 first-year students who were enrolled in one of 30 colleges or universities in 1995. They compared the attainment of students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds and found that on average, an African American student with the same high school GPA as a white student was likely to have a lower college GPA.1

**Advanced Placement (AP)**

Students who hold AP qualifications have been shown to outperform those who do not in both first-year college performance and college completion outcome (Curry, MacDonald and Morgan 1999; Dougherty, Mellor and Jian 2005; Mattern, Xiong and Shaw 2009; Morgan and Maneckshana 2000; Morgan and Ramist 1998). After controlling for a number of background variables, including academic ability, prior course history, and performance, Sadler and Sonnert (2010) demonstrated that students who pass an AP exam in the sciences earn significantly higher grades in biology, chemistry, or physics in college than do their peers who failed the exam. However, when the confounding effects of self-selection by students (with more able students joining AP programs) and inter-school differences (with better resourced schools more likely to adopt the AP program and for that program to be taught by more experienced teachers) are taken into account, the picture is more complex (Klopfenstein and Thomas 2005; Paek et al. 2010). Klopfenstein and Thomas (2005), for example, found no relationship between AP experience and either first-semester college grades or retention to the second year after controlling for these factors.

**International Baccalaureate (IB)**

The efficacy of the IB as a pre-university acceleration program has been investigated by Panich (2001). In a study of the university performance of IB students, Panich (2001) matched three cohorts of IB graduates (1998–2000) attending Florida State University with students entering with comparable SAT verbal and math scores. Comparing groups of students with no IB background, students with IB experience, and students with an IB diploma, Panich (2001) concluded that IB diploma students achieved the highest first-year university GPA while students with IB experience but no diploma achieved the lowest.

A study of the Chicago inner-city IB program found that students taking the IB were more likely to attend a four-year college course and demonstrated higher two-year persistence rates at college (Coca et al. 2012). IB holders reported that they felt academically prepared for postsecondary education, but research uncovered a deficit in transition knowledge and skills for many students, which suggested that, in this area, the IB program had not compensated for the effects of students’ disadvantaged backgrounds. A second, related study of the Chicago program found that the IB can increase high school graduation and college enrollment rates (Saavedra 2011).

**Cambridge Program**

Recent Cambridge research has focused on a three-phase, collaborative project with Florida State University (FSU).

In the first phase, a comparative study of the effects of the Cambridge program on FSU students’ first-year GPA was undertaken (Shaw and Bailey 2011a, 2011b). Using multilevel modeling, the study explored the link between

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1 For a useful summary relating to the predictive utility of SAT and ACT scores and high school GPA (HSGPA) as indicators of university success, see Cohn et al. (2004).
high school quality (in terms of the acceleration program followed) and first-year university academic achievement. The data (n=8,557; 2007–2010) included information about each student’s high school academic performance, ethnicity, gender, and first-year university GPA. The study showed that students who followed an acceleration program obtained a higher GPA on average than did those without any extra credit. After controlling for gender, race, and SAT score, Cambridge students achieved a higher GPA, on average, than did IB students and students having no extra credit. No statistical difference was found between Cambridge and AP students on all of the models tested.

Phase 2 addressed the impact of acceleration programs on various aspects of university engagement and college determinants of success (Shaw, Warren and Gill 2014). This entailed expanding the freshman GPA data modeling effort to include a longitudinal study comparing degree completion by Cambridge, AP, and IB cohorts at FSU (n=30,144; 2007–12). The likelihood of students pursuing additional undergraduate educational, professional, and research opportunities was also modeled, and findings were compared across the AP, IB, and Cambridge cohorts. The study showed that after accounting for attainment at the end of high school (total SAT score) and other background variables (gender and race), students who participate in Cambridge, AP, or IB acceleration programs:

- tend to have an increased likelihood of participating in study abroad, directed individual supervised studies, undergraduate research, and honors in a major; and

- are less likely to drop out of college in proportion to the increasing numbers of credit hours earned. AP and Cambridge students who earned the same number of credit hours were equally likely to continue their postsecondary studies whereas IB students who also earned the same number of credit hours were more likely to discontinue their studies.

**PURPOSE OF THE CURRENT STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the impact of the Cambridge program on students’ transition from high school to college by exploring students’ experiences, perceptions, and opinions associated with their high school acceleration programs and their subsequent transition to postsecondary education.

Unlike the first two phases of the FSU research, which employed a quantitative approach, the final phase adopted a qualitative approach designed to obtain data from students. Impact studies in education concentrate on the effects of interventions (e.g., teaching programs or examinations) on the target population. The importance ascribed by Cambridge to impact studies is well documented both in the context of language testing (Green 2003, Hawkey 2006, Saville 2009) and general education (Beedle, Eason and Maughan 2007, Shaw 2011).

**METHODOLOGY**

The participants included 104 FSU students (78 females and 26 males) between the ages of seventeen and 22 years from a range of degree courses and year groups (representing 13 percent of the targeted population). Permission to gain access to participants was obtained from the university’s Internal Research Board. A purposeful sampling method was used whereby only students with Cambridge program credits were invited to participate. The four student cohorts included freshman (n=36); sophomore (n=20); junior (n=25); and senior (n=14). Figure 1 shows student data in terms of relative proportions by geographic origin.

The research sought to obtain detailed insights into the transitional experiences of participants who had com-
pleted the Cambridge program. Students were encouraged to reflect on the skills needed to succeed at university as well as on the quality, effectiveness, and demands of the Cambridge program.

An online questionnaire was utilized given its potential to gather the opinions of a considerable number of participants in an effective manner while encouraging them to provide detailed insights and accounts of personal experiences. (Other forms of elicitation were considered—e.g., semi-structured interviews, focused discussion groups, and telephone interviewing—but were not chosen given the desire to maximize access to participants.) The questionnaire included a mixture of open-ended and closed questions. Open-ended questions were used to elicit comprehensive responses and detailed accounts of personal experiences.

A senior member of the FSU admissions team contacted potential participants via e-mail with the details of the study (including informed consent and confidentiality information). The data collection was completed in the first semester of the 2015–16 academic year.

Questionnaire data were analyzed using a qualitative approach that involved descriptive and frequency analyses of the closed-response questions and a data-driven analysis of the open-response questions. Inductive thematic analysis was used to categorize and analyze the qualitative data (Frith and Gleeson 2004).

A Reflective Analytic Framework

Sections in the questionnaire provide a framework for evaluating the impact of the Cambridge high school acceleration program on college readiness—one that encourages postsecondary college students to reflect on their experiences of the Cambridge program of learning and assessment. The framework depicts various facets of student reflection relating to perceptions of the Cambridge acceleration program, Cambridge examinations, and the transition from high school to college.

Four key concepts of college readiness emerge from the literature:

- **Academic skills and strategies**: This concept relates to ways of thinking and doing in an academic discipline and includes, for example, research skills, problem-solving skills, 21st century skills, and writing skills.
- **Learning skills and strategies**: This concept relates to skills and strategies compatible with learning and includes, for example, time management skills, organizational skills, and interpersonal skills.
- **Affective and psychological attributes**: This concept relates to processing thinking and learning and includes, for example, motivation, diligence, and dedication.
- **Transition skills and strategies**: This concept relates to navigating the transition from high school to college and includes, for example, collegiate culture, admissions processes, career counselling, and financial help.

**FINDINGS**

**Perceptions of the Cambridge Acceleration Program**

**Motivational Factors Affecting Choice of Acceleration Program**

The majority of participants (n=86, 82.7 percent) reported having a choice in the acceleration program in which they enrolled. The most prominent factors that encouraged respondents to enroll in the Cambridge program related to the characteristics and expected outcomes of completing the program, especially in relation to university entrance requirements and college fees. In particular, they included the rigorous and challenging nature of the curriculum; flexibility of the Cambridge program and the broad range of subjects offered; meeting the requirements of the Bright Futures scholarship; gaining college credits; and obtaining qualifications recognized by universities in the United States and beyond. Other motivators included the international dimension of the Cambridge program; the quality of teaching; and perceptions of the Cambridge program as good preparation for college in its development of college-level skills. Opportunities to pursue personal interests and recommendations by teachers, family members, and friends were also highlighted.

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2 The state of Florida awards the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship to students who do well in high school, virtually all students who attend FSU receive this award. The scholarship is awarded for 120 credit hours and is not reduced by the number of accelerated credits a student earns in high school. For example, if a student enrolls at FSU having already earned 30 hours of credit from accelerated programs, her scholarship will still cover 120 credit hours of study at FSU.
* “I did AICE because it was the most challenging of my options, and it gave me the ability to get a bit of college credit.”
* “I thought that participating in a program that is more geared toward college-level courses would help prepare me for college courses.”
* “I wanted to challenge myself academically and join a program that was ‘global’ versus focused on one specific area of study.”

College students are expected to be intrinsically driven given the absence of the extrinsic sources of motivation available in high school (Bowen, Chingos and McPherson 2009; Camara 2005, 2013). Without sufficient motivation, college students may be unlikely to acquire the knowledge and skills they need (Baber et al. 2010; Conley 2010; Dweck, Walton and Cohen 2011; Fadel and Trilling 2009; Hoover 2008). Some responses indicate that for certain individuals, the source of motivation appeared to change from extrinsic to intrinsic. That is, when initially explaining the reasons for enrolling in the Cambridge program, students focused predominantly on the opportunity to obtain college credits and pay reduced college fees (as a result of being awarded the Bright Futures scholarship). However, a later change to intrinsic sources of motivation (evident in a number of participant responses) could be an indication of internalizing the skills and learner attributes associated with greater self-management and more advanced academic skills and behaviors. The shift also may be indicative of enhanced student maturity and study re-prioritization within a new educational environment:

* “This program allowed me to experience accelerated learning for four years. I felt that being in a program with other advanced students pushed me to exceed expectations.”
* “I struggle to stay motivated sometimes, but I remind myself that I have goals to reach.”
* “The program gave me the motivation to do the best I can.”

Students' willingness to engage with new materials and take more responsibility for their own learning, demonstrate self-discipline, and study independently—though not necessarily linked to the Cambridge program itself—resonates with the literature documenting the transition from high school to postsecondary study (Camara and Kimmel 2005; Conley 2003a, 2003b; National Survey of Student Engagement 2004, 2006, 2009).

Developing College-Ready Skills

Students arriving at college are expected to manifest a range of academic skills (Achieve Inc. 2004; Conley 2007; Conley 2011a; Hoover 2008; National Survey of Student Engagement 2003, 2004, 2006; Roderick, Nagaoka and Coca 2009; Rotherham and Willingham 2009). Participants in this study reported a number of important skills developed throughout the Cambridge program. The most frequently referenced relate to:

- writing skills and critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation skills (academic skills and strategies);
- time management and note-taking skills and the ability to study independently (learning skills and strategies); and
- perseverance and the ability to work under pressure (affective and psychological attributes).

The shift from high school- to college-level study means that students need to be prepared to move from memorization and rote learning to thinking and engaging more critically (Shaw 2011). College courses present information in a more conceptually complex manner, and students are expected to process information in fundamentally different ways. Tutors in college emphasize thinking skills (typically undeveloped in high school) over amassing content knowledge. College-ready students are expected to use inductive reasoning to apply general principles they are taught to specific non-taught, real-world contexts.

Students' perceptions of a wide range of skills and learning strategies developed during the Cambridge program and the ways in which these contributed to their subsequent college experiences are illustrated through the following responses:

* “Most of the classes for the AICE program require assessing multiple sides to an argument logically and expanding on it. AICE classes also teach you to get rid of the ‘fluff’ in your writing and to get your point across seamlessly.”
* “You must possess critical thinking skills in order to be successful. Through AICE, I felt I developed the necessary skills to be successful.”
* “The AICE program helped me develop the skills needed to learn and absorb information and utilize it. Specifically, the fact that most of the exams were essays instead of multiple choice [meant that] I had to learn material well enough to write about it and use practical examples.”

* “This program taught me how to analyze text and research things for myself and how to check for validity and reliability of sources.”

A number of responses either directly or indirectly refer to research-related skills. Shaw, Warren and Gill (2014) found that students who had followed a Cambridge program had an increased likelihood of engaging in undergraduate research. College-ready students need to demonstrate that they can conduct independent research and that they possess a range of research skills, including designing, planning, and managing a research project; collecting and analyzing information; evaluating and making reasoned judgments; and communicating findings and conclusions. They are also required to engage critically with their sources and document their research using credible, relevant, and appropriate citations (Conley 2007, 2011a; Hoover 2008; Roderick, Nagaoka and Coca 2009; Rotherham and Willingham 2009):

* “I greatly enjoyed my AICE psychology course, and while the exams were difficult, they were fascinating studies, and I frequently did follow-up research on the studies presented in class.”

* “[The Cambridge program helped] to find our own resources to better understand the material.”

In order to evaluate the perceived value of the Cambridge program in preparing learners for higher education, the skills developed in the Cambridge program were contrasted with those students considered important for college-level studies. This was achieved by asking open-ended questions designed to encourage free, unconstrained responses. Students reported a range of aspects of the learning experiences that were developed as a result of enrolling in the Cambridge program. (Note that some of the data analysis was neither neat nor elegant.)

Students highlighted the value of the Cambridge program to their subsequent education in relation to a range of academic skills—in particular, academic writing, structuring logical and coherent arguments, making judgments and decisions, and adjusting to new ways of learning and different exam formats. In addition to fundamental literacy and numeracy skills, students were also expected to master certain academic skills (what Conley 2007 refers to as habits of mind crucial to college success) related to constructing arguments and interpreting data (making inferences, interpreting results, interpreting graphical and tabulated data, solving complex problems, drawing conclusions, hypothesizing, offering explanations, engaging critically with data, exchanging ideas, and supporting arguments with evidence and critical reasoning).

A number of participants commented on how their reading and writing skills had improved while studying on the Cambridge program. The Standards for Success (2003) stress the need for college-ready students to demonstrate a range of writing genres and styles, including discursive, rhetorical, expository, descriptive, narrative, and analytic—in order to produce well-argued, plausible, and well-organized papers. College-ready students also are required to possess specialized reading skills that may not have been explicitly taught as part of acceleration programs (e.g., skimming and scanning for salient information).

College students are expected to possess a range of attributes, productive dispositions and behaviors (including effective organizational and social behaviors and self-management skills) (Baber et al. 2010; Conley 2010; Dweck, Walton and Cohen 2011; Fadel and Trilling 2009; Hoover 2008). Participants commented:

* “The Cambridge program made me put school and learning as a first priority in my life and taught me how to do well in school and learn while also living my life.”

* “[T]ime management is a skill I learned pretty quickly. Being organized is also very important because it helps to prioritize the work, and without motivation, no work would get done.”

The importance of learning skills and strategies was consistently affirmed. College-ready students are expected to work independently and to be self-reliant learners who recognize when they are having problems, manage their time on their own, create their own support systems, and know when and how to seek help from tutors, peers, and other sources. The following responses illustrate the importance of developing independent approaches to learning that, while desirable in high school, are necessary in college:
“Homework and assignments for Cambridge courses helped us gain the skills of taking proper notes and reading supplemental texts to help us better understand the lessons and be better prepared for tests. Professors in college do not walk step by step to do these things, so it was good to have already acquired these skills to implement in college.”

“One must possess critical thinking skills in order to be successful; through AICE I felt I developed the necessary skills to be successful.”

Students also are required to work in teams to solve problems (Camara and Kimmel 2005; Conley 2003a, 2003b; National Survey of Student Engagement 2004, 2006, 2009):

“Projects like the one required for Travel and Tourism, where group work was required, really helped with learning to make judgments and decisions, particularly since we held roles within the group.”

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of respondents’ perceived areas of strength and weakness at the point of entering college, students were asked how they would rate their skills upon completion of the Cambridge program (Figure 2). In addition to those previously discussed, required skills also include 21st century competencies (see Suto 2013 for an overview) and the ability to transfer knowledge and skills from one setting to another without specific instruction on how to do so (Conley 2013; Dweck, Walton and Cohen 2011). The Cambridge curriculum explicitly aims to develop learners’ metacognition and to encourage their creativity, innovation, and collaboration.

Students appeared very confident as far as the following skill areas (listed in the question) are concerned: critical thinking (n=73, 70.2 percent), communicating clearly and logically (n=68, 65.4 percent), making judgments and decisions (n=65, 62.5 percent), problem solving (n=63, 60.6 percent), metacognition (n=57, 54.7 percent), and evaluating different sources of information (n=59, 56.7 percent). Similarly, the vast majority of students (between n=93, 89.4 percent, and n=103, 99.0 percent) reported their skill levels for almost all of the skills listed in the question as either high or medium upon completing the Cambridge program (Figure 2). One exception related to the use of computers and technology for study: 20 students (19.2 percent) described the level of their IT/technical skills as low or non-existent, with the lowest proportion of students feeling confident (n=31, 30 percent):

“[AICE] provided good study skills but did not use technology for work in and out of the classroom as much, and the teacher taught instead of expecting you to learn it on your own.”

Conley (2011b) identifies technological proficiency as a key transition learning skill/technique. Despite this finding, 75.6 percent of students (n=79) described the level of their IT/technical skills as either high or medium (though this figure was considerably lower than for other types of skills developed during the program).

Students also were asked to rate the effectiveness of the Cambridge program in developing each of these skill areas (Figure 3). Again, the use of computers and technology...
in studying was the least well-developed skill (n=40, 38.5 percent). Nevertheless, students’ responses indicated that the majority of skills appeared to have been developed effectively during their high school program. This was particularly true of problem-solving skills (n=101, 97.1 percent), critical thinking skills (n=99, 95.2 percent), and communicating clearly and logically (n=95, 91.4 percent).

The findings from this part of the questionnaire suggest that the Cambridge program is perceived as relevant and valuable in preparing students for the transition from high school to college-level study. Nevertheless, even though students might have had good command of certain skills, their confidence was not necessarily a result of the program. Causality and the link between participation and success cannot be overlooked.

**Perception of Study Demands**

Participants also were asked to reflect on the main differences between the Cambridge program and their college experiences. In particular, they were asked to compare expectations in high school and college regarding workload, subject knowledge and understanding, tutor expectations, lesson format, and ways of learning (Figure 4).

The greatest differences related to tutor expectations and lecture/lesson format: 58.7 percent (n=61) and 51.0 percent (n=53), respectively. Typical comments included:

* “The workload and tests in the AICE program are much less/easier than college. College is a completely different experience from the AICE program.”

* “My teachers [at high school] were more lenient with due dates etc. It is different with professors in college because they are very strict with it. Also, in high school teachers want to help you, unlike in college. If you don’t show up to office hours, professors won’t help you.”

* “Understanding the instructor’s style of teaching [was difficult at the beginning of college].”

* “[In high school] the teacher taught instead of expecting you to learn it on your own.”

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**FIGURE 3.** Perceived Effectiveness of the Cambridge Program in Developing Skills

**FIGURE 4.** Students’ Perceptions of High School and College Expectations
Despite these differences, the majority of students suggested that expectations at the secondary and postsecondary levels were, in fact, similar—for example, with regard to subject understanding (n=93, 89.4 percent), subject knowledge (n=86, 82.7 percent), workload (n=77, 74.0 percent), and styles of learning (n=78, 75.0 percent). Consider the following responses:

* “The necessary knowledge of the topics covered is similar.”
* “The program was difficult in high school, but it prepared me for the workload in college. It also helped me get used to lecture-style classes and to not depend solely on teacher notes.”
* “Similar effort [has to be] put in outside of the classroom.”

Although college courses have considerably greater reading loads than high school courses and tend to be more complex in their content (Center for Education 2002, Conley et al. 2006), a number of students indicated that the Cambridge program constituted good preparation for the demands associated with increased workload at college:

* “The workload of studying was easy to handle because I had a lot of homework and school work in high school.”
* “The workload and rigor of Cambridge AICE program helped prepare [me] for the workload of college, allowing a smoother transition.”
* “The workload in the Cambridge program is pretty similar to college, so time management is a skill I learned pretty quickly.”

College-ready students also are expected to understand that the relational protocols and interpersonal dynamics associated with the tutor-student relationship are different in college than in high school. This includes the ability to interact and cooperate successfully with a wide range of faculty and support staff as well as peers (Conley 2010). Many participants commented on the importance of developing such skills and highlighted the positive consequences of overcoming social and interpersonal challenges:

* “How to navigate the social sphere (making friends, networking, meeting professors, etc.) [was one of the most important skills needed to study at university].”
* “I consider AICE to be one of the most important experiences in my life. The whole culture around AICE at my high school (e.g., the friends I made and the teacher I became fairly close with) made me who I am to a large extent.”
* “[Finding] friends who can explain things you don’t understand [was one of the most important skills needed to study at university].”
* “[The Cambridge program] allowed me to have professors who treated me with a mutual respect [if I earned it], which is similar to college. The program did help me a lot with studying, but it also taught me that professors are there to help me [and are] not [to be] feared.”

Students also explained that accessing support from teachers or peers may constitute a considerable challenge in the early stages of the transition to college:

* “No academic aspects of college were difficult from the beginning. The biggest challenges were social.”
* “[Much] larger class sizes—so [it was] harder to go directly to the teacher to get help [with] studying.”
* “College does not have the same interactions and communication.”
* “Less aid from teachers [was difficult at the beginning of college].”

Importantly, several students perceived the overall level of demand of the Cambridge program as greater than that experienced initially at college. This suggests that for these students, the program constituted effective preparation for the demands encountered subsequently at college:

* “[College] is pretty much high school with lower expectations.”
* “The Cambridge [program] required more organization/higher performance.”
* “Some of my classes in high school required a greater level of dedication and study than some of my college classes do.”
* “High school was much harder and more stressful than college has been thus far.”
* “I have found [college] curriculum to be easier than AICE.”

These views are likely to reflect individual differences in student skills and approaches to learning as well as the level and quality of teaching and differences in subjects studied.
Perceptions of the Cambridge Curriculum

A number of factors can influence students' perceptions of the demand of specific subjects—and, subsequently, on their engagement, motivation and enjoyment, and academic experiences in general. The extent to which students find a course interesting, challenging, and intellectually stimulating can be an important indicator of their engagement with and motivation to pursue a particular subject, which has implications for academic outcomes. The students were asked to rate the Cambridge program in terms of the extent to which they found it interesting, challenging, and stimulating (Figure 5). (These ratings relate to the program as a whole rather than to specific subjects.)

Overall, 87.5 percent (n=91) of participants stated that the program was very interesting or quite interesting; 90.4 percent (n=94) reported that the program was either very challenging or quite challenging; and 93.3 percent (n=97) believed the program was very stimulating or quite stimulating. This suggests that in general, students appeared to associate the Cambridge program with a high degree of demand and intellectual challenge as well as interesting subject content. The findings were supported by a number of student reflections, which suggests that personal interest in a particular subject and program of learning is instrumental in shaping perceptions of the difficulty of that subject:

* "Thinking skills [was the easiest subject] because it was interesting."
* "Environmental Management was easy for me because I found it most interesting and logical."
* "Global Perspectives and Literature [were the easiest subjects] because those are topics I am passionate about."

Being personally engaged with a subject can also lead to a sense of fulfillment and intrinsic motivation (Camara 2005):

* "I found [environmental science] very interesting and wanted to study for it."

However, other students indicated that they were able to develop and use learning strategies to overcome the challenges. One indication of a successful transition from high school to college is demonstration of self-management behaviors such as long-term goal setting, effective time management, study skills, precision and accuracy, persistence, self-direction, resourcefulness, and task completion (Baber et al. 2010; Bowen, Chingoss and McPherson 2009; Camara 2005, 2013; Fadel and Trilling 2009; Hoover...
College students are expected to claim ownership of their own learning—that is, to develop a sense of student agency and of "knowing how to learn," self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and metacognition. It is expected, for example, that college students actively interpret, reorganize, and draw on developed knowledge. The following comments demonstrate a high level of student metacognition, manifested through coping strategies and taking responsibility for their own learning:

* "[I learned how to learn] difficult material by actively asking questions and going to tutoring sessions."
* "I learned how to teach myself. Much like college, I taught myself most of the material outside of class while my teacher just reviewed."
* "Learning how to learn is the biggest part of the program. There is a specific learning style and way of executing the material."
* "I think that each AICE program required you to handle material, answer questions, and study in specific ways. I learned how I needed to handle each test based on previous tests. AICE offers the ability to look at past tests and see the answers that were given and what kind of marks they earned. You have to take the test on your own, but looking at past tests provided a high advantage."

The perception of an adequate level of demand is subjective: Whereas some students felt overwhelmed by both the nature and amount of work and the subject content of the Cambridge program, others perceived it as a positive, intellectually stimulating experience with beneficial effects on both learning and preparation for college:

* "It was overwhelming at times, but those experiences definitely prepared me for college!"
* "[AICE] was hard to do, but it taught some very important life lessons on how to pursue and achieve excellence."
* "AICE taught me how to think critically and, most important, [to] always look at two sides of an argument. [T]hose are skills I use in everyday life, not just for school work."

A number of students described the positive consequences of being challenged by the program in terms of aiming for better educational outcomes, developing key academic skills, and personal development beyond the immediate educational context:

* "The Cambridge program really challenged me as a student. Without the Cambridge program, I am not sure I would be where I am today. It is important to be challenged intellectually, and I am so glad I had this experience."
* "Cambridge helped with making me persistent in trying to understand different material. It helped me with learning it thoroughly. It helped me become a well-rounded person who knows how to tackle challenging material. I ended the program feeling I was appropriately challenged intellectually."
* "I enjoyed class greatly as it forced me to think and learn about significant events and problems of our times and the greater effect they would have on our future as a society."
* "Thinking Skills and English Literature were the most challenging for me. Thinking Skills introduced a lot of new material and an entirely different type of thinking than I was used to. It also required advanced critical thinking, which took time to develop."

These responses demonstrate the importance of providing intellectual challenge and stimulation in the learning process, which has implications beyond the school context for students’ personal development—including their learning life skills, ambition, the ability to think critically, and persistence (see dropout analyses in Shaw, Warren and Gill 2014).

Some students explained that being able to bring an element of personal perspective, creativity, and freedom of expression to their work had an effect on their perceptions of the extent to which they rated the difficulty of a Cambridge course of learning:

* "Global Perspectives and Literature [were the easiest subjects] because those are topics I am passionate about. Both classes are structured where the exam is essay format, and you can choose what you write about. The freedom allowed me to find topics that interested me."
* "Art and Design [was the easiest subject] because it was a very open-ended class. Even though I didn’t score as highly on Art and Design as I did in some of my other exams, I thought it was easy because it was interesting and personal."
* "I liked [that] I had more freedom to take academic electives that interested me. Also, the freedom allowed me to explore and challenge myself in core classes."
College-ready students are expected to assess their own level of ability and to identify their strengths and weaknesses (Conley 2010). Some students will always appear to have a natural aptitude for certain subjects. This will have a positive impact on their perceptions of those subjects. The following comments illustrate how students had a good understanding of their own abilities and how they appeared to build on their respective strengths while enrolled in the Cambridge program:

* “The easiest courses were Mathematics and Thinking Skills, because they involved problem solving and critical thinking. Personally, I find these aspects interesting and easy, so I found these classes to be easy.”
* “The easiest (for me) were the language courses, but they were not the easiest for everyone.”
* “Thinking Skills [was the easiest] because it is all logic, and that is one of my strengths.”

Teaching quality was an important factor in developing students’ attitudes toward particular subjects. A number of students commented on the very high level of teaching in the Cambridge program and singled out specific teachers’ contributions:

* “[In] psychology, the teacher I had was great at making sure we knew all of the material going into the exam, and [she] made it interesting to learn about.”
* “I usually hate history, but the teacher I had was very good at making it interesting and easy to understand.”
* “My teachers prepared us very well [for tests]. We would always have practice tests, and they would always give us feedback.”
* “Literature exams were the easiest because I felt my teacher prepared us so well that we weren’t surprised when we opened our test booklets. We knew how to analyze and develop a clear essay.”
* “I loved [Environmental Management] and the teacher, so it was a lot easier for me to dig deep into the subject matter and excel on the test.”

Some students were less satisfied with their Cambridge courses:

* “My high school was not the greatest, and the teachers were not the best, so when it came to the AICE test at the end of the year, I felt that my teacher never taught us all the material.”
* “AICE Math was by far the most difficult course. It was the first year offered when I took the class. There was no structure to the class. The teacher was unsure how to teach the class. There were two textbooks for the course. We finished only one of them, and 90 percent of the students failed the AICE exam.”
* “AICE Art and Design was the only exam I did not pass. My teacher was not the greatest, and I felt that I never fully learned the materials.”

Perceptions of Cambridge Examinations

The data obtained in this study suggest that the Cambridge program was perceived as an effective preparation for the AS and A Level examinations in that it helped students develop necessary knowledge and skills. Overall, 93.3 percent of participants (n=97) rated the program as very effective or quite effective in equipping them with the knowledge needed while 92.3 percent (n=96) thought that it had been either very effective or quite effective in doing so. Similarly, 89.4 percent of respondents (n=93) considered the program very effective or quite effective in preparing them for AS and A Level examinations (see Figure 6, on page 15).

A number of respondents qualified their ratings by explaining the effectiveness of the Cambridge program in preparing them for AS and A Level examinations:

* “Testing anxiety was minimized by my senior year because of the number of exams I took during the program.”
* “In the AICE program I was constantly being tested. I was used to the stress and heavy workload, so coming to college was not an extreme adjustment. You have to know how to prioritize and manage your time to be successful. The AICE exams were extremely important, so I was also used to high-stakes testing.”
* “In my opinion, the hardest part of AICE in general is adapting to the writing style. If you can learn the way the graders want you to write, most of the tests are passable.”

Transition from High School to College

The literature suggests that developing students’ college awareness helps them adjust to the demands of higher education (Camara and Kimmel 2005, Hoover 2008). College awareness entails absorbing college standards and norms as well as acquiring collegial habits of mind and ways of thinking and being open to developing them (Conley 2007). Although it is unlikely that any program that takes place outside of the college environment would
fully facilitate college awareness according to these requirements, some participant responses refer to aspects of their experience of college awareness:

* “Going through this program allowed me to sit in college classes without actually attending college. Most teachers treated it as if the class was a college class; therefore, the transition into college wasn’t too bad.”

* “Adapting to different teaching styles [was difficult at the beginning of college].”

* “Time management, ability to handle stress, test taking/ability to use critical thinking, [and] ability to adapt to various learning and teaching styles [are the most important skills needed to study at college].”

* “[Some things] can’t be replicated in a high school setting (such as being liable for all actions), and professors aren’t very lenient in college.”

The importance of developing personal attributes such as motivation, responsibility for one’s own learning, and prioritizing educational outcomes was highlighted in participant responses and in the literature (e.g., Baber et al. 2010, Conley 2010, Hoover 2008). These attributes were described among the perceived benefits of completing the Cambridge program, especially in relation to respondents’ early college experiences. A number of students felt that participating in the Cambridge program—a rigorous and challenging learning program—helped make their transition from high school to college easier and more successful:

* “AICE modeled the college experience for the most part regarding the workload and intensity level. I felt pretty well prepared when entering college.”

* “I learned a great deal in the Cambridge program. My study and writing skills were stretched in high school, so I came to college prepared.”

* “I really enjoyed the Cambridge program...and I feel that it prepared me very well for the environment and study habits needed to succeed at the university.”

* “The Cambridge Acceleration Program was a very rigorous program that gave me the freedom to choose classes that interested me while continuing to stay within the scope of the program. It prepared me to study and to think critically and creatively.”

These sentiments were not shared by all study participants, however. In particular, a few felt that the program did not teach some of the important skills required at college:

* “[The program] was lacking...in integrating technology and computer knowledge into the classes, so when I got to college, the transition in that was a little rougher than I hoped, since the college I ended up going to has many classes based heavily on-line, requiring practical computer skills in programs like Excel that I just had not been taught before.”

* “Although AICE did a good job teaching me the content, the program never provided tips on how to study.”

* “[AICE] did not help me learn how to be more consistently organized and focused. Often, the workload became overwhelming and left me feeling even more disorganized and unfocused.”

Participants’ responses highlighted the idiosyncratic nature of the data. This was evident, for example, in the high degree of overlap between different skill areas and
aspects of studies reported by some students as “easy” while others considered them to be “difficult” at the early stages of their college experiences. These included time management, workload, writing essays, study skills, as well as working independently. Differences in perceived difficulty of academic skills and strategies could be the result of a number of different factors, including individual differences in academic aptitude, personal preferences, motivation to study, and/or personality type. These differences could also reflect the quality of teaching at the secondary level, which can be an important contributing factor in determining students’ success both in high school and in their subsequent education. Importantly, students’ comments regarding aspects of study perceived to be easy or difficult provide a further indication of how successful their transition from high school to college was. For example, some participants reported that their early experiences at college were relatively undemanding. These students appeared to attribute this to their prior experiences in the Cambridge program:

- “[M]y transition was easy. My first impression of college was that it was even easier than what I was presented with in high school.”
- “Cambridge is a mini version of college.”
- “[I found] the accelerated pace, the content of a few introductory courses, [and] the style of teaching [easy at the beginning of college].”
- “I barely even need to study. College is a breeze compared to AICE.”

Irrespective of prior experiences in the Cambridge program, most participants highlighted the general challenges associated with embarking on college-level study. These tended to relate to what Conley terms “key transition knowledge and skills”: study skills such as independent work, time management, and taking responsibility for one’s own learning (Conley 2014). College-ready students, for example, are expected to assess their own level of ability and to identify areas where improvement is required (Dweck, Walton and Cohen 2011):

- “Literature in English was one of the hardest subjects because I was not adapted to analyze novels that were going to be tested and to use quotes to support the main idea.”
- “If you don’t come in knowing [how you learn best, time management, and the ability to write papers], it can make your beginning semesters of college difficult.”
- “The [high school] teachers have a very strict curriculum to follow. If they stray from that, then their students do not do well. However, they spoon feed all of the information, which has made me struggle with certain professors in college.”

Student responses also highlighted the importance of support during their transition from secondary to university education. The literature suggests a number of key factors that can help learners transition successfully. The potentially adverse effects of challenging circumstances can be alleviated by formal and informal assistance. Some responses indicated that teachers constitute an important source of support during the transition process:

- “My English teacher was phenomenal: She taught me so much, from the basic mechanisms of the English language to how to write a beautiful and intriguing essay or short story. I also learned to analyze almost anything, which is useful to me in art history.”
- “The teachers really helped us pass the exams and prepare us for college.”
- “I feel as if I wouldn’t be as successful here at FSU if it hadn’t been for the fantastic teachers I had while in the Cambridge program in high school.”
- “My study and writing skills were stretched in high school, so I came to college prepared. Teachers in the Cambridge program gave me the attention I needed to fine-tune these skills.”
- “My teachers made sure we knew the best tools to study. For example, my history teacher had us use notecards for our homework, so when it came time to study for tests and the exam, we already had all the information organized.”

CONCLUSION

The Cambridge program, challenging and academically rigorous as it is, allows students to develop a range of skills and learning attitudes that subsequently help them adjust to many of the demands of college. These include academic and learning skills such as time management, writing, critical thinking, ability to work under pressure, independent
study, and perseverance. Some participants in this study even suggested that certain aspects of the first-year college curriculum seemed less demanding than the Cambridge program, although these perceptions varied. A number of students highlighted similarities between their high school and college experiences in terms of the workload, subject knowledge and understanding required, and necessary study techniques.

The majority of participants reported finding at least some aspects of the transition difficult. These included increased coursework, limited support from college tutors, the need to study independently, and problems with concentration and motivation. Such difficulties might reflect individual differences in academic abilities and engagement as well as the quality of teaching in high school or the amount and type of support received from teachers and/or peers. Arum and Roska (2011) argue that many students will not possess all of the transitional indicators of success identified in the literature even after a year or more of college.

The findings of this study provide important insights into the impact of the Cambridge program on college readiness and students’ transition to higher education. According to the perceptions, opinions, and experiences of students who participated in this study, the Cambridge program constitutes good preparation for college study, allowing students opportunities to develop academic skills and attitudes perceived to be important to succeed in subsequent stages of education.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Because of the case study approach and sample size utilized in this study, the findings cannot be considered representative of the wider population of Cambridge program alumni. Nevertheless, the sample—even though drawn from a single university—was varied in terms of participants’ educational history and university year groups. Considering the views of engaged volunteers helped ensure rich and insightful responses, but it could also mean that the sample itself might have been inher-
ently biased. Many participants highlighted the value of the Cambridge program as a means of preparing students for university, but the responses included positive and negative comments. This suggests that a balanced perspective was achieved.

Participants represented a self-selected sample of students, most of whom completed a mixture of Cambridge and other acceleration programs and thus contributed to a complex picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Future studies should consider other types of acceleration programs (though a number of difficulties would arise in identifying participants who would comprise such a control group). The present study did not allow for triangulation of the findings from students with the perceptions of university staff (due to staff not being aware, for example, in which high school acceleration program their students had participated); triangulation of data would have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the Cambridge program. Future studies should consider methods of engaging university staff to facilitate triangulation of the research findings. Future research could also include participants from various institutions and representing various backgrounds, roles, and geographical locations.

With regard to methodology, the current research utilized a qualitative approach based on subjective self-reported data that might be affected by response bias. These concerns were mitigated by highlighting that participant responses would remain anonymous, and students would not be identified; thus, honest and open responses were encouraged. One of the main measures of impact associated with any acceleration program is the extent to which students are able to develop the skills necessary to succeed in subsequent stages of education. Development of these skills could also reflect individual differences in ability, motivation, personality traits, learner attitudes, and/or maturity, not to mention teaching quality at high school, characteristics of the learning environment, family and peer support, and other external factors. Apart from the appeal of receiving college credit without having to pay full college tuition fees (MacVicar 1988), individuals who embark upon an acceleration program are almost certainly a self-selecting group of highly motivated, capable individuals (Breland et al. 2002; Dougherty, Mellor and Jian 2005). This raises an important issue: whether causal links exist between participation in an acceleration program and later academic success (Dougherty, Mellor and Jian 2005; Hargrove, Godin and Dodd 2008; Klopfenstein and Thomas 2005; Paek et al. 2005). Because the issues around causality are multifaceted and complex, the acquisition of college-ready skills should not be attributed to the effects of an acceleration program alone.

The approach reported here is based on a three-phase methodology—modeling of first-year university data, cumulative university data, and generating stakeholder perceptions—and has engendered insights that might be useful in other university contexts that share similar characteristics. A research agenda consisting of a series of mixed-method studies (Creswell and Plano 2011), along with other stakeholders across a number of tertiary institutions, could serve as a template for further research. Studies of this kind will enable the gathering of comprehensive evidence in support of any claims about the sound theoretical basis of international acceleration programs and assessments.

REFERENCES


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*SOURCE: Hossler et al. Transfer and Mobility: A National View of Pre-degree Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions (Signature Report No. 2), Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.


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PRESIDENT OBAMA
AND OTHERS HAVE CALLED FOR FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE—
“AMERICA’S COLLEGE PROMISE.” YET CONTROVERSY SURROUNDS
THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM, WITH
PROponents EMpHASIZING THE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES
PROVIDED WHILE CRITICS BEMOAN THE HIGH DROPOT RATE
AND LACK OF EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES. LITTLE
RESEARCH EXPLORES HOW STUDENTS PERCEIVE THEIR
EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AT TWO-YEAR COLLEGES. THIS
ARTICLE EXPLORES COMMUNITY COLLEGE STRENGTHS
AND WEAKNESSES AS PERCEIVED BY A SAMPLE OF
SUCCESSFUL CRIMINAL JUSTICE TRANSFER STUDENTS. DURING
QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING, STUDENTS REPORTED THAT THEY
HAD A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE AT COMMUNITY
COLLEGE AND THAT IT ALLOWED THEM TO PREPARE TO BE
SUCCESSFUL AT UNIVERSITY. EXPENSE, TEACHER AVAILABILITY,
AND SMALLER CLASS SIZE WERE PERCEIVED AS REASONS THE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE WAS ADVANTAGEOUS. NOTABLY, MANY
STUDENTS SENSED THAT THEY MISSED OUT ON A STEREOTYPICAL
COLLEGE EXPERIENCE BY FIRST ENTERING COMMUNITY
COLLEGE. SOME REFERRED TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE AS
THE “13TH YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL,” “FAKE COLLEGE,”
OR NOT A “REGULAR” INSTITUTION.
Brint and Karabel’s (1989) early work reported that individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely than others to attend community college. Since the early 1990s, community colleges have enrolled a majority of first-time freshmen. Since the late 1970s, women have outnumbered men in this population (Gonzalez 2013; U.S. Department of Education 2012). A major function of community colleges is to prepare students for transfer to four-year institutions (Beach 2011; Brint and Karabel 1989; Cohen 2012; Dougherty 1987; Grubb 1989; Zwerling 1976). Provasnik and Planty (2008) reported that the majority (approximately two-thirds) of seniors who entered a community college immediately after high school intended to pursue a bachelor’s degree. Much work has addressed how well community colleges prepare students for transfer; however, few researchers have asked successful transfer students about their community college experience. The purpose of the present work is to explore how successful community college transfer students (those who soon will complete their bachelor’s degrees) reflect on their community college experience. This work offers valuable insights into challenges that policy makers may want to raise should “America’s College Promise” become reality.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE CRITICS

Community college critics have long argued that relative to four-year college entrance, community college entrance has a negative impact on adult socioeconomic attainment (Bailey 2012; Dougherty 1992; Pincus 1980; Velez 1985). Like four-year college entrants, the majority of community college entrants hope to earn a bachelor’s degree (U.S. Department of Education 2012); however, fewer community college entrants do so. Further, it is estimated that up to 80 percent of community college entrants drop out (Admon 2007; Grubb 1989; Velez 1985; Zwerling 1976). Among community college entrants, college retention is complicated by having to gain entrance to a four-year institution as well as by what coursework will transfer for credit.
Critics have long argued that community colleges depress educational attainment in part because their entrants take classes that do not transfer to four-year institutions (Alexander, Holupka and Passas 1987; Dougherty 1994; Goldrick-Rab 2006; Tinto 2006–7). Others have emphasized problems related to counseling and the extent to which counselors encourage community college students to continue their education (Brint and Karabel 1989; Myran and Parson 2013; Reininger 2007; Valez 1985). How well community college students are advised about the best classes and tracks in which to enroll (in terms of not losing credits in the transfer process) continues to be debated (Admon 2007; Clark 1960; Goldrick-Rab 2006; Gonzales 2013; Levey 2006).

In addition, there are concerns regarding the quality of community college education (Green 2007). Dougherty (1992) questions students’ preparation in basic courses (Bailey 2012; Rosenbaum, Redline and Stephan 2007). Notably, the vast majority of four-year college faculty were awarded the terminal degree in their field of study; by contrast, only 20 percent of full-time community college faculty (and only 10 percent of part-time faculty) have this degree (Braxton and Hirschy 2005; Link and Ratledge 1975; Spence 1976; U.S. Department of Education 2008). Community colleges rely heavily on part-time/adjunct faculty, who typically have a master’s degree or have earned eighteen credit hours in the discipline they are teaching (U.S. Department of Education 2008). McDonough and Calderone (2006) argue that the community college environment is more similar to that of a high school than a four-year college in terms of expectations for success, involvement in campus events and organizations, and opportunities to learn outside the classroom (Levey 2006).

COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROPONENTS

Advocates of community colleges have emphasized the democratic function they play by offering an inexpensive and convenient higher education to all (Follins 2005; Raby and Thomas 2006; Reynolds et al. 2006; Roksa 2008; Rosenbaum 1998; Rouse 1998). They also argue that the transfer function works effectively (Cohen 2012; Holahan et al. 1983; Nickens 1972). Nolan and Hall (1978), for example, found that compared to their counterparts who attended an institution continuously, transfer students received comparable grades. Hilmer (1997) considered whether community college entrance harmed students’ chances of transferring to a higher-quality university and reported that community college students actually choose higher-quality universities than do students who enter university immediately after high school. Others have argued that a credit is a credit and that where one attends college does not affect his earning ability (Ehrenberg 2004; Kane and Rouse 1999; Pascarella et al. 2004).

COLLEGE ENTRANCE AND COMPLETION OF THE B.A. DEGREE

Levey (2006) argued that community college effects are complex. Specifically, he suggested that community colleges may be an inexpensive route toward upward mobility if one looks at mobility across generations. On the other hand, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2008), “The percentage of students who had left school by 2006 without completing a degree or certificate program was higher among 2003–4 community college freshmen who intended to transfer to a four-year college than among all 2003–4 freshmen at public four-year” institutions. What role community colleges play in enhancing educational opportunities will be the focus of much future work as sociologists and economists concede that educational attainment is a critical variable in shaping adult socioeconomic opportunities.

METHODS

The sample for this study was drawn from criminal justice majors at a large urban university. Criminal justice was selected because it is one of the most popular social science majors at the university. All majors must complete theory. Typically, students enroll in this upper-division class when they are juniors and seniors. In this particular semester, two theory classes were offered. Initially, students in both classes were asked two questions: (1) Did they begin their college career at a two-year college? and (2) Would they be willing to be interviewed regarding their experience? Interviews were scheduled with those students who answered yes to both questions. Interviews were conducted in the researchers’ office at a time convenient for each party. Students who participated in the research were awarded extra credit points. To ensure fairness, students who did not meet the criteria and who did not want to participate in the research were also offered an opportunity to earn extra credit.
In all, approximately 28 percent of students in selected classes (n=30) began their higher education at a community college and were eligible to participate in this research. Of these, 23 agreed to be interviewed. The project received human subject approval from the college before interviewing began.

THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT
This work rests on a qualitative interview methodology. The interview was estimated to take less than an hour. Students were asked a variety of questions ranging from where they started their community college education to how many semester hours they completed there and whether they earned a degree (and if so, what degree). Next, students were asked, “For you, was going to a community college a good experience?” This question was followed by “What were the advantages of starting your higher education at a community college? What were the disadvantages?” Students were encouraged to share their perceptions of their educational experience honestly.

Responses were analyzed, and emergent themes were identified in an effort to better understand how students perceived the experience of starting their higher education at a community college. A related effort was to identify institutional practices that supported student transfer to a four-year college—a retention issue Tinto (2006–7) believes to be critical to the success of community college students—especially economically disadvantaged ones.

RESULTS
Most (48 percent) of the students in the sample began their higher education at a community college in the local area. Another seven attended community colleges outside the state (e.g., California, West Virginia, New York, Florida). Others began at a community college in the state but beyond the area where they were currently enrolled. Almost half of the students completed the credits for an associate’s degree. The number of credit hours completed ranged from six to more than 100.

EMERGENT THEMES
Students were asked if they believed that attending community college was a good experience and then were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of starting their higher education at a community college. Three main themes emerged from students’ responses to the first question (was community college a good experience?): preparing students for further study, building confidence, and flexible scheduling. Three themes—cost, teacher accessibility, and class size—were identified as advantages of community college.

Was Going to Community College a Good Experience?
The first theme, preparing students for further study, was the perception that attending community college would help one succeed later in college. For example, two respondents thought that “some professors were very tough in grading in order for students to rise to a four-year level” and “two of my teachers said they intentionally were tough in order to prepare us for a four-year college.” Tied to the idea of preparation was building a better academic record. One respondent said he did not perform well in high school, and community college “gave me time to raise my GPA. [I] learned study habits for college.” Another respondent said that community college helped her “prepare.” She believed that if she had started at the university, it would have been a waste of money. Another respondent said he would recommend community college “for anyone who is unsure about what they [sic] want to do.” In other words, community college might prepare one for a better college experience. It was, as another student noted, “a place to start.”

The second theme, building confidence, was defined as gaining the recognition that one could succeed academically in college. One student said that going to community college was a deliberate decision “to prove to myself that I could do it, to show me that I could do it.” Another respondent said similarly that “once she finished at [the local community college], she had the confidence to pursue a four-year degree.” This sentiment was clearly echoed by yet another, who stated that going to community college “allowed him to rebuild his confidence.”

Others said it helped in a successful transition from high school to college as they got “a taste of college.” Others described community college in the following ways: “a more comfortable environment”; “a lot less intimidating”; “a very easy transition for me from high school to college.” Another student said, “I don't think it started getting really, really hard and time consuming until I transferred to the university. But I do think I was ready for university
as well.” Another student was not sure about college and “didn’t want to waste dad’s money,” so he decided to go to community college. Some students noted that it was easier to get in to the community college, which clearly afforded them the opportunity to enter the higher education system. At least one student acknowledged that having another degree—the associate degree—was an advantage and helped further her sense of being prepared to go on in higher education.

The final theme centered on flexible scheduling and convenience, which was defined as finding classes that easily fit into busy lives and did not require major life changes to enter college. Students said, “Online schooling ... with [local community college] just seemed a lot easier and cheaper too” and “It was cheaper, close to home, free parking.” Like many others, one student said, “It was closer to home, so I didn’t get homesick.” With regard to more flexible scheduling, some respondents reported that community college “allowed [them] to work while going to school (class flexibility).” Another respondent said, “I need to support myself, so I have to work full time and take classes at night, and it was good for that... the community college [was] cheaper and very flexible.” Another student concurred that the local college offered “flexible hours for working full time and having a child.” Having transferred to the university, many students said that they had had to leave their jobs—even if they had taken another less time-consuming job—in order to focus on their classwork.

Advantages of Going to a Community College

The first theme, cost, was defined as recognizing the relative inexpense of a two-year college. Respondents said that the “biggest advantage was cost...knocked out his general education requirements and they transferred. This saves a lot of money”; that the “main advantage was the money. Two years completed debt free”; and “knock out credits for 1/10 the price.” Another student said it was “kind of the only option, it was cheap”—a refrain echoed by many. One student said that he had been accepted at a lot of universities, but his father died right before he graduated from high school, changing his college plans. Some students got very specific about the cost of their education. One said that in Florida, “each credit hour is $60... so I took four classes every semester... my parents paid for it, and then when I transferred here, it was really expensive, so I’ve gotten student loans for my last two years.” One student felt that she did not get “much help through the financial office (at the local college)...as far as how to actually pay for school.” Some students felt that because they paid for their education themselves, they had “more incentive to do well.” One argued that the low cost offered the opportunity to get a start or better oneself whereas four-year students were perceived as being in school in part because it was expected that they would get a college education. Nevertheless, for many, cost was central to their decision of which type of college to enter. One student said, “The decision to start at a community college depends on the person and what their [sic] financial situation is.”

The second theme, teacher accessibility, was defined as the ability to easily communicate with faculty. One student reported, “I felt like I could just talk to my teachers if I didn’t understand something”; another believed that community college faculty are “there because they want to teach you. They’re not worried about... being a founding father of cell division or whatever.” This sentiment was echoed by other students: “They’ll put that information up there in a fashion that you can understand”; “Teachers were more available [and] gave us more attention.”

Many students liked that classes tended to be smaller at the community college. This theme was defined simply as recognition that class size was smaller and appealing. One respondent reported, “I personally like...the size of the classrooms. At no time did you ever have more than about 25 or 30 people. And I think that’s effective because you don’t feel like you get lost in the crowd.” Another shared that the class size tended “to be a lot smaller, which gives you a better relationship with all the professors... you tend to learn their names [and] they tend to know your name, and you know you can have a nice conversation and they’ll help you with anything you need.” Another student said, “I knew everyone.” The smaller class size allowed yet another respondent “to get more from each class.” Instructor accessibility was often reported as even more attractive than the cost of attending community college. One respondent said that the advantages of community colleges were “smaller class sizes, able to get more from each class... instructors work more with students...cost was important but a secondary concern.” One student reported that compared to class size at the university, class size at the community college was “probably 12 to 20 students. I had
a couple with 40 students, but that was rare. Here I’ve had 40- to 60-people—couple-hundred people—classes—monster classes.”

Students also reported that it was easier to ask questions in smaller classes. One said, “If you want to ask a question or you don’t understand something, you raise your hand, and they respond to you.” Related to “small class size” was the idea that the “community college is ‘smaller.’” This theme ties to prior themes of preparing students and building confidence. One respondent said, “Wow, you’re in college now...so you could get overwhelmed by that feeling and then showing up to a big class [and realizing] ‘I don’t understand something’; ‘I’ll find out on my own’; or ‘oh well’...” This student believed that small class size allowed her voice to be heard and enabled her to find out what she needed to know. On the other hand, many students reported liking the personal stories they heard from community college instructors and noted that at the university, “more professors were into theory... they have more of a textbook knowledge.” Clearly, students perceived many advantages of community college education.

Three themes emerged from analysis of students’ comments about the disadvantages of going to community college: lacking a stereotypical college experience; negative perceptions of community college; and frustration with the transfer process and counseling at the community college.

Disadvantages of the Community College Experience

Lacking a stereotypical college experience was defined as sensing that something was being missed socially by enrolling at a community college instead of a college or university. Students noted the lack of social activities, peer group association, and other aspects of a four-year college experience. One referenced “the lack of... peer groups... there [aren’t] as many people like me, who are 18 and 19 years old...there [are] more people in the 25-plus range.”

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Another student reported, “I also had a feeling of missing out on the college experience.” One volunteered “that some people might be jealous that their friends were off at a party school or regular university.” Another advised, “If you’re really seeing college to be this social experience, where you want to make friends and have fun, then community college isn’t for you.” This student felt that community college entrants know this: “They know they’re not going to get that college experience, so it’s not a shock.” This feeling of lack continued even after students transferred to university: “When you go to community college, even if you transfer to a university, you always feel like you didn’t get the stereotypical college experience. I’ve never lived in a dorm, I’ve never joined a sorority, I don’t think I’ve ever been in any clubs...and honestly, all four years of college I’ve never really had a lot of friends.” Another student said that when she transferred to the university, she didn’t know anyone and “wasn’t in a group.” Students seemed to feel that community colleges “didn’t have a lot of social activities, not a lot of social interaction.” One student said that his community college lacked social interactions and that “lots of students skipped classes.”

A second theme was termed perception and was defined as some students’ belief that community colleges are essentially inferior to four-year institutions. One student was exceptionally critical of his community college experience and felt there was a huge difference between it and university. Specifically, the community college environment was disorganized (he described it as “a fake college”). He clarified that it was “because of the lack of professionalism, and the students didn’t care a bit about being there...there were always fights, and usually people didn’t come to class.” One respondent said there was no significant disadvantage in going to community college save “the stigma of attending a community college...assumptions of stupidity or poverty” for choosing this option. Another student said he had no interest in associating with his community college peers because “they were a bunch of losers.” A respondent who was not critical of the community college experience said, “I liked [community college] overall, but then again I felt like I was still in high school, I was just paying for it.” Likewise, one student said that the biggest disadvantage of going to community college was “feeling like it was the 13th grade.” Yet another said that “it was like a transitional experience from high school to college... it was slower paced and not as demanding...I definitely think it was easier.” One student offered the following insight about the primary difference between two- and four-year colleges: “Four-year students tend to have goals. It is much safer at community college not to have goals....Community college students take a class here and there. Students are a lot different.”

Students who had transferred successfully looked back on their community college experience and perceived that university was “harder than” the community college and that their grades at the community college were “As and Bs, and here they are Bs and Cs.” Many felt that community college classes were “easier” and that “the classes are harder [at university], but you learn more.” Yet another reported that the transition “was rough because of the more rigorous education and larger class sizes.” Beyond finding the university classroom more challenging, some students pointed to the university’s larger size and faster pace: “There’s a lot more people, and it’s a lot more fast paced... oh, and this campus is a lot bigger.”

Interestingly, some students recognized differences in accreditation and research expectations between two- and four-year faculty. Thus, one respondent figured that his community college teachers had “at least a bachelor’s [degree] to be able to teach.” One student mentioned interactions with teaching assistants at the university and said “that the assistants are pretty much pawned off, you don’t really talk much to the teacher...you talk to them...they are helpful. The professors themselves weren’t available, but the teacher’s assistants were more than happy to help.”

Frustration with the transfer process and problems with counseling at the community college were the third identified theme. This was defined as angst—especially after students transferred to a four-year institution—that community college credits did not transfer in the way they believed they would and that advice offered at the community college was lacking. One student said, “At the time I thought it was a good experience, but then when I transferred, I wished I had just gone straight to [the university] because I had to take a lot of classes over.” Many students felt that the advice they received from community college counselors was lacking. One student who intended to transfer to earn a bachelor’s degree said he was given the wrong advice and was told that “these classes will help you—they’ll work at [university].” Still, this stu-
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dent returned and found another counselor who told him about a seamless transfer agreement between the community college and the university if one earned the associate’s degree. He pursued this path; however, “four of the five classes I was in wouldn’t transfer to [university]…So basically I wasted money” at the community college. Another student echoed this problem, saying that she “lost some credits and had to take some unexpected classes,…[I] may have wasted time.” Another respondent said to “make sure you get the classes you need to take.” This student reported that at the university, she had met with a counselor and mapped out what courses she needed to finish the degree. This was in stark contrast to her experience at the community college: “You decide—you bring what you want to take to them—and they just check it off; there’s never any assistance.” Yet another student said, “The only complaint I have about going to community college is the advisors. They almost seem like they really don’t care. They’ll sign you up for basically whatever you want to take, as long as you meet the prerequisite.” In addition, many students reported that getting “counseling appointments may take weeks and that administrative paper work was slow.” One respondent said that a disadvantage of going to community college was that “I kind of feel behind…kids from high school who are my age are already graduating.”

Students saw the need for more program integration between local community colleges and the university “because so many will be wanting to transition to a four-year school.” Many students did not realize that technical training credits would not transfer to the university. One student reported that “none of the [paralegal] courses would transfer.” Many respondents in this sample were unaware of differences in the likelihood of success relative to transferring different two-year college degrees or specific classes.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The goal of this study was to report how successful community college transfer students understood the advantages and disadvantages of having started their higher education at a two-year institution. This work sheds light on “America’s College Promise,” the proposal to open community colleges to all. It is especially important for criminal justice students, many of whom will begin their higher education at community college. Students were asked open-ended questions about whether they felt the decision to enter a community college was a good one and about their understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of obtaining a community college education. Responses mirrored the debate found in related literature. While many students reported that their community college experience was positive, others did not share that perspective. The vast majority of students in this sample identified both positive and negative aspects of their decision to enroll at a community college. On the positive side, students said that the experience helped prepare them for success at a four-year college; boosted their academic confidence; and provided a place where academic and personal schedules could mix successfully. Advantages of community colleges were their inexpensive cost, the accessibility of teachers, and small class size, which provided ample opportunity for students to ask questions. Students often felt that they were not academically or personally ready to enter a four-year college or university immediately after high school—a change they perceived as a giant leap. Successful transfer students generally felt that the community college prepared them for success at the university. A key component that informed students’ feeling of being prepared was the smaller class size, which enabled them to get to know their instructors and to ask questions when they did not understand the material being presented in class. Many students clearly felt that community college was a good option for them, especially considering the cost of higher education. (Remember that these students were not only successful transfer students but also were only months away from earning their bachelor’s degree.)

Successful transfer students also identified disadvantages to having begun their higher education at a community college. Notably, the disadvantages are very similar to those detailed long ago by critics of community college education. First, students felt that they had missed out on the stereotypical college experience. They reported feeling a lack in terms of having a peer group or many social interactions at the community college. The community college appeared to be where students went strictly to attend class. Related to this was the perception that community colleges were somehow less than a “real” college. Several students said that community college felt like “13th grade” and referred to their peers who attended four-year institutions as being at a “regular” university. One student said that there was
a stigma attached to attending a community college: others assumed they were either poor or stupid for being there. Many students said that “lots of students skipped classes” and believed that community college classes were easier than those at the university. One student reported that the main difference between two- and four-year college students was that “four-year students tend to have goals. It is much safer at community college not to have goals... community college students take a class here and there.” Finally, many students reported frustration with the transfer process and with the counseling offered at the community college. Much work remains to be done to ensure that community college entrants know which courses typically transfer to four-year institutions and that they are aware of transfer agreements between many community colleges and universities (should they want to obtain a transfer-oriented associate’s degree). What appears to be basic information—especially for transfer-oriented students—is not readily available to many community college students.

The current research is limited by the sample selection, but it is notable that the themes that emerged from student interviews are in line with concerns noted by scholars with expertise in this area of higher education.

The debate about community colleges and divisions within U.S. higher education will continue, especially because educational attainment significantly influences adult socioeconomic status (Dowd, Cheslock and Melguizo 2008; Paulsen and St. John 2002; Tinto 2006–7). Community colleges appear to help those who feel they are not ready to enter the university system immediately after high school. Students are well aware that community colleges are an inexpensive way in which to acquire higher education credits and avoid debt. What they may be less aware of is how enrolling at a community college may affect the likelihood of their ever graduating from a four-year college (not to mention the effect this decision may have on their socioeconomic attainment).

Nevertheless, many students did not see another option; their choice was to go to a community college or to not go to college at all. If this is the reality for many students, then these respondents offer insights into how to increase the likelihood of success of community college entrants. Focusing on advising within community colleges and ensuring that students know the differences between technical and transfer-oriented classes and degrees would be most worthwhile. For community college proponents, one of the biggest challenges is how to transform negative perceptions of two-year colleges. Finally, four-year college and university faculty might evaluate their openness to students asking questions in their classes and determine what they can do to enhance the learning experience for all students. This area of research is worthy of further exploration—especially because policy makers in California and New York have sought to limit enrollment at four-year colleges and to encourage enrollment at community colleges instead (Kane and Rouse 1999). President Obama and others support the idea of community college for all, suggesting that upwards of 9 million individuals could benefit from such a plan. It is important to explore how to build on the strengths of the community college and to address lingering problems. How well these students will fare must continue to be tracked.

**References**


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Mentoring occurs in formal and informal ways. While formal mentoring programs are valuable, more of us are likely to have opportunities for informal mentoring in our workplace and in our communities.

Mentoring has a dramatic history. As told in Homer’s *Odyssey*, Odysseus, king of Ithaca, left home to fight in the Trojan War. He entrusted the care of his palace and of his son, Telemachus, to Mentor, an old friend. At key times, the goddess Athena disguised herself as Mentor and energetically served as overseer and guide to Telemachus as he searched for his father. Centuries later, in 1699, “The Adventures of Telemachus,” by educator and philosopher Francois Fenelon, presented a stronger portrayal of Mentor as one who counsels, guides, nurtures, advises and enables (Roberts 1999). Thus, “mentor” is defined as:
- Someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced and often younger person (Merriam-Webster).
- An experienced and trusted advisor (Oxford English Dictionary).

These definitions frame the way in which we think about mentoring, whether it occurs in the academy or the business world or in youth development programs. Professional literature, conference presentations, and training sessions often focus on how to be a good mentor and how to establish mentoring programs and relationships in which the mature person and/or professional guides the younger person and/or rookie.

An article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* describes the efforts of the National Research Mentoring Network (NRMN)—funded by a $21 million grant from the National Institutes of Health—to more aggressively address diversity in the sciences and engineering by connecting students with professionals in related fields (Patel 2016). Leaders of the NRMN project recognize that the training of mentors is important and note, for example, that the scientific skills of an experienced professional do not always translate to the “gentle shepherding” of aspiring students.

Whether a mentoring program is scaled nationally, like NRMN, or locally, as at a college or youth organization, the formal aspects of training, mentor-mentee matching, and follow-up deserve continued attention.

Rarely does a week go by without one reading or hearing of one or more formal mentoring programs at a college or professional organization or in a community. Mentoring relationships are valued because of their expected outcomes. In this, there is a strong intersection of interests. In general, we aim for the mentee to benefit. We want
mentees to experience more connectedness with the organization, to improve their performance and behavior, and to feel more satisfied and successful. We also seek benefits for the mentor, who likely feels satisfaction and may learn from the perspectives and experiences of the mentee. In addition, there are organizational and societal benefits, such as improved employee retention, commitment to a profession, and healthier and more acceptable behavior.

Whether the goals of these interests and of the formal programs that promote them are fully realized is a matter of some conjecture (Eby 2008), but most of us can attest to experiencing some or all of these benefits. But is mentoring always part of a formal mentoring program?

I have collaborated in the development of formal mentoring programs and have assumed direct assignment as a mentor. I believe in formal mentoring programs. But when I reflect on the length of my life and of my career, I confess that except during a satisfying internship in graduate school, I myself was never a designated mentee. Yet in retrospect, I can identify several people who significantly influenced and helped me apart from any formal mentoring program; I certainly regard them as mentors who clearly fit the definitions above.

These mentors were (and are) more than “role models.” Beyond being exemplary professionals (role models) themselves, my informal mentors engaged me in extended conversations, involved and nurtured me in activities that expanded my own capabilities, and advised me as to new opportunities. They did this almost casually, as if this was simply part of their day.

The point I wish to make is that mentors are all around us, and each of us may have the capacity to mentor or to be mentored, whether clearly designated as such or not. To illustrate this—and yes, to pay homage to those who served as unacknowledged mentors to me—I will describe just a few.

Early in my career, I was curious about transfer credit policy and practice. Two mentors helped me advance in this field. One actively introduced me to colleagues (with whom I would later develop my own relationships) and continued to offer insights through the years. The other offered hours of time—just chatting—over several years and explained the whys and wherefores of various institutional policies and procedures related to transfer credit and articulation relationships and the nuances of faculty interests, curriculum structure, and institutional missions. The expertise of these individuals far transcended that in any books or manuals I could have read, and it was offered freely.

Good management and supervisory practices are challenging for many of us, and I am no exception. I was fortunate to have two colleagues who provided significant guidance in these areas. I needed advising in my first experience at the director level. I knew some of the administrative tasks I needed to do, but I had much to learn about managing staff and establishing an office environment. A colleague freely offered advice and guidance. Although I am unsure how much I was able to absorb and implement at the time, his continued support began to make a difference, and he offered me many valuable lessons. Some years later, in a different time and place, another colleague showed me how to develop and advance managerial relationships and a positive office environment. As a result of many conversations, I was able to use transparency, humor, follow-through, and caring to chart successful pathways in management and supervision.

These individuals were—and remain—long-term mentors. Others had more time-specific effects, having advised me about promotions or job changes and having acted behind the scenes to help open up other professional opportunities. Were their roles as mentors ever formally acknowledged? No. Yet they had an impact that reflects the goals of formal mentoring programs. I was guided into learning more than just the basic tools of my trade. I was offered moral support and wisdom. I was encouraged and aided in my pursuit of new opportunities. These mentors helped me develop a passion for my work that I hope benefited my institutions as well as society.

Each of us has not only the capacity to mentor but also the responsibility to do so. There is always someone in your circle who can benefit from your example (your good example!) and someone who is willing to accept information, training, advice, and/or help. If you have the opportunity to participate in a formal mentoring program in your organization or community, do so. Even if you do not, think about how you advise and guide others in your organization and community simply by being you and by investing extra time and effort in others.

What steps can you take? First, “know thyself”: Take an inventory of your own strengths and challenges. Formal and informal mentors have the most positive effect when
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their own personal integrity and knowledge are clear. Second, identify those individuals you respect and admire, and carefully consider their traits. What can you learn from them that you can internalize and transmit? Third, talk with those whom you consider good role models and mentors. Discuss how you might incorporate their characteristics and skills into your own. Finally, take time to share your expertise and to encourage and enable others to grow and succeed. It's not really rocket science; it might just be sharing coffee breaks.

If you are in a good place now, it likely is because you learned from others. Pay it forward.

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CHRISTINE KERLIN, PH.D., retired from Everett Community College as Vice President for Strategic Planning and the University Center after 36 years in higher education at two- and four-year institutions. She now serves as a Senior Consultant with AACRAO Consulting.
Giving Back: Mentoring Others as You Were Mentored

By Sharon F. Cramer

When you look back at critical moments in your experiences in higher education (as a student, as a professional staff and/or faculty member), who do you see and hear? Likely, you recall people who went out of their way to provide you with advice when you were unsure or uneasy, or were your champions when you achieved a goal. Regardless of whether you took the advice from formal mentors or helpful guides, you probably gained new perspectives from others throughout your career. Now, in your current role in higher education, you have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others.

Are you considering becoming a mentor? Have you already received feedback that your professional suggestions have been helpful? Are you considering formalizing a mentoring relationship but are unsure how? This article intends to provide guidance for beginning a mentoring relationship. Give the included exercises a try, to prepare to take on mentoring responsibilities.

LOOK WITHIN

- Begin with yourself. Start by taking inventory of your own strengths and experiences.
- Take five to ten minutes to reflect on the informal opportunities you have had to provide guidance to others.

Create a list with three columns, as follows: Column 1: Names; Column 2: Types of advice sought; Column 3: Strengths you were able to draw upon to respond.
- As you develop the list, don’t try to be exhaustive, just include whoever/whatever comes to mind.
- Underline the strengths you feel most confident about using in a future mentoring relationship.

Take five to ten minutes to reflect on how you have been mentored by others.
- Create a new list with three columns, as follows: Column 1: Names of mentors; Column 2: Circumstances that led you to seek help and/or advice; Column 3: Thoughts and feelings you experienced during and after mentoring discussions.
- Consider many different times in your life in higher education.
- Underline the most powerful reactions you had.

Your reflections can help you identify a starting point for becoming a mentor, especially as you recall times when an exchange with another person transcended vulnerability. List times that were helpful as well as those that were less so. Use your past to help others. Being open to...
another, and giving or receiving advice on the basis of your experiences, can transform you in your workplace.

LOOK AROUND

In your higher education setting, do your many regular responsibilities already overfill your calendar? Even so, you may be interested in becoming a mentor. As you continue reading, identify some realistic ways to prepare to assist others that will not make undue demands on your time.

Begin by observing, and expand where you observe. How often do you take time to consider the types of guidance others around you are offering or receiving? If you are like most higher education professional staff and faculty members, your head is more often down than up, with time spent with others on campus limited to “must do” interactions. You may rarely take time to see or listen to what is happening around you, categorizing such observations as “non-essential.”

One way to begin considering your potential as a mentor is to prioritize new routines in your work life—routines that will enable you to see things in new ways. For example, get involved in an aspect of your campus that is wholly unfamiliar to you: join a committee outside of your particular area or department, or get involved in campus governance. At the outset, you will have to pay attention because you will no longer be on “automatic pilot,” enmeshed in your regular routines. Pay attention to both verbal and non-verbal communication in these unfamiliar settings.

As you do so, you are likely to observe how others interact to effectively convey information, obtain answers to questions, and collaborate. This can provide a glimpse of what you might like to be able to do as well as of what you want to avoid. Perhaps you admire particular people on your campus; whenever possible, join committees on which you can work with them directly.

For some people, involvement across campus may not be possible or desirable. If that is true for you, consider taking on leadership roles in your professional organizations. Begin by offering to serve on committees, and engage with people whose experiences might be quite different from your own. By extending yourself beyond your own campus, you can gather useful information while taking a “field trip” to view informal information exchanges among your peers.

As you observe others on and away from your campus, keep track of the kinds of interaction styles you observe and admire; consider how you could incorporate them into your own mentoring style. “Looking around” will enable you to step beyond your preconceived ideas about how best to assist others.

LOOK BEYOND

Mentors help mentees look into the future. In the midst of circumstances that may seem to be the quicksand of campus difficulties or politics, many of us become paralyzed. We see few options, and we fear the worst. Effective mentoring can help individuals put things in perspective and evaluate alternatives. Sometimes, mentors have to provide unwelcome information or raise questions that will be painful to answer. Honest exploration of choices by two trusting individuals within a mentoring context may lead to outcomes that could have arisen no other way.

In order for such trust to be established, a mentor must be willing to spend time getting to know the mentee. On campuses that have existing mentoring programs, these pairs will be assigned, and training and resources will be provided.

If your institution has no such program, inform yourself about mentoring: Read articles in C&U, or consult the references from articles in C&U. Mentoring is not an abstract idea but rather a purposeful series of communications with someone in your professional sphere. A meaningful mentoring relationship offers opportunities for candor with no hidden agenda.

On most campuses, formal supervisory relationships are too complex for mentoring to develop; supervision may require action that precludes an impartial mentoring relationship. Mentor/mentee interactions are not friendships but instead enable a more experienced staff or faculty member to provide insights and guidance to one who is younger and/or less experienced.

It will be generous of you to offer your time and expertise to another professional on your campus. Commit to helping an individual you believe has potential to grow. Alternatively, you may consider becoming a mentor because someone has asked you to. Either way, it is possible to set up a structured mentoring relationship with clear parameters.

Note: If it seems preferable to do so, consider inviting several people to form a mentoring network. This can allow several curious and willing people to participate in the mentoring process, with each person drawing on his or her
own strengths. Having a small group of people might feel more comfortable than working individually with just one person. Make sure to clarify the expectations of confidentiality at the outset.

**DIY Mentoring Sequence**

- Schedule a time to meet the individual(s) in a neutral place. Explain that you would like to talk about establishing a mentoring relationship or network.
- Begin the dialogue based on the results of the exercises at the beginning of this article. Explain how much it meant to you to receive assistance from a mentor and how that assistance helped you grow. Clarify that this is in no way coercion or harassment but rather is a professional opportunity for growth and encouragement. Be sure to commit to confidentiality.
- Describe your thoughts about what a mentoring relationship might look like:
  - Each of you should define what types of assistance would be helpful to offer/receive.
  - Each of you (mentor and mentee) should identify goals for professional growth.
  - Schedule a meeting every six weeks or so.
  - Be intentional about seeking and providing guidance by encouraging each person to describe what took place in working toward a professional goal. Discussions allow each participant to share insights and observations. Focus the mentoring conversations so that opportunities for progress can be evaluated more directly.
  - Help by asking questions or offering suggestions. Share useful resources (e.g., readings, websites, articles from *C&U* or referenced in *C&U*), and discuss them together.
  - Establish a timeframe within which your series of mentorship meetings will occur (e.g., a semester).
  - Seek input from the other(s), and adapt this sequence as needed.
- At the end of the pre-established timeframe, decide whether you would like to continue the mentoring relationship—and, if so, if/how any goals should be changed. Again, the timeframe for the mentoring relationship (e.g., a semester, an academic year) should be specified. If, at one of these natural re-evaluation points, one or both people feel the time has come to end the formal phase, create a positive way to close out the commitment. If it feels right, leave the door open to reconnect in the future. Make sure the mentee knows that it will be his/her option to do so.

**LOOKING BACK**

Being a mentor can be enriching. When I look back on my own professional life, I am reminded that many of the most unique and meaningful moments occurred within the context of mentoring relationships—either giving or receiving. Enabling a colleague mired in a professional conflict to reflect on both its difficulties and opportunities is like opening a window. If we had not established trust, nor drawn on it, that window would have remained closed: the individual would have become a casualty of unresolved professional catastrophes. It is also a joy to see the individual triumph.

Drawing on my own professional challenges to identify the right words to share with a younger colleague enabled me to put my difficult times to good use. Offering suggestions to junior faculty or professional staff members who were uncertain about their options provided them with new perspectives when they felt unsure; our conversations helped identify alternative ways to move forward. Years later, individuals I have mentored have reminded me of counsel I provided and have told me how much my counsel mattered. The investment I made in learning how to listen (and in enabling others to consider various options) continues to yield benefits.

**LOOKING AHEAD**

Developing a mentoring relationship is a slow process. Perhaps you have considered initiating one because you have been impressed by someone’s potential for growth and change or because someone asked you to. But you might have wondered, “Am I ready to be a mentor?” You might have worried about whether you have the skill to help someone think constructively about a role change on campus or a move to a new position elsewhere. Realize that by listening and asking questions, you can serve as a sounding board for the individual who is searching for new ways to build a career in higher education.

Continue to be honest—not only about what you know, but also about what is outside of your experience.
Encourage the individual to seek guidance from other people if you are unable to do so. And continue to evaluate your own capacity to serve as an effective mentor. Solicit feedback, and use it to become even better. Being a mentor can enrich your—and your mentees’—professional lives.

About the Author

SHARON F. CRAMER, PH.D., a SUNY Distinguished Service Professor at Buffalo State College, was a faculty member from 1985-2011. During her career, she served as an academic leader, in roles that included department chair (1995-1999), chair of the College Senate (2007-2010), and chair of the Governance Committee of the SUNY University Faculty Senate (2007-2010). She was an officer, on the Board of Directors, of four professional and governance organizations, and received the highest award from each of them. She served as Parliamentarian for the SUNY University Faculty Senate 2011-2017, and was recognized for her contributions with the “Senator Emerita” award in 2015.

Dr. Cramer has given over 100 presentations and keynotes in 23 states and two provinces in Canada. She completed her Ph.D. studies at New York University, earned an M.A.T. degree from Harvard University and a B.A. from Tufts University. Her publication record includes three books (one co-authored with Jan Stivers), 26 scholarly articles, 20 reflective essays published in the Buffalo News, and seven chapters in academic publications. She is editor of two volumes on shared governance, to be published by SUNY Press in 2017. She is listed in Who’s Who in America (2006-present), Who’s Who in American Education (2006-present), and Who’s Who in American Women (2008-present).

Helping Veterans Succeed: A Handbook for Higher Education Administrators is AACRAO’s first comprehensive guide to address the unique needs of student veterans on campus. Through 16 chapters, this handbook gives campus administrators the tools to effectively help veterans achieve their academic goals and transition successfully into the workforce. Written by experts in the field, it covers transfer of credit and prior learning credits, campus communication strategies, certification, orientation efforts, implementing a Yellow Ribbon Program, and helping veterans transition from the classroom to the workforce. In addition, case studies and appendices offer relevant tips and resources for higher education professionals serving student veterans.

Item #0139 | $115 | $80 (members)  Available at bookstore.aacrao.org and on Amazon Kindle
Mentoring in higher education is a powerful and critical process for institutional and personal growth. Shared learning experiences are invaluable not only for the mentee but also for the mentor, the institution, and the profession. Mentoring enables a seasoned professional to pass knowledge to another via a formal or informal process. It benefits the mentee as well as the mentor by providing both with fresh perspective through their work and network relationships. Finding a person or program to meet the mentee’s expectations can be challenging depending on the mentee’s acknowledgment of the need to enter into such a relationship or his ability to access a formalized mentoring program. As in any relationship, mentees and mentors must consider their needs and agree as to their commitment of time.

Structured mentoring programs provide established goals and objectives and clarify expectations and access for the mentee. Institutions often tailor these programs to meet their cultural and leadership needs, guiding the mentee in her current position and future growth opportunities. Such internal programs assist with succession planning and other forms of professional development, but not all institutions have the resources to support them. In the case of resource scarcity, unstructured mentoring is an option that allows for flexibility and for the mentee and mentor to develop a mutual comfort level even regarding sensitive topics. Recognized roles and goals are flexible in unstructured programs. Bataille (2014) states that it’s “important to find someone who will do more than just listen to you—who will nominate you for positions and help you prepare for your next career move.”

Mentor relationships can also happen outside of the institution. One example of an external program is the AACRAO Mentor Committee program that was launched in 2010 for new professionals. Prospective mentees volunteered during the new professional workshops at the 2010 AACRAO Annual Meeting, listing their current positions, institutions, and areas of interest for mentoring. Mentees were then paired with seasoned professionals in their field by experience, region, and institution type. More than 24 mentees remained in the twelve-month program, during which mentors engaged with them by phone, email, and in person. (The majority of the mentor pairs communicated by phone or email because of their locations.) Mentors were provided with monthly “tools and topics” to discuss using Lois Zahary’s “Creating a Mentoring Culture.” Mentors also shared best practices via email. In-depth and confidential topics
proved challenging given the distance that separated participants and their consequent lack of confidence in their mentoring relationship. At the conclusion of the program, twelve of the relationships were deemed highly successful and were strengthened by face-to-face interaction at the 2011 AACRAO Annual Meeting. Overall, 24 mentees stayed connected with AACRAO through committee participation and session presentations the following year. The strongest relationships were those in which the mentor and mentee were in close proximity and were able to schedule in-person visits. Lessons learned from this program were that mentors who knew their mentees or who met frequently in person created a stronger relationship and attained more goals, thus reinforcing the power of networking and of situational knowledge transfer.

Whether one engages in a formal or informal mentor relationship, establishing a balanced match sets the foundation for a strong experience. Successful mentors often choose protégés whom they believe they can mentor effectively (Johnson and Ridley 2008). Personality traits and other matching variables to consider include work ethic, need for achievement, career interests, drive, structure, and productivity. The more similar the traits of the mentor and the protégé, the greater the perceived benefits of mentoring for both. Expectations need to be established at the outset; during the initial mentorship phase, protégés should clearly articulate their expectations as well as their goals and career interests. Mentors typically interact with their protégés as supervisors, performance evaluators, or committee members, making it important to establish relationship boundaries. Mentors also must remember to remain productive in their own professional careers and not to neglect them.

Several examples of outstanding mentorship programs are available online and in the workplace. When creating a program or benchmarks for a mentee in admissions, enrollment management, or student records, the AACRAO Core Professional Competencies (2011) are extremely
helpful and can serve as a foundation for formalizing such 
an initiative. (See <aacrao.org/resources/professional-
competencies> for benchmarks and strategies at the 
professional core level as well as additional proficiencies 
for each area of expertise.)

WHY MENTORING IS IMPORTANT FOR 
HIGHER EDUCATION NOW

Higher education is in a time of great financial and struc-
tural change. The days of stable and traditional budgets, 
goals, and expectations of postsecondary institutions have 
been replaced with outcome/benchmarking measures, fiscal 
responsibility initiatives, and other formal analytical 
initiatives. Over the past two decades, most (if not all) in-
stitutions have endured cuts in federal and state funding as 
well as deep losses in endowment income. The downturn 
of the overall population of high school graduates in 2011 
further elevated the financial crisis as competition for stu-
dents increased. Accountability—especially as measured 
by graduation rates and student success—are at the fore-
front of operational changes being made at all institutions. 
Departments have had to reengineer their business pro-
cesses in order to meet institutional goals more efficiently 
even while working with capacity skill gaps. Administra-
tive offices are facing these changes with fewer staff—the 
result of hiring freezes that have left positions unfilled 
when employees have left. Backfilling positions or find-
ing qualified candidates has become even more complex 
given limited resources. Doing more with less is a reality, 
and “to a greater degree than currently practiced, institu-
tions of higher education will engage in strategic planning 
and other techniques utilized by business and industry in 
a concerted effort to increase their efficiency and ability to 
compete in the marketplace” (Wilson 1990).

WICHE’s December 2012 “Knocking at the College 
Door Report” outlines trends in birth and high school 
graduation rates that forecast the number of students en-
tering higher education. Demographic changes cited in 
the report (see figure) depict actual high school gradu-
ation rates at public and non-public schools from 1996–97 
The decrease in enrollment after 2011 correlates with bud-
get cuts in higher education; only now are the rates begin-
ing to rebound. (Projected high school graduation rates 
suggest that college enrollment trends will increase steadily 
util 2025.) New data projections are expected to be pub-
lished in December 2016 which follow the same trend lines.

It can be assumed that in the near term (the next five 
years), the increased high school graduation rate will in-
crease the volume of work in colleges, so that departments 
will need to realign their services accordingly. Offices that 
had been downsized will need not only to prepare for 
increases in student enrollment but also to address the 
inevitable exit of the Baby Boomer generation that has 
fueled the work force for decades. Born between 1946 
and 1964, Baby Boomers make up a large percentage of 
today’s higher education leaders. Those born after 1960 
won’t reach full Social Security eligibility until 2031. At 
the same time, economic instability may mean that Baby 
Boomers work longer, thus providing more opportunity 
for knowledge transfer (Leubsdorf 2006). Mentoring is 
the nexus between sharing knowledge and professional 
development. It’s a vehicle for filling leadership gaps that 
may be a result of budget and operations cuts. In such 
circumstances, a formalized mentoring program may be 
more difficult to launch and is apt to require commitment 
from top-level administrators (as well as dedicated time 
and resources).

What are the job prospects in higher education for the 
coming decade? The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) 
projects faster than average job growth in postsecondary
education from 2014–24 (the result of an anticipated increase in student enrollment). Admission personnel and registrars are anticipating a 9 percent increase in the number of positions in those fields (<learningpath.org/articles/highereducationadministrationcareersjobdescriptionsalaryinfo.html>). HigherEdJobs (2016) reported that higher education positions reached their highest growth rate in three years during the fourth quarter of 2015. In anticipation of the retirement of Baby Boomers, remember that as of 2014, the BLS reported 175,000 employed postsecondary administrators; 75 percent of those were employed at colleges, universities, and professional schools, 15 percent worked at junior colleges, and the remaining 10 percent worked in technical and trade schools.

**EMPLOYING TALENT**

Anticipating staff and operation growth will become increasingly challenging for many higher education leaders during the next decade, especially as they evaluate the need for more diverse programs with the necessary support facilities, faculty/staff, and services. Leaders will have to decide whether to grow talent (internal mentoring), buy talent (temporary consulting), or recruit talent (outside candidates). Robin Mamlet, of Witt/Kieffer, an executive search firm for higher education, confirmed that there has been a decrease in qualified candidates. This is primarily because the scope and challenges of key leadership roles have increased significantly, and higher education is under tremendous pressure to compete and change. Candidates are expected to be great, not just good. That is, they should be specialist and generalist, have strong interpersonal sensitivity while being shrewd strategists and analysts, and be good day-to-day administrators as well as strategists and change agents for the future.

In 2014 the Global Talent and Management Rewards Study conducted a survey on talent availability and found that “nearly two in three respondents are experiencing problems attracting top performers (65 percent) and high-potential employees (64 percent), ...and more than half reported having difficulty retaining high-potential employees (56 percent) and top performers (54 percent).” Engaging in searches is costly; extensive searches might be avoided if the groundwork for succession planning were laid (particularly advantageous when an institution is facing significant financial or strategic challenges) (Bornstein 2010).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Understanding and supporting the importance of mentoring relationships is the first step toward institution-wide commitment. Given the sobering statistics regarding future resource constraints in higher education, leaders should be encouraged to consider sponsoring and creating a mentoring culture. Initially this could be a human resources initiative; encouraging various units within the institution to develop and execute formal and informal mentoring goals would constitute a reasonable starting point. As plans begin to take shape, care should be exercised to connect institutional needs and goals with individuals’ own views regarding their professional development and career aspirations. The plan must make sense for all involved as it will form the basis of a trusting relationship.

Groves (2007) recommends creating and sustaining a network of mentoring relationships within the organization and integrating leadership development with succession planning. Such an approach requires a commitment from senior leadership to embrace an organization-wide model. Key steps include identifying potential candidates for leadership from within, assigning activities that will foster their growth, and enhancing their visibility (Groves 2007). A self-selection process could be used, but it might be more effective to have leaders nominate potential mentors/mentees. A blended development model in which resident administrative staff help facilitate and maintain these relationships would provide a formal structure that would lend critical support to employees (Gmelch and Buller 2015).

The following steps can be a starting point for any institution, irrespective of its size, type, mission, or academic focus:

- Understand the institution’s mission and goals as they relate to the strategic plan. Leaders and emerging talent must be aligned with what the community believes of itself and what it’s capable of achieving.
- Senior leadership must frequently endorse and demonstrate support for an institutional culture of mentoring, development, and practice. Setting such an expectation serves as a lodestar for the organization to follow.
- Through the use of consulting or in-house expertise, determine where critical gaps lie, and structure the program accordingly. For example, is academic lead-
To find or post a job, visit jobs.aacrao.org or e-mail us at jol@aacrao.org

AACRAO Jobs Online is the only employment site specialized for admissions, enrollment management, student service and other higher education administration professionals.

jobs.aacrao.org
ership in need of support? Do supervisors understand what’s expected of them in terms of supporting senior administration, staff, and students?

- Develop the program with specific goals and outcomes so it is tangible but not unnecessarily burdensome. A program that seems labyrinthine will not succeed.
- Develop a funding model that reasonably supports the initiative. Initiatives without funding are merely ideas.
- Encourage periodic and detailed feedback from mentors and mentees. Understand that, like any relationship, the plan and the effort are fluid; the institution, through its expertise, should address issues quickly and effectively, without excessive procedural delay.
- It’s acceptable to lose mentoring talent to other organizations. This creates a culture in which people understand that they’re valued and allowed to grow—even if it’s elsewhere. The educational process that sends graduates into the world can be the ethos for institution-sponsored mentoring, too.

Maintaining a competitive advantage in a sea of seemingly similar choices will remain a preeminent challenge for many higher education institutions over the next decade. As the cultural landscape continues to shift, and as students continue to seek newer and sleeker methods of learning, it’s incumbent upon institutions to recruit, mentor, and retain top talent that’s poised to address the time-sensitive forces that are eroding traditional modes of higher education delivery. Striving for institutional excellence will require identifying and cultivating individuals with attributes needed for leadership during turbulent times. Mentoring—at the institutional or individual level—will be key to achieving the transformative operational changes that are needed in higher education.

REFERENCES


About the Authors

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Challenges on the Front Lines: Serving Today’s Student Veterans

By Alexander Taylor, Rodney Parks, and Ashley Edwards

In recent years, veterans have enrolled at higher education institutions in vastly increasing numbers to utilize their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. In response to this influx, universities have established a variety of resources and support systems designed to serve the needs of student veterans. There has also been heightened attention toward veterans returning from service with mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and mild traumatic brain injury. Media outlets and politicians have reported that veterans are not receiving the treatment they need in order to transition successfully to civilian life. Quite apart from misconceptions regarding veterans and mental illness, many student veterans struggle to earn a degree because of the rigid structure of higher education and inflexible curricula. The current mixed methods study examines whether college administrators have reported changes in student veterans’ psychological characteristics since the Post 9/11 GI Bill’s full implementation in 2009. With more veterans utilizing their Post-9/11 GI benefits to pursue higher education and with institutions developing departments and staff to serve student veterans, the authors also seek to examine whether there are noticeable changes in student veterans’ behaviors. The research found that higher education administrators do not report more challenges in working with student veterans today than they did in previous years. Participants also discussed the importance of providing support systems for student veterans and identified specific challenges that accompany the transition from the military to college life. Further research is proposed to understand the impact of veterans’ offices on student veterans.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Post-9/11 GI Bill was enacted in 2008, the United States has experienced one of the largest influxes of military troops returning from active duty since the Vietnam War (Institute of Medicine 2013). According to the American Council on Education (McBain, Kim and Cook 2012), the United States has reintegrated more than 2 million troops into civilian life following their service in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Taking advantage of the generous education benefits provided by the Post-9/11 GI Bill, many service members returning from deployment enroll at postsecondary institutions to expand their knowledge, obtain new skills, and earn a degree in hope of improving their employability.

With such a large number of veterans enrolling in higher education, colleges and universities are seeking to become more “veteran friendly” by improving academic resources, financial aid, and support services to meet their needs.
An estimated 62 percent of U.S. higher education institutions currently provide programs and services designed to serve active-duty military service members and/or student veterans (McBain, Kim and Cook 2012). Yet meeting the unique needs of this population remains difficult.

Estimates of the prevalence of PTSD among veterans returning from active duty range from 4 to 20 percent (Institute of Medicine 2013). PTSD has been defined as “stress-related reactions after a traumatic event” that can occur in military and civilian life. Stress-related reactions can be triggered through flashbacks and severe anxiety as well as uncontrollable thoughts about an event and can range in severity. PTSD can dramatically affect veterans’ mental and psychological capabilities—and of those individuals around them. Veterans with PTSD who seek to enroll in higher education may have difficulty earning a degree. Left untreated, PTSD can lead to drug and alcohol abuse, social isolation, and depression (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs n.d.), each of which presents significant barriers to academic achievement.

Despite growing concerns about the experiences and success of student veterans in higher education, little research has investigated how student services administrators tasked with providing resources and services for student veterans perceive their interactions with this population. This omission represents a significant gap in professional knowledge. Like individual and institutional perceptions of other underrepresented groups, those of military veterans are often shaped by misunderstandings and stereotypes. Such perceptions influence the experiences of student veterans as they interact with faculty, students, and staff.

In particular, media representations of the prevalence of PTSD among veterans, while intended to raise awareness of an important issue, may unintentionally create or reinforce stereotypes of student veterans as difficult or aggressive. One survey found that eight in ten Americans believe that veterans are more likely than are non-veterans to suffer from mental health problems, even though this statement is false (Lieberman and Stewart 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, approximately 8 percent of the U.S. population will have symptoms of PTSD at some point in their lives. Thus, veterans and civilians are equally likely to suffer from PTSD, yet media outlets and politicians are quick to reinforce the misconception that veterans are more likely than are non-veterans to suffer from mental illness.

Nonetheless, with potentially one in five veterans returning from service with symptoms of PTSD and with many of these veterans using their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to attend college, it is important to consider whether student veterans are more likely than other students to face challenges during their college careers. The current research examines whether higher education personnel observed changes in student veterans’ psychological characteristics during the five-year period from 2009 to 2014. The study uses a five-year timeframe based on implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2009 and the consequent increase in the number of student veterans enrolling in higher education (Dortch 2014).

To elicit the perceptions of higher education staff, surveys were sent to administrators and staff in offices that provide services to student veterans. By investigating the perceptions of those individuals charged with assisting and supporting student veterans on college campuses, barriers could be identified that might arise as a result of negative perceptions of veterans; strategies could then be proposed for improving communication between administrators and student veterans. The goal of the current study is to improve the resources and services available to student veterans in order to enhance their college experience and facilitate their academic success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008

On June 30, 2008, President George W. Bush signed into law the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which included the Veterans Educational Assistance Act under Title V (Pub. L. 110–252). As with many GI Bills since 1945, recipients receive education benefits according to the length of their service. Today, all active duty service members or veterans who served on or after September 11, 2001, are eligible. Full benefits are provided to service members who served an aggregate of 36 months on active duty in the armed forces; diminished benefits are provided to those who served fewer than 36 months. All eligible individuals receive no more than 36 months of education benefits. Like previous GI Bills, the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance
Act includes provisions for payment, monthly stipends, and the transfer of benefits to a dependent or spouse.

According to the payment structure, active duty members and veterans enrolled in an undergraduate degree program will receive benefits with the approval of the U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs. The payment will cover all tuition provided that it does not exceed the maximum cost of enrolling at any in-state public institution. As a result, fewer student veterans attend private institutions, and private institutions are less likely than are public institutions to provide programs for military veterans (McBain, Kim and Cook 2012).

Benefits also include a monthly stipend for housing and variable costs, such as textbooks and school supplies. One notable feature unique to the Post-9/11 GI Bill is the Yellow Ribbon GI Education Enhancement Program. This program gives eligible service members greater flexibility to pursue a degree at more expensive institutions that have chosen to participate in the program; such institutions cover additional tuition costs. Service members may also be eligible for other benefits, such as tutoring and waiving the costs of certification tests to receive additional college credits.

Despite the many benefits of the Post-9/11 GI Bill for veterans, the legislation introduces administrative challenges for postsecondary institutions. For example, administrative offices responsible for student veterans must frequently update their personal and academic records to ensure that they are actively pursuing a degree (a requirement for receiving GI benefits). In addition, the administration must report any changes to a student’s schedule to the VA and certify that the student is still enrolled at the college. Much of the responsibility for certifying benefits for student veterans rests with college administrative offices. For universities that lack a veterans office, the work of certifying benefits may fall to individuals with little understanding of or expertise in student veterans’ education benefits.

**TRANSITIONING TO POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS**

Veterans face numerous challenges when they return to civilian life. Combat veterans in particular may have incurred physical injuries and/or mental illness as a result of their service. In addition to the estimated 4 to 20 percent of returning troops who have PTSD, another 20 to 23 percent have mild traumatic brain injury (TBI) (Institute of Medicine 2013). Disabilities such as PTSD and TBI may adversely affect afflicted individuals’ psychological stability and learning capabilities. A recent study by the National Center for PTSD (2014) found that PTSD also may contribute to problems such as drug and alcohol use, social isolation, and violence. While many higher education institutions provide support services for students with disabilities, studies have shown that student veterans may choose not to utilize these services, either because of a lack of outreach by the support system or because of the perceived stigma of seeking counseling or psychiatric help (Gonzalez and Elliott 2013).

Many lifestyle factors also pose challenges to veterans’ educational success. The American Council on Education (Soares 2013) has identified a number of risk factors that may affect any college student’s degree attainment, including but not limited to delayed enrollment beyond one year after high school, having dependents, and working part or full time. For veterans, many of these “risk factors” are lifestyle choices that nevertheless jeopardize their chances of completing a degree. Surveys have found that 43.1 percent of student veterans have part- or full-time jobs, compared to only 29.6 percent of non-veteran students (Kim and Cole 2013). In addition, 43.1 percent of student veterans provide for dependents living with them while they are attending school, compared to 12.1 percent of non-veteran students. Such lifestyle factors contribute to the challenges for student veterans attending college.

Veterans by definition are nontraditional students who do not fit neatly into the typical high school–to-college transition model. They report less interaction with their instructors than do non-veteran students. They also are less likely to participate in educational opportunities such as internships and study abroad (Johnson 2010), perhaps in part because of the time limits imposed by the Post-9/11 GI Bill. To effectively serve this demographic, the interests, characteristics, and needs of student veterans must be understood. Institutions then must offer opportunities and provide resources to help veterans take maximum advantage of their educational experience while also enabling them to complete a degree within the provisions of the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

A veteran’s benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill last for no more than 36 months, limiting the time they have to explore new interests or discover new passions. Moreover,
veterans are more likely than are traditional students to attend multiple colleges and to transfer credits, which may further delay their time to graduation (McBain, Kim and Cook, 2012; Vance and Miller 2009). Yet to date only a few clear credit transfer policies have been designed for student veterans.

In addition, very few institutions allow veterans to receive credit for the skills and experiences they obtained while they were deployed (Griffin and Gilbert 2012). Prior learning assessment (PLA) refers to the “process of earning college credit for college-level learning acquired from other sources, such as work experience, professional training, military training, or open source learning from the Web” (Council for Adult Experiential Learning 2015). Military personnel may have difficulty accessing or completing the PLA process because college administrators may have little or no knowledge of this option or of the process for evaluating such non-academic experience.

Parks, Walker, and Smith (2015) found that only half of the military veterans in their 50-person study were notified by their advisors of institutional policies to grant academic credit for military education; 78 percent of participants indicated that academic advisors would benefit from greater knowledge about veterans and how they differ from traditional students. The researchers encouraged universities to provide more information about degree programs to student veterans and to obtain more knowledge about veterans’ benefits and how they intersect with institutional policies (Parks, Walker and Smith 2015). As a result of academic advisors’ and student veterans’ lack of knowledge about PLA as well as a lack of opportunities for student veterans to receive credit for their military service or other life experience, many veterans enroll in courses that teach skills and knowledge they have already mastered (Vacchi 2015).

**MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF VETERANS**

Veterans bring a unique perspective to postsecondary institutions as a result of their maturity and experience as well as their understandings of self, position, and relationships (Kasworm 2005). Yet despite institutional efforts to serve them, veterans may find themselves stigmatized. Often they are viewed in terms of negative stereotypes, harmful myths, and over-generalizations perpetuated by the media. This may lead to feelings of isolation and “psychological invisibility,” a dynamic in which members of an underrepresented group are viewed solely in terms of stereotypical assumptions and prejudices and consequently feel invisible as individuals (Franklin and Boyd-Franklin 2000). This syndrome can harm individuals and groups and may be a catalyst for substance abuse, depression, and other disorders (Baines et al. 2012; Coll 2013; Franklin and Boyd-Franklin 2000).

According to a survey by the Society for Human Resource Management (2010), 46 percent of employers considered PTSD and other mental health issues to be a significant obstacle to hiring veterans. Because of misconceptions about PTSD and the fear of aggressive post-deployment behavior, many employers and organizations are reluctant to employ veterans. The National Center for PTSD (2014) issued a statement that “individuals with PTSD are not dangerous. Although PTSD is associated with an increased risk of violence, the majority of veterans and non-veterans with PTSD have never engaged in violence.” For individuals with PTSD who do exhibit violent behavior, treatment such as substance abuse counseling, psychiatric treatment, and social support can moderate their symptoms (Corrigan and Watson 2005).

Nevertheless, student veterans returning to college may feel unwanted or marginalized, especially because much of the structure and focus of higher education is directed toward traditional students. Thus, student veterans are likely to leave college without adopting a positive student identity (Drake 2011). This may reinforce the stigma associated with being a student veteran and can have a lasting adverse impact on student veterans’ college experience.

Efforts to better serve student veterans are at a crossroads, poised between lingering concerns about their psychological health and college readiness and the desire to enhance services for them and foster their success. The college landscape has changed for student veterans since the Post-9/11 GI Bill’s full implementation in 2009. The bill provides some of the most generous education benefits available to hundreds of thousands veterans (Dortch 2014). This study examines changes in student veterans’ psychological characteristics observed by college administrators over the five-year period from 2009 to 2014. The goal of the research is to contribute to the literature on student veterans and to help institutions better serve their student veteran populations.
METHODOLOGY
The present study consisted of an online, quantitative survey sent to administrators and staff in college and university departments that interact most frequently with student veterans. These include registrars, academic advisors, financial aid officers, admissions counselors, and veterans’ services officers. To obtain a representative sample of postsecondary institutions, surveys were sent to two- and four-year public and private institutions throughout the United States. Two- and four-year institutions first were stratified by state and then were randomly selected. Surveys were sent via e-mail to the respective offices as listed in the institutions’ public directories. This allowed for responses from a representative pool of institutions and enabled analysis for distinctions among various types of institutions.

Participants were asked to complete a quantitative survey based on their experiences with student veterans. Respondents were asked to rate their interactions with student veterans over the previous five years according to their perceived characteristics, including aggression, patience, communication skills, and other traits. Respondents indicated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly decreased) to 7 (strongly increased) whether various characteristics of student veterans had increased or decreased. The period of time was selected because of the increase in the number of veterans returning to higher education after the Post-9/11 GI Bill was fully implemented in 2009 (Dortch 2014; Lieberman and Stewart 2014). Questions also probed whether each respondent’s institution had a designated veterans’ services center and whether the participant had received training from the university on best practices for serving student veterans.

Respondents to the online survey were invited to participate in an additional qualitative phone interview. During the 30- to 45-minute phone interview, participants were asked to clarify and elaborate on their experiences working with student veterans. Of the 87 respondents who completed the online survey, 32 agreed to be interviewed, and 7 were randomly selected for a phone interview at a time convenient for the respondent.

Respondents to the online survey represented 49 states and the District of Columbia. For statistical analysis, SPSS was used to create frequencies and cross-tabulations, as well as to run univariate testing and correlations. Frequencies were drawn to determine respondents’ demographic characteristics, including gender, department, age, and number of years’ experience in postsecondary education. Cross-tabulations included select demographics and Likert ratings along with chi-square analysis to determine whether there was a significant distinction between groups. The chi-square analysis was set to $p < 0.5$.

To test whether certain psychological characteristics had changed, the Likert scale ratings were re-codified so that “No Change” represented 0, a negative integer denoted a “decreased” emotional response, and a positive integer denoted an “increased” emotional response. A one-sample t-test was used to determine whether each characteristic was significantly different from 0.

RESULTS

Demographics
Table 1 (on page 52) shows the demographics of the 87 respondents. Women accounted for 59.8 percent of the sample. The largest group of respondents (32.2 percent) represented registrar’s offices; an additional 20.7 percent were from veterans’ offices, and the remaining participants represented departments such as admissions, academic advising, and financial aid. Among respondents, 28.7 percent had worked in postsecondary education for less than two years (indicative of the recent increase in services for student veterans). Of the sample, 66.7 percent worked at four-year public institutions, 25.3 percent at four-year private institutions, and 8.0 percent at two-year institutions.

A key limitation of the data is that 28.7 percent of respondents had been in their postsecondary position for two years or less. Respondents were asked to rate how veterans’ characteristics had changed in the previous five years, so their reports of veteran behavior doubtless will be less comprehensive than those of professionals with longer tenure. Further analysis demonstrates that this group did not skew the data.

Table 1 shows that 67.8 percent of respondents were aware of a veterans’ services office at their college or university. This is consistent with the literature, which reports that 62 percent of institutions offer programs and services designed for service members and veterans (McBain, Kim and Cook 2012).
Table 1.
Demographics of Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Department</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Admissions/Enrollment Services</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid/Bursar</td>
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<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registrar</td>
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<td>32.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Veterans’ Services</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Years in Position</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>0-2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Type</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Year</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year, Public</td>
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<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year, Private</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Veterans’ Office at Institution</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quantitative Findings

Table 2 (on page 53) presents cross-tabulations between demographics of college administrators and whether administrators had experienced more challenges interacting with veterans at the time this survey was administered compared to five years prior.

Table 2 illustrates several distinctions among administrators at different types of institutions and the challenges they reported in serving student veterans. First, public universities are the most likely of all institutional types to have a designated veterans’ services office. This is largely because GI Bill recipients receive education benefits calibrated to in-state tuition, so most of them attend public institutions.

Because few veterans choose to attend private institutions, such institutions are less likely to create veterans’ services offices and instead serve this student population through existing offices and resources.

Despite significant structural differences between public and private institutions, few distinctions were evident in the challenges administrators and staff reported in working with student veterans. Cross-tabulations revealed no statistical distinction among the types of institutions and the challenges administrators and staff members identified in serving student veterans. Respondents from public and private institutions reported serving student veterans today is no more challenging than in years past. Neither was any distinction evident between the challenges administrators encountered with their institutions’ veterans’ services offices as compared to those encountered where their institutions do not have such an office. Institutions without student veterans’ centers may have limited resources available to serve this population, but the issues they encounter are no different.

Data demonstrated a distinction among individuals’ tenure in postsecondary education and the challenges they reported in working with student veterans. Administrators who had worked in higher education fewer than ten years generally responded more positively than did those with more than ten years’ experience. Reasons for this may include more relevant or targeted training for more recently employed administrators. Those with three to ten years of experience were more likely to report having received training from their university related to working with student veterans whereas administrators with ten or more years of experience reported having received less formal training in this area.
Table 3 (on page 54) shows which characteristics of student veterans respondents reported had changed significantly over the past five years. The Likert scale was recoded so that “No Change” was represented as “0,” positive integers denoted increasing occurrence of the characteristic over the last five years, and negative integers denoted decreasing occurrence. A one-sample t-test was performed to determine whether administrators perceived each psychological characteristic to have increased or decreased among student veterans over the previous five years.

Table 3 indicates that respondents’ reports of many of the negatively associated emotions (e.g., anxiety) have not changed over the past five years. In contrast, reports of positive emotions, such as confidence and persistence, have in-
increased over the same period of time. Results thus indicate that regardless of their own preparation to serve student veterans or the institutional resources available to support them, administrators perceive student veterans to be more motivated, confident, and persistent than in the past.

Over the last decade, higher education has been evolving to better serve the needs of nontraditional students (AACRAO 2008). With more institutions adopting online platforms for class instruction and administrative tasks, higher education has increased the number and types of opportunities available to students from diverse backgrounds—including those with greater and more varied responsibilities outside of college than most students of traditional age have. This shift to address the challenges nontraditional students encounter may help explain why administrators perceive student veterans to be more confident than in the past.

In addition, many institutions have developed more robust online resources to help students navigate the complexities of earning a degree. The significant increase in the number and variety of courses offered online and the enhanced support available for students enrolled in such courses have made course scheduling more flexible and have alleviated some of the stresses on student veterans and other nontraditional students. Many veterans’ services offices have focused on providing 24x7 service online, allowing nontraditional students to change their academic profiles, register for classes, order important documents, and complete required courses at times convenient to themselves. These shifts in institutional norms and policies have helped many student veterans use their GI benefits to make progress toward a degree.

Administrative officers in this study reported that working with student veterans was no more challenging than in previous years, regardless of the type of institution or whether the institution had a dedicated student veter-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error Mean</th>
<th>Sig (2-Tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>-0.90</td>
<td>0.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopelessness</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>0.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyper-Awareness</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panic</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scattered</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhastion</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Processing</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-Stimulation</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Assurance</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 p < 0.10
2 p < 0.05
3 p < 0.01
ans’ office. College officials perceived student veterans to be more persistent and more motivated today than five years ago. (Note that these reports are from the administrators’ perspective and should not be confused with students’ reports of their own experiences while transitioning to or progressing through college.)

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Qualitative interviews were conducted following the collection of quantitative surveys. Survey respondents were invited to participate in a phone interview in which they would elaborate on their experiences with student veterans. Thirty-two respondents agreed to be interviewed and provided their contact information; seven of these were randomly selected to participate in a qualitative interview. Interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes and were conducted by phone at a time convenient for each participant.

Interview questions covered topics such as how individuals’ experiences with student veterans had changed over the previous five years, whether participants believed it was important to provide support networks and services for student veterans, and the difficulties participants had seen student veterans struggle with in recent years. The interviews were transcribed and evaluated by the research team to identify common themes. (Participants were assigned pseudonyms during transcription to ensure confidentiality.) Each respondent’s pseudonym, position, and type of institution is reported in Table 4. Institutions with fewer than 7,000 undergraduate students are characterized as “small” whereas those with undergraduate enrollments 7,000 or greater are “large.”

Researchers used a grounded theory approach to categorize the themes. Three themes were identified that best represented the discussions from the seven interviews: administrative challenges as a result of the Post-9/11 GI Bill; the importance of providing connected services and support networks for student veterans; and the ongoing struggle of transitioning from the military to college life.

THEMES

Administrative Challenges as a Result of the Post-9/11 GI Bill

The Post-9/11 GI Bill provided millions of veterans the opportunity to attend college—and assigned to administrators the burden of navigating the bill’s complex policies to certify benefits. Administrative challenges were one of the topics most frequently discussed among all interviewees. Tim, a student veterans’ officer at a small institution, explained that the Post-9/11 GI Bill has benefited student veterans by providing the “assurance that yes, they will be getting benefits, and they will be coming at a certain time.” Tim believed that other issues on campus can be equally influential on a student veteran’s college experience—e.g., academic advising, student life, etc.—and have a greater impact on their lives and therefore also need to be addressed. But following the implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, institutions have had to focus significant

Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>Registrar/Student Records</td>
<td>Four-Year Private</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Academic Advisor</td>
<td>Four-Year Public</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Veterans Officer</td>
<td>Four-Year Public</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>Veterans Officer</td>
<td>Four-Year Public</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Veterans Officer</td>
<td>Four-Year Public</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Registrar/Student Records</td>
<td>Two-Year Public</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>Academic Advisor</td>
<td>Four-Year Public</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

resources on certifying benefits and updating student records rather than providing additional support networks and services for their student veterans.

Tim noted that although the GI Bill relieves student veterans’ financial burden, some staff resent the burden its administrative complexity places on higher education institutions. In particular, the bill’s certification process
presents a challenge for some institutions. Under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, postsecondary institutions must certify that student veterans are enrolled full time in a degree-seeking program before they can receive benefits. George noted that “this certification process creates an undue burden for administrative offices.” He explained, “At our institution you can change your schedule up to seven days after the class starts... so an official is checking that Post-9/11 file at a minimum twice per student.” For George, certifying veterans’ eligibility is a labor-intensive and time-consuming process—one that is much more challenging than was that required by the Montgomery GI Bill.

Paul, a veterans’ services officer who maintains records for more than 600 student veterans at his university, identified a similar problem. According to Paul, as of 2014, the federal government was allocating more than $40 billion in VA benefits among more than 1 million recipients. As a result, “the government has gotten much more restrictive on what constitutes a degree-seeking program. So the government is wreaking havoc on the school side when they [sic] come in for the audit once a year.” While it is reasonable for the federal government to be selective about what it deems a degree-seeking program in order to ensure that VA benefits are being used appropriately, a result is that many institutions must continually update student veterans’ records.

Importance of Providing Support Networks for Student Veterans

Each university has its own system to certify student veterans and provide them with the necessary educational and support services. Thus, a question about how student veterans interacted with the university administration elicited mixed responses. Since the Post-9/11 GI Bill was passed in 2008, many universities have established departments to provide support and assistance to student veterans transitioning from military service to college life. Such offices have made communicating with and supporting student veterans easier for service members and the institutions they attend. Some respondents noted that a well-equipped office with a well-connected staff is best able to serve student veterans because it provides consistent support and reliable assistance in linking students with other campus offices. Although many respondents expressed this view, others noted that their offices did not receive the resources and funding necessary to effectively serve a growing student veteran population.

For Paul, whose university has had an established student veterans’ office for several years, a well-connected office is crucial to student veterans’ success. He elaborated on the importance of establishing trust between the office and the students it serves:

The biggest benefit of having some designated contact is both consistency and trust.... So having people on campus that are designated can be very advantageous, plus, in time, the consistency of going to the same person can draw a certain amount of trust.

Moreover, he noted, “a well-equipped veterans’ services office with a dedicated staff is vital because it provides dedicated, consistent support and aid for this student population.” Paul identified the value of having a designated contact(s) to instill and maintain trust between the staff and student veterans.

Helen concurred, observing, “Students know that these two people are the people to go to. And these students are frequent flyers here that call our veterans’ officer by her first name. They have a personal relationship with her.” Helen emphasized the importance of providing a strong support system that establishes close connections with student veterans to ensure that they are comfortable interacting with administrators and advisors. This relationship can provide much-needed support for student veterans in their transition from the military to college.

Respondents from universities with well-funded, well-connected student veterans’ offices noted how staff in such offices can relieve a great deal of stress for student veterans. In contrast, respondents from other institutions expressed frustration at the lack of services available for student veterans, citing inadequate institutional resources and poor communication among various offices and departments. Grace, an academic advisor at a public institution, reported that the veterans’ office at her institution has “neither the space nor the resources to meet the needs of its student veteran population.” Grace noted further, “We had to donate resources from our office to their office so they had what they needed to make sure the students get what they needed.” Although there has been an increase in the services available for student veterans at many institutions, progress remains uneven, with many
colleges and universities unable to serve their student veteran populations effectively.

The second common concern cited in interviews was the lack of a support network in the form of communication among administrative departments. The limitations of the Post-9/11 GI Bill sometimes necessitate requesting exceptions to established university policies and guidelines. George explained, "We sometimes get blowback from our university when we try to provide for our student veterans.... From the big picture, working with the administration and working within the red tape of the university can be difficult for our veterans." Many student veterans’ offices encounter obstacles in the form of university policies that were not designed with this student population in mind.

The Struggle of Transitioning from the Military to College

The difficulty of transitioning from the military to college was the topic discussed most often in the interviews. All participants expressed concern for student veterans who are still struggling with this transition. For some, it goes relatively smoothly, but for many it represents a dramatic cultural and social shift that requires a significant adjustment period.

Paul identified the major struggle in the transition process as adjusting to the lack of structure and the unprecedented freedom provided by college life:

'Some newfound freedom tends to be more of a punishment than a reward. Because they were told what to do in the amount of time that they would do it, they just don't like it.... Others like the newfound freedom and can manage it.'

Paul’s view is representative of most of those interviewed. In the military, service members’ actions are determined largely by their superiors, with few decisions left to the individual. Thus, when a service member enters college, individual freedom and the accompanying need for time management can come as a shock.

Helping Veterans Succeed: A Handbook for Higher Education Administrators

Helping Veterans Succeed: A Handbook for Higher Education Administrators is AACRAO’s first comprehensive guide to address the unique needs of student veterans on campus. Through 16 chapters, this handbook gives campus administrators the tools to effectively help veterans achieve their academic goals and transition successfully into the workforce. Written by experts in the field, it covers transfer of credit and prior learning credits, campus communication strategies, certification, orientation efforts, implementing a Yellow Ribbon Program, and helping veterans transition from the classroom to the workforce. In addition, case studies and appendices offer relevant tips and resources for higher education professionals serving student veterans.

Item #0139 | $115 | $80 (members) Available at bookstore.aacrao.org and on Amazon Kindle

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
bookstore.aacrao.org
Respondents noted further that while student veterans usually persist in their education, personal circumstances may require them to transfer to multiple institutions before they complete their degrees. Paul explained, “If you see our statistics, what you will see is a very high rate of persistence. That’s because vets tend to go through at least three institutions if not up to five.… Typically they will go low, high, and then middle [in terms of the rigor of the institution].”

Student veterans have been found to transfer as a result of a variety of lifestyle factors, including employment, raising dependents, and others (Kim and Cole 2013). As student veterans continue their college careers, many seek to earn bachelor’s degrees from more competitive research institutions. If their lifestyles permit, student veterans may opt to transfer to top-tier research institutions. But if top-tier institutions do not prove suitable—whether because of lifestyle changes, rigor of coursework, etc.—they may transfer again to mid-level universities to finish their degrees.

One of the major barriers for student veterans transitioning to college is the higher education curriculum. For decades, higher education has been structured for young adults who have just graduated from high school. Student veterans and other nontraditional students may find themselves at a disadvantage because they are older, financially independent, and have life experiences and perspectives that differ from those of traditional college-age students. These differences may manifest themselves in numerous ways but may have particularly frustrating consequences relative to transfer credit and core competencies.

Respondents noted that evaluating transfer credits within the narrow confines of the traditional college curriculum and Carnegie unit has made it more difficult to serve student veterans. An accurate assessment of transfer credits is essential, yet most institutions do not award academic credit for work or life experience, including military service. Grace explained:

They might get a few physical education credits for their service, but they rarely get any credits for the experiences they have lived…. Their experience in the military gives them skills and experience that are important in building a strong work ethic, but their schools rarely look into that.

Grace continued, “I always tell them that when they come to school here, they can take course examinations, they can do some testing that will earn them some credits.” Placement testing and course challenges can offer partial solutions to the inability to translate military service into academic credit. However, these options cannot entirely overcome barriers related to higher education’s rigid curriculum.

Core competencies established with traditional students in mind are another obstacle for student veterans. Core competencies are essential for developing the fundamental skills and basic aptitudes needed to complete a college degree, but they usually are designed for traditional college students—e.g., those who, because of their age and circumstances, are more willing and able to devote entire terms to non-specialized coursework. The Post-9/11 GI Bill requires that student veterans be registered for 12 credit hours in a degree-seeking program. Although general electives are necessary to earn a degree, some student veterans find that their military background renders general electives redundant.

Not only can it be frustrating for student veterans to spend valuable time taking general electives, but they also may feel out of place in required core courses that are directed toward traditional students. Core requirements help students develop basic skills in such areas as academic writing, general mathematics, and understanding global perspectives, but they may hinder student veterans’ academic progress given their time constraints and the rigidity of the curriculum.

Grace recounted an occasion when she advised a student veteran who was struggling in English 101. When Grace approached the student veteran about the course, the student responded, “I don’t want to go to class and write about those topics! That just seems stupid to me.” It is important for student veterans to fulfill their core requirements and refine their critical thinking skills, but some report that core classes do not take into account their life experiences. In the case of Grace’s student, an appeal to have the topics modified was granted, but many administrators did not support this decision. Grace noted, “Some will say, ‘Oh, that’s just our policy’ when they could appeal things. Some can be sympathetic and understand the struggles for student veterans. But some people are not always willing to do that.”

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) provides a means of accounting for life experience and awarding student veter-
ans the appropriate amount of college credit for their time
on active duty. This could make their transitions to college
more efficient and allow them to achieve more academi-
cally. Developing PLA policies will also encourage student
veterans and academic advisors to obtain more knowledge
on the subject of transfer courses for military members.

CONCLUSION

With thousands of service members returning from de-
ployment and pursuing higher education, many colleges
and universities are altering policies and establishing new
departments to better serve this population. Over the
past five years, postsecondary institutions have created
committees and action plans to address the needs of stu-
dent veterans and to equip their administrations to do so.
McBain, Kim, and Cook (2012) found that the percentage
of postsecondary institutions that increased their staffing
to accommodate student veteran enrollment rose from 29
percent in 2009 to 47.5 percent in 2012. The same study
found that the percentage of institutions with an estab-
lished student veterans’ department increased from 13.4
to 36.2 percent over the same period (McBain, Kim and
Cook 2012). Higher education administrators and staff
have not experienced more challenges working with stu-
dent veterans today than they did five years ago.

Nevertheless, a number of ongoing administrative chal-
enges are associated with the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Many insti-
tutions find it difficult to manage the VA workload required
to certify a student veteran’s benefits. Other institutions
report that some student veterans are struggling in their
classes because of rigid curricula. But many of the prob-
lems student veterans confront in higher education can be
resolved if institutions are willing to change their policies.
Establishing Prior Learning Assessments and improving
transfer credit articulations are two steps institutions can
take to bridge the gap between veterans’ experiences in the
military and college-level general competencies.

This research study found that administrators and staff
perceived increases in happiness, confidence, and motiva-
tion among student veterans over a five-year period and ob-
served no change in student veterans’ negative emotions,
such as anger, sadness, or frustration. This perception of
positive change reflects no noticeable upsurge in PTSD-
related behaviors among returning student veterans, such
as aggression or violence, which some institutions may

have feared. Because of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, student vet-
erans are attending postsecondary institutions in record
numbers. While administrators remain concerned about
student veterans’ ability to transition from the military to
college, most perceive student veterans as motivated and
persistent in their pursuit of a college degree.

The current study has several limitations. Although
participants perceived that student veterans are increas-
ingly persistent and motivated, all student veterans do not
demonstrate these characteristics. Each student is differ-
ent and has unique needs that must be met if he is to thrive
in higher education. Further research is needed to more
fully understand the benefits of hiring veterans’ services
officers as liaisons between student veterans and other stu-
dent services.

Establishing an independent veterans’ office can in-
crease student veterans’ trust and feelings of security from
their first days on campus through their graduation. How-
ever, further research should examine how the training
of higher education administrators and staff could ben-
efit student veterans and what forms of training can best
prepare higher education personnel to interact effectively
with this population. Additional research should explore
how students perceive veterans’ service offices and should
provide direct feedback on the impact of such offices on
student veterans.

Student veterans possess a maturity and discipline that
bring a perspective to the college classroom that differs
from that of traditional college students. Having sufficient
resources and a well-connected veterans’ services office are
keys to providing the most effective support and assistance
for student veterans. With a strong network come consis-
tency and trust, both of which are vital in providing a foun-
dation for student veterans’ academic and personal success.

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About the Authors

ALEXANDER TAYLOR is a senior at Elon University majoring in political science. He has served in the Registrar’s Office as a Student Worker and Research Assistant for the past year, and has contributed to three research publications. Mr. Taylor has also mentored with Dr. Parks for the past year to expand his knowledge of enrollment management and higher education in general. After graduation, Mr. Taylor hopes to relocate to the nation’s capital to intern with AACRAO.

RODNEY PARKS, PH.D., is Registrar and Assistant Professor of Human Services for Elon University, where he has served for the past three years. He is a prolific author, appearing in multiple higher education publications annually, but is perhaps best known for his work in innovative credentialing. His work has gained national attention, and Elon University was recently selected as one of eight recipients of a $1.3 million Lumina grant funding work to extend the transcript. Dr. Parks is also an active mentor for undergraduate student researchers, appearing in nineteen publications with his students over the past five years.

ASHLEY EDWARDS COMBS graduated from Elon University in 2015 with a B.A. in Psychology. While at Elon, Ashley worked with Dr. Parks to co-author several pieces of research concerning the challenges undergraduates face, including sexual orientation and those with traumatic brain injuries. Currently in the Office of University Advancement at The College of William & Mary, Ashley is pursuing her MBA & M.Ed. with concentrations in Project Management and Higher Ed Administration in hopes of returning to Student Affairs in the near future.
Experts have noted a great deal of variability among U.S. higher education institutions’ planning and preparedness for emergency situations. However, resources are available to help campus leaders effectively mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from a multitude of disaster scenarios. One way for emergency managers and campus leaders to engage in a productive conversation about campus risk is to conduct a hazard vulnerability analysis (HVA) using a hazard assessment tool. This paper presents a discussion of the results of a national survey regarding the frequency and use of HVA assessments in higher education as well as a call to action for institutions to develop more intentional and systematic relationships at the state, regional, and national levels.

Under the best of circumstances, U.S. higher education institutions face challenges every day. However, campus operations can be severely threatened or completely halted by natural and man-made disasters (Srinivas 2015). Experts have noted a great deal of variability among U.S. institutions’ planning and preparedness for emergency situations (Kapucu and Khosa 2012; Roscorla 2010; Zdziarcki et al. 2007). Therefore, the goal of this research was to examine the capacity of U.S. higher education institutions in general—and of one institution in particular—to evaluate potential threats using a hazard vulnerability analysis (HVA) assessment. Specifically, investigators sought to identify institutions that used the Kaiser Permanente model or another type of HVA assessment, the frequency with which institutions administered HVA assessments, and the types of risks institutions considered most likely based on HVA assessment scores.

BACKGROUND

The concept of emergency management for U.S. higher education institutions is complex because the range of potential hazards and disasters is almost limitless. Recent examples, among many others, include acts of individual violence (Jensen 2007; Sander 2008; Vanderhart, Johnson and Turkewitz 2015); natural disasters (Gardner et al. 2007; Simmons and Sutter 2012); and influenza and other campus pandemics (Costill 2015).

Because emergencies vary in size and scope, higher education institutions increasingly are adopting an all-hazards approach to emergency management that is comparable to that used by local, state, and federal government entities (Fox and Savage 2009; Kapucu and Khosa 2012; Worsley and Beckering 2007). According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (1996), an all-hazards approach to emergency management combines a chain-of-command structure with the flexibility to adjust to new...
information in real time rather than relying on a rigid set of guidelines based on a particular type of incident.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While many postsecondary institutions have full-time staff members with formal education, training, and certification in emergency management, others employ individuals with add-on responsibilities for emergency management who have little or no formal training or education in this highly specialized field (Kapucu and Khosa 2012; Mitroff, Diamond and Alpaslan 2006). The location of emergency management operations varies by institution, and recovery and response efforts may be influenced by institutional characteristics such as the number of students, faculty and staff members, and visitor populations; geographic landscape of the physical plant; number and types of academic and residential buildings; emergency management budgets; and research activities involving toxic or hazardous materials (Lindell, Prater and Perry 2006; Mitroff, Diamond and Alpaslan 2006).

HAZARD IDENTIFICATION

Many higher education institutions maintain their own police forces; some even manage fire departments, transportation services, and other large-scale operations. Thus, many college and university campuses essentially operate as cities in terms of the services they provide (Mitroff, Diamond and Alpaslan 2006). In addition to the size and scale of the physical plant, educational environments can pose unique challenges to emergency managers as a result of their affiliations with medical centers and research labs in which individuals utilize radiological and other hazardous materials. Further, institutions often host events—e.g., Division I football games—that draw tens of thousands of visitors to campus.

As the complexity of college campuses increases, emergency managers must develop increasingly sophisticated plans and protocols to effectively mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from a multitude of disaster scenarios (Mitroff, Diamond and Alpaslan 2006). Hites et al. (2013) noted that quantifying perceptions of risk on college and university campuses can be a significant challenge. Donahue and Tuohy (2006) suggested that lessons learned from disaster situations tend to be isolated and perishable rather than generalized and institutionalized.

Finally, emergency planning guidelines often provide extensive details about developing a comprehensive institutional emergency operations plan (EOP) and composing a planning team, including collaborative community partners. However, less information is available about sharing tools, resources, and lessons learned at the local, regional, and national levels (Somers and Svara 2009; U.S. Department of Education 2010, 2013).

HAZARD VULNERABILITY ANALYSIS

One way for emergency managers and campus leaders to engage in productive conversation about campus risk is to conduct a hazard vulnerability analysis (HVA) using a hazard assessment tool. HVA assessment tools are designed to compare different types of hazards and to identify events that are most likely to occur as well as risks that would have the greatest impact on the environment. In addition to using historical data, HVAs employ critical thinking and predictive analytics to assess what events are most likely to occur in the future (Perry 2005). These assessments take into consideration all aspects of the college or university environment and rank relevant threats, allowing institutions to identify specific hazards and greatest risks to inform the development of an EOP (Ferrier 2009).

According to FEMA (2010), an EOP is a set of guidelines that defines the scope of preparedness and emergency activities and directs decision making from chain-of-command authority to personnel, equipment, facilities, supplies, and other resources. A number of HVA tools are currently available that combine hazard identification, community impact, and response recommendations; two of the most common are the Kaiser Permanente model and Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) (FEMA 2011).

**Kaiser Permanente Model.** The Kaiser Permanente model uses a categorical model to help individuals identify relative risk. Its categories include naturally occurring events, technological events, human-related events, and events involving hazardous materials. Each category includes between nine and nineteen specific events that are rated by the user based on their probability of occurrence and magnitude. The Kaiser Permanente instrument assesses three types of impacts—human, property, and business—and also factors in opportunities for risk mitigation. Combined rankings of probability, magnitude, and miti-
gation scores are used to determine preparedness, internal response, and external response for communities based on each type of event (Kaiser Foundation Health Plan 2001).

**Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment.** The Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) is a four-step common risk assessment process that helps organizations and communities understand their risks and estimate capability requirements. THIRA helps individuals identify threats and hazards, contextualize threats and hazards, establish capability targets, and apply the results to achieve capability targets and mitigate risks (FEMA 2013). Unlike Kaiser Permanente, THIRA does not provide a quantitative score (FEMA 2013).

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

As previously noted, emergency situations on college and university campuses can vary in size and scope as well as by crisis type. According to the experts, campus emergencies are typically sudden and severe and involve a great deal of uncertainty (Klann 2003; Mitroff and Anagnos 2001; Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger 2007). Pepper et al. (2003) identified two types of crisis situations that are relevant to the discussion of HVAs: external predictable and external unpredictable.

External-predictable events are characterized by externally driven problems that can be anticipated and mitigated through planning and preparation. Prichard (2015) observed that while the total impact of an external-predictable event may be difficult to discern, organizations typically have sufficient notice to examine potential outcomes and solutions. By comparison, external-unpredictable crises are events that lack forewarning, are external to the organization, and typically involve extraordinary levels of mass casualties, damage, or disruption. These events frequently have an immediate and overwhelming effect on state and local responders and require support from the federal government and other entities (PCIE ECIE 2006).

Kreps and Bosworth (1993) suggested that disaster preparation is often lacking due to the infrequency of events, absence of resources, and uncertainty regarding what and how many resources are needed. Others, however, have noted that even an imperfect crisis management plan can provide guidance and vision for decision makers who find themselves responding to crisis situations (Bishop et al. 2015; Schwab et al. 1998). McCullar (2011) advocated that institutional leaders develop a response framework that is flexible enough to use in all emergencies.

**All-Hazards Approach.** According to Drabek (2004), a number of normative theories may be useful to emergency managers, including those that outline common managerial functions (e.g., mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery) as a way to organize the broad strategies and specific tactics of an all-hazards approach. For the purpose of this paper, an all-hazards approach was defined as an integrated hazard management strategy that incorporates planning for and consideration of all potential natural and manmade emergencies (FEMA 2015, National Science and Technology Council 2005).

**SETTING**

The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) is a four-year, public institution in the southeastern United States. The Carnegie Classification system categorizes the University of Alabama at Birmingham under the heading of Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education 2015). UAB is located in the downtown, metropolitan district and enrolls approximately 18,700 students in undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs (University of Alabama at Birmingham 2015). Additionally, the University of Alabama at Birmingham encompasses a world-class medical system, including the only Level 1 trauma center in the state (UAB News Archive 2009).

**THREAT ASSESSMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM**

Emergency managers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham sought guidance to identify hazards and determine risk to inform their EOP, which includes written plans for preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. While planners had collected anecdotal information about the institution’s historical risks, there was no mechanism for quantifying those risks and assessing possible crises that could lead to financial hardship, injury, and/or loss of life (Booker 2014).

Because no published guidelines or hazard identification tools are specific to higher education institutions, UAB emergency managers chose the Kaiser Permanente model in order to assign quantitative values to potential
threats. Specifically, they combined knowledge of weather events in the southeast region of the country with historical knowledge of past incidents to develop a baseline understanding of the types of risks that have most frequently affected the campus community. This background information also provided a means by which to evaluate institutional risks at the state, regional, and national levels.

**METHODS**

As a result of a gap in the literature on institutional emergency management, UAB emergency managers determined that a comparison of risks across academic institutions might help them think more deeply about their own challenges and planning assumptions and thereby improve their ability to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. Emergency managers worked with the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health to develop and disseminate an electronic survey to higher education institutions across the country.

**SURVEY**

Emergency managers distributed a 21-question survey via Qualtrics© (Qualtrics 2016) through a customized URL that was posted to the Disaster Resilient Universities (DRU) listserv administered by the University of Oregon. Based on DRU listserv records, the survey was available to approximately 1,200 emergency managers representing nearly 600 higher education institutions worldwide. The survey was posted with a letter of invitation and remained open for two weeks. A reminder message was sent to the listserv one week after the survey was posted. On average, it took participants approximately fifteen minutes to complete the survey.

**Descriptive variables.** Institutional characteristics were solicited to identify comparison universities. Measures included campus population (faculty, staff, and student); campus setting (urban, rural, suburban); Carnegie classification; medical center affiliation; size of medical center (i.e., number of beds); geographic location; placement of Emergency Management Unit within the institution’s organizational chart; timeframe for completion of most recent hazard vulnerability analysis; instrument used to complete hazard vulnerability analysis (Kaiser Permanente, other); top five institution-specific risks; recommendations for best practices in threat mitigation; and contact information for additional follow-up.

**ETHICS STATEMENT**

Research ethics approval for this survey and its administration was received from the University of Alabama at Birmingham Institutional Review Board (#N150709001). Consistent with the Office of Institutional Review Board (OIRB) policies at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, written consent was not obtained because the research was eligible for the designation “Not Human Subjects Research.”

**FINDINGS**

A total of 59 completed surveys were received for a response rate of 9.8 percent. Despite this relatively low response rate, emergency managers noted that there was sufficient variety among institutional respondents to make preliminary comparisons. Responses were used for descriptive comparisons only. Institutional characteristics are shown in Table 1 (on page 65).

Two-thirds of respondents (66 percent) indicated that they had completed an HVA. Of these, the vast majority (87 percent) had completed the HVA within the past five years. Institutions with higher populations (20,001 or more) had an HVA completion rate 38 percent higher than that of lower populations (20,000 or less). Notably, only three institutional representatives identified using the Kaiser Permanente as their HVA of choice. (See Table 2, on page 66, for a descriptive summary of completion rates by institutional size.)

Approximately two-thirds of respondents (68 percent) reported that either public safety offices (n=29) or occupational/environmental health and safety offices (n=11) were responsible for emergency management. The remaining institutions (n=19) indicated that some “other” unit on campus (32 percent) was responsible for emergency management.

As noted previously, higher education institutions were asked to rank the top five threats and/or risks to their campuses based on HVA scores or narratives. A summary of risks as reported by respondents is shown in Table 3 (on page 67), as are comparison threat levels for UAB as recorded on Kaiser Permanente.
Threat Levels at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Using Kaiser Permanente’s event typology, UAB emergency managers rated threat levels by event category and event types. Emergency managers deemed severe weather as a relatively low threat. However, within the severe weather heading, tornadoes and severe thunderstorms were identified as moderate threats at 50 percent and 39 percent, respectively (Kaiser Permanente Scale: 0–100 percent). Earthquakes, disease/epidemic, and winter weather events (including snowfall, blizzard, and ice storm) were all rated as low threats, at 20 percent, 30 percent, and 19 percent respectively.

UAB also rated fire (internal) as a moderate threat, at 48 percent. Because the Kaiser Permanente model also listed wildfire as a naturally occurring event type in addition to a technological event category, emergency managers could not differentiate between the two and opted to report the latter. Further clarification would be needed for a more accurate comparison between UAB and responding institutions.
Similarly, the Kaiser Permanente instrument did not specifically list active shooter/criminal acts as an event type. Therefore, UAB emergency managers used mass casualty events as a proxy score and rated this event type as a low threat (20 percent).

As a category, events involving hazardous materials were rated as a relatively low threat (27 percent); however, the Kaiser Permanente tool also included hazmat exposure (internal) as an event type under technological events, which UAB emergency managers rated as a moderate threat (44 percent). UAB emergency managers used the technological events category as a proxy for utility failure because the Kaiser Permanente instrument did not include utility failure as a separate event category or event type.

Technological events were rated as a moderate threat (34 percent); however, within this category, threats ranged from low (13 percent) for medical gas failure and medical vacuum failure to high (72 percent) for HVAC failure. IT failure/attack was identified on the Kaiser Permanente tool as information systems failure within technological events; it was rated as a low threat (19 percent).

Civil unrest, listed as civil disturbance on the Kaiser Permanente instrument, was calculated at the cut point of 33 percent; therefore, UAB emergency managers opted to list it as a low to moderate threat. Because the Kaiser Permanente instrument did not include public health emergency as a distinct event, UAB emergency managers used mass casualty incident (medical/infectious) as its proxy. This event type was considered a relatively low threat (19 percent). Transportation incident, listed as transportation failure on the Kaiser Permanente instrument, was also considered to be a low threat (24 percent). Finally, the Kaiser Permanente model did not include the event category or event type of mass gatherings, and there was no suitable option to serve as a proxy. Therefore, UAB reported no score for this event.

DISCUSSION

For this investigation, representatives from a wide cross-section of institutions identified risks they considered most likely as well as those that would have the greatest impacts on their campus communities. The majority of institutions (66 percent) used an HVA assessment to identify campus risks within the past five years; institutions with larger student populations (20,001 or more) were more likely to have conducted an HVA assessment (77 percent) than were institutions with smaller student populations (20,000 or less) (56 percent). Unexpectedly, only three of the 59 responding institutions (5 percent) used the Kaiser Permanente instrument as their HVA assessment of choice. However, given the time, knowledge, and skills necessary to complete the Kaiser Permanente instrument—as well as its affiliation with health systems—this may not be a surprise.

While representatives from all of the institutions who completed the survey identified risks, which were subsequently compiled to show an overall composite score, UAB emergency managers wondered how institutions that had not used an HVA assessment determined their actual levels of risk (44 percent of responding institutions indicated that they had not completed an HVA to identify campus risks). While historical events may provide some level of guidance for future events, a lingering question remains: In the absence of data from an HVA assessment, how are institutions developing their planning assumptions for emergency response?

Based on the results of this survey, the likelihood of conducting an HVA appeared to decrease according to diminishing institutional size. This suggests that a lack of resources may affect an institution’s ability to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from a multitude of disaster scenarios. Yet campuses of all sizes are susceptible to hazards. As Gulf Coast colleges and universities reported

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>HVA Performed?</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20,001 or more</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,001 or more</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000 or less</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000 or less</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, “No one is immune to disaster” (UNCF 2011).

If smaller institutions have fewer resources to implement and test EOPs and yet are subject to the same or similar conditions as larger, better-resourced institutions, then the lack of planning and preparation may place students, faculty, and staff at unnecessary risk. Thus, it may be worthwhile for higher education institutions to consider building a more intentional and systematic network for sharing resources by state or region. Further, risk managers, emergency managers, or other institutional representatives might benefit from communicating with peers at like-size institutions regarding HVA resources and mitigation plans. These steps may be occurring informally or even through professional organizations, but the lack of HVA usage reported in this survey indicates that college and university campuses still have needs in this area.

**LIMITATIONS**

As noted above, the response rate to this survey was low (9.8 percent), which significantly limits the generalizability of the research findings. In addition, characteristics of responding institutions (e.g., size, location, and services) inherently affect the types of events and responses that were reported. As a result, caution should be used in interpreting the results. Finally, only three institutions reported using the Kaiser Permanente instrument as their HVA assessment of choice, and only one of the three reported subscores for category types. A more targeted approach to this study might involve identifying institutions that use the Kaiser Permanente instrument prior to administering the survey as a way to develop more accurate comparisons. Future researchers are also encouraged to add a qualitative component in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of emergency planning across institutional types using HVAs.

**CONCLUSION**

Planning for and responding to emergency situations on college and university campuses is challenging and complex. Institutions frequently serve multiple audiences, and maintain sophisticated infrastructures. Some may even introduce radiological or hazardous materials to the environment as a result of ongoing medical and scientific research. The range of naturally occurring and human events makes it clear that there is no shortage to the types of risks that may threaten the health and well-being of a campus community. At the same time, resources are available to help institutions plan for and decrease the effects of these risks.

### Table 3.

**Top Risks Identified by Higher Education Institutions and UAB**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risks</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>UAB Threat Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Severe Weather</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Moderate¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Shooter/Criminal Acts</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Low²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAZMAT</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Low to Moderate³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utility Failure</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Low to Moderate⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disease/Epidemic</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Weather</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT failure/Attack</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Low⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Unrest</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Low to Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health Emergency</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Low⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation Incident</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Gatherings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>No score²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Casualty Event</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Low³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Fire reported as internal threat; category did not include threat of wildfire
² Active shooter/criminal acts is the same score as mass casualty event on the Kaiser Permanente instrument.
³ Average for hazardous materials events and HAZMAT (internal) scores on Kaiser Permanente instrument
⁴ Technological event category served as a proxy for utility failure
⁵ Listed as information systems failure on the Kaiser Permanente instrument
⁶ Listed as mass casualty incident (medical/infectious)
⁷ There are no equivalent events on the Kaiser Permanente instrument for mass gatherings.
Emergency managers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham administered a national survey to participating members of the Disaster Resilient Universities (DRU) listerv to assess current usage of HVA assessments and to compare HVA results across institutions. In doing so, UAB emergency managers initiated a critical dialogue about readiness in higher education and developed a foundation upon which to build their own network of peer institutions for information and resource sharing.

This study should be considered a preliminary attempt to assess the frequency and use of HVA assessments in higher education; however, based on initial findings, much work remains to be done. Only 5 percent of responding institutions reported using the Kaiser Permanente instrument as their HVA assessment of choice, and fully one-third of respondents had not completed an HVA of any type. While institutional representatives identified potential campus risks, it was unclear how many of these institutions actually determined risks. In addition, HVA usage appeared to decrease as the size of student populations decreased. As previously noted, disasters do not discriminate according to institutional size, and a lack of planning and preparation could put campus populations at unnecessary risk.

While many disaster situations are inherently unpredictable, the more a campus knows about its own threat profile, the better prepared it can be. Developing an emergency operations plan informed by an HVA and framed by an all-hazards approach may mitigate future emergency situations.

Fostering intentional and systematic relationships among institutions at the state and regional levels may lessen the impact of potential resource gaps. Cavanaugh (2006) surmised that [campus] leaders must develop a mindset of not if but when a crisis will happen. It is the hope of this research team that this preliminary study will encourage campus leaders to consider using an HVA assessment to mitigate and manage unfortunate but inevitable events.

REFERENCES


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- historical overviews
- education ladder(s)
- grading system(s)
- sample credentials
- placement recommendations
- lists of postsecondary institutions

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Now that enrollment managers have recovered from the stress and hectic activities leading to May 1 and have officially closed the book on the class of 2016, it is important to consider a few interesting take-aways from a book on optimism and outlook. *Up: How Positive Outlook Can Transform Our Health and Aging*, by Hilary Tindle, inspires reflection on the important role that an optimistic outlook plays in managing enrollment and leading enrollment management teams effectively.

**ENROLLMENT MANAGERS: WHO ARE WE?**

Enrollment managers, like most managers, have goals that must be focused on with precision, excitement, and vigor. Among other things, enrollment managers must understand (and effectively share with others) what enrollment management is *not*: a quick fix to increase enrollment; solely an organizational structure; an enhanced admissions and marketing operation; or an administrative function that operates separately from the academic mission of the institution. In addition, enrollment managers must excel at enrollment planning. Typically, enrollment planning unites undergraduate and graduate recruitment plans, out-of-state recruitment plans, marketing plans, retention plans, international enrollment plans, academic affairs strategic plans, academic college enrollment plans, diversity plans, and financial aid strategies. Finally, enrollment managers must “keep strong and carry on,” always maintaining the most positive outlook possible.

**OUTLOOK 101**

One’s outlook is the lens through which she views the world. According to Tindle, “Our outlook is the product of our genes and life experiences” (2013, p. 5). Research shows that one’s outlook has the potential to influence every facet of one’s health, from how quickly one recovers from an illness or surgery to whether one becomes depressed, develops cardiovascular risk factors, or suffers a heart attack, stroke, or cancer, or even how well one cares for oneself when her health begins to break down (p. 5).

Tindle identifies several kinds of outlook, including optimism and pessimism, and invites readers to discover their own. To put the broader topic of outlook in context, Tindle reminds readers of the “big five” personality and character traits that are considered to account for the majority of variation in human personality.

The “big five” traits are:

- Openness to experience (imaginative, interested in new ideas)
- Conscientious (reliable, persistent, striving to achieve)
- Extroversion (being sociable and generally positive)
- Agreeableness
- Neuroticism (highly prone to distress) (p. 29)

According to Tindle, of these five, neuroticism has been linked most consistently to negative health and conscientiousness and openness most consistently to positive health. The author goes on to describe optimism as “a general hopefulness for the future” and pessimism as optimism’s polar opposite. Pessimism is a tendency to lack hope for good things to come or to take lack of hope one step further so as to expect the worst (p. 28). One way to determine whether one is an optimist or pessimist is to take the Life Orientation Test.

**THE LIFE ORIENTATION TEST**

The Life Orientation Test (LOT) — Revised (Scheier, Carver and Bridges 1994) was developed to assess individual differences in generalized optimism versus pessimism. This measure has been used in a good deal of research on the behavioral, affective, and health consequences of this personality variable. The LOT-R is a brief measure that is easy to use and is shared in *Up* (Tindle 2013, pp. 78–79).

**LOT-R**

Be as honest and accurate as you can throughout. Try not to let your response to one statement influence your responses to other statements. There are no correct or incorrect answers. Answer according to your own feelings rather than how you think most people would answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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1. In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.
2. 3. If something can go wrong for me, it will.
4. I’m always optimistic about my future.
5 6 7. I hardly ever expect things to go my way.
8 9. I rarely count on good things happening to me.
10. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.

Scoring and Interpretation

To score, first subtotal the answers to questions 1, 3, and 6. Questions 2, 4 and 5 are reversed scored, meaning that a 1 is scored as a 5 and a 2 is scored as a 4 (3 remains 3). Once you’ve reverse-scored these three questions, subtotal them and add this to the first subtotal for your final score (p. 79). The higher your score on the LOT-R, the more optimistic your outlook.

PRAGMATIC, INCREMENTAL, STRUGGLING, AND ENDURING

In addition to sharing information about the LOT-R, Tindle describes types of optimists: pragmatic, incremental, struggling, and enduring.

- The pragmatic optimist (guardedly optimistic) believes that most positive outcomes may result from scanning the horizon, anticipating possible scenarios, and formulating a plan B if things become unstable. In some cases, the very act of not expecting misfortune can almost guarantee it through sheer lack of preparedness.

- The incremental optimist builds skills (and optimism) bit by bit.

- The struggling optimist takes frequent side trips through valleys of pessimism and doubt. This person generally maintains a hopeful outlook and exerts a lot of energy trying to keep himself on solid, hopeful ground—but does not always succeed.

- The enduring optimist stays optimistic even if doing so ultimately requires long-term endurance through desolate times.

Higher education is the perfect work environment for enduring optimists, especially as gaps in college attainment persist and new challenges emerge. As was recently shared in the University Business article “New Pell Grants to Pay for College Classes in High School:”

Earning a college degree is an increasingly important step toward entering the middle class. Yet less than 10 percent of children born in the bottom quartile of household incomes attain a bachelor’s degree by age 25, compared to over 50 percent in the top quartile. Many high school students—especially those from low-income backgrounds—lack access to the rigorous coursework and support services that help prepare them for success in college. (Botelho 2016)

Deep-rooted societal issues can test the outlook of even the most optimistic person (even one with “optimistic genes”).

IS OUTLOOK A PRODUCT OF NATURE OR NURTURE?

According to Tindle, research shows that up to 50 percent of one’s outlook is genetic. A UCLA study found that a gene encoding the receptor for the hormone oxytocin is related to traits such as optimism. Oxytocin has myriad effects on humans’ social functioning but is best known for its role in parent-child bonding; it has been simplistically dubbed the “love hormone.” Oxytocin also protects the nervous system from shutting down in the face of stressful circumstances—especially those that require being still rather than fighting or fleeing (DeAngelis 2008).

Nevertheless, UCLA researchers point out that genes are not destiny. Tindle concurs and reminds readers that “if our genes determine less than half of our outlook, then we have control over more than half” (p. 160). Everyone can take proactive steps toward being his best self...starting today.

Optimus (Latin for “Best”)

Optimism derives from the Latin word optimus, meaning “best;” in other words, the optimistic person always looks for the best in any situation and expects good things to happen. After reading Up and thinking more about outlook, the reader will be much better prepared as she pivots toward another recruitment cycle.

THE 2016 ENROLLMENT MANAGER’S OUTLOOK QUESTIONNAIRE

Now consider the non-scientific “Enrollment Manager’s Outlook Questionnaire:” On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you respond to these enrollment management scenarios? Give yourself a 5 if your response would be considered “glass is half full” and a 1 if your response would be considered “glass is half empty.”

- A group of student protesters occupies your administration building—the same building in which an upcoming spring yield event is to be held. The students
are annoyed that the university has not agreed to divest from fossil fuels, and the building is starting to smell like it has been occupied for nearly a month. With no other space on campus large enough to accommodate the event, you’re stuck.

A new Fair Labor Standards Act law has been announced that could impact the classification of admission counselors and other staff who earn less than $30,000 per year. This unfunded mandate could have a significant impact on an already stretched budget.

The director of financial aid shares that the financial aid IT person (the search for whom took six months and who has been with the university less than a year) just resigned, and no one is readily available to fill the role (perfect timing with prior-prior-year FAFSA on the horizon).

A contract with a key vendor is up for renewal after a busy year of planning and progress. The vendor assists with international recruitment—a key component of your recruiting plan. Wholly unexpectedly, the vendor doesn’t renew.

Two seasoned admission counselors resign in August, just weeks before the busy fall recruitment season begins.

It’s December, and you’re significantly lagging behind your out-of-state application targets; the target of 20 percent of the class seems completely out of reach.

Your enrollment target is increased mid-cycle, pushing you well beyond your “stretch goal.”

A snowstorm hits in early spring, resulting in the need to cancel your first junior open house of the season.

A wave of early retirements results in the loss of key staff in roles they had occupied for 30+ years.

A commuter student drives to campus with a huge confederate flag waiving from the back of his pick-up truck. Freedom of speech, yes; good for recruitment, no.

If you score a 50 on this test, you’re pretty optimistic and are primed to tackle another fun and exciting year in higher education enrollment management. If you score less than 50, there’s ample room for improvement. In any case, just remember: Genes are not destiny!

REFERENCES


About the Author
KIMBERLEY BUSTER-WILLIAMS is Associate Provost for Enrollment Management at the University of Mary Washington. Buster-Williams has more than two decades of experience in higher education, including senior administrative assignments at Northern Illinois University and the University of Michigan—Flint. Buster-Williams earned an Ed.S. degree in Higher Education Administration, a master’s degree in Education Administration, and a bachelor’s degree in English, all from Old Dominion University.
Merging the Mazes: Joint Admission as a Transfer Student Pathway

By Brett Morris and Lisa Cox

“When we in higher education think about transfer students, we see pathways; when students think about transferring, they see mazes.” —Anonymous Provost

The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Research Center reports that 48 percent of all students begin their postsecondary education at community colleges—15 percentage points more than the number of students who begin their postsecondary education at four-year public institutions. Why this is is pretty easy to explain: Access is easier because admission is open, community colleges are conveniently located, and they cost less. At the same time, obtaining a bachelor’s degree has been and continues to be the primary goal of eight in ten new, first-time community college students (Handel 2012). The NSC estimates that only approximately 25 percent of these students end up transferring to four-year institutions within six years; among those who do, 45 percent transfer more than once (AAC&U 2015).

Thus, the evidence indicates that despite their desired outcome of earning a bachelor’s degree, many students never do so. In reality, transfer students are a forgotten commodity. Tracking the academic journey of a transfer student is difficult, and too often, transfer policies languish because they have little to no bearing on national rankings. Transferring from one institution to another remains an opaque, convoluted, and confusing process. While serving as an executive at the College Board, Handel summarized the problem:

The nearly endless number of inter-institutional articulation arrangements necessary to link curricula at two- and four-year institutions has led to the creation of an articulation bureaucracy, stunning in its complexity and nuance, which often hampers rather than assists students’ academic progress (Handel 2013).

Many obstacles prevent students from completing the transfer process, but one of the greatest is “lost” credits. According to AACRAO’s Transfer Handbook, of all the students who transfer to four-year institutions, only 58 percent are able to transfer 90 percent or more of their credits (Atwell et.al. 2015). The National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS) recommends that transfer-receiving institutions provide timely degree audits, preferably before enrollment, so that students can make informed decisions prior to incurring significant financial expense. NISTS would also prefer that conversations about credentialing move beyond credit acceptance to credit applicability (Marling 2013). Accepting and recording credits are necessary first steps, but credit acceptance often becomes an empty promise as transfer credits end up
as excessive free electives and ultimately lengthen the time to degree. Some blame for this rests with four-year faculty members’ reluctance to assign value to community college instruction, but the growth of accreditation has reduced faculty flexibility, resulting in a dwindling number of elective credits available to students to explore and broaden their education.

Transfer students “shop” their credits, looking for a school where most of their credits will transfer; this is especially true of online distance learners. Without a clear understanding of where they are headed, community college students soon discover that lower-division prerequisites, general education courses, and supporting course requirements vary significantly from one four-year institution to another. Logic might suggest that a specific degree is pretty much identical at all higher education institutions, but in reality that is far from true. Faculty at each institution take varying approaches to presenting their disciplines in such a way as to distinguish their particular programs. Transfer students shopping multiple institutions soon discover the improbability of being able to complete a degree plan that meets the requirements of several four-year institutions simultaneously (Handel 2013). While many (if not most) institutions post some form of transfer equivalency tables on their websites, course-by-course comparisons are hardly an efficient method of determining where credits will count within a program. And course evaluations for prospective students can be next to impossible to obtain. Registrar staffs at four-year institutions manage large volumes of credit evaluations for admitted students and typically lack the resources to also complete credit evaluations for prospective students (Handel 2013). This means that transfer students must decide which institution to attend without full knowledge of how their community college credits will count in their new programs of study.

To address the lost credit issue, faculty have gravitated to the perennial articulation agreement—attempts by two- and four-year institutions to align their learning outcomes on a program-by-program and course-by-course basis. Like a blueprint, an articulation agreement prescribes the ideal pathway. But as Marling (2013) observes, no two transfer students are alike. Given that 45 percent of transfer students actually transfer more than once, the one-size-fits-all articulation model is an ineffective solution, requiring continuous efforts by both parties to maintain alignment. Articulation agreements are valuable in diffusing disagreements over academic preparation, credit transfer, and control of the baccalaureate degree, but these details are of little interest to students. Rather, transfer students are most interested in knowing how courses they took at community college will transfer and whether they will count toward their chosen degrees (Handel 2013). Ultimately, articulation agreements are inefficient policy instruments because they are institutionally focused. What is needed is a student-focused solution.

To move beyond the articulation agreement, some community colleges and four-year institutions have signed formal agreements offering transfer admission guarantees (TAGs) or dual enrollment programs. TAGs guarantee admission to transfer students who complete an academic contract that specifies certain requirements a student must complete by the time of transfer; typically, they require students to have regular conversations with a community college or four-year advisor to verify that they are on track and making satisfactory academic progress. Dual enrollment programs are slightly more advanced, offering community college students the opportunity to enroll simultaneously in courses at the two-year and at the four-year institution; they also may include access to libraries, special lectures, sporting events, and, in some cases, on-campus housing (Handel 2011). At the heart of both of these policy instruments is an individualized advising experience created by the sharing of a student’s personal academic record and supported by informed advising at both the two- and four-year institution.

Choosing the advanced policy instrument most appropriate for an institution depends on many factors. Dual enrollment programs are likely to work best when the community college and the four-year institution are within close proximity, facilitating cross-enrollment and joint use of resources. TAG agreements work well when the distance between institutions is considerable, but staffing is sufficient and appropriately trained to manage and advise students from a distance. If the volume of transfer students is sufficient, it is ideal to place a four-year transfer advisor at the community college on a permanent or semi-permanent basis; this can make a TAG or dual enrollment policy even more effective.
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JOINT ADMISSION AS A TRANSFER STUDENT PATHWAY

Initiatives such as TAGs and dual enrollment require advance support services that help prospective transfer students plan their programs of study, select courses, and prepare for their transition to the four-year campus's academic and social culture. The remainder of this article explores the details involved in designing, implementing, and managing advanced transfer policy instruments.

Before deciding whether to develop a TAG or dual enrollment policy, decision makers at four-year institutions should consider the following questions:

- Does the institution have the proper staffing in place, and are staff adequately trained to support, advise, and assist students throughout the transition process?
- Are administrative tools such as transfer equivalency tables and automated degree audits in place?
- Is there a sufficient volume of transfer students to warrant such a policy and the necessary staff?
- Does a transfer culture exist at both the community college and the four-year institution to support an advance transfer initiative?

If the answer to these questions is "yes," then the conditions are appropriate for developing a TAG or dual enrollment transfer policy. If the answer to these questions is "no," then these conditions do not exist, and further evaluation and actions may be needed to set the conditions for success. Of the questions, the last is the most important as it determines whether either policy instrument will succeed. Without mutual interest in creating a student-focused pathway, the policy will fail. For the four-year institution, that begins with valuing the foundation of instruction being laid by the community college faculty and being willing to accept coursework and grant exceptions as appropriate. Community colleges must be willing to support transfer students and must understand that this may result in their leaving before they earn credentials. A positive attitude and policy relative to reverse transfer credentialing is a clear indicator that the positive culture exists at a partnering community college. In essence, a “Miracle on 34th Street” attitude is of paramount importance. As in the movie, in which the owners of Macy’s and Gimbel’s discover that it is good business to help customers find exactly what they need regardless of where it is purchased, so community colleges and four-year institutions must place student interest first. Helping students achieve their educational goals must be the priority, even if sharing the journey requires a miracle of cooperation.

Creating an individualized advising experience sounds easy but is difficult from a practical standpoint. Access to transfer equivalency tables is fairly common, but access to an automated degree audit typically is restricted to currently enrolled students. Without degree-audit automation and a steady flow of current transcript information, the advisement of transfer students reverts to a manual process reliant upon catalog information, course description comparisons, curriculum guides, and equivalency look-ups. Depending on the volume of students in the transfer pipeline, a manual system is highly inefficient. Thus, the second condition is key before moving forward with a TAG or dual enrollment strategy.

Granting would-be students access to the degree audit system can be a major undertaking. Registrars rightfully protect this access not only to ensure data integrity but also because of FERPA. Access is limited to students who have been accepted and who are prepared to register for classes. Thus, any successful TAG or dual enrollment initiative begins with the transfer student’s admisibility to the bachelor’s degree-granting institution. Once deemed admissible, these students need to be identified in the student information system (SIS) so they are not dropped from active status when the registration window closes (action that would trigger termination of the automated degree audit).

The adage “the devil is in the details” holds true here. In September 2014, Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) entered into a TAG to assist community college students who identified early in their enrollment that their ultimate goal was to earn a bachelor’s degree from EKU. Eastern Kentucky enrolls many first-generation and low-income students, and many of these begin their postsecondary education at one of 72 KCTCS campuses statewide. Recruited and supported by the EKU’s Student Outreach and Transition Office (SOTO), nearly a thousand of these students transfer each year. In fact, the idea for TAG originated among SOTO staff. SOTO advisors at community colleges had devised a work-around by having students apply to the university each semester (with an application fee waiver). With each application, the community col-
lege student would send updated transcripts, which were recorded and included in his DegreeWorks audit (making it possible to conduct an effective advising session). The transfer advisors reported that working with prospective transfer students earlier in the process had helped mitigate the “lost credit” problem. This led to efforts to formalize the process and eliminate the need for students to apply each term and incur the additional cost of sending updated transcripts. The result was a TAG dubbed the “colonel connection” (named in honor of EKU’s mascot).

For a TAG to work effectively, a procedure must exist for identifying (“tagging”) the participant’s records, and academic advising must be available. For advising to be sufficiently precise, a continuously up-to-date degree audit for the bachelor’s degree plan is needed. These were the objectives of the Colonel Connection. First, a method was needed for tagging the Colonel Connection student’s academic record in the student information system (SIS). At EKU, as at most schools, the admission process triggers the creation of a student’s academic record. Thus, for all students participating in the TAG program, the journey begins with applying and being admitted to a university according to standard admission criteria and procedures for transfer students. Note that because many high school seniors in Eastern Kentucky apply to both EKU and a KCTCS school, accommodations were made for students who ultimately decided to enroll at a KCTCS schools but who had applied and were admitted as freshmen to EKU for the fall term. If these students join the Colonel Connection program during their first year, they are not required to reapply for admission (this policy excludes drop-outs, withdrawals, and stop-outs). Once a student agreement is signed and a community college transcript received, the EKU registrar tags and reactivates the student’s EKU academic record, which also reactivates the automated degree audit.

Solving the admissibility issue was relatively easy; determining where to place the Colonel Connection tag in the SIS so the student’s academic record remained active without interfering with official data collection and reporting proved more difficult. Ultimately, two new SIS attributes were devised to identify Colonel Connection students: one for those entering the program and a second for students in the program who declare that they are ready to transfer in the subsequent term. Having the two attributes permitted reporting to be modified so as to eliminate the first attribute and include the latter. This ensured data integrity for reporting to Kentucky’s Council on Post-Secondary Education (CPE) and the Department of Education’s IPEDS database.

With the SIS tagging issue resolved, the next hurdles were to identify who the Colonel Connection students were; to inform them of program criteria; and to monitor their continued eligibility to transfer to the university. A written student agreement was devised that served these multiple functions: it advised students as to what they must do to remain eligible for transfer; it provided authorization for the sharing of academic records between institutions; and it became the means by which a student declared his intention to transfer and into which program. Key information in the agreement was the student’s identification number at each institution (critical for identifying, tracking, and managing each student). Once the agreement was signed by the student, it was scanned and attached to the student’s SIS records and shared with the community college registrar for purposes of FERPA and advising.

A central component of TAG is the process for transmitting the student’s community college academic record or transcript to the four-year institution. Transmittal needed to be effortless and cost free for students in the program. Even though student agreements are sent to each community college’s registrar as they are signed, it is difficult for community college staff to stay continuously apprised of who has left the program and who remains eligible to transfer. To expedite transcript transmission, EKU is working to create an automated end-of-term e-mail to notify the various community college registrars of which students are still active in the program and to request copies of their most recent end-of-term transcripts (currently the process is manual). It is essential to include each student’s full name and community college ID number in the message. As transcripts are received, they are included in the registrar’s normal workflow (they are neither expedited nor delayed). It is important to list “in-progress” coursework on the community college transcript. Accurate and effective advising requires that courses for which the student has registered for an upcoming term and which she is in the process of completing are reflected on the community college transcript and recorded on the student’s degree audit at the four-year institution.
All actions to this point serve one purpose: to build the most complete four-year degree audit possible. Every seasoned academic advisor will agree that an accurate degree audit is prerequisite to effective advising. The likelihood of TAG students losing credits during the transfer process can be greatly reduced by using existing technology to provide an accurate audit. But more is needed for precise advising: Transfer advisors at the community college and the four-year institution should have a thorough understanding of the other institution’s curricula. This can be daunting given the number of academic programs and courses at each institution.

Having dedicated program advisors at both institutions is vital, as is appropriate training. Advisor staffing is always a concern, especially when the volume of transfer students is substantial. At EKU, transfer admission advisors are supported by a team of college advisors from across the university. Each college has designated one of its professional advising staff to serve as the primary Colonel Connection advisor. This has helped ensure the accurate and consistent flow of information between SOTO staff and the five colleges; it also provides for an effective division of labor. The SOTO transfer admission advisors at the community colleges recruit prospective transfer students into the program and help them apply for admission and complete their Colonel Connection student agreements. They also conduct the initial advising sessions with students, assessing their updated four-year degree audits. Once students are fully in the program, the designated college advisors conduct subsequent advising sessions until the students are in their final term at the community college. To help with cross-training, the SOTO director schedules an annual workshop for the KCTCS transfer and college advisors. This provides advisors from both institutions with the opportunity to learn about changes to curricula. When community college students are in their final term and ready to transfer, SOTO staff help them sign the Colonel Connection transfer request; request a change in the database attribute; and arrange for a campus visit, schedule orientation, help them register for EKU classes, and prepare them for other transition activities.

TAG RESULTS

As mentioned earlier, previously admitted students who join the Colonel Connection program during their freshman year are easily admitted and processed through the tagging system. It is more difficult to monitor continuing KCTCS students—including those whose last application is more than one semester old and those who never applied. It is not uncommon for these students to submit a Colonel Connection agreement before they have been admitted. The program administrator routinely monitors the admission status of these students and forwards the agreements to the registrar’s office only after they have been fully admitted for the upcoming term. To date, more than 150 students have signed a Colonel Connection agreement, and 120 have enrolled in the program. At any given time, approximately 20 students are in preliminary phases of becoming fully enrolled Colonel Connection students.

Thirty students have matriculated through the program. Analysis of their degree audits reveals that 77 percent (23 of 30) were able to transfer 90 percent or more of their credits. Although the sample size is small, this constitutes preliminary evidence that the TAG policy will have a positive impact on these students’ transfer experiences. (It should be noted that very few of those who matriculated joined the program during their first term of community college enrollment.) As the number of freshmen signing up for the program increases, it is likely that the average number of lost credits will decrease even further.

LESSONS LEARNED

Four-year institutions considering adopting such a program should note that the administration of a TAG requires extensive planning and constant monitoring. For example, students occasionally attempt to sign up for the program too late in their community college career—occasionally even as they are ready to transfer. In such instances the agreements are not processed, and the students are offered advising through the traditional transition process. Students who submit agreements but have not been admitted are contacted and instructed about applying as a necessary prerequisite. Depending on the situation, admission may be delayed as other documents (e.g., high school or other college transcripts, ACT scores, etc.) are received. SOTO staff routinely monitor the admission status of these students and then scan the agreements into the SIS once they have been admitted.

Students in the program receive ongoing communication about deadlines and the actions they need to com-
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plete to officially transfer. Like communications with most students, they are not always read. Occasionally, students will mistakenly submit new applications for admission. In such instances, the latest applications are withdrawn and the students are invited to complete their Colonel Connection Admission Request forms. When the forms are submitted may affect students’ ability to receive transfer scholarships; therefore, students are sometimes counseled to submit their own final transcripts to ensure that they meet the scholarship deadline.

Administering a new program that spans multiple work units can take time, and occasional hiccups are likely. Program administrators should identify key points of contact in the office of admission and the registrar’s office to expedite adjustments to students’ SIS records. Other critical steps include confirming that new procedures and processes are being completed on time and that automated actions are working as intended. Occasionally a necessary step may be missed inadvertently, so attention to detail early on is necessary. Do not overlook the importance of information technology (IT), which should be used to generate reports that identify students who are in the program, those needing to be assigned advisors, and those who are ready to move forward.

CONCLUSION

In today’s higher education marketplace, the value of transfer students is increasing even as the freshman market is shrinking. A national movement to collect and analyze college completion data at the student level is growing, as is the recent trend of performance-based funding to promote and reward graduation outcomes rather than enrollments.

As attention turns increasingly to transfer students, implementing best practices such as TAGs and dual enrollment instruments will become the norm. Institutions that have given little consideration to transfer student success will change course, and those with strong transfer initiatives will experience increased competition. Faculty will be called upon to reevaluate transfer credit policies and to award more credit for prior learning. As competition for transfer students increases, national lead-generation services will expand their offerings, and four-year institutions will mine National Student Clearinghouse data more carefully in order to determine where non-matriculating applicants actually enrolled and to pursue them yet again.

Issues impacting transfer students will move from the back burner to the front—a move long overdue.

REFERENCES


About the Authors

DR. BRETT MORRIS is the Executive Director for Enrollment Management at Eastern Kentucky University where he is responsible for domestic and international undergraduate recruitment operations, admissions, and financial and transition assistance to prospective students seeking entry to the university. Prior to his current role he served as the Director of Admissions and Associate Director for Veterans Affairs at EKU. He also served as the Professor of Military Science and Leadership from 1999–2004. Dr. Morris earned his Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and has a Masters in National Security Affairs from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

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Gender Pronouns: Recommendations from an Institution with Solutions

By Rodney Parks, Margaret O’Connor, and Jesse Parrish

As the population of transgender and gender-nonconforming students at colleges and universities increases, it is important to examine how institutions have adjusted policies and student systems to create a universally welcoming environment. Transitioning is often a challenging and sensitive process, making each interaction in a new setting vital to student development. Even the use of the wrong pronoun or a renounced legal name in a classroom setting can lead to embarrassment for the student and awkwardness for the faculty member. These social setbacks can be detrimental to both the transgender student’s self-concept and the campus’s efforts at creating an inclusive community. From an enrollment management perspective, a lack of attention to these matters can also adversely affect retention.

In an effort to address the needs of this burgeoning subpopulation, universities are seeking ways to modify systems to help transgender and gender-nonconforming students navigate these challenges. Specifically, some institutions are building technologies that recognize the unique aspects of their personality. In fall 2015, Elon University became an early adopter of the methodical use of a pronoun in the university’s student information system. The system allows for the use of the pronoun in every aspect of the student’s life on campus, from an instructor’s class roll to the name used on campus identification cards. Together, the offices of the university registrar, admissions, application technologies, and student life are working to ensure that transitioning students benefit from systematic changes that allow them to select a pronoun, preferred name, prefix, and preferred gender at the time of matriculation.

ACTION/IMPLEMENTATION

In fall 2014, Elon took a preliminary step by allowing students to voluntarily affiliate with the LGBTQIA population at the point of admission. Students who self-identified were sent information about the LGBTQIA community and the process for declaring a preferred name. A year later, the pronoun and prefix attributes were officially added as an educational resource. Any student seeking to use a preferred pronoun could meet with the university registrar to request that the pronoun be added to the system. Students could also petition to change their email address and email alias to reflect their preferred name.

This early meeting with the registrar proved critical. Several students decided to initiate the process and in doing so pointed out several previously unconsidered campus systems that still used the legal name. The students asked careful and specific questions about how the pronoun change would affect them, which inspired the registrar
to conduct a more comprehensive assessment of student systems on campus. As anticipated, several more were identified as problematic, including the library’s circulation portal, mail services, housing networks, and a whole host of custom reports created at the departmental level. They all used legal name and gender. The user-generated reports posed a particularly unwieldy challenge because changing the source of one commonly used field would necessitate report reconfiguration en masse, which in turn would necessitate a candid justification. In response, application technologies proposed an elegant solution: A custom meta-report (i.e., a report on reports) was written to identify all reports currently using legal name and gender, and in one batch process, the source for those fields was overwritten to point to preferred name. In complementary fashion, access to legal name and gender fields was restricted to trained users with a legitimate legal need.

**ADMINISTRATOR PERSPECTIVE**

To facilitate the best possible experience for transitioning students, a systematic overhaul was necessary. Correspondingly, faculty and staff needed to learn where to look for and how best to use this new information. It may be surprising, then, to learn that from the time they matriculate Elon students are expected to embrace diversity by participating in seminars and culturally significant events on campus. As the number of LGBTQIA applicants has increased, that expectation has become encouragement. Brooke Barnett, associate provost for institutional diversity, spoke about the simple yet fragile importance of the issue: “People want to be recognized for who they are. Understanding pronouns is now a part of that recognition, because we want to avoid mis-gendering anyone.” While most would agree that each of us should be recognized as an individual, few are ready to upend deep-seated notions about basic grammar.

To smooth the way for this paradigm shift, the university offers a plethora of seminars—including LGBTQIA ally training; workshops focusing on gender, ethnicity, or religion; and forums for nationally renowned transgender speakers that help community members expand their knowledge of diversity-related topics. In addition, Elon offers many academic courses that feature educational outcomes focused on knowledge and skills related to diversity in race, sex, and gender. Because these courses often satisfy one or more requirements in the Elon Core Curriculum, a wide variety of demographics is represented, eschewing the preconception of a cadre of like-minded students taking courses on diversity.

Barnett asserts that no matter how many initiatives are launched or discussions held, this remains a sensitive subject for all parties. The line between informing and educating the community and enforcing policy is blurry and can make people feel uncomfortable. Barnett says that “like any other worthwhile social adaptation, [using preferred pronouns] is unfamiliar at first,” and students and faculty need to work past minor difficulties or discomfort to grasp its true importance: the normalizing effect of inclusive language.

**STUDENT CASE STUDY**

In participating in a case study, one gender fluid student, James, spoke highly of the university’s efforts to create a welcoming and inclusive environment. He acknowledged areas on campus that have excelled in support of the transgender community: “The University has been a big help to me identifying myself. The counseling center is really fantastic in a lot of ways, so they are a really good resource. Just the faculty/staff community is really supportive.” He also offered advice about what can be improved by noting, “There’s a lot of areas that still need work. [For example], just overall advertisement of these resources is currently lacking.” To James, it is obvious that a lack of transparent communication about the availability of counseling resources helps perpetuate the stigmatization of counseling.

He also points out the need for further staff and faculty education. “I think it would be good if all faculty and staff were safe-space trained,” he says. “If this training were required across the board, it would be a great step for every faculty/staff member.” It may seem surprising that fewer than 100 percent of faculty are properly trained when all students are held to higher expectations concerning social climate, but it could merely echo the fact that the student population is changing more rapidly than is the faculty population.

James also noted that a discussion about pronouns should be included routinely at the beginning of classes. A student’s name, grade, hometown, and pronoun should be commonplace, he suggests, to reinforce the institutional mission to support diversity. Further, educating
Space use and management is an integral part of operating a college or university. From scheduling classes to events, understanding how to effectively manage space can result in increased productivity, cost savings, and overall efficiency. Part case study and part how-to guide, Managing Academic Space uses the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) as a case study of how to significantly increase efficiency of space use.

“For those integrally involved in managing space as well as those new to the increasingly important issue of utilization and scheduling, studying this Guide is time well-spent. Exploring the eight chapters and related information will provide leaders with insights on issues of space management currently utilized at their institution and their impact on students, faculty, and the community, as well as a wealth of new considerations — woven together in a publication that you will want to read, share with others, and implement.”

David M. Sauter
University Registrar
Miami University - Ohio

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peers about inclusive language would lead to a campus of acceptance and openness. Overall, James found the pronoun initiative very important: “I think it has a big impact. I think it’s good to start like this... kind of small... and not a big deal... make it an option for everyone to proclaim a pronoun. Elon is on the right road when it comes to creating a welcoming environment and sets a precedent that it’s an accepted thing to accept everyone.” While his may not be the most unbiased voice in the conversation, he is speaking out to start the conversation.

**MOVING FORWARD**

There are many ways in which universities can normalize transgender and gender non-conforming students’ experiences. An important precursor to action, of course, is the recognition that pronoun, preferred name, and preferred gender are all important aspects of identity. Updating and redesigning systems that allow these pieces to be a normal part of registration and student interaction on campus can have a tremendous positive effect on this population. Implementing the option of a preferred pronoun and name in the registration system is but a part of a greater initiative to reach the ultimate goal of a truly open and accepting college community. Moving forward, the institution will seek ways to incorporate an online application that captures all of this information at the time of application rather than piecemeal post-matriculation. Some faculty and staff may continue to feel discomfort about the choice of a pronoun, so ongoing conversations and training opportunities remain a high priority.

**About the Authors**

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