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Paving the Way: Enhancing the Transfer Admission Practices at the University of San Diego

Andrew Alsoraimi-Espiritu

University of San Diego, aespiritu@sandiego.edu

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Paving the Way: Enhancing the Transfer Admission Practices at the University of San Diego

Andrew Alsoraimi-Espiritu

University of San Diego

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how the University of San Diego's (USD) Office of Undergraduate Admission can better serve prospective students from local community colleges by striving towards a Transfer Receptive Culture (Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2011). Using my positionality as an admissions counselor at USD, I explored the following question with current and prospective transfer students, as well as local community college partners: how can I enhance the practices of my department to better support transfer students during the pretransfer phase at USD? My findings indicate that the transfer path to USD is hectic and confusing. Utilizing a mixed-methods research approach, this study contributes to a better understanding of how students negotiate the transfer process but also identifies resources and practices that need to improve to make this journey easier.

Introduction

The values that will be guiding this Action Research (AR) project are growth, empathy, making a difference (changemaking), and autonomy. These values inform my everyday work in guiding prospective transfer students in their pursuit of a four-year degree. As a former transfer student, I feel a sense of duty and an obligation to serve and mentor these students. As a result, I have become more passionate about my work, and I am continually examining ways that I can improve my practice.

Even though I've worked in higher education for nearly seven years, it wasn't until I started working at USD did I discover what my passion in higher education was. I plan on dedicating my career to serving transfer students and hope to make a difference (changemaking) for them. When working with transfer students, I see my values enacting themselves out. I do my best to empower each student so that they can make the most informed decision in continuing their education. I feel this empowerment piece aligns with my values of growth and autonomy. Empathy is another value that plays itself out in my work. As a former transfer student, I can easily empathize with many of the students that come into my office. For me, the ability to empathize allows me to draw upon my other values in helping each student to the best of my ability.

Reflecting on my experience as a first-generation college student who transferred to a public four-year research institution, I remember there being only two college options presented to me during high school, the local community college (CC) and the local California State University (CSU). However, I was encouraged by my family to think about options outside of CCs and the CSU system. Due to a variety of circumstances, I ended up attending my local CC and only looked at University of California (UC) schools when I was ready to transfer. It should

be noted that I never considered private schools since I had a limited understanding of these schools and their admissions process.

Fast forward to my work in facilitating the transfer admission process at USD, I've observed the same phenomenon - local CC students are primarily looking at CSU and UC schools, and if they are considering USD, are doing so as an afterthought. In some instances, these students are encouraged by their community college agent (counselor, professor, advisor, etc.) to apply to USD to diversify their options as UC and CSU schools are becoming increasingly competitive. Encountering transfer students whose first choice is USD is rare and often a result of the student having prior contact with us.

Tying my values of growth, empathy, making a difference (changemaking), and autonomy, I began reflecting on the factors preventing CC students from considering USD as a transfer destination. Furthermore, I began reflecting on how my role can be utilized to increase USD's footprint at local CCs. One opportunity to improve my practice as an admissions counselor is to examine how our transfer admission practices can be enhanced to make the transfer journey easier. Therefore, I ask the following question to guide my research: how can I enhance the practices of my department to better support transfer students during the pretransfer phase at USD?

Background

I've identified my values and incorporated them into this work, knowing that moving towards a Transfer Receptive Culture (TRC) (Jain et al., 2011) will be less challenging if I can build a sense of purpose behind it. To aid in my approach as an action researcher, I am defining my construct of *enhancement* as: 1) Understanding the needs of the Transfer Center and the students it serves, 2) Identifying how my role at USD can help address these needs, 3)

Identifying what my department can do to meet these needs, and 4) Ways we can all work together to achieve this.

The purpose of this research is not to increase applications to the University. Instead, I hope to gain a better understanding of how transfer students are navigating the admission process to USD. The reason I want to gain a better understanding of this process is due to the number of stories shared by prospective students that were marked by confusion and frustration. As a result, I would like to see what factors contribute to this confusion and what we can do to make the transfer admission process easier for students. I believe we can improve the transfer process to USD by building better relationships with local community colleges and Transfer Centers (TC), while using TRC (Jain et al., 2011) as a framework to enhance our practice.

Transfer Receptive Culture

I was introduced to TRC (Jain et al., 2011) at the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS) Conference that I attended in February 2020. Jain et al. (2011) define TRC as “an institutional commitment by a four-year college or university to provide the support needed for students to transfer successfully” (p. 252). Rather than placing the sole responsibility of the transfer function on CCs, this model acknowledges the shared responsibility of baccalaureate granting institutions (BGI) in the transfer process. The TRC (Jain et al., 2011) framework consists of five elements, two of which focus on the pre-transfer journey, while the last three focus on the post-transfer journey. The first two elements are:

- 1) Establish the transfer of students, especially nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students, as a high institutional priority that ensures stable accessibility, retention, and graduation.

- 2) Provide outreach and resources that focus on the specific needs of transfer students while complementing the community college mission of transfer. (p. 258)

For this AR project, I've focused on these two elements because these are functions that are tied to my role at USD.

Having a TRC (Jain et al., 2011) is becoming more relevant, especially here in California, where the community college system is the nation's largest system of higher education (Higher Education in California, 2020). Furthermore, the demographics in higher education are shifting towards students who are older, ethnically diverse, first-generation, are parents, and who are working full time. TRC (Jain et al., 2011) will ensure these students have the necessary systems of support in place, not only for a successful transfer but also to complete a bachelor's degree. That said, there are limitations to achieving this ideal. Jain, Melendez, and Herrera (2020) note that, "it is impossible to standardize a transfer receptive culture for all forms of transfer" (p. 94). Furthermore, this model calls for campus-wide efforts between student affairs and academic affairs in achieving a TRC (Jain et al., 2011), something that the developers of this framework have not witnessed at any institution.

Acknowledging these challenges as it relates to my institution and positionality is important. I know that USD has a long way in achieving a TRC (Jain et al., 2011), but I hope that this AR project will highlight practices that can be improved so that we can begin taking steps towards a TRC (Jain et al., 2011). *Do what you can, with you've got, where you are* is a quote that was shared at the NISTS Conference. I feel that this quote accurately captures the amount of grit, perseverance, and the value system needed in working towards a TRC (Jain et al., 2011).

Outreach and Relational Strategies

When examining the need to build stronger partnerships with TCs, Davies and Dickmann

(2006) revealed that despite there being a wealth of information describing the transfer process and its requirements between Colorado's CC system and Colorado State University, this information was not reaching students. Similarly, I have found that regardless of the number of brochures, website content, FAQ sheets, or other collateral materials describing USD's transfer process and transfer credit policies, prospective and incoming transfer students seem to be confused in understanding these requirements. In turn, admitted students are taken by surprise or are incredibly disappointed when they discover there are additional requirements they must fulfill if they were to attend USD. Furthermore, Davies and Dickmann (2006) note that transfer students' overall experiences could be improved if there was better access to information that clearly described the transfer process and policies. This research is especially helpful as I examine our current practice when communicating information about the transfer process to prospective students.

Research from Fink and Jenkins (2017) identified the challenge in determining who is responsible for building and maintaining relationships with CC partners and placed the onus of effective relationship building on campus leadership. This is particularly discouraging because I already feel that I lack the institutional support to effectively do my job and see this as a direct result of the lackluster relationship USD has with local CCs. Even though there are institutional forces that I cannot control that affect my job, I constantly remind myself that the purpose of my AR is to learn and improve my practice.

Several strategies identified by Rhine, Milligan, and Nelson (2010) that can strengthen the relationship between BGIs and community colleges (CC) are: 1) hold regular workshops or information sessions where students who've successfully transferred to the four-year college can share their experiences with students, staff, and administrators from the community college, 2)

strengthen the overall communication between the institutions by holding yearly or biannual visits to the CC where updates about transfer requirements, new programs, and changes to transfer credit policies can be shared, and 3) faculty collaboration between the CC and BGI. This research is helpful as it is directly tied to the functions of my role and encourages me to examine our current outreach and relational practices. That said, the research does not address the complexity of implementing all three strategies, nor does it identify the departments or stakeholders who are needed for this endeavor to be successful. Since most of this research was done on public CCs and BGIs located outside of California, there may be structural and cultural differences that the literature is not accounting for that allows for easy replication.

A challenge I face when working with transfer students is that more than one department at a community college can distribute information about the transfer process. Students who are interested in transferring may get their information from their assigned counselor or a department within the student services unit, such as the TC or the Extended Opportunity Programs and Service Office. For others, students may accidentally or haphazardly receive this information from a transfer agent. With this in mind, I am curious which BGIs Transfer Centers would identify as having a strong commitment towards transfer students, what qualities or practices contribute to this commitment, and how that dictates the relationship the TC has with the BGI. Furthermore, I am curious how this commitment is related to a BGI having a TRC (Jain et al., 2011) and what are some steps my department can take to strengthen our commitment to transfer students.

Context

I conducted this research within the context of my professional role at USD. I have worked at USD for almost five years in the Office of Undergraduate Admission (UGA). The

UGA office is located on the second floor of Manchester Hall and falls under the purview of academic affairs in the enrollment management (EM) wing. The EM wing consists of five departments: the Registrar's Office, Graduate Admission, Undergraduate Admission, Financial Aid, and the One Stop Student Center. All five departments are managed by the Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Management, who directly reports to the Vice Provost.

The UGA Office is made up of eight admission counselors, one event coordinator, one executive assistant, five full-time data processors, two graduate assistants, 16 student workers, one assistant director, two associate directors, and one director. The admissions counseling staff are assigned to specific geographical areas within the United States and handle all communication with prospective student applicants from that region. Additionally, each counselor is assigned to specific collateral duties which include but are not limited to athletic liaison, communication and marketing, event planning, and student ambassador liaison.

My role as the Senior Transfer Admission Counselor entails managing our prospective transfer student application pool. The collateral duties that are assigned to me primarily involve assisting with all stages of first-year student recruitment and the day to day functions of our office. My role is a bit different than my colleagues' in that transfer students can apply to USD during the spring and the fall semesters. Additionally, I work with transfer students from across the United States. When working with transfer students, I often receive referrals from CC counselors or the TC.

TCs are departments that are present at most of California's 114 community colleges and are housed within student services (College Alphabetic Listing, n.d.). The role of the TC is to assist students who are transferring to a BGI. Within the context of my work, I must have relationships with TCs and its staff in order to provide clarity to the admission process, facilitate

the transfer of a student from the CC, and provide important updates about our campus or admission policies. While my relationship with individual TCs is better than others, one experience that I've had with all TCs is the confusion surrounding the admission process at USD.

Needs Assessment

When examining the need for a stronger relationship between USD's UGA Office and the TC, I began by looking at the function or mission of both departments. San Diego Mesa College's TC mission statement states that it "is the focal point of transfer activities and up-to-date information... We provide resources and support to empower students to become experts in their transfer educational goals and transition to a four-year institution" (San Diego Mesa College Transfer Center, n.d.). Even though USD's UGA Office does not have a mission statement, the role of the UGA Office "walks prospective students through their journey to USD... Whether they are looking to take a campus tour, check on their application status, or learn about USD's history, academics, and more" (USD Campus Video Tours, n.d.). Viewing our department's function alongside the mission of the TC, it makes sense why a strong relationship should be established and maintained.

Furthermore, USD's second goal in its *Envisioning 2024* strategic plan hopes to strengthen the diversity of its student body. This will be measured by enrollment, retention rates for diverse groups, and graduation rates for diverse groups (Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Initiatives, n.d.). Not only does this affect the recruitment of first-year students, but knowing that transfer students encompass many layers of diversity, the University needs to consider supporting and growing its transfer student population in order to meet these goals.

I secured permission for this research from my director supervisor, Associate Director and International Admission Manager, Maria Malloy. Maria has worked for the UGA Office for

over 15 years and is an instrumental colleague and resource when I examine the relational strategies we have used in outreach to community colleges, can easily provide historical data on transfer student enrollment, and has a firm understanding of the needs of our office. When I initially informed Maria of my research interests, she agreed that our office must do more in improving our relationship with local TCs and extended her full support.

Methodology

I utilized Coghlan and Brannick's (2014) Meta Cycle of Inquiry AR model illustrated in Figure 1. I was drawn to this model due to the emphasis on critical reflection incorporated into each cycle known as content, process, and premise reflections. Each reflection is summarized by Coghlan and Brannick below:

- Content reflection is where you think about the issues, what you think is happening, etc.
 - Process reflection is where you think about strategies and procedures, and how things are being done.
 - Premise reflections is where you critique underlying assumptions and perspectives.
- (p.13)

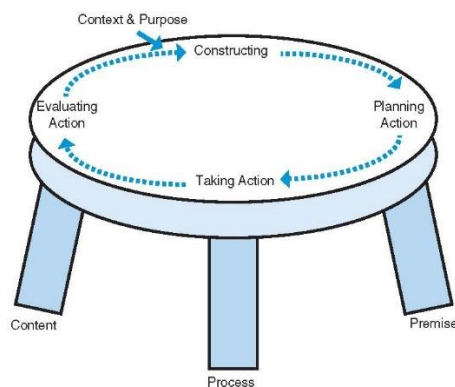


Figure 1. Coghlan and Brannick's (2014) Meta Cycle of Inquiry.

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) note that the action researcher needs to be continually examining each step of the AR cycle (planning action, taking action, evaluating action, diagnosing) while simultaneously taking part in the project. This AR model allowed me to critically reflect on each

of the cycles, informed the design of subsequent cycles, and built awareness of how I influenced the overall process. Coghlan and Brannick describe this process as learning about your learning.

The authors assert that because action research involves work with individuals, teams, the interdepartmental group, and the organization, it is essential that opportunities for content, process, and premise reflections are built into each cycle (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). These reflections were particularly useful as I examined the conscious and unconscious actions and behaviors surrounding transfer student outreach and advising in my practice and by transfer agents at the CC. As a result, these reflection points uncovered larger issues stemming from my research question.

The research participants included students who transferred to USD, current students attending CC, and an administrator from a local TC. Data was collected through one on one interviews and surveys. Additionally, I journaled extensively during the AR journey, which allowed me to capture my learning and reflections throughout this process. All the participants signed a consent form and were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research before the initiation of the interview or before receiving the survey link (Appendix A). To protect the identities of the participants and the institutions that they represent, I've assigned a designated pseudonym to them.

Data Collection

Data for this AR project was collected at four different times during academic year 2019-2020.

Table 1

Cycle Timeline

Pre-Cycle: August-September 2019	Cycle One: October-November 2019 & February-March 2020	Cycle Two: March 2020
<i>The Transfer Process to USD</i>	<i>Needs of Transfer Students</i>	<i>Understanding the Mission of the Transfer Center</i>
Current USD Students	Current Community College Students	Transfer Center Administrator
10 Participants	23 Participants	1 Participant
1:1 Interviews	Survey	1:1 Interview

Pre-Cycle: August-September 2019. The pre-cycle included students who recently matriculated to USD. This cycle gave me an understanding of the experiences of transfer students during the admission process and confirmed some of the difficulties transfer students encounter. Student interviews took place in August and throughout September. My original plan was to conduct a focus group, but due to the number of questions and the complexity of coordinating the schedules of ten students, I opted for one on one interviews. After reflecting on this process, this decision allowed opportunities for participants to engage fully with each question and highlighted how unique the transfer process is. Interviews were scheduled on campus and were conducted in my office. My interview guide consisted of nine questions and allowed for flexibility, depending on the participant's experience (Appendix B). Participants were asked about their experience transferring to USD, resources they utilized to inform them of the transfer admission process, and how USD could partner with CCs to ease this process. Each interview was recorded via a smartphone application with the interviewee's permission and was later transcribed.

Cycle One: October-November 2019 & February-March 2020. This cycle examined the qualities and characteristics participants found important when selecting a BGI as well as their level of engagement with the TC. Data was collected from surveys that were administered to current community college students in two separate phases. The survey was created using a

Google Form and consisted of 29 questions composed of multiple-choice, Likert scale, rank order scaling, and short answer questions (Appendix C). The first phase of this cycle was made up of participants who were still in the beginning stages of their CC journey. In contrast, participants in the second phase were ready to transfer and actively pursuing admission to USD.

Data from phase one was collected between October-November 2019, while phase two's data was collected between February-March 2020. The purpose of distinguishing these two groups in cycle one was to see if there were any variances between the group that was actively seeking admission and the group who were still in the early stages of the transfer process.

Cycle Two: March 2020. Cycle two took place in early March. Email solicitations were sent to three local CC administrators (Appendix D). I specifically targeted community college TCs since they act as the focal point for students, staff, and faculty in understanding the requirements to transfer to a BGI. Included in this email was a brief explanation of the research and options for interview formats. Having worked with all three administrators in the past, each person expressed interest in this AR. My first and only interview took place in March 2020 at a local CC. My interview guide consisted of 15 questions that examined the various challenges transfer students face, how the TC facilitates the transfer process, and ways BGIs can complement the work of the TC (Appendix E). The interview was recorded via a smartphone application with the interviewee's permission and was later transcribed. Unfortunately, I was unable to schedule my two remaining interviews as these administrators' availability was sidelined due to ongoing developments with the COVID-19 pandemic and the toll it continues to have on college campuses.

Implementation

Pre-Cycle: Understanding the Transfer Process to USD

The intention for this cycle was to get a better understanding of the transfer process to USD. As the designated admission counselor for prospective transfer students, my interaction with students during the transfer process usually comes in the form of an email or phone inquiry and may also include a scheduled or a walk-in appointment. Typically, these students have a basic understanding of our school and our admission requirements. That said, I have very little understanding of the journey the student has taken that leads them to our office, nor do I feel that this method of inquiry is the norm that is exercised by many transfer students. Jain, Melendez, and Bernal (2020) note that the transfer process to elite institutions is often by accident, whether it is by being in the right place at the right time or knowing the right people. Reflecting on my transfer process, I did not realize reaching out to the admissions office at a BGI was even an option. In order to understand the transfer process, specifically to USD, this pre-cycle allowed me to get a better understanding of this journey.

Planning Action. To gain a better understanding of the transfer journey, this cycle included participants who recently matriculated to USD. From this data, I hope to make adjustments and improvements in how transfer student outreach is conducted to combat the accidental occurrences Jain et al. (2020) refer to. When recruiting participants for this cycle, I specifically targeted current students at USD who transferred from one of the eight community colleges in San Diego County. The second criterion that I used when soliciting students was the completion of one semester of coursework at USD but no more than one full academic year. This allowed the participant to gain some distance from their transfer journey but was recent enough so that it could easily be recalled.

For this reason, I sent targeted emails to students who matriculated in Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 (Appendix F). I received 13 responses from the email solicitation and was able to

complete ten one on one interviews. With the permission of each participant, these interviews were recorded via a mobile phone application and were later transcribed. Table 2 exhibits the demographic data collected from the participants.

Table 2

Pre-Cycle Participant Demographics

<i>Student Pseudonym</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>Age Range</i>	<i>Term Matriculated</i>	<i>Intended Major</i>	<i>Type of Institution Transferred From</i>	<i>First-Generation</i>	<i>Units Completed</i>	<i>Applying for Financial Aid</i>	<i>Other Important Characteristics</i>
Jeremiah	Male	Asian	26	Fall 2018	Engineering	Local and out of state community college	No	94	Yes	Veteran, obtained associate's
Roger	Male	White	21	Fall 2018	Biology	Local community college	No	33	No	Formerly applied to USD as a first year student, family member works on
Mitchell	Male	White	25	Spring 2019	Business Administration	Local community college, out of state community college, and two out of state private colleges	No	83	No	Veteran
George	Male	Black or African America	42	Fall 2018	Business Administration	Local and out of state community college	Yes	82	No	Veteran
Shannon	Female	White	21	Fall 2018	Business Finance	Local community college and out of state private college	Yes	59	Yes	From San Diego
Adriana	Female	Asian	23	Fall 2018	Environmental Studies	Local community college and out of state private college	No	89	No	
Anna	Female	Asian	22	Fall 2018	Sociology	Local community college	Yes	61	Yes	From San Diego
Mohammed	Male	White	28	Spring 2019	Business Administration	Local community college and private out of state college	No	87	No	Veteran
Tony	Male	White	21	Spring 2019	Engineering	Local community college	No	44	No	From San Diego
Louis	Male	White	35	Fall 2018	Business Administration	Two local community colleges and one non local community college	Yes	127	Yes	Staff at USD, obtained associate's degree

Taking Action. The following themes emerged from this cycle after transcribing the interviews.

Confusion about the transfer process. Many participants noted that the transfer process to USD was met with confusion when inquiring about the process at their CC. These students met with their counselor from the counseling center or with staff and administrators at the TC. Roger shared, “They weren’t very clear about transferring, especially to USD, because they obviously work with the UC and [CSU] schools more... Some counselors didn’t even know what USD was and thought I was talking about UCSD.” Mitchell shared a similar experience, “They [TC] weren’t that helpful. I mean, they helped me with my academic plan, but I didn’t learn much about USD... It would be nice if they knew more about USD. Maybe I could have learned about USD sooner.” These two comments capture the experiences of most of the participants and suggest that the relationship between USD and the local CCs needs improvement.

Transfer Center awareness. Another theme that emerged was the lack of awareness of the TC. Eight of the ten participants expressed confusion when asked about the TC. They mistook it for the community college counseling center, admissions office at USD, or the academic advisor for their major at USD. When reviewing the websites for each of the eight local community colleges, there are slight differences between the services each counseling center offers. However, along with offering transfer advising, their primary function is to assist with educational planning, facilitate financial aid appeals, and offer career planning as well as personal counseling (San Diego City College Counseling and Personal Growth, n.d.). On the other hand, the TC offers transfer planning workshops, assists with navigating transfer admission guarantee (TAG) programs, reviews articulation and transfer agreements with BGIs, hosts workshops and appointments with representatives from the BGI, assists with transfer application

assistance, acts as a receptacle for university brochures and handouts, plans university bus trips, offers transfer counseling appointments, and assists students with their educational plans to transfer (San Diego Miramar Transfer Center, n.d.).

The confusion distinguishing the counseling center from the TC may be due in part to both departments offering transfer advising services. However, in my experience visiting CCs, each department has its own dedicated space and is clearly marked. Regardless of this confusion, students who seek information about USD are left with unanswered questions. Mohammed noted that when visiting the TC for assistance with the application process to USD, none of the staff or administrators had experience with the Common Application and referred him to USD for assistance. Mohammed shared his frustration:

I'm like you guys are the Transfer Center. The Common App is not just USD - I'm sure it's probably hundreds of schools... Why don't they have training in the Common App? I was really shocked that they didn't have any ability, and they didn't even try to help me.

Mohammed was the only participant who specifically sought out the services of the TC.

Unfortunately, there is no explanation for what Mohammed experienced. According to every TC website that I reviewed, assistance with college applications is a service the TC offers and specializes in. Understanding how frustrating this might have been for Mohammed, I wrote down the following questions to reflect on later: 1) Where are the majority of transfer students receiving information about the transfer process from?, 2) Are transfer agents at the CC familiar with USD's transfer and application requirements?, and 3) What can I do to ensure up to date information about USD is available and retained at the CC?

Self-Reliance. Due to the lack of information the participants received at their CC, a theme that was shared among all participants was how self-reliant they needed to be in

navigating the transfer process to USD. All but one of the participants utilized our transfer admission website as their primary resource to understand our admission requirements and for course advising. Additionally, all the participants scheduled an in-person or phone appointment with one of my colleagues or with me to get their specific questions and concerns addressed. Two of the participants utilized additional resources on campus to gain information about USD, namely the Military and Veterans Program Office and major-specific faculty. Lastly, four of the participants mentioned attending transfer specific events on campus that were hosted by our office.

Demonstrating how self-reliant prospective students need to be, one participant shared:

I had to seek out what classes transferred, the application requirements, and the deadlines.

The community college, not to insinuate that they are doing a bad job, but they just didn't have that information. Their best advice was to speak to USD...If I had known that they didn't know anything, I would have spoken with USD first.

Jack echoed this, stating, "I mean USD is a school where you know about it or you have to go out of your way to figure it out." Even though the level of self-reliance demonstrated by these participants can be viewed as a barrier for admission to USD, Mohammed views his hands-on approach as a benefit:

Now I know they [TC] didn't actually help me but the fact that I was so used to doing everything on my own kind of benefited me because I did all my own research and knew exactly what I was getting into here."

I believe this self-empowerment piece that Mohammed alludes to is what educators hope their students achieve when navigating the college admission process. However, the self-reliance that

the participants demonstrated was forced in that little to no direction was given to them when seeking out information about USD.

It appears that this lack of knowledge is specific to private institutions. A couple of the participants spoke about their experience applying to public BGIs in California and how transfer agents at the CC were more prepared in navigating this process with them. This lack of knowledge is unfair to students who may not know much about private BGIs or who have not considered transferring to a private BGI. With the high level of commitment the participants demonstrated, choosing a school based on how accessible and convenient information is found might be a reason not to consider a private BGI, especially if they have entrusted someone with negotiating this process with them.

Perceptions of USD. An interesting data point worth mentioning was the change the participants spoke of after matriculating to USD. Having worked in this specific role at USD for four and a half years, I am used to hearing the typical stereotypes that USD is the *castle in the sky*, a predominantly white institution, or a school that primarily caters to wealthy students. On the other hand, students who get to know us a bit more highlight our quality of education, the small class sizes, and the campus community. Even though there may be some truths to these negative associations, my experience in this role has proven how difficult it is to cast a positive light on them.

Mohammed pointed out that before coming to USD, he was afraid that he was not going to fit in with the student body because he did not belong to the right social class. However, after matriculating to USD, he saw how friendly and normal everyone was. Anna spent a lot of time on campus before applying to USD. She was familiar with the stereotypes and experiences it occasionally as a current student. That said, she also sees the new USD emerging:

I could see why people would think that, but it doesn't happen as much. There aren't people flashing their clothes all the time, and there aren't a lot of rude people here. I've met a lot of nice people here.

When asked about the diversity on campus, she continues:

I don't really see a lot [of diversity] - like you have to find them through clubs, the Commuter Commons, Student Support Services (SSS), and like I guess ethnicity clubs... So that kind of changed my perspective before coming here. I originally thought it's not going to change, but actually coming here, you slowly see the transition... I don't think USD is always going to be the white school. I think in the future it will be more diverse. People just need to be more open-minded about [this school].

Despite the demographic changes that Anna sees occurring on campus, one of the participants who previously attended a private out of state BGI was shocked about the lack of diversity on our campus:

I wasn't expecting that [it would be a predominantly white institution], but I've never really seen my race as something blocking me from other people, so I feel that was not a hurdle I didn't have to go over especially after seeing it being not as diverse as where I came from.

Highlighting how these students initially perceived USD and what they've encountered might be a tool in recruiting students who may have doubts about attending a predominantly white institution. However, this may not be the only challenge, especially when working with transfer agents at CCs. There is a noticeable generational gap among the staff and administrations from the counseling center and the TC. Their experiences and views of USD may be antiquated or no longer relevant, and as a result, may not be aware of the current initiatives

and opportunities at USD that promote diversity and multicultural understanding on campus.

Jack shed some light on the possibility that this might be a factor:

Well, I think that people who are in charge of that [TC] have the same perceptions about USD as the general public, you know what I mean? I'm telling you right now USD is not in the equation when they ask you what school you want to go to.

USD's *Envisioning 2024* strategic plan highlights the importance of recruiting and retaining a diverse student body as well as having more diverse faculty and staff (Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Initiatives, n.d.). Something that I was not aware of is that USD ranks higher in overall diversity than any of the local BGIs in San Diego and sits in the top 5% of all colleges in the United States (Nationwide Diversity Rankings, 2018). Sharing this information, as well as current student perspectives, may not help the overall perception of USD but may act as conversation starters to combat the negative associations students and transfer agents have towards us.

Choosing USD. Nearly all the participants were aware of the negative stereotypes of USD before applying. Despite these views, they all chose to apply and later joined our community. In response to our campus being predominantly white, it's worth noting that half of the participants in this cycle belong to minoritized ethnic groups. Furthermore, only three of the participants spoke to the lack of diversity on campus. Among all participants, affordability was a concern by four of them. I expected both issues would have been more prevalent in the interviews since affordability and lack of diversity are often highlighted by prospective students and transfer agents when sharing information about USD. Even though these were not highlighted in this cycle, I believe costs and financial aid are important concerns among the overall pool of students who are applying to BGIs. So, what were the deciding factors among the

participants in choosing USD over other institutions? Shannon, a San Diego native, who formerly attended a private out of state BGI shared:

It really reminded me of [my former institution], so I was excited about it because it was kind of like the school that I wanted to be at. It was really expensive to be out of state, but I could have a similar experience in San Diego [by attending USD].

Even though Shannon took a semester at community college before attending USD, she was looking for a local campus that was like her former BGI. Tony originally planned on attending a UC school before learning about the strength of our academic programs:

I knew it was a liberal arts college but didn't know that it has one of the best engineering programs in the country and that I could get a dual degree. I was like, oh wow, I'd like to do that now. Also, I heard there were small classrooms, and the school itself was smaller. Everything that I kind of like – I didn't want to go into a big lecture hall... Last semester all my professors knew me by name, which was a big plus.

The smaller classrooms and personalized attention that Tony refers to is something that cannot be obtained at a large public institution and contributes to the appeal of attending a private liberal arts school.

Three of the participants chose to apply to USD because they had friends or family members who attended. In contrast, only one of the participants was referred to USD by a transfer agent at their CC. Other factors that the participants considered when choosing to attend USD was the active student community and student outcome data, specifically student employment rates. Lastly, two of the participants highlighted the level of service they received at USD when making their final decision. Jack shared:

People [at USD] would actually like pick up the phone and be like let's hook you up with the department of engineering or the head of the department so that you can make an appointment with them and sit down and see what class count and what else I would need to take.

Roger expressed a similar view, "I feel that even before I came to USD I had a lot of resources, a lot of counselors, faculty, staff, and One Stop that were always willing to help and go beyond what I was asking for." Both experiences speak to USD's *Culture of Care*, which recognizes the dignity of every individual and works to create an environment where people feel included and valued. I assume that most schools have a similar guiding philosophy but experiencing it may be easier at a smaller institution. Regardless of the negative stereotypes, the *Culture of Care* appears to be the strength of our institution, even for prospective students, so how can we extend our *Culture of Care* when working with CCs?

Partnering with community colleges. This section explored ways USD's UGA Office could partner with community colleges, specifically the TC. Since many of the participants did not receive information about USD from their community college, they were not aware of our current outreach efforts. With that in mind, this section provided insight on ways we can improve our outreach efforts to better engage with transfer students. Nine of the ten participants felt that transfer agents at the community college could be better informed about the transfer process to USD. When asked specifically of the ways we could improve outreach efforts, there was a tendency to resort to soft methods such as ensuring there are school brochures, transfer counselor contact information, and pennants available at the CC. Even though these are already part of our outreach practice, all ten participants felt that USD did not have a presence in this way at their CC. Roger shared:

I remember everywhere that I went I would get brochures about UCSD, the whole UC system, and SDSU, but I don't ever recall seeing one thing about USD which was odd because I remember in high school we heard a lot about USD, but as soon as I got to [community college], it was kind of only focused on UCSD and SDSU.

Roger exposes an area of improvement with our transfer outreach practices. One example of this is the role I play in the office. Even though my title is specific to working with transfer students, I also assist with the recruitment of first-year applicants. If I were to quantify the amount of time that I'm tasked with first-year student recruitment, I would estimate it is anywhere between 35%-40%. The priority on first-year students impacts the time it would require conducting effective outreach and relationship building with CCs. Handel and Strempe (2018) stress the importance of having dedicated transfer admission counselors who can assist with the application, admission, and matriculation of transfer students who are also tasked with sustained visits to community colleges. Being released from my first-year recruitment duties would allow me to focus on efforts that some of the participants identified, which include hosting student and faculty panels as well as admission presentations at both USD and local CCs.

Another way to ease the transfer process that is currently employed by all public BGIs in California is the creation of degree pathways and articulation agreements. According to Handel (2011), one of the challenges BGIs face in moving towards a TRC is the ability to assess transfer credit accurately. However, Handel emphasizes the importance of having strong articulation agreements as it would take the guesswork out of the transfer process for students and would set a foundation for relationship building with CCs.

Evaluating Action. After conducting the interviews and reflecting on this cycle, I felt overwhelmed by the issues the participants shared. As a transfer student and a first-generation

college student, deciding which BGI to apply to and attend was anxiety-inducing and lonely, but nowhere near the level that the participants experienced. Compared to the participants, they were forced to be proactive in their approach in seeking admission to USD. I can only imagine how frustrating this experience would be if I had been in their shoes, let alone the number of students who aren't willing or don't possess the savviness to navigate this process on their own.

Furthermore, prioritizing transfer students of color at a BGI is one of the essential steps in creating a TRC (Jain et al., 2011). According to Jain et al. (2020), "If universities were legitimately pursuing educational equality, want more students of color to enter higher education and complete a baccalaureate degree, they would employ transfer-friendly practices" (p. 52). Even though USD's *Envision 2024* strategic plan calls for improved recruitment and retention of a diverse student body, it doesn't explicitly have a plan for transfer students other than growing enrollment. According to Handel (2011), growing transfer enrollment is a tactical commitment many leaders at BGIs employ to balance the ledgers. Rather than seeing transfer students as assets and ensuring that they are successful, these BGI treat them as financial opportunities. Using TRC (Jain et al., 2011) as a lens to examine our current student enrollment goals and recruitment plan, our strategic plan is clearly focused on first-year students of color, and despite how beneficial this is to our community, it provides little hope for the larger pool of students of color who are attending community colleges. With the data that was shared with me, improvements need to be made to our transfer outreach practices. However, without an institutional commitment made towards transfer students, these changes would be limited in their scope and would provide a short-term solution in meeting the needs of transfer students.

Cycle One: Needs of Transfer Students

The intention of this cycle was to understand the needs of students who were preparing for or who were active in their college search. Furthermore, I wanted to get a better understanding of the factors students felt were important when selecting a BGI and their level of engagement with the TC in helping them through this process. Understanding both perspectives will allow me to critically examine USD's outreach practices and how we engage with students during the transfer process. Anticipating that the factors that influence college choice would be highly subjective, I developed a survey that included multiple-choice and short answer questions with the hope that it would capture overarching themes among the participants (Appendix C). Furthermore, I expected that the data I collected would challenge the assumptions I have made around college choice among transfer students.

Planning Action. Cycle one was conducted in two phases. The first phase occurred in October 2019 and was administered via a Google Forms survey (Appendix C). Participants were recruited from a college-level English course taught at Centro College, a local community college. I secured permission from the professor of the class to make an announcement that highlighted the purpose of my research with a request for volunteers. Students who were interested in participating were given a consent form (Appendix A), where they were instructed to share their email address so a copy could be sent to them along with a link to the survey. Survey responses were collected between October 2019-December 2019. Eighteen participants responded to the survey.

Phase two occurred between February 2020-March 2020. Initially, this phase was scheduled for November 2019-February 2020, but due to unexpected work commitments and the birth of my second child, I had to postpone the timeline for this phase. During the fall, three of our counselors took new positions outside of our office. As a result, their duties were delegated

to the remaining counseling staff until their positions were filled in January 2020. Even though these changes were manageable, the extra work and the commitments to my family impacted my ability to work on this AR. Additionally, data collection for this phase was planned throughout March 2020, but was impacted by COVID-19.

Participants in phase two were recruited via an email solicitation that was sent to prospective applicants to USD who attended a Transfer Information Session (TIS) on our campus (Appendix G). TISs are bi-monthly events on campus that provide an overview of USD and the path to transfer. TIS is a by-product of the initial brainstorm of my AR and became a standardized practice of the UGA office since March 2019. The purpose of this second phase was to compare the data from the previous phase to see if there were variances in the resources students identified when navigating the transfer process. Five participants participated in this phase and were sent the same survey that was distributed to participants in phase one.

Taking Action. Each participant answered 29 questions that asked about their background, experience navigating the transfer process, factors that influence transfer choice, expectations of the TC, and experiences interacting with BGIs at their CC (Appendix C).

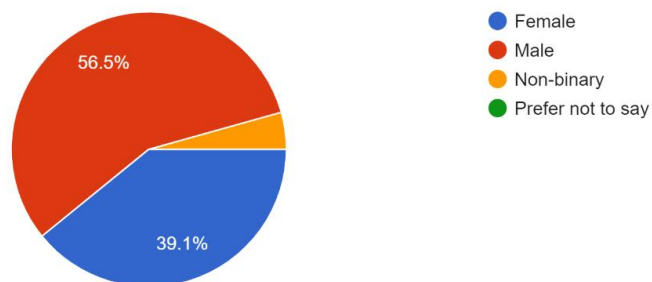
Demographics. The following tables are summaries of the demographic data that I collected from the survey.

Table 3

Cycle One Participant Demographics

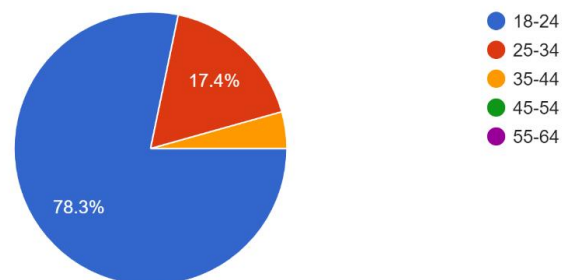
What is your gender identity?

23 responses



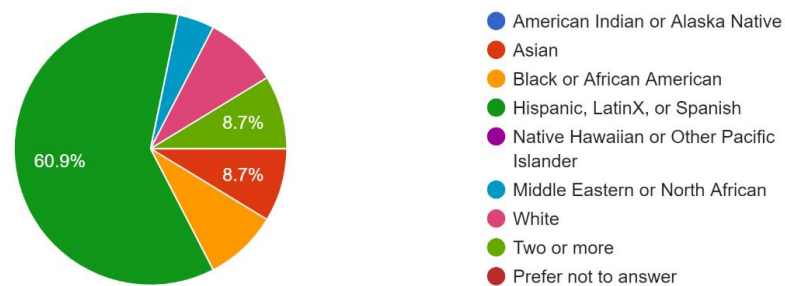
What is your age?

23 responses



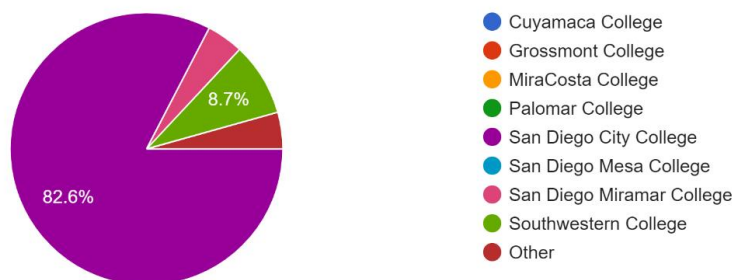
What is your race?

23 responses



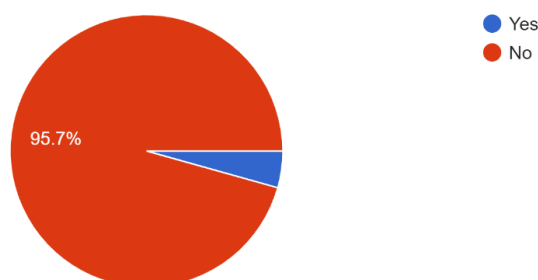
What community college do you currently attend?

23 responses



Have you previously attended a 4-year college or university?

23 responses



Phase one. Something that immediately grabbed my attention was that most of the participants were males: 11 identified as male, six identified as female, and one identified as non-binary. Unlike the pre-cycle, all participants in phase one were attending college for the first time. Furthermore, 13 of my respondents were between 18-24 years old, four were between 25-34 years old, and one was between 35-44 years old. Lastly, 12 of my participants identify as Hispanic or LatinX, two White, two Black or African American, one Asian, and one two or more races. This last data point is worth highlighting as the participants in this cycle, and the diversity at Centro College is almost the opposite of USD's diversity. One example that illustrates this is 52% of the student body at Centro College identifies as Hispanic or LatinX (College Student

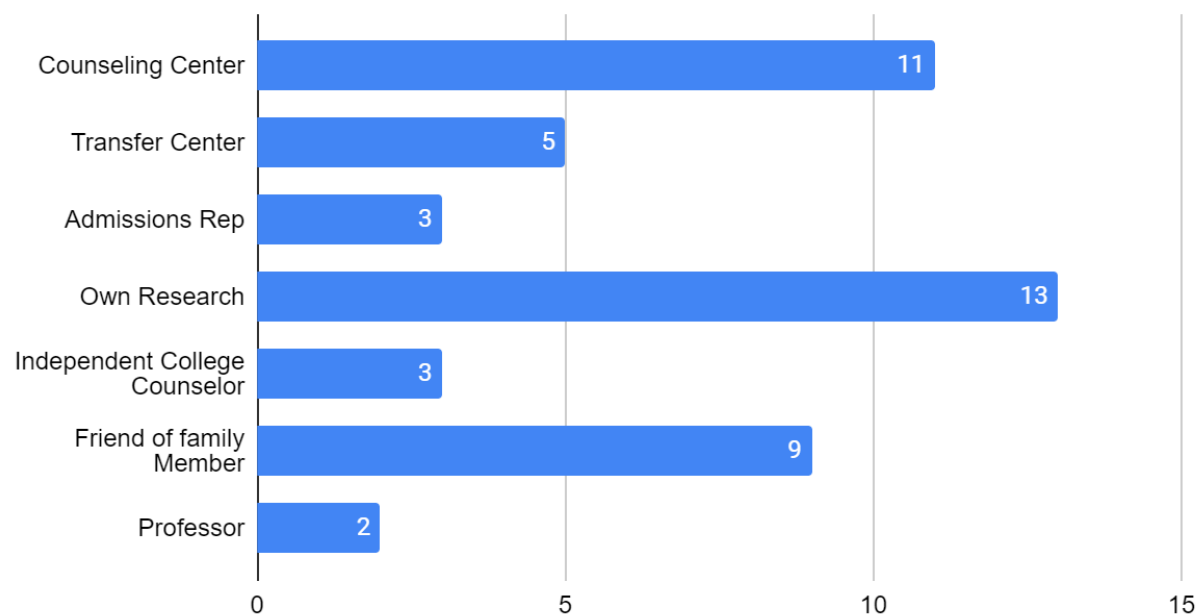
Profile, n.d.). In contrast, at USD, this percentage is significantly lower at 20% (Student Diversity, 2017). Inversely, the White population at USD is 51%, while the population at Centro College is 21%.

Phase two. Even though the number of participants was lower in phase two, there were noticeable differences in the demographics of this group: there was a female majority (3), all were between the ages of 18-24, one participant previously attended a BGI, all participants intended on studying business, and there was representation from two other local community colleges as well as one community college in Orange County. Similar to the pre-cycle, there were various racial and ethnic groups represented in this phase. However, those who identified as Hispanic or LatinX were the majority.

Student experience. In this section, students were able to list the resources they used and rank their experiences in navigating the transfer process. A breakdown of these resources and their frequency can be found by referencing Table 4.

Table 4

Resources Utilized to Inform the Transfer Process

What resources have you used to inform your transfer process?*23 Responses*

Phase one. Of the 18 responses in this phase: three used the counseling center as their primary resource, four primarily did research on their own, while 11 used a combination of both, along with the input of friends and family members, the TC, the services of an independent college counselor, a current or former professor, or a representative from a BGI. Of the combined responses, family or friends and the TC (four participants each) were the most common responses, while the use of an independent counselor and interacting with a representative from a BGI yielded the least amount of responses (one participant).

Participants were then asked if they knew anything about USD and were asked to identify where or whom they received this information from: six noted this information came from friends, family members, or through word of mouth; five received this information through a combination of the above along with information obtained from our website, brochures, and or

information shared by a transfer agent, while three received this information specifically from a transfer agent.

Phase two. Phase two yielded similar results, however each participant used at least two resources in navigating the transfer process. Relying on their research (three responses) and receiving information from a friend or family member (four responses) were the most frequent responses. The use of the counseling center or the TC was only referenced once among this group. Lastly, a resource that was used by two of the participants that caught me by surprise was the use of an independent college counselor.

Regarding information that was specific to USD, four of the five participants received information from friends or family members. The influence of family, friends, and peers appears to be an outreach strategy worth exploring. It is supported by research in this area that notes this correlation and calls for targeted marketing pieces that highlight the experiences and testimony of these groups (Asa, Carignan, Marchesani, Moser, & Woods, 2018).

The use of the counseling center or independently researching BGIs seems to mirror the experiences shared in the pre-cycle. Even though I am curious about the lower number of participants who utilized a representative from the BGI, I can only assume this is the result of phase one's participants being in the research phase of their transfer process. Another reason that may account for this lower number might be dependent on the institutions the participants plan on attending. According to Centro College's IRP data collected between 2012-2017, over 50% of its students who transferred went to in-state public institutions (Fact Book, 2018). Data collected from the pre-cycle suggests that transfer agents at the community college are more equipped to share information about public BGIs, which may account for students not having to interact with admission representatives from these BGIs.

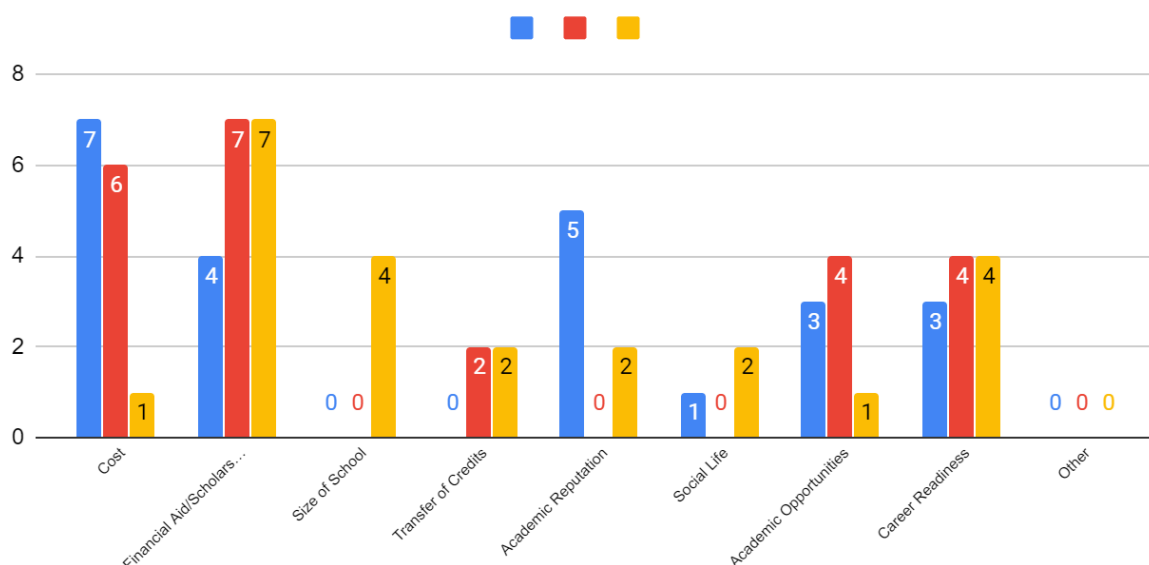
Transfer choice. This section allowed participants to list and rank the factors or qualities that are important when selecting a BGI to apply to. Table 5 summarizes this data.

Table 5

Factors that Influence College Choice

Factors or qualities that influence BGI choice

23 Responses



Rank Ordered Responses: 1st Choice (Red), 2nd Choice (Blue), 3rd Choice (Yellow)

Phase one. Examining the characteristics that influence school choice, cost and the availability of financial aid were the top two concerns shared by participants. Additionally, the size of the school and the transfer of credits were other important concerns. When considering USD as a transfer destination, these concerns might be amplified by our high cost of attendance, lack of transfer student scholarships, and specific Core Curriculum requirements. Just knowing our cost of attendance may be a deal-breaker and was reflected in this phase where 15 participants noted that cost and or the lack of financial aid would deter them from applying to a

BGI. This might be especially relevant at Centro College, where 64% of the student body are Pell Grant eligible (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Phase two. Cost and or lack of financial aid was also an essential factor referenced by this group. That said, it was interesting to see that two of the participants did not reference either factor in influencing their decision in applying to a BGI. Instead, they placed importance on location, major impactation, career outcomes, and class sizes.

In a study conducted by Asa et al. (2018), they found that students who said finances are a top factor in determining transfer choice, only 2.9% researched scholarship opportunities. Regardless of the outside scholarship opportunities that we highlight in the admission process, this research suggests that yielding these students is low. That said, the transfer process to USD appears to be time intensive, so should we expect students to research outside scholarships as well? How navigable is the scholarship process for first-time college goers who might be struggling to meet admission criteria and deadlines? How can we be more transfer friendly to these students?

Utilizing the Transfer Center. In this section, students were asked to rate their experiences using the Transfer Center on their campus.

Phase one. Among this group, only six had any interaction with the TC, nine did not have any type of interaction, and three were unaware of this resource.

Phase two. All but one of the participants utilized the TC during their college search. The remaining participant was not aware of this resource. These results contradict the responses by this group when listing the resources they used in navigating the transfer process. In that section, only one person noted the use of the TC. This information either highlights a flaw in the survey

or that these participants may not know what the TC is and may be confusing it for another department, the latter of which is similar to the confusion expressed in the pre-cycle.

Regardless of where either group was at in the college search process, nearly every participant expected to receive the following information from the TC: the transfer process to a BGI, financial aid information, assistance with the college application, general info about a BGI, and how courses would transfer. Reviewing the websites for the eight local TCs, these expectations align with the services the TC provides (San Diego City College Transfer and Career Center, n.d.). As demonstrated by the data, as well as the experiences of participants from the pre-cycle, it appears that students are not utilizing the TC to aid in their college search process, or not utilizing it as much as I expected. Furthermore, USD does not have a presence at the community colleges that are represented in this cycle, which might be indicative of our presence at other community colleges in the region. With both issues in mind, I am curious if there are opportunities for the TC and USD to collaborate that would direct more students to the TC while also creating more visibility for USD.

Interacting with BGIs. This selection allowed my participants to rate their experiences interacting with BGIs at their CC.

Phase one. Overall, the participants in this phase have had positive interactions with BGIs at their CC. When asked if there was equal representation of BGIs on their campus, 11 felt there was equal representation. For those who answered no, they felt that public BGIs in California had the most prominent footprints, with San Diego State University, UCLA, and UC San Diego mentioned the most. Only two participants listed private schools in their response.

Phase two. The participants in phase two were split in their perception of BGIs represented at their CC. Three of the participants answered no to this question and felt that San

Diego State and UCLA had the largest footprints. Similar to phase one, only two participants listed private BGIs in this section.

I feel there are missed opportunities when informing CC students about their private BGI options. Even though most of the participants in phase one did not list private BGIs in their top three BGI choices, 38% are considering private BGIs in their overall search. San Diego has five major institutions, two of which are private BGIs. Among the respondents from phase one, neither private BGI in San Diego was a transfer destination. Clearly, community college students have an interest in private BGIs. It may not be as high as the interest for public BGIs, but something is stopping them from engaging with private institutions. I believe this is where implementing a TRC (Jain et al., 2011) at USD could help. According to their research, “When transfer students are given a high institutional priority at a university...the transfer imperative becomes clearer across the institution and its constituents on how to develop effective strategies along the transfer educational pipeline” (Jain et al., 2011, p. 55). Simply put, very little is done at USD that illustrates our commitment to transfer students and it shows by the number of students who express interest in attending.

Partnering with community colleges. The last part of the survey allowed participants to write in what they felt a productive relationship between a CC and a BGI looked like and recommended ways USD’s UGA Office could partner with the TC.

The overarching themes from both groups involved being more transparent about the transfer process, having clear policies or articulation of transfer credit, holding admission events at the community college, and the BGI being available and open to help students. These same themes appeared in the pre-cycle and have also been referenced in creating a foundation towards a TRC (Jain et al., 2011). Even though recommendations of how the UGA Office could partner

with the TC were varied, the main idea was to increase outreach so students could learn about USD.

As mentioned in the pre-cycle, outreach to community colleges is lacking in the time that I have worked in this role. One issue that contributes to this problem is the amount of time that my role is dedicated to first-year student recruitment. Another issue is that transfer recruitment is modeled after first-year recruitment. That said, I believe the underlying issue contributing to both is that our recruitment and strategic plans do not prioritize transfer students and is a direct result of transfer students not being an institutional priority at USD.

Evaluating Action. After concluding this cycle, it's become clear that we need to gain a better understanding of the issues facing CC students so that we can better engage with them. I get the sense that students acknowledge the value of receiving a private school education with our academic reputation and smaller class sizes but doing so comes at a high price tag. California is unique in the realm of higher education because many of its public institutions, especially within the UC system, are world-renowned. I'm not suggesting that these schools don't have their own challenges in outreach to CC students, but the academic reputation that is associated with these schools comes at a fraction of the tuition cost. USD's tuition for academic year 2019-2020 was \$50,450 (Tuition and Financial Aid, n.d.) compared to \$12,570 throughout all nine UC campuses (Tuition & Cost of Attendance, n.d.). Based on the student demographics at Centro College, over half of the students are considered low income (Fact Book, 2018). Attending an academically reputable institution for these students involves a conversation about what is economical. If you factor in the lack of financial aid available for transfer students at USD, the choice becomes a no brainer. This may be one of the reasons contributing to the low footprint of private BGIs at Centro College and may explain why transfer agents at CC lack information

about USD. This argument is further strengthened by the fact that only 18.4% of the 343 transfer students from Fall 2019 at USD were Pell Grant eligible and suggests that even if low-income students are granted admission, the overall cost of attending USD may prevent them from actually attending (Transfer Student Profile, 2019).

Furthermore, both cycles highlight the importance of collaborating with our community college partners. Seeing how transfer agents at the CC play an essential role in sharing information about BGIs, we need to remain in constant contact with these institutions so that they can accurately share information about our school or make an appropriate referral. Additionally, opportunities to include family and community members into our outreach methods need to be examined further. This idea is further supported by Asa et al. (2018), especially when working with academically vulnerable student populations, who have been known to base their college decisions on recommendations by counselors and teachers.

Cycle Three: Understanding the Mission of the Transfer Center

My intention for cycle three was to gain a better understanding of how the TC contributes to the transfer function at the CC. I originally planned for this cycle in January 2020. However, due to work and personal commitments, along with working with the schedules of three administrators, I was not able to initiate this cycle until March 2020. The TCs that I targeted for this study all belong to the same CC district and are the closest in proximity to the USD campus. Despite having an open enrollment model, each CC has its own unique culture and student populations that they serve. Centro College is located in a dense urban environment, Mountain Ridge Community College is closest to USD and is located in a suburban environment, while Craft College is furthest from USD and is located in a suburban environment that hosts a major

military base. MRCC is the largest community college and serves the most students in this district.

Planning Action. An email was sent to three TC administrators from each CC in January that described my research topic with a request to interview them (Appendix D). All three responded and asked me to check in with them during the second week of February as the demands placed on the TC are high leading up the academic term. Follow up emails were sent to the three administrators in February. I was able to secure an interview with one of the administrators but did not hear from the other two until late February. Unfortunately, the dates that were proposed by the two other administrators were affected by the school closures resulting from COVID-19. As a result, I was only able to conduct one interview during this cycle.

Asa signed a consent form and gave their permission to record our conversation via a smartphone application (Appendix A). The interview was later transcribed, and Asa's identity was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Taking Action. My interview guide consisted of 15 questions that covered topics related to the administrator's role, the functions of the TC, the challenges they experience in serving their students, as well as a discussion about improving the relationship between the TC and USD's UGA Office (Appendix E). In the past, I've had the most success in working with Asa in scheduling events on their campus, ranging from providing admission updates to their counseling staff to meeting one on one with students. Additional factors that may contribute to this relationship with Asa is that they are an alumnus from SOLES' counseling program and married their partner at the Immaculata. Lastly, the CC that Asa works at, MRCC, is one of our local feeder schools.

Transfer function. Asa shared that the mission of the TC is to serve disproportionately impacted students, which includes underrepresented students, low-income, those who identify as LGBTQ+, and military veterans with the transfer process. A trend and that is occurring on CC campuses nationwide is that there is an increasing number of students who are homeless, are former foster youth, or who are food insecure. Working with this new reality is challenging, but the hope for these students is that they acquire the academic and social capital while attending CC so that they can continue their education at a BGI. Even though the focus is on disproportionately impacted students, the TC's goal is to be a one-stop resource for all things transfer related. Furthermore, Asa shared that a big part of their job is ensuring their staff is up to date on articulation agreements, UC transfer admission guarantees (TAG), the CSU associate degree for transfer program (ADT), and legislation affecting transfer students. While both public and private BGIs use articulation agreements, TAG and ADT are unique to the UC and CSU system in California. Both enhance the transfer function of the CC and provides a seamless path to transfer if students meet specific admissions criteria. Responding to the substantial investment that UC and CSU schools have put into easing the transfer process, several private BGIs who belong to the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU) have followed suit. Asa comments:

They (ADT) are progressively being used for more and more things. For example, the AICCU is now using the ADT to guarantee your admission. There are also a lot more scholarships now – National [University] now offers a scholarship if you have an ADT. Azusa Pacific [University] is also doing this for students who have an ADT- they'll waive a bunch of fees and put you in. So even though the ADT was specific to the CSU schools it is kind of morphing and being used differently by other institutions.

It's worth mentioning that USD is a member of AICCU but does not currently offer any special considerations for students with an ADT. Membership in AICCU does not dictate the admission requirements or practices of its members. Instead, they outline best practices that better serve students, families, and communities in California (About AICCU, n.d.). The recommendations AICCU makes to complement the transfer function at the CC, which are also necessary for establishing a TRC (Jain et al., 2011) are:

- 1) Guarantee admission for ADT students meeting admission requirements.
- 2) Guarantee a minimum of 60 semester/90 quarter units will transfer.
- 3) Guarantee the student starts with junior standing. (AICCU Transfer Commitment, n.d.)

Taking these recommendations into consideration, as it relates specifically to USD, it would be feasible to guarantee admission to students who have an ADT. However, due to the specificity of our general education requirements, it would be nearly impossible to guarantee that all 60 units would meet these requirements impacting the overall time to complete a bachelor's degree. That said, guaranteeing admission to those with an ADT or TAG is a practice worth incorporating into our office, especially as more students are taking advantage of these admission pathways.

As a contemporary Catholic university, we should complement the transfer function of the CC by making the transfer process as easy as possible. Even though our minimum requirements to apply to USD is more flexible compared to the UC and CSU schools, this model is becoming less relevant to CC students. Examining our admission data between Fall 2018-Fall 2019, transfer students matriculated to USD with an average of 51 units. This suggests that students who transfer to USD from CCs were also considering transferring to a public BGI in California, where the completion of 60 units is required. With more community colleges offering

the first two years of college for free, the flexibility we offer may be overshadowed by the cost savings of attending CC for an additional year, especially for low-income students.

Needs and challenges. Asa pointed out that they often advocate for students in situations where a student is denied admission or if a student needs more financial aid to cover tuition or associated education costs. Many of Asa's students, due to family and financial reasons, have to attend a local BGI. As a result, this limits the schools they can apply to. If a student is denied admission or does not receive the adequate financial resources to attend a local BGI, their academic pursuits may suddenly have to come to a halt. According to Asa:

Region 10 is very unusual. We only have three public schools, whereas in other parts of the state, students have lots of access. A lot of our students can't move so we have lots of advocacy based on if somebody gets denied.

Region 10 is a California designated census area that includes San Diego and Imperial Counties (Regions, n.d.). Within Region 10, there are three public BGIs, nine CCs, and a handful of regionally accredited private BGIs (College Alphabetic Listing, n.d.; Institutions, n.d.). While I was transcribing this interview, I thought it was interesting that Asa did not factor in private BGIs when referring to the lack of access. This made me think, are CC administrators biased against private BGIs? Or did Asa's comment simply reflect where most of her students transfer?

According to the district's IRP data, USD ranks fourth among the top five schools that students transfer to from MRCC (SDCCD Transfer Report, 2019). Other schools that belong to this top five include three in-state public BGIs and one other private BGI. As noted in an earlier section, we consider MRCC a local feeder school. Unfortunately, and as reflected in our data, Centro College nor Craft College list USD within their students' top five transfer destinations. That said, we are listed sixth in the district when looking at overall transfer volume. The BGIs

who rank higher than us in the district include three in-state public BGIs, one out of state public BGI, and one local private BGI. This data confirms that students from MRCC, as well as students throughout the district, are mostly seeking admission to local BGIs. With that in mind, I am curious as to why we don't have the same footprint at Centro College and Craft College, especially considering that there is not much geographical distance between us. This problem is magnified as public BGIs in California are also looking at ways to increase access for transfer students. According to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office's *Vision for Success* strategic plan, they hope to increase students transferring to a UC or CSU annually by 35% (Vision for Success, n.d.). These measures will have implications on our ability to attract transfer students on our campus, especially when you consider that information about these BGIs seems to be readily available at the CC.

To provide a better understanding of how students utilize the TC at MRCC, Asa shared a challenge their office has identified is meeting the needs of working students or students who are not able to visit the TC during regular operating hours:

Fifty-four percent of students on campus say they want to transfer, but we don't get those students coming through the Transfer Center, nor does that group of students transfer successfully. A lot of that is because we could do a better job converting more stuff to the web because that's really where students are going for information...Our students have more than one job, many of which are gig jobs, where they usually work about 40 hours a week while taking a full [course] load. They don't necessarily have a lot of free time to come here or next door to general counseling, even though they should.

Asa addresses an important challenge in working with the modern-day student. Engaging and encouraging students to utilize services that have traditionally been offered in person is

problematic as students become busier in managing their everyday lives. Deciding what services are offered digitally while still maintaining a high level of quality is a challenge that many CCs and BGIs face but is becoming more relevant because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The TC at MRCC is a little bit ahead of this curve since they have a significant population of working students. An example of how Asa has met the needs of this population is by hosting admission workshops through live cast features embedded on social media platforms. This option allows students to interact with the TC or representatives from a BGI without having to be physically present on campus. Additionally, these casts are recorded and can be accessed at any time of the day.

An additional suggestion Asa made that reflects a growing trend at BGIs was to establish a TC at USD. Rather than focusing on admission related issues, TCs at BGIs are centralized offices that focus on the needs of new and current transfer students (Jain et al., 2020). These TCs offer a range of services that include but are not limited to academic coaching and advising, help with financial aid, registration, peer tutoring, and mentorship. More importantly, the TC is a space on campus for transfer students to study or build community with each other. Herrera and Jain (2013) note that a critical component in building a TRC (Jain et al., 2011) is having an office on campus that is dedicated to serving transfer students and the transfer function. Understanding that a dedicated space could make a difference for transfer students' sense of belonging at USD, it would also be a beacon for prospective transfer students showing them that we are here to support them and meet their needs.

Would a transfer center make a difference at USD? Maybe not, but Asa feels that a dedicated space would, and described some of the efforts UCSD recently made in supporting transfer students by creating the Transfer Student Hub:

At UCSD, they just started a transfer center (Transfer Student Hub), and the number one thing that students found was helpful to them was a place to print out their paper and make copies for free. Additionally, they have peer coaches who are former transfer students that are there to offer academic and social support. For them, they noticed it wasn't the social [transition] that new students were finding difficulty with but more with getting academic support. Oh, and then there is the food.... But those universities that have a place for [transfer students] that go up to them and say you are a transfer student – here is a copy card, we are here to help you, that really goes a long way. Or just somebody who is looking out for them. Transfer students need a little more hands-on.

Transfer specific programming and resources at USD include transfer orientation and an academic and social integration component known as the Transfer Learning Communities. Though both aid in the transition of transfer students to USD, they are offered prior to and during the first semester for students. In other words, there is nothing specific for transfer students at USD that allows them to continue to access programs or resources that are specific to their needs. It is often assumed that transfer students already possess the savviness to navigate their new institution because they are coming with experience from another institution. Jain et al. (2020) counters this view and says, “People say transfer students will take care of themselves. The reality is they won't. If you really want to help them get the baccalaureate degree, you've got to have services for them when they to get to the four-year institution” (p. 60). Not to say that transfer students do not have access to the extensive amount of resources at USD, but knowing that there isn't anything on campus specific to transfer students beyond their first semester, we need to examine how we can support these students during their entire BGI journey.

After learning about the various challenges transfer students from MRCC face, it further strengthens the argument of incorporating a TRC (Jain et al., 2011) at USD. The issues that Asa spoke of simply do not disappear as soon as a student transfers. BGIs need to ensure that transfer students continue to receive support on their campuses so that they can complete their undergraduate education.

Building a relationship. Hoping to complement the function of the TC at MRCC, I asked Asa what USD could do to begin working towards a TRC (Jain et al., 2011). Asa pointed out that her students are interested in transferring to USD but stop in their tracks once they hear about the cost of attendance or the lack of diversity. Even though Asa tries to highlight the advantages of attending USD, the factors mentioned above are difficult for most of her students to overlook. One suggestion Asa made to increase USD's visibility while addressing these concerns was:

To me, if you had transfer mentors come with you on campus and they saw, like wow, that person looks like me, they came from a community college! This would allow students to make that human connection. That human connection that human face allows the student to relate that individual because it always goes back to that emotional experience even though we think we're so rational.

Participants from cycle one echo this suggestion and is supported by a TRC (Jain et al., 2011).

Lastly, increasing our presence at CCs should go beyond providing information and resources just to students, but it should also include the departments and individuals at the CC who help facilitate the transfer process. Asa shares, "It's those personal touches that people seem to like so much here. Once you make that connection, [our counselors] will feel more inclined to call you if they have a student who is interested in transferring to USD." To make these connections, Asa recommends attending counseling meetings at least once a year to share

admission trends and updates. Having attempted these visits in the past, I can attest to how beneficial these have been for transfer agents. There is no better way to answer questions, provide updates, or clear up confusion about admission requirements or transfer credit policies. Even though I've been lucky to fit these meetings in with a couple of community colleges in San Diego, the frequency at which they occur are inconsistent and do not reach all nine schools in Region 10.

Evaluating Action. Asa's assessment of the needs of CC students provided additional insight into how we can better disseminate information about our transfer process and complement the mission of the TC. Even though some of the issues Asa highlighted transcends what we can address alone in the UGA Office, it highlights the areas we can improve on overall as an institution, especially if we are to work towards a TRC (Jain et al., 2011).

The interview didn't reveal the reasons why information about the transfer process to USD was lacking at MRCC. However, it does confirm that public BGIs have a larger footprint at community colleges. The reasons for this larger footprint may be due to the size, reputation, and affordability of these schools. However, there is something to be said about how the articulation of coursework and degree pathways offered by these BGIs can take the guesswork out of the transfer process. Simultaneously, public BGIs are equipped to conduct transfer student outreach on a larger scale. Reflecting on my experience attending transfer fairs at community colleges throughout California, nearly every UC and CSU is represented and offer opportunities to meet with an admissions representative before and after these visits.

Lastly, when talking to Asa about resources for transfer students, she referenced several ways CCs and the public BGIs can support transfer students during their entire undergraduate career, both academically and socially. For counseling staff who want the best for the students

they work with, it makes sense why they may be inclined to make referrals to BGIs who already have a network of support that is specific to the needs of transfer students. As shared by my participants, costs and financial aid are concerns when selecting a BGI to transfer to. However, if you can provide a rich educational experience with specific resources tailored to your needs, all at a significantly lower price point, then the decision becomes easier for those that already see private schools as unattainable. One can argue that attending a private school with smaller class sizes and the effects it has on retention and persistence is the benefit of choosing USD. However, that argument has limited appeal when you consider the costs, the lack of institutional aid, and the limited resources and programming specifically for transfer students. Unfortunately, these are all signs of an institution where a Transfer Receptive Culture (Jain et al., 2011) does not exist.

Limitations

Participants

Even though the data that I collected was rich in detailing the experiences of students navigating the transfer process to USD, it is specific to the experiences of the ten students in the pre-cycle and does not represent the journey every transfer student has at USD. The limited scope of this study also applies to the participants in cycle one, where their responses represent a small sample of the overall CC student population.

Furthermore, limiting the participants to one or two community colleges would have been beneficial for this AR Project. While most of the participants from the pre-cycle attended MRCC, participants in subsequent cycles attended other CCs throughout San Diego County. Grouping participants by CC would have allowed for an in-depth analysis of how I could work with my department and collaborate with the TC in providing resources and conduct outreach that would be the most effective for that institution. That said, the data did reveal central themes

and findings regardless of which CC the participant attended, and despite their background.

Lastly, the design of this AR was primarily focused on the discovery phase of the participants' journeys to USD. An examination of the process and practices the UGA Office employs after a student submits their application would have presented a complete view of the pre-transfer process to USD. Including this would allow for a richer analysis of how implementing a TRC (Jain et al., 2011) could make the entire admissions process friendlier for transfer students.

Income

Knowing that costs and financial aid play an important role in the college decision process, I attempted to focus on other aspects of the college search process to avoid these issues from taking over the study. However, this is unavoidable, especially at an institution like USD, where the cost of attendance and the lack of financial aid makes us unapproachable for many transfer students, especially those who are low-income. As a result of these fears, I did not collect income data from the participants. Even though all my participants identified costs of attendance and the lack of financial aid as barriers to admission, this didn't prevent students from my pre-cycle from applying to USD. These concerns might be mitigated if participants in this group received help paying for their education or were in a financial position to take out a loan. Collecting income data could have demonstrated a relationship between perceived barriers and college choice. Collecting this data might also explain why transfer agents from certain community colleges may hesitate when referring students to USD. An example of this was found while reviewing Centro College's financial aid data. Of the 15,191 students at Centro College, 64% of the student body is Pell Grant eligible (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). None of the participants in cycle one: phase one, all of whom attended Centro College, listed

USD in their top three college choices. Even though I did not focus on costs and financial aid, the data from Centro College highlight how both are important in influencing college choice.

Bias

I was delighted with the perspectives the participants shared with me in the pre-cycle. However, after coding the data, many of the themes and findings focused on what the TC or CC college could improve rather than what USD could do to improve the transfer process. I believe this one-sidedness was a result of my research question and the number of questions that were focused on the practices of the TC.

As Jain et al. (2020) note, one of the goals of instituting a TRC (Jain et al., 2011) is to shift the responsibility of the transfer function from the CC to a shared responsibility where the BGI takes an active role. Without intending to, I feel that I confirmed the bias these students have towards the TC while also contributing to the expectation that this responsibility belongs to the CC. One example of how we are responsible for some of the negative experiences shared by the student participants is that up until Fall 2018, we did not have transfer admission brochures. Since all these participants transferred to USD in Fall 2018 or Spring 2019, these brochures did not exist or were too new to have made an impact on their transfer process. There are other examples that I could highlight in our admission practices that contribute to the negative experiences during the pre-transfer phase. However, the majority of them can be explained by the lack of commitment and priority we have towards transfer students.

Lastly, the design of the pre-cycle intentionally blocked newly admitted transfer students from participating in the study. Including their experiences may have offered a more balanced critique of the transfer experience to USD. I question my degree of certainty because I designed the pre-cycle to allow a buffer for students to reflect on their transfer experience after spending at

least a semester on our campus. That said, including the experiences of newly matriculated students would have offered a fresh perspective of the transfer process as this experience is more recent to them. Participants from the pre-cycle might have forgotten some of the critical aspects of their transfer journey, and because they are now part of the USD community, they can easily shift the negative feelings of their journey over to the CC. My positionality and the setting where I conducted these interviews might also have affected these participants as they may not be as open to critique the practices of the UGA Office directly to their point of contact.

COVID-19 and Cycle Three

I intended to close the study with a focus group that would have brought the staff and administrators from the TC with members from my office together. Since the overall timeline for this AR was affected by professional and personal challenges, this pushed cycle three to the end of March. The hope for cycle three was to share the data that was collected from the previous cycles to brainstorm ways our departments could collaborate in easing the transfer process for students. Additionally, I wanted our office to commit to at least one long term change in our practice to demonstrate our commitment and complement the transfer function. Unfortunately, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic prevented this cycle from occurring as the staff and administrators from all of San Diego's college campuses were impacted by campus closures and departments shifting their programming online. Though disappointing, I do not intend for this to be the end of my work. The data collected from this AR project is valuable, especially at a time where I've been allowed to rethink how we engage with prospective transfer students. As this AR project is directly connected to my professional role, I intend to conduct cycle three when our campuses begin functioning more normally.

Recommendations

Establish Articulation Agreements

Participants from cycle one were particularly concerned about how their courses from their previous institution would transfer to USD. There is an expectation of knowing which courses will meet general education requirements and major prep since this is a practice employed throughout the UCs and CSUs. An update to USD's Core Curriculum has made course selection from California's CC much easier, but there are areas within our Core Curriculum that are not as clear. Community college students want a clearly defined path that allows them to complete most, if not all, of the general education requirements at a BGI so that they can save money and complete their degree on time. I feel this is especially important as students may be considering attending a community college for their first two years to take advantage of the California Promise Program. Furthermore, the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), both professional organizations that I belong to, has a code of ethics that specifically addresses transfer admission practices at BGIs. The policies that they recommend support this recommendation and align with a Transfer Receptive Culture (Jain et al., 2011):

- Colleges will publish up-to-date lists of the institutions with which they have articulated transfer agreements, including which courses and credits transfer and the minimum course grade that is acceptable for transfer.
- Before transfer candidates are required to submit an enrollment deposit or other commitment to enroll, colleges will provide them with an evaluation of their prior college-level credits that is a good faith estimate of how those credits will be applied

toward their graduation requirements. An online articulated transfer agreement will meet this requirement.

- Enjoy the maximization of available credit in transfer in support of reduced cost to students and the most efficient time to degree completion.
- Have the right to clear, complete, and accessible information about how prior learning credit will be accepted and applied to degree requirements in their select program of study. (Holaday, 2017; Transfer Student Bill of Rights, n.d.)

As of March 2020, USD hired its first articulation officer who will be assigned to some of this work. That said, they must prioritize articulating courses with our feeder schools as it will have a direct impact on how we can better serve these CCs.

Commit to Transfer Outreach and Recruitment

To increase our visibility at the local CCs, we need to create more opportunities to visit the nine CCs in Region 10. As shared by my student participants, information about USD is limited or does not exist. Even though we try to build visits to local CCs into our annual recruitment plan, these visits are often overshadowed by first-year recruitment priorities. Research from Rhine, Milligan, and Nelson (2010) and data collected from cycle two encourage BGIs to visit CCs on a bi-annual basis. I've attempted to do this in the last couple of years but could only fit bi-annual visits to two or three local CCs. Ideal times for these visits are in September-October and February-March. Unfortunately, these months are also peak times for first-year recruitment, application reading, and hosting yield events. With our current organizational model, I am unable to fit these activities in unless I was relieved from my first-year admission duties. What I am proposing goes beyond just visiting community colleges, but also includes exploring ways we can include faculty and students in our outreach to transfer

students. Additionally, reviewing our physical and digital content is part of this process, which would allow us to explore and develop new ways of engaging with transfer students, their families, and local CCs.

Institutional Commitment

My prior suggestions would be a great starting point in ensuring information about the transfer process is reaching students and the TC. However, these suggestions are limited in their scope in supporting transfer students as they transition to our campus. An authentic commitment made by USD would ensure that transfer students are included in all areas of decision making. This would have a long-term impact in increasing transfer enrollment, but also ensure there is appropriate programming and support at USD for transfer students to be successful. Furthermore, an authentic commitment would involve a serious discussion about financial aid that would allow us to explore ways we can become more accessible to transfer students who attend the three closest CCs to USD. Lastly, and most importantly, committing to transfer students will ensure that appropriate training is developed for all units on campus where transfer student related issues and accomplishments are highlighted. Jain et al. (2020) note:

Having transfer efforts contained in only certain parts of campus is not the goal of a transfer receptive culture; although we advocate against this, we understand that unfortunately this is the reality for most universities across the United States. The overall goal is that transfer becomes a campus-wide effort where every employee and student sees it as a normalized component of campus life. (p. 97)

Having an institutional commitment towards transfer students would not only allow us to work together as a University in welcoming transfer students but also show them that they matter on our campus.

Final Reflection

I thoroughly enjoyed this AR project despite the challenges and the unexpected turns that it presented to me. As a first-generation college student who navigated the transfer process, there were many times during the AR process where I reflected on my college search and the obstacles that I had to overcome. Coincidentally, I've felt lonely during both journeys.

Despite the growing scholarship on transfer students and the number of changes BGIs have made to meet our needs, a sense of loneliness also marked the stories shared by the participants in this study. That said, these journeys are testaments to the transfer student experience that should be sought out and valued by BGIs. Like other groups who are marginalized at institutions of higher education, the transfer journey is marked by self-advocacy and empowerment, both of which are skills that we acquire in our pursuit of education. Even though this AR project was designed to inform my practice, I hope that it also pays tribute to transfer students. As I continue my career in higher education, I hope to inspire my current and future colleagues to examine their practice in working with this population. By doing this, it will allow us to honor the experiences and accomplishments of transfer students rather than making it more difficult for them to succeed.

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Appendix A: Research Participant Consent Form

**University of San Diego
Institutional Review Board
Research Participant Consent Form**

For the research study entitled:
Paving the Way: Enhancing the Transfer Admission Practices at the University of San Diego

I. Purpose of the research study

Andrew Alsoraimi-Espiritu is a student in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research study he is conducting. The purpose of this research study is to examine how USD's Undergraduate Admissions Office can better serve prospective transfer students from local community colleges. Using Transfer Receptive Culture (Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solorazano, 2011) as a framework, he would like to improve the relationship with the Transfer Center in order to meet the needs of the students it serves.

II. What you will be asked to do

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Take part in a private interview that will inform the admission practices of USD's Office of Undergraduate Admission.
- Complete a questionnaire that will inform the researcher of the needs of students who are ready to transfer
- Take part in a private interview that will allow the researcher to understand the needs of the Transfer Center as well as strategies to improve its relationship with the Transfer Center.
- Complete a survey measuring the need for a relationship between USD's Office of Undergraduate Admission and the Transfer Center
- Collaborate with the researcher to improve the admission and relational practices of USD's Office of Undergraduate Admission.

You will be audio recorded during the researcher's interviews and focus group.

Your participation in this study will take a total of 3-5 hours over the course of 6 months.

III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts

This study involves no more risk than the risks you encounter in daily life.

IV. Benefits

While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that you helped researchers better understand the needs of local Transfer Centers and the students it serves. Additionally, this study will allow the researcher to examine the practices of USD's Office of Undergraduate Admission in better serving students through the admission process.

V. Confidentiality

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name). Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually.

The information or materials you provide may be cleansed of all identifiers (like your name) and used in future research.

VI. Compensation

You will receive no compensation for your participation in the study.

VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this, and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will have no effect on any benefits you're entitled to, like your health care, or your employment or grades. **You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.**

VIII. Contact Information

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact either:

1) Andrew Alsoraimi-Espiritu
Email: aespiritu@sandiego.edu
Phone: 619.576.7995

2) Cheryl Getz, EdD
Email: cgetz@sandiego.edu
Phone: 619.260.4289

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Participant (**Printed**)

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix B: Pre-Cycle Interview Guide

Student Experience

1. Please tell me about your experience transferring to USD
 - a. Did you use any specific resources to inform your transfer process?
2. What perceptions did you have of USD prior to transferring? What informed these perceptions? Did these perceptions change after attending here?

Transfer Center

1. Can you describe your experience in reaching out to the Transfer Center? What information did they share with you about USD? What information did you have to seek out yourself?
2. How did the Transfer Center help you in seeking admission to USD? Did you feel like you had enough information about USD before submitting an application?
3. Is there anything you wish Transfer Centers could have provided to you to ease your transition to USD?
4. Do you feel that USD had a presence at the Transfer Center (brochures, contact information is readily available, transfer credit policies)?

Examining the Need for a Relationship

1. What advice would you give to a prospective transfer who is exploring their transfer options?
 - a. What advice would you give to them if you knew they were specifically thinking about transferring to USD?
2. What does an effective relationship between a four-year school and a Transfer Center look like? Have you encountered this in your transfer experience?
3. Do you have any recommendations for ways USD's Office of Undergraduate Admission can partner with the Transfer Center?

Appendix C: Cycle 1 Survey

6/30/2020

Transfer Student Survey

Transfer Student Survey

The purpose of this research study is to examine how the University of San Diego's Undergraduate Admissions Office can better serve prospective transfer students from local community colleges. Using Transfer Receptive Culture (Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solorzano, 2011) as a framework, the researcher (Andrew Alsoraimi-Espiritu) would like to improve relationships with local Transfer Centers in order to meet the needs of the students it serves. This survey will take 15-20 minutes to complete.

*** Required**

1. Email address *

2. What is your gender identity? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Non-binary
☐ Prefer not to say

3. What is your age? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 18-24
☐ 25-34
☐ 35-44
☐ 45-54
☐ 55-64

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4. What is your race? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic, LatinX, or Spanish
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Middle Eastern or North African
- ☐ White
- ☐ Two or more
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

5. What community college do you currently attend? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Cuyamaca College
- ☐ Grossmont College
- ☐ MiraCosta College
- ☐ Palomar College
- ☐ San Diego City College
- ☐ San Diego Mesa College
- ☐ San Diego Miramar College
- ☐ Southwestern College
- ☐ Other

6. Have you previously attended a 4-year college or university? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

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7. What is your intended major? *

8. What has been your experience like in searching for a school to transfer to? (Do not answer if this question does not apply to you)

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Excellent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Poor

9. What resources have you used to inform your transfer process? *

Select all that apply

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Counseling Center at my community college
- ☐ Transfer Center at my community college
- ☐ Admission representative at the 4 year school
- ☐ Own research
- ☐ Independent college counselor
- ☐ Friend or family member

Other: ☐ _____

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10. What are the top 3 qualities that you are looking for in deciding on a school? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Cost	Financial Aid/Scholarship opportunities	Size of the school	Transfer of credits	Academic reputation	Social life	Academic opportunities at the school	Ca Rea
Rank 1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rank 2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rank 3	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Please explain if you selected 'Other' in the previous question.

12. Is there anything about the school that would make or break your decision to attend? *

*

Select all that apply

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Financial Aid
- ☐ Cost
- ☐ Location
- ☐ Major Impaction
- ☐ Lack of employment opportunities
- ☐ Student Diversity
- ☐ Class Sizes

Other: ☐ _____

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13. What are your top 3 college choices? Have you visited any of these schools? *

14. Have you considered private four-year institutions in your college search? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

15. If you answered no, then please explain.

16. What do you know about the University of San Diego (USD)? *

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17. What has informed your knowledge of USD? *

Select all that apply

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Friend or family member
- ☐ Information found at the Transfer Center
- ☐ Information from a counselor
- ☐ Information from USD's website or brochure
- ☐ Word of mouth
- ☐ N/A

Other: ☐ _____

18. Have you utilized the services of the Transfer Center at your community college? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ What is the Transfer Center?

19. If you selected "No" in the previous question, then please explain why you haven't visited the Transfer Center.

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20. What information do you expect to receive at the Transfer Center? *

Select all that apply

Check all that apply.

- ☐ The transfer process to a 4 year university
- ☐ Financial Aid Information
- ☐ Assistance with the college application
- ☐ General info about a 4 year university
- ☐ How courses will transfer to the 4 year university
- ☐ 4 year universities visiting campus
- ☐ I don't know

Other: ☐ _____

21. Do the services of the Transfer Center meet your expectations? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ N/A

22. If you answered no, then please explain.

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23. Is there anything that you wish Transfer Centers could provide you with to ease your college search? *

24. Do you feel there is equal representation of 4 year schools at the Transfer Center? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

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25. If you answered no, which schools do you think have the largest footprint? *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ San Diego State University (CSU)
- ☐ CSU San Marcos
- ☐ CSU Fullerton
- ☐ Cal Poly - Pomona (CSU)
- ☐ CSU San Bernardino
- ☐ CSU Northridge
- ☐ CSU Channel Islands
- ☐ CSU Los Angeles
- ☐ CSU Dominguez Hills
- ☐ CSU Long Beach
- ☐ CSU Bakersfield
- ☐ Cal Poly - San Luis Obispo (CSU)
- ☐ CSU Monterey Bay
- ☐ Fresno State (CSU)
- ☐ San Jose State University (CSU)
- ☐ CSU Stanislaus
- ☐ CSU East Bay
- ☐ San Francisco State University (CSU)
- ☐ Sonoma State University (CSU)
- ☐ Sacramento State University (CSU)
- ☐ Chico State University (CSU)
- ☐ Humboldt State University (CSU)
- ☐ Cal Maritime (CSU)
- ☐ UC Berkeley
- ☐ UC Davis
- ☐ UC Irvine
- ☐ UCLA
- ☐ UC Merced
- ☐ UC Riverside
- ☐ UC San Diego
- ☐ UC Santa Barbara
- ☐ UC Santa Cruz
- ☐ National Univesity
- ☐ University of Phoenix
- ☐ Grand Canyon University
- ☐ Point Loma Nazarene University
- ☐ University of San Diego

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☐ Alliant International University

Other: ☐ _____

26. What has been your experience interacting with four-year universities at your community college? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Excellent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Poor

27. What does an effective relationship between a four-year university and a Transfer Center look like to you? *

28. Have you encountered this in your transfer experience? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ N/A

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29. Do you have recommendations for ways the University of San Diego's Office of Undergraduate Admission can partner with your Transfer Center? *

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Appendix D: Email Invite to Transfer Center Administrator

Hi [Insert Name],

How are you? Happy 2nd week! I am emailing you this evening to see if it would be possible to interview you for my graduate research project. The purpose of my research is to collect data and research ways of enhancing the relationship between USD's Office of Undergraduate Admission and the Transfer Center. The interview shouldn't take more than 45 minutes. If you are interested, please send me 3 or 4 dates and times that would work best for you. I understand that your calendar fills up quickly so any date and time between February 17th-March 20th will work for me.

Thank you for your consideration!

Best Regards,

Andrew Alsoraimi-Espiritu

Senior Transfer Admission Counselor | Undergraduate Admission

University of San Diego

5998 Alcala Park | Manchester Hall | San Diego, CA | 92110

T: (619) 260.4506 | F: (619) 260.6836

aespiritu@sandiego.edu | www.sandiego.edu/BecomeATorero

Appendix E: Cycle Two Interview Guide

Transfer Center Interview Guide**Positionality**

1. Can you describe your job to me? What roles do you play at your institution?
 - a. Please describe the function/mission of your current role and the office that you belong to?
2. In your role, do you work with four-year institutions? If so, can you describe this relationship?
 - a. If not, whose responsibility do you feel it is to build and maintain relationships with four-year institutions?
3. What do you know about USD? What has informed this knowledge?

Transfer Center

1. Do you feel that students at your institution fully utilize the services of the Transfer Center?
 - a. If not, what needs to improve?
2. What do you think are the biggest barriers are for your students hoping to transfer to a four year school? What helps them overcome these barriers?
3. What kinds of support at your institution are available to students contemplating a transfer?
How do students learn about resources? How often do you think students use them? Do you think there are resources that don't currently exist that would be particularly helpful?
4. Do you feel that your students are interested in transferring to USD?
 - a. What are some of the barriers/challenges that you may know of that prevents them from attending?
5. In your opinion, how can USD be more transfer-friendly?

Examining the Need for a Relationship

1. Can you think of things that we could make work better by partnering our two schools? What knowledge, support, co-advising do you think would be helpful?
2. In which ways can USD's Office of Undergraduate Admission improve its relationship with your Transfer Center? With your students?
3. Where can a student receive information about transferring, other than the Transfer Center, on your campus? How do they receive this information?
4. What are the biggest needs of your students? How does your office help the student meet these needs? How can four-year institutions help with this?
5. We would like to talk to transfer students more about their experiences during the transfer process and what their impressions are of USD. Which groups of students would you recommend reaching out to?
6. What can we do to best complement the work that you are already doing?
7. Any other thoughts on who we should be talking to on your campus in establishing a partnership?

Appendix F: Email Invite for Pre-Cycle

Good Afternoon,

I hope that you are enjoying your summer break and the lead up to the new academic year! I'm reaching out today because I'm looking for participants for my research project that examines how we can enhance the relationship between USD's Office of Undergraduate Admission and local community college Transfer Centers.

The initial phase of my research will include a short 30-45 minute interview but may also include surveys, focus groups, and follow-up interviews.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please respond to this e-mail.

Enjoy the rest of your summer!

Best Regards,

Andrew Alsoraimi-Espiritu

Senior Transfer Admission Counselor | Undergraduate Admission
University of San Diego
5998 Alcala Park | Manchester Hall | San Diego, CA | 92110
T: (619) 260.4506 | F: (619) 260.6836
aespiritu@san Diego.edu | www.sandiego.edu/BecomeATorero

Appendix G: Email Invite for Cycle One – Phase Two

Good Evening,

Thank you for attending a recent Transfer Information Session at the University of San Diego! I hope you learned more about the admission process and had your questions and concerns addressed during your visit.

I'm reaching out this evening because I'm seeking participants for my research project on enhancing the relationship between USD's Office of Undergraduate Admission and local community college Transfer Centers.

Participation will strictly be limited to filling out one survey that should not take longer than 15 minutes. Please note that **this survey is only open to enrolled students at a community college**. Lastly, your participation or lack thereof will not impact your admission decision if applying to the University of San Diego.

If you would be interested in participating or have any questions, please respond to this e-mail.

Have a great rest of your week!

Best Regards,

Andrew Alsoraimi-Espiritu

Senior Transfer Admission Counselor | Undergraduate Admission
University of San Diego
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