TRANSFER SHOCK AND THE EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS TRANSITIONING TO CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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DISSERTATION

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TRANSFER SHOCK AND THE EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS TRANSITIONING TO CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

A Dissertation

by

Rebecca Jane Berner

Approved by Dissertation Committee:

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Caroline Turner, Ph.D., Chair

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Jim Riggs, Ph.D.

SPRING 2012
TRANSFER SHOCK AND THE EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS TRANSITIONING TO CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Student: Rebecca Jane Berner

I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this dissertation is suitable for shelving in the library and credit is to be awarded for the dissertation.

_________________________________, Graduate Coordinator
Caroline Turner, Ph.D. Date
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the transfer students who shared their lives and stories with me so freely. You may have had a rough first semester but I am convinced you will all recover, graduate and achieve your dreams!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been honored to work closely with my advisor and committee chair, Dr Caroline Turner, who is an amazing mentor and friend. Thank you for your constant support, understanding and feedback and for not allowing me to falter along the way. I am also very grateful to my other committee members, Dr. Jana Noel and Dr. Jim Riggs, for their time, flexibility and expertise.

I received considerable professional support for this project. I am indebted to my colleagues in the office of Academic Advising Programs at CSU, Chico for their on-going support, input and flexibility with my work hours. They are an amazing group of professionals who do their very best for students every day. Most of all I am thankful to my friend and mentor, Lorraine Smith, who encouraged me to pursue my doctorate from the very start and who supported me every step of the way.

To all the members of cohort three who provided support and inspiration – thank you! I am in awe of your amazing talents and your dedication to the field of education. I am honored to be in your good company. I am especially grateful to my study group, Jenni Helfrich Murphy, Viridiana Diaz and Linda Meyerson whose friendship and support kept me going. It has been a wonderful bonus of this program to encounter such a group of inspirational women friends and colleagues.

I would like to thank my dear parents, Carl and Marilyn Berner, who have always highly valued education and who instilled in me the love of reading and the
importance of being a life-long learner. Thank you for supporting me in every possible way along this educational journey and throughout my lifetime.

To my dear sister Susan, a high school English teacher, who read my work in its rough state and gave me valuable input and emotional support during this entire process. You are true blue and I am lucky to have you for a sister.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my sweet husband and best friend, Steve Pettersen, who cooked meals, ran errands and cheered me on through thick and thin. Thank you. I am truly blessed to have you in my life.
CURRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION

Doctorate of Education - Educational Leadership – 2012
California State University, Sacramento
Dissertation: An Exploration of the Transfer Student Transition

Master of Arts – Communication - 2001
California State University, Chico
Concentration: Intercultural Communication & Health Education

Bachelor of Science, Journalism, 1988
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
Concentration: Broadcast News

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Orientation Coordinator & Academic Advisor - 2005-Present
Academic Advising Programs, California State University, Chico
- Direct annual 22-24 session summer orientation program for 6,000 new students & parents
- Develop programming in alignment with university master plan & enrollment trends
- Manage annual budget of over $300,000 for orientation programs
- Create & implement marketing plan to encourage attendance at orientation
- Oversee maintenance of orientation website & printing of program materials
- Hire, train & supervise professional Reservation Coordinator & Reservation Assistant
- Recruit, hire, train & supervise 25-30 student peer leaders each year
- Collaborate with college deans, departments & faculty on faculty advising at orientation
- Coordinate student registration for courses with Records & Registration
• Work with Student Affairs units across campus on student life component of orientation
• Collect & analyze data used to evaluate orientation programs
• Advise undeclared, probationary & disqualified students regarding academic planning

Program Coordinator - 2001-2005
Alcohol & Drug Education Center, California State University, Chico
• Developed, implemented and evaluated campus prevention campaigns & activities
• Created and organized alcohol-free & educational outreach events
• Prepared and delivered presentations to student, parent, faculty & staff audiences
• Conducted Substance Abuse Seminars for students in violation of campus policy
• Advised students, faculty and staff on alcohol & drug–related issues
• Coordinated grant activities and met grant reporting requirements
• Collected & analyzed data on student alcohol and drug usage for program planning

Regional Trainer & Consultant - 2000-2006
Prevention by Design, ISSC, University of California, Berkeley
• Promoted use of research-based planning strategies to county prevention programs
• Developed training & presented to alcohol & drug prevention staff within 7-county region
• Helped individual prevention program staff utilize data for program planning
• Provided technical assistance to county staff on state reporting requirements
• Developed yearly training plan for each county prevention program within region
• Reported monthly on data-based prevention planning outcomes to ISSC
- Trained on logic models, environmental prevention, focus groups, program fidelity
- Served as Safe and Drug Free Schools site visitor and reported findings

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Associate - 2000-Present
California State University, Chico Health & Community Services Department
- Teach leadership/training course (HCSV 389) for Summer Orientation Leaders
- Instruct students on academic policies, procedures & basics of academic advising
- Coordinate diversity, leadership, communication & teambuilding workshops
- Coach students on speaking, advising & interpersonal skills

Communication Arts & Sciences Department
- Develop, organize & present lessons on communication topics
- Evaluate student written & oral performance

University Academics
- Taught first year Academic Success course (UNIV 101) - Fall 2004
- Helped freshmen students gain study, information literacy & research skills
- Designed exercises to teach life skills needed for college & life success
- Team-taught 1-unit pilot “Transfer Success” course (UNIV 201) – Fall 2009
- Developed course materials & guided course through course proposal process
- Coordinated promotion & registration for the course with community college staff
Part Time Faculty - 2000-2001
Butte Community College – Language Arts Department
- Taught Public Speaking & Small Group Communication courses (Speech 2 & 4)
- Developed class syllabi, course materials & tests
- Designed and led student activities & discussion to build communication skills

Teaching Assistant - 1998-2000
California State University, Chico- Communication Department
- Instructed three sections per semester of freshmen Public Speaking (CMST 131)
- Led class activities & exercises on presentation skills
- Graded outlines and speeches & submitted final grades

MEDIA EXPERIENCE

Event Coordinator - 1999
Independent Contractor, Chico Chamber of Commerce, Chico
- Organized & promoted two-day business trade show featuring 130 exhibitors
- Coordinated sponsorships & booth sales to Chamber members
- Promoted event in the community via billboards, posters & newspaper ads
- Handled all event logistics including volunteer staffing, permits, coordination
- Planned exhibitor pre-event dinner & scheduled event entertainment
- Event met targeted net of $20,000

Communication Director - 1990-1994
San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce, San Luis Obispo
- Developed public relation programs to gain optimum membership
- Wrote all chamber publications including award-winning monthly newsletter
- Wrote award-winning Annual San Luis Obispo Visitors’ Guide
- Coordinated tourism promotion contract for City of San Luis Obispo
- Promoted & planned familiarization tours for state-wide tourism media
- Planned special member business events including trade shows & workshops
- Organized annual dinner for over 500 business members
- Organized speakers & logistics for monthly business leader breakfasts for over 100
- Conducted focus groups & surveys to gain feedback on Chamber programs
- Served as local media liaison for the Chamber on business-related issues

Community Affairs Director - 1988-1990
KS BY Television, NBC Affiliate, San Luis Obispo
- Wrote & produced public service announcements and news promotions
- Organized community outreach in San Luis Obispo, Santa Maria & Santa Barbara counties
- Researched & wrote viewer information booklets to accompany news series
- Developed sales materials in conjunction with creative department team
- Coordinated talent appearances & live weather broadcasts at special events
- Acted as liaison with local schools on special events, station tours
- Coordinated station internship program with local colleges & universities

News Staff and Promotion Coordinator - 1986-1988
US-98, KKUS Radio, San Luis Obispo
- Wrote & delivered live newscasts
- Aired commercial breaks & maintained accurate logs/equipment readings
- Did voice-overs, & recorded & dubbed commercials, & on-air promotional spots
- Planned special events & on-air promotions to increase station listenership
• Developed sales & promotional materials including quarterly client newsletter
• Coordinated special events to boost community visibility

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

• Graduate - OPI - Orientation Professionals Institute (2008)-Three-day training sponsored by the National Orientation Directors Association
• Graduate - Leadership San Luis Obispo (1992) -Year-long leadership development program sponsored by the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce

SELECTED GRANTS & RESEARCH PROJECTS

• Student Voice Orientation Survey
  Coordinate survey of new CSU, Chico freshmen and transfer students each fall and analyze the data for use in orientation program improvement.
• Prevention Research Center: Safer California Universities
  Collected data at CSU, Chico for five-year National Institute of Health research grant.
• Office of Traffic Safety Sober Driver Initiative
  Collaborated on two-year grant to create increased awareness about alcohol-related driving fatalities & to reduce drinking & driving among CSU, Chico students.
• U.S. Department of Education Grant on Alcohol & Violence
  Helped write & coordinate activities for two-year grant, “Social Norming & Breath Sampling: Preventing High Risk Drinking Among First Year College Students.”
• Core Alcohol and Drug Survey
  Coordinated the annual sample selection, administration & analysis of campus-wide survey. Disseminated survey results to campus/community.
• Healthy Chico Youth Mini-Grant
  Wrote annual grant to support on-campus alcohol education events.

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS & PAPERS

• Conference Presentation: National Orientation Directors Association
  “Focus on Faculty: Orientation and Faculty Partnerships” (New Orleans, 2011)
• Conference Presentation: Regional Orientation Directors Association
  “Life After Orientation: Empowering Second Semester Freshmen” (Berkeley, 2011)
• Conference Presentation: National Academic Advising Association
  “Navigating Rough Waters: Group Advising for At-Risk Students” (San Diego, 2011)
• Presenter: California Prevention Summit
  “Focus Groups Demystified” (Riverside, 2003)
• Presenter: CSU System Alcohol Advisory Council Conference
  “Battling the Party School Image: CSU, Chico’s Prevention Program” (Long Beach, 2002)
• Presenter: CSU, Chico’s Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Conference
  “Student/Instructor/Community Partnerships: A Win/Win Situation” (Chico, 2002)
• Professional Paper, Western States Communication Association
  “Dying for A Drink: A Narrative Analysis of Binge Drinking Artifacts” (Sacramento, 2000)

SELECTED UNIVERSITY & COMMUNITY SERVICE

• Early Start Implementation Team, CSU, Chico (2010-present)
• First Year Experience Task Force, CSU, Chico (2006-present)
Getting Connected/Wildcat Welcome Committee, CSU, Chico (2002-present)
Faculty & Staff Diversity Summit, CSU, Chico (Fall 2010)
Student Diversity Summit Mentor, CSU, Chico (2009)
Student Services Center Committee Chair, CSU, Chico (2009)
Butte Youth Now Community Coalition, Butte County (2005-2007)
President’s Task Force on New Student Orientation. CSU, Chico (2005-2006)
Public Safety Advisory Committee, CSU, Chico (2005-2006)
Student Affairs Professional Development Committee (PDC), CSU, Chico (2003-2006)
Healthy Chico Youth Community Coalition, Butte County (2001-2006)
Abstract

of

TRANSFER SHOCK AND THE EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS TRANSITIONING TO CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

Rebecca Jane Berner

This qualitative phenomenological study examines transfer shock and the experience of community college students as they transitioned to California State University, Chico. Interviews were conducted with 13 community college transfer students who experienced a difficult transition to the four year institution as evidenced by a significant first semester drop in grade point average, known as transfer shock. The five research questions were:

1. How do students characterize their transition experience?
2. What are transfer students’ expectations around transfer?
3. What differences do transfers students report between the two and four year institutions?
4. What helps and hindrances to their transition do students report?
5. What additional types of support might be offered by the institution to aid their transition experience?
The author utilized Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1995) as a lens to explore the transition experiences of students during their first semester at the new institution. Schlossberg posits that situation, self, supports and strategies (the 4 S’s) impact an individual’s ability to transition successfully. The researcher found that students characterized their transition in negative and positive terms. Student’s expectations were largely inaccurate in that they expected their experience at the four year institution to be very similar to their community college experience. Instead, they discovered many differences between institutions in terms of the academic and social environment and campus culture. Overall, the findings revealed that the academic transition was much more difficult for students than the social transition. For example, students found classes at the four year institution larger and more demanding with less instructor interaction. In regards to the social transition, study participants reported that Chico State provided a welcoming social environment in which it was easy to make friends. They also found that the campus culture was more positive and goal-oriented at the four year level than at the community college. Overall, study participants reported many more hindrances than helps to their transition experience. In particular, transfer students who lived away from home for the first time experienced difficulties with time management and basic life skills such as cooking and cleaning. One of the greatest hindrances to many transfer students in their transition was their reluctance to seek help. Challenges reported at the institutional level included: difficulties with the admission process, obstacles to obtaining academic
advising and lack of information about academic and probation policies. Using Schlossberg’s Transition Theory as a lens to assess students’ coping strategies revealed that students’ assessment of their situation, as well their unwillingness to reach out for support contributed to their transition difficulties. This study concludes with policy and future research recommendations, as well as an emerging theoretical framework of transfer socialization. Institutions must consider the entire transfer process beginning at the community college and extending through the first semester at the new institution. Therefore, in order to help students avoid transfer shock, interventions must be staged at key points along the transition continuum.
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

California needs more highly educated workers to fulfill its growing workforce needs. By 2025, only 35% of working-age adults in California will have a bachelor’s degree but 41% of jobs will require bachelor’s degree (Johnson, 2012).

“The future of our state economy is tied to increasing the number of Californians who both enter and complete their education” (Moore, Shulock, Ceja, & Lang 2007, p. IV).

Graduating from college also improves individuals’ quality of life, “College graduates do much better in the world of work than those who do not go to college” (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 240). Failing to graduate from college negatively impacts students’ ability to compete in the labor market and, ultimately, their lifetime ability to support themselves (Venzia, Callan, Finney, Kirst, & Usdan, 2005).

Yet a growing population and sweeping state budget cuts have combined to make completion of a four-year degree in the state more difficult (Lester, 2006). Since 2010, all three systems of public higher education in the state have experienced significant budget reductions and more cuts are anticipated. Both of the state’s four-year systems, the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) have reduced new student enrollment in an attempt to cope with these cuts. In 2010-2011, the CSU reduced its enrollment system-wide by approximately 40,000 students and enrollments are expected to continue to shrink (At Transfer Time, 2009).

The result is that freshmen students normally eligible to attend either the UC or CSU have been turned away in large numbers The situation is worse for transfer
applicants from the CCC who have been shut out of four-year universities at an even greater rate than freshman applicants (Analytic Studies, 2011). The number of community college transfers to the CSU has dropped steadily since 2008 (see Table 1). During the 2009-10 academic year, fewer than 38,000 students were able to transfer from community colleges to the CSU, down from a high of 55,000 just two years earlier (Analytic Studies, 2011).

Table 1

Transfers from the CCC to the CSU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
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<tr>
<td>CSU</td>
<td>53,693</td>
<td>52,640</td>
<td>54,379</td>
<td>54,970</td>
<td>49,768</td>
<td>37,651</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: California Postsecondary Education Commission, Transfer Totals

Additionally, students with average grades and test scores have found that the state’s public colleges, relatively easy to get into a few years ago, have raised their academic standards (Analytic Studies, 2011). Many of the 23 campuses in the CSU have raised their expectations for transfer students. Many CSUs, including Chico State, now admit only upper division students who have completed 60 or more units of college work.

Given the rising rate of community college students wishing to transfer to four-year institutions, “the outcomes of these community college students at senior institutions have increasingly become of central interest among policy makers and educational researchers” (Ishitani, 2008, p. 404). With more students vying for fewer
spots, it is increasingly important to understand the transfer transition more fully so that each transfer student who actually secures a coveted spot at a four-year institution then succeeds.

The issue becomes more critical when one considers the important role that transfer plays in providing college access for underrepresented minority and low-income students within the state. (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2005; Laanan, 2004, 2006, 2007). Many of these students would not be in college at all if it were not for the low tuition and open door admission policy provided by the community college. It is not only important that these CCC students are able to transfer to four year institutions and that, after transfer, they persist and graduate.

This study explores the experiences of transfer students in their first semester after transfer in order to create a richer understanding of how Chico State can best assist and support transfer students in their completion of a four-year baccalaureate degree. The remainder of this chapter includes: (a) a statement of the problem, (b) a description of the purpose of the study, (c) key operational definitions, (d) assumptions, limitations, scope and delimitations, (e) an explanation of the theoretical framework for the study, (f) an argument for the significance of the study and, (g) a brief summary.

**Problem Statement**

The transition to college is a vulnerable period for students. Many new students experience academic and social difficulties during the transition which can hinder their persistence and, ultimately, their degree attainment. A plethora of research
has been done around the transition to college and around college persistence and graduation. However, this research has typically focused on students transitioning from high school to college, rather than on the transition of students from the community college to a four-year institution.

As experienced college students, educators often assume that transfer students will fare better in the transition process than students straight out of high school. However, the research shows it is quite common for transfer students to experience academic difficulty in their first semester at the four-year institution. So common in fact, that the term transfer shock was coined by Hills (1965) to describe the difficulty in adjustment and subsequent dip in GPA typical of many transfer students in their first semester at a new institution. It should be noted that Hills also found that most transfer students eventually recovered. However, the fact is that this disruption in students’ academic performance can create significant problems. Students may have to repeat classes they failed and may take longer to graduate. Other transfer students don’t recover from transfer shock and drop out, or are disqualified by the institution.

The research varies on transfer drop-out rates. Some studies have shown that transfer students tend to persist at higher rates than first-time freshmen (Glass & Harrington, 2002; Johnson, 2005; Miville & Sedlacek, 1995). This makes sense when one considers that transfers have already proved themselves capable of college level work, and that they are closer to the goal of graduation.

Other studies have shown that transfer students persist at lower rates than freshmen (Duggan & Pickering, 2007-2008; Ishitani, 2008). Davies and Dickmann
(1998) documented a high attrition rate for transfer students and one study by Cejda, Kaylor, and Rewey (1998) found that community college students experienced dismissal rates between 18 and 22% at the end of their first semester after transfer to a four-year institution and were actually more likely to be placed on academic probation than first year students.

Although that study was conducted some time ago, the numbers hold true today at CSU, Chico where, traditionally, between 14 and 21% of all first-time students, both freshmen and transfer, are on academic probation after their first semester (Institutional Research, 2009). While many of these students recover, get off academic probation and persist, some are academically disqualified the following semester.

The risk of being academically disqualified at Chico State is actually greater for transfer students than for first-year students because transfer students are held to a higher GPA standard. For example, a first-year student is only disqualified if, while on probation, her GPA dips below a 1.5. A junior may be disqualified if, while on probation, her GPA dips below a 1.85 (see Table 2).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class level</th>
<th>Freshman</th>
<th>Sophomore</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>Senior</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Units completed</td>
<td>0-29</td>
<td>30-59</td>
<td>60-89</td>
<td>90 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA for academic disqualification</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since Chico State, like many CSUs, now accepts only upper division transfer students with 60 or more units this means almost all transfer students enter the university as juniors and are subject to the more stringent GPA disqualification standard.

Transfer students have been successful college students to this point at the community college level or they would not be eligible for transfer. The question is why do they struggle upon transfer and experience a dip in GPA?

Research points to the unique characteristics of the community college transfer population as contributors to transfer transition issues. Many transfer students begin their postsecondary education at a community college for reasons that include economics, location and flexible schedules. Transfer students are also often trying to balance work, family, and community obligations along with their academic goals. As such, community college transfer students often bring with them an assortment of barriers to academic success and retention (Duggan & Pickering, 2007-2008; Laanan, 2004). They typically live off campus rather than in on-campus housing and so may have less connection to campus life and fewer interactions with faculty, compared to native students, according to the National Survey of Student Engagement (2005). They have to learn a new system with different rules and norms. They must also enter an institution where many native students have established networks of friends. They may be living away for home for the first time and they may not have taken many courses in their major or be sure of their major as expected of junior students having
focused most of their energy on completing general education requirements and upon transfer.

In short, the process of transferring from a community college to a four-year institution can prove extremely challenging. “Many students face academic difficulties, cultural confusion and social uncertainty” (Lester, 2006, p. 57). The four-year institution may be quite different than the two-year institution in terms of academic standards, social environment and institutional culture.

It may be assumed on the part of the institution that older, more experienced transfer students are self-sufficient and thus do not require the special programs or assistance that are often provided for first time freshmen (Duggan & Pickering, 2007-2008; Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solorzano, 2011; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Another common assumption is that transfer students are not as interested in extracurricular activities as freshmen students. However, these ideas are assumptions. Little research or attention has focused upon the specific needs of transfer students. Yet, given the key role that transfer students play in the state’s system of higher education, it is evident that their needs are worthy of attention (Davies & Dickman, 1998; Hagedorn, Moon, Cypers, Maxwell, & Lester, 2006; Laanan, 2001, 2007). This study focuses specifically on transfer students who experienced transfer shock so that institutions such Chico State can provide better support for them during the critical transitional period.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the transfer student transition experience. The overarching research question was: What is the experience of community college transfer students who exhibited transfer shock during their transition to Chico State? The five specific research questions were:

1. How do transfer students characterize their transition experience?
2. What are transfer students expectations as they enter Chico State?
3. What differences between the two and four year institution do transfer students report?
4. What types of helps and hindrances to their transition do students report?
5. What additional types of support might be offered by the institution to aid them in their transition experience?

Qualitative methods, specifically phenomenology, were used to address the research questions. Students were interviewed individually about their specific transfer transition experiences using a guided interview process. A qualitative approach was selected because this method has proved useful when little is known about a phenomenon, or when there is interest in gaining new perspectives (Creswell, 2009). Phenomenological research helps the researcher understand the essence of human experience around a phenomenon as described by participants (Cresswell, 2009, p. 13). In this particular study, the common phenomenon under examination was transfer from a community college and the experience of transfer shock.
Research has established that many community college transfer students suffer a rocky first semester at the receiving four-year institution. Their transition difficulty is reflected in the lower first semester grades known as transfer shock (Diaz, 1992; Hills, 1965). The goal of this study was to uncover ways to help students avoid first semester transfer shock and experience a smooth transition from the CCC to Chico State.

Criterion and purposeful sampling were used to select transfer students who experienced significant academic difficulty (transfer shock) in their first semester at Chico State. A list of transfer students was pulled with permission from Academic Advising data sets of first semester transfer students who were both on academic probation (GPA under 2.0) and who had GPAs so low they are disqualification range (GPA under 1.85). From this list of 128 students who met both criteria, purposeful sampling was used to select a diverse range of participants in terms of gender and ethnicity. The list was sorted by gender and ethnicity so that roughly equal numbers of males and females of a variety of ethnicities were invited to be interviewed. In total, 60 students were invited to participate in the study via campus e-mail. Follow up phone calls were used to schedule semi-structured individual interviews with 13 students.

Prior to the start of the interview, participants were asked to sign a consent form and were given a brief written demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E). They were then interviewed using a guided interview protocol (see Appendix D) as suggested by Creswell (2009). Questions were purposefully open-ended in order to
elicit a rich array of participant experiences and opinions. The researcher took notes as well as audio-recorded the sessions in order to capture complete responses. Each interview was completely transcribed and the resultant data analyzed using a coding process to identify central ideas or themes. From these findings recommendations were made as to how the transfer experience might be improved to help students avoid transfer shock in their first semester at Chico State.

**Operational Definitions**

*Academic Disqualification:* A student on academic probation whose GPA falls below the specified level for their grade level risks being dismissed from the university. Freshman with less than 30 units are held to a 1.5 standard, sophomores with 30-59 units are held to a 1.70, juniors with 60-89 units are held to a 1.85 standard, seniors with 90 or more units must achieve a 1.95 GPA in order to escape disqualification. Academic disqualification means students are no longer allowed to attend the University and must appeal in order to be reinstated.

*Academic Probation:* The term used to describe the academic standing of a student whose grade point average (GPA) falls below a 2.0 or C average on a four point scale.

*Class Standing or Grade Level:* Number of college credits or units earned. 0-29 units = freshman standing, 30-59 = sophomore standing, 60-89 = junior standing, 90+ = senior standing

*Clear Standing* – Students who end their semester with a grade point average of 2.0 or higher.
Degree Completion or Graduation – Students who complete all baccalaureate degree requirements and graduate within two, three, and four years of transferring to the four-year institution.

Freshman or First-Year Student – This term is used for a student who has less than 29 units. In the context of this study, it also means students who began their college careers at Chico State. Because the term freshman implies gender, the more inclusive term first-year student will be used when possible.

Native Student – This term is commonly used in the literature for students who begin their college careers at a four-year institution. However, because this term implies ethnicity, the preferred term first year student will be used when possible.

Persistence - Continued enrollment at an institution from one semester to the next.

Recovery – The rise in GPA over subsequent terms after transfer shock is experienced in the students first semester.

Senior Institution – A four-year bachelor’s degree granting institution or university.

Transfer Shock – The dip in grade point average (GPA) after transfer from a community college to a four-year institution. Transfer shock is typically noted as a dip in GPA of approximately 1/3 of a grade point (Hills, 1965, Diaz, 1992).

Transfer Student: A student who moves from one institution to another. This study will focus on students who transfer from a two-year community college to CSU, Chico.
Transition – An event, or non-event leading to change including changed relationships, roles, routines and assumptions.

Two–year Institution – A two-year, AA granting institution or community college.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

This study relies upon students’ retrospective memories of their first semester transition experience. It was assumed that participants were able to reflect on their first semester experiences and that they were able to accurately describe their experiences to the researcher. Another assumption was that participants were truthful in their answers.

Limitations include the fact that, because this study was conducted with participants at Chico State, findings may not be generalized to other institutions. The fact that participants were volunteers also decreases the generalizability of the findings. An additional limitation is that, as in any qualitative study, findings are subject to multiple interpretations, as well as subject to the world-view of the researcher.

The study was delimited to upper division transfer students entering CSU, Chico from a CCC. This means it excluded lower-division transfer students, transfer students from other four-year institutions, international students and students who transferred to CSU, Chico from out-of-state institutions.
It should be noted that the researcher works in the Academic Advising office at CSU, Chico. To avoid researcher bias, the data and codes were peer reviewed to ensure the congruency of emerging findings with subsequent interpretations.

**Significance of the Study**

Transfer students play a key role in California’s higher education pipeline. As such, it is increasingly important to gain a better understanding of transfer student needs and issues. According to Wawrzynski and Sedlacek (2003), “Although numbers of transfer students increased over the past decade, research on transfer students has not kept pace with this growing trend” (p. 489). More research is clearly needed.

Most existing studies on transfer students focus primarily on comparing them to freshmen students in the areas of persistence and graduation. While there is a preponderance of literature around freshman success strategies, less research has been done around strategies and programs aimed specifically at transfer students. Most of the transfer research is also quantitative in nature and is focused on predicting transfer student’s academic success or failure, rather than qualitative research focused on understanding why students fail. This study addresses the gap in the literature as it explores the reasons behind transfer shock and why students experience this phenomenon. Most importantly it also explores what specific institutional supports supports can be put in place to assist transfer students.

The study is targeted toward administrators and educational leaders in academic and student affairs at Chico State. The information gathered has real life practical applications in the improvement of existing transfer programs. Findings from
this study can be used to help orientation and other student services staff make adjustments and changes to advising, orientation and other key support services.

Currently, there are numerous programs in place to help first time students succeed at Chico State. There are at least a half dozen programs aimed at freshmen students including courselinks, a book-in-common reading program, living-learning communities, first-year mentors and a civic engagement program. In contrast, there are no existing programs outside of orientation, directed specifically at first-semester transfer students at Chico State. This study points to programs that might be implemented to better support incoming transfer students to help them avoid transfer shock. It also identifies rough areas in the transfer process at the institutional level.

Additionally, this study sheds light on some of the pre-conceived notions and expectations that students may have about four-year institution. The findings will also inform programs and policy around transfer services. Ultimately, it is hoped that all this information will be used to increase the quality and number of services to transfer students and will help increase transfer student persistence and graduation. On a grander scale, while not generalizable, the findings may inform practice at other similar CSUs.

Regardless of the specific outcomes of the research, the work is important. Davies and Dickmann (1998) argue that,

Improving the transfer process from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities will conserve our fiscal and our human resources and provide a higher education for more of our citizens. The transfer process is, and will
continue to be, a critical function of public community colleges in the United States. (p. 11)

**Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Originating in the fields of psychology and counseling, this model describes a transition as “any event, or non event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 27). Moving from one institution to another represents a big transition for students and impacts all of these areas significantly.

Schlossberg’s model also explains how individuals adapt to transition and identifies four factors that influence the quality of any transition: situation, self, support and strategies. These four areas are referred to as the “4 S’s” (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Strengths or weaknesses in any of these areas can either facilitate or hinder a successful transition. Viewing the student transfer experience from this lens helped the researcher pinpoint specific issues related to students’ coping strategies.

According to the theory, individuals move through the transition process in phases described as “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 44). According to Schlossberg, the first stage can be conceptualized either as moving in or moving out. In other words, while in transition, students may focus on moving out of the familiar community college environment, or on moving in to the new four-year institution and this can color their perception and experience of the transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 44). Moving in alone can pose enormous
challenges to students entering a new educational institution. “They need to become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms and expectations of the new system (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 44).

This model is especially well suited for community college transfer students. “Unlike traditional-aged 4-year college students, the intricacy of community college students’ lives are more like the lives of typical, highly complex working adults – for whom Schlossberg’s theory was postulated” (Tovar & Simon, 2006, p. 550).

**Conclusion**

California clearly needs more educated workers to sustain its economy. In fact, President Obama has made college completion a national priority. However, the economy continues to falter, good jobs are scarce, and good jobs that do not require a college degree remain even scarcer (Carey, 2012).

Transfer students make up a significant percentage of students attending the CSU and UC. About one-third of UC and about two-thirds of CSU graduates began their college education at a community college (EdSource, 2005). The challenges facing students wishing to transfer from a CCC to a four-year institution in California are considerable. Fees and admission standards are rising, and spaces for new students are becoming increasingly limited. Overcoming the hurdles of admission to the university is often just the very beginning of a series of challenges for transfer students. Once community college transfer students are admitted, they often struggle to adjust both academically and socially to the new culture of the four-year institution.
While there is a great deal of research on the freshman student transition, research about transfer students has lagged. It is important to recognize that transfer students have unique issues, barriers, and problems that must be addressed if they are to successfully graduate and enter the state work force. The literature around transfer is also primarily quantitative in nature. The majority of the research looks at predicting student success after transfer, or on predicting or quantifying transfer shock, rather than focusing on the nature of the transition and the causes of transfer shock.

This study examines transfer transition experience from the student perspective. Findings from this study will inform support services to transfer students at Chico State and will contribute to the overall body of knowledge about transfer students and their unique challenges and needs.

Next, Chapter 2 provides a review of the existing literature and is divided into four main sections that cover the differences between two and four year colleges, the transition to college, retention and persistence, and the theoretical framework for the study.

Chapter 3 provides an explanation of the methodology including a justification for the research approach, an explanation of how participants were selected, details on how data collection and analysis were conducted, and the research challenges.

Chapter 4 explains the findings related to each of the five research questions as well as the theoretical framework.
Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings and provides recommendations to facilitate the transfer student transition at Chico State. It also includes suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Preparing students to transfer to a four-year college or university is one of the major functions of the community college. Attending a community college prior to transferring to a four-year institution is an attractive, cost-effective option for many of the state’s college bound students. Community colleges provide a key point of access to higher education for many of the state’s low income and minority students (Bailey et al., 2005; Turner, 1988, 1990, 1992). While many students enter the community college intending to transfer to a four-year college, many do not realize this dream. While approximately 37% of students enter the community college intending to transfer, only about 28% succeed in transferring, and even fewer, around 10% actually graduate and obtain a bachelor’s degree (Nevarez & Wood, 2010, p. 9).

While much of the transfer literature focuses on the community college and why students don’t transfer, this study narrows in on that small percentage of community college students who actually do transfer and what happens to them after they transfer at the four–year institution. It focuses on students who experienced transfer shock during the transition.

A formidable body of research exists around college persistence, retention and graduation. However, in general, researchers have tended to focus attention on freshmen retention and persistence. Well-known retention experts (Astin, 1991; Tinto, 1993) have written extensively about the freshman first year experience and what can be done to help students persist and graduate. There has also been a great deal of work
done around first-year adjustment to college issues. Again, here the majority of the research focuses on needs and services for freshman students rather than on transfer students.

The bulk of the research has found that transfers generally graduate at higher rates than freshman students. According to CSU Analytic Studies data (2011), transfers with the CSU do generally have higher graduation rates than freshmen. However, it is noted that transfers suffer significant attrition during their first year of study at the CSU. Undergraduate transfers are clearly not immune to transitional problems as they move from one institution to another (Analytic Studies, 2011).

A number of studies have focused on transfer shock, the first semester drop in GPA often experienced after the first semester upon transfer. The phenomenon was first identified by Hills (1965) and many subsequent studies have set out to either prove or disprove the transfer shock phenomenon and to test it at different sizes and types of institutions. However, the transfer shock literature does not fully address the reasons why transfer students experience this shock, nor do they address what can be done to prevent transfer shock.

The majority of the research conducted with transfer students is quantitative in nature and focuses on quantifying or predicting transfer academic persistence and graduation based on student demographics. Qualitative studies which explore the lived experiences of transfer students are far fewer in number.

There is clearly a need to have a better understanding of the transfer transition and the ways in which students learn about, adapt and transition to their new college
environment. It is hoped that this qualitative study will fill this gap in the literature and provide information that can be used to help transfer students better adjust during the transition process.

This review examines the literature in four main categories: (a) students and the college environment, (b) college retention, (c) the transition to college, (d) transfer shock and, (e) effective interventions. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a description of the theoretical framework upon which this study is based, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory.

**Students and the College Environment**

It is helpful to have a clear picture of the background characteristics of community college students, as well as an understanding of the fundamental differences between community colleges and the four-year institutions in terms of mission and environment.

**Community College Students**

Who are community college students? Overall, the community college population is far more diverse than the traditional four-year bound college freshman in terms of socioeconomic status, ethnic background, age, educational history and goals (Flaga, 2006). In short, students who enroll in community colleges are more likely to be low-income, ethnic minorities, non-traditional aged students or first generation college students than their four-year counterparts (Laanan, 1996).

**Economically challenged.** Compared to students at both public and private four-year colleges, community college students are more likely to come from lower-
income households (Bailey & Morest, 2006). Nationally, approximately 44% of low-income students (those with family incomes under $25,000 per year) attend community college after high school, while only 15% of high-income students start at the community college (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011).

**Underrepresented minorities.** Women and students from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups are also more likely to go to a community college. Since 1985, more than half of community college attendees are women (American Association of Colleges, 2011). According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2011), 50% of Hispanic students start at a community college compared to 28% of white students. While there are still more white students at the community college than ethnic minorities, the percentage of students of color is on the rise (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

**First generation college students.** Community college students are also more likely to be first generation college students in comparison to students at public and private four-year colleges (Bailey & Morest, 2006). In addition, 38% of students who are the first in their families to attend college start at the community college, compared to 20 percent of students whose parents are college graduates. (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011)

**Non-traditional students.** Many community college students are working adults or non-traditional aged students. The average age of the community college student is 29. Many students have raised families and must work and so are only able
to attend school part time (Bailey & Morest, 2006). Approximately 80% of community college students work and about two-thirds attend college on a part time basis (American Association of Colleges 2011). Some are veterans who have served our country and are now looking to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Students vary in their goals for attending community colleges. Some are taking a class for pleasure, brushing up on basic skills or working towards a certificate. Still, a significant number of students, approximately 60%, enter the community college with the intention of competing a degree or transferring. Yet transfer rate remains low - only about one-fourth of community college students who intend to transfer actually succeed in transferring to a four-year institution (Shulock & Moore, 2007; Zamani, 2001). In fact, research suggests that students who begin their college careers at two-year institutions are less likely to earn baccalaureate degrees than those who begin at a four-year institution (Zamani, 2001).

**Differences in Mission and Environment**

In addition to understanding the community college population, it is important to understand the community college environment and culture that students are leaving, as well as the four-year environment and culture that students are entering (Flaga, 2006). The culture can be dramatically different. Some researchers have described the transition of moving from one educational environment to another as a form of culture shock (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). So how do the overall culture and environment of community colleges and four-year institutions compare?
Community colleges are one of the fastest growing sectors in American higher education serving 6.5 million undergraduates. California has the largest community college system in the nation serving 2.8 million students across 112 campuses (Esh, 2009). Although most community college students attend part time, this number still translates to over a million full-time equivalent students (Sengupta & Jepsen, 2006). This compares to the roughly 400,000 students enrolled in the CSU system and 200,000 students enrolled in the UC system (Sengupta & Jepsen, 2006).

Nationwide, about half of college-bound students attend a community college. In California, even more students start at a community college with approximately 73% of the state’s public undergraduates attending the CCC (Shulock & Moore, 2007).

Under California’s Master Plan for Higher Education adopted in 1960, the CCC has a very broad educational mission and serves many different kinds of people. The CCC has four main functions: transfer, terminal degrees, remedial education, and continuing education (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). In contrast, the missions of the CSU and UC are more narrow and focused. The CSU’s mission is to provide undergraduate, graduate and professional education, while the UC is charged with providing all of the above, and conducting academic research (Sengupta & Jepsen, 2006) There is generally more focus on teaching at the CCC and less on research. Faculty generally have a master’s degree at two-year community colleges, while faculty typically have a PhD and are responsible for conducting research at four-year institutions.
The CCC also has an open door policy meaning anyone who is a high school graduate, is over the age of 18, or can benefit from instruction is eligible to attend community college (CCCCO, 2011). In contrast, the CSU and UC have more stringent admission policies. The CSU is charged with serving the top third of high school graduates while the UC is the most competitive - charged with serving the top tenth of high school graduates.

The CCC is less expensive than either its CSU or UC counterparts. The current cost is $36 per unit or approximately $864 a year (12 units per semester) at the CCC (CCCCO, 2011). For 2011-2012 California residents attending a CSU as undergraduates will pay an average of $5,900 in fees (CSU Mentor, 2011) compared to an average of $13,300 at a UC (University of California website, 2011)

There are also differences in the collegiate environment and culture. The community colleges are nonresidential while many four-year institutions have large populations of students who reside on campus. At community colleges, students many take classes on a part-time basis, or in the evenings because their day-time hours are constrained by work and family obligations while at four-year institutions more students attend full time (Sengupta & Jepsen, 2006). As a result two-year students are generally on campus less, interact less with faculty members and are often less connected with campus life than students at four-year universities (Zamani, 2001).

**College Retention**

One of the most enduring topics in the field of higher education is that of student retention/attrition which can be defined in simple terms as whether students
remain at, or leave, an institution. Retention has been the focus of a multitude of studies and a formidable body of work exists too large to be examined within the scope of this exploratory study. However, no discussion of college student retention would be complete without reference to Tinto (1975) who affirmed the importance of both academic and social integration as key influences in student retention. Before Tinto, much of the research focused on academics. Tinto’s ground-breaking work acknowledged the importance of the social component of the college experience.

A great deal of subsequent research has built upon Tinto’s work. Astin focused on student involvement saying that the more involved a student is with the college, the higher likelihood of student retention. (1977, 1985). As a result, there has been significant focus on how to involve and integrate students effectively into institutions including research on first-year college adjustment programs, orientation programs and learning communities.

**Institutional Characteristics**

In many of these studies, retention is seen as the function and responsibility of the institution (Heverly, 1999). Bean’s model of student attrition (1980, 1983) examines how organizational attributes affect student satisfaction with the institution and how greater satisfaction with the institution leads to greater persistence. Kamens (1971, 1974) examined data from a number of institutions to demonstrate the impact of the size of the college on retention.
Student Characteristics

Other studies have focused on persistence or factors outside of institutional control, such as full-versus part-time enrollment, and/or factors specific to the student such as gender, ethnicity and age (Spady, 1971, Summerskill, 1962).

This discussion is introduced briefly here because it highlights an important point about whether student success is primarily the responsibility of the students to persist toward graduation, or of the institution to retain students. For the purposes of this study, the terms will be used interchangeably because it is the author’s view that persistence and retention of students is a joint partnership between the student and the institution, and the responsibility of both entities.

Transition to College

Transition to college issues have been well documented for traditional, full-time, traditional-age, first-year students. Much of the literature focuses on documenting persistence and graduation rates, or on assessing programs designed to retain first year students such as residential learning communities and freshmen seminars. Less research around transfer student exists. This is likely because fewer efforts are generally made to ensure the persistence and success of transfer students (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). “Four-year college efforts to facilitate the fit of community college transfer students into the receiving institution have been minor in comparison to the efforts to assist first-year students” (Townsend & Wilson, 2006, p. 454). According to Townsend & Wilson (2006) first year students typically receive the
bulk of an institution’s retention efforts such as first year seminars and living-learning communities while transfer students have been largely ignored.

Other studies have confirmed that at some institutions, few efforts have been made to intervene with transfer students who may be at risk for academic difficulty and attrition. Duggan and Pickering (2007-2008) found that at Old Dominion University, while there is an extensive retention program addressing freshman student needs, little has been done to address transfer student retention needs other than creating a one-day voluntary orientation. “Even though retention programs have been designed to assist the traditional college freshman, few such programs exist to assist the transfer student in his or her transition into the four-year setting” (Duggan & Pickering, 2007-2008, p. 438).

**Academic Performance**

As noted, much of the research on transfer students focuses on comparing transfer students with native, first-year students in terms of academic performance. A number of studies focus on the performance of students who begin their college careers at an institution (native students) straight out of high school as compared to students who transfer from either another four-year university, or a two-year university. The bulk of these studies use GPA as the standard for assessing the achievement of transfer students (Duggan & Pickering, 2007-2008; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Johnson, 2005; Laanan, 2004, 2006, 2007). There is conflicting research but many of the studies have found that native students obtain better grades than transfer students (Hills, 1965; Laanan, 2004; Townsend & Wilson, 2008-2009).
This difference in GPA is attributed to the wide variety of academic issues and intellectual climate issues transfers face while transitioning to their new school environment including more challenging course work, differences in policy and larger class sizes (Johnson, 2005).

GPA aside, there has been debate in the literature over whether native or transfer students actually graduate faster. Glass and Harrington (2002) found that most transfer students graduate as quickly, or even faster, than native students. However, they noted considerable variation from year to year, and suggested that graduation rates need to be studied at other institutions to determine if there are truly significant differences between native and transfer graduation rates (Glass & Harrington, 2002). Duggan and Pickering (2007-2008) demonstrated that transfer students not only have lower GPAs but also drop out at higher rates than their native student counterparts.

Ishitani (2008) conducted a quantitative, longitudinal study that investigated the departure behavior of transfer students compared to native students with particular attention to class level. Ishitani (2008) found that over six semesters, native students were retained at higher rates than transfer students. However, the class level at which students entered the institution appeared to play a significant role. The results indicated that sophomore and junior transfer students were 73% less likely to depart than freshman transfer students, and sophomore and junior transfer students were retained at higher rates than either native or freshman transfer students.

If, as the research suggests, transfer students experience similar, and sometime even greater academic difficulties than freshmen, equal efforts must be made at the
institutional level to support both populations. Townsend (2008) claims that that transfer students are “unlike beginning first-year students in that they have already survived college life and have shown they can succeed in an academic environment” (p. 73). Yet they still struggle. One of the themes uncovered by Townsend in a qualitative study was that regardless of where students transfer from (community college or four-year institution) students “feel like a freshman again” in their lack of knowledge about how the new school works (Townsend, 2008, p. 73). One of the biggest dangers is that transfer students, having experienced college, think they know it all. In fact, they may be facing a completely different reality and set of rules, which in itself can come as a type of culture shock.

**Social Integration**

Because transfer students are starting anew at another institution, it makes sense that they may be affected by the same social integration issues facing first-year students, as well as by their own views of institutional culture (Nurkowski, 1995).

Townsend and Wilson (2006) interviewed 19 community college transfer students regarding their perceptions of the transfer process and their academic and social integration. Their study specifically examined the perceptions of community college transfer students about institutional factors, which may have influenced their fit with the receiving four-year institution. The study focused specifically on students transferring from the community college to a large university oriented to full-time, residential, traditionally aged students. Difference in size between the university and the community college proved a significant factor in adjustment with greater amounts
of difficulty facing students transferring from a small community college to a larger university.

The study also revealed that academic integration is more important to transfer students, while freshmen students are typically more concerned with social integration. Of note, that while transfer students reported that social integration was less important, it still proved a stumbling block for transfer students. Both traditionally aged and nontraditionally aged transfer students reported difficulty making new friendships when entering a new community where friendships have already been established among native students (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Townsend and Wilson (2006) provide the explanation that native students who already bonded together during the first year in school may have little interest in expanding their social groups and making new friends with incoming transfers. Ironically, they concluded that “…it may be that university efforts to help native student form friendships and connections may render more difficult transfer students’ social integration with these students” (Townsend & Wilson, 2006, p. 450).

Research has also shown that all transfer students are not alike. According to Wawrzyski & Sedlacek (2003) it is also important to examine student subgroups in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender for differences in their experiences. Townsend (2008) also cautions that it is also important to distinguish between issues that affect any college student such as parking complaints, which cut across class year and transfer status, versus the needs and issues unique to transfer students such as credit articulation agreements with community colleges.
It is evident that most new students experience difficulties during their transition to college whether they are freshmen or transfers. Yet, it is clear from the research, that freshmen and transfers are not necessarily the same. That is why talking to transfer students and fine-tuning assistance to meet their unique needs is key to designing effective interventions to prevent transfer shock.

**Transfer Shock**

Historically, the bulk of existing literature around transfer students has examined transfer shock, defined as the shock or trauma and resultant decline in GPA students experience upon transferring from a community college to a four-year institution. This concept was first identified by Hills (1965) who found that in 44 of 46 data sets, community college students suffer “an appreciable loss” in their grades when they transfer (p. 209).

Since then, many studies have confirmed and documented Hills’ transfer shock theory of lower first semester GPAs for transfer students (Cejda et al., 1998; Davies & Casey, 1999; Davies & Dickmann, 1998). Most notably, Diaz (1992) undertook an in-depth meta-analysis of 62 studies related to transfer shock. Diaz found that in 79% of the studies community college students experienced transfer shock of about a half grade point in their first semester upon transfer.

Numerous subsequent studies have focused on documenting the transfer shock phenomenon further and how transfer shock is experienced at different types of institutions both public and private. Of particular interest is Glass & Harrington’s (2002) study where the researchers found that transfer shock was experienced by
community college transfers to a greater degree than transfers from four-year colleges. Townsend & Wilson (2008-2009) also found a relationship between institutional size and transfer shock, with greater shock experienced by students transferring into larger institutions.

Transfer shock theory is not without its detractors. Nickens (1972), in particular, challenged the idea that the transition process was responsible for a decline in first semester GPA. His study of 926 students at Florida State University, found there was no significant difference in the first term GPA between junior transfer students and junior native students in fact some students did better after transfer – a phenomenon he dubbed transfer ecstasy. Nickens (1972) concluded that the GPA’s of transfer students in the study showed no evidence of problems unique to transferring. He suggested that perhaps differences in GPA noted by Hills and others might actually be attributed to differences in grading practices among institutions rather than to any maladjustment of transfer students.

Both the early and recent literature on transfer shock describes it as a temporary condition. In other words, most students recover from the declining GPA the following semester, and a majority eventually go on to graduate from college (Diaz, 1992; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Hills, 1965; Peng & Bailey, 1977). Although most students recover, transfer shock can be a pivotal point in student’s college experience.

The goal of this study is to examine ways to mitigate transfer shock because Ishitani (2008) found that a lower GPA was significantly associated with transfer
student departure. His study found that students in their first semester with a GPA of 3.0 were 85% less likely to depart than students with a 2.0 GPA. Ishitani concluded, “Therefore, a dip in GPA in the first semester was not only defined as ‘transfer shock,’ but it was also significantly associated with reducing a student’s chance to return for the second semester (p. 412).

Glass and Harrington (2002) also found that transfer shock can impact student departure, “It is at this point that some transfer students leave the four-year institution due to presumed failure and drop out” (p. 417). They concluded that, “Since transfer students seem to experience transfer shock during their first semester, four-year institutions should continue to seek effective ways of reaching these students, perhaps through counseling, tutoring and mentoring, in an effort to help them adjust more effectively to the academic and social life of the school” (Glass & Harrington, 2002, p. 427).

Effective Interventions

How can institutions assist transfer students who experience transfer shock? At Chico State, many transfer students will experience a drop in GPA large enough to place them on academic probation (AP) and possibly in disqualification (DQ) range. While there was little literature on specific interventions for transfer students on AP, several interesting studies were found which explore general interventions for all students on AP. In general, the link between academic support services and transfer success has been well documented.
Tovar & Simon (2006) looked at community college students of different ethnicities and genders and their level of academic success and found that a disproportionate number of Latino students were on probation after their first semester. They conducted a mixed methods study using the College Student Inventory (CSI) to measure students’ levels of academic motivation, general coping and receptivity to support services and encouraged students to attend a re-orientation. Their findings showed that probationary students actually wanted and welcomed institutional assistance to help them return to good academic standing. (Tovar & Simon, 2006, p. 559). They noted that the real challenge for institutions lies in getting probationary students to actively seek the help they need.

Another interesting concept from Tovar and Simon (2006) was that the view of being placed on AP as a temporary crisis or dangerous opportunity which can represent a critical turning point in a student’s college career. “It is dangerous in that not acting upon it (AP) may lead to more serious consequences (i.e. dismissal from college). Students who recognize the opportunity presented in this crisis are likely to successfully emerge from it” (Tovar & Simon, 2006, p. 559). Getting students to clearly recognize the severity of their situation while giving them the tools they need to act upon it, may be key to helping students survive and escape academic probation.

Davies & Dickmann (1998) explored reasons why community college transfer students dropped out of the CSU. Their study examined probationary and non-probationary students’ perceptions of the transfer process and utilized focus groups to determine what students thought about their experiences including their feelings,
reactions and attitudes. They found that both groups of students stressed the importance of academic advising and the necessity of clear and accurate course equivalency information as key to student success.

Kirkpatrick, Stant, Downes, & Gaither (2008) took a unique approach and examined locus of control (LOC) or the degree to which individuals perceive events in their lives to be the result of their own actions (internal LOC) or fate (external LOC). They found that students with greater internal LOC were more successful academically. The researchers then experimented with interventions to help students see that they were indeed in control of their destiny. This type of intervention has significant interest to professionals in academic advising where probationary students may blame the institution, teachers or circumstances beyond their control for their academic problems and fail to see the role they play in their own academic success or failure.

Similarly, Dewitz, Woolsey, and Walsh (2009) studied the impact of self-efficacy on college student success and retention. Self-efficacy is defined as individuals’ confidence in their ability to complete a task. Self-efficacy has been linked to success in many areas including college. They used the College Self Efficacy inventory and several other instruments to investigate students’ self-efficacy beliefs and to increase their sense of purpose in life. Students with increased self-efficacy and life purpose felt better about college and performed better academically. Perhaps helping probationary students explore majors and find a life purpose will help them
get off academic probation and have a more satisfying and successful college experience.

Of note is the fact that the majority of these studies are quantitative in nature and focus on students already in academic difficulty rather than on examining how academic problems can be avoided. The research reveals a number of interventions for probationary students that show great promise. However, is still unclear if these interventions will be effective for the unique population of transfer students because the research was generally conducted with all students, both freshmen and transfers.

Wawrzynski & Sedlacek (2003) caution against grouping transfer students haphazardly and making broad generalizations about them. “Students entering higher education are a diverse and complex group so you cannot study them in a broad group.” Instead, they recommend studying smaller student subgroups that assess the goals, attitudes and intentions of transfer students. This “allows for a better understanding of the college retention process for transfer students” (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003, p. 489). Since transfer students do not all share the same experiences and expectations when transferring into a new institution, they cannot all be treated the same. Instead, unique interventions based on student feedback must be designed and tested. This study is a step towards identifying those unique groups of transfer students at Chico State and allowing their voices to be heard so their needs can be addressed.

**Theoretical Framework: Schlossberg’s Transition Theory**

Attending a new college is a big life transition which can impact nearly everything about a student’s life. There are a number of adult transition theories which
can provide a systematic framework for understanding these changes. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory has been selected as a guiding framework due to its applicability to college students in the college environment. It has been used successfully in several college research studies.

The theory was originally presented in 1981 and is based on the work of over 15 authors on adult development theory. A well-known author in the field of psychology and counseling, Schlossberg presents a useful model that views adaptation to transition as a dynamic process or movement through the various stages of transition. A transition is defined by Schlossberg as any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Given that definition, transferring from one college to another represents a significant transition in a student’s life since it impacts most of these areas.

Schlossberg originally identified three sets of factors influencing adaptation to transition:

1. The characteristics of the transition itself;
2. The characteristics of the pre- and post transition supports, and physical setting; and
3. The characteristics of the individual (Schlossberg, 1981).

Schlossberg’s model went through several iterations before arriving at its most recent conceptualization which focuses on: (a) the type of transition, (b) the stages of transition, and (c) the four coping mechanisms (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006).
Type of Transition

According to the model, the first step in approaching a transition is to identify the type of transition and whether it was anticipated, unanticipated or a non-event. (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 29).

- Anticipated transitions: include predictable, expected events such as marriage, the birth of a child, taking a new job and retiring
- Unanticipated transitions: include things that are not predictable like illnesses, being fired from a job or death.
- Non-events: are described as transitions which the individual expected but never happened such as a marriage or graduation that never occurred or a promotion that never materialized.

Schlossberg contends that the same event can have different meaning for different individuals. “Therefore it is not the transition itself that determines its meaning for the individual: rather it is whether the transition is expected, unexpected, or never occurring” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 31).

Stages of Transition

According to the model, individuals move through the transition process in phases described as “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out” (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Goodman et al., 2006). These phases are explained below:
• **Moving in:** describes the process of leaving behind one known context and entering into new one. For a transfer student this would be leaving the community college environment and perhaps moving from home for the first time.

• **Moving through:** follows after the moving in process and is related to how the individual copes with the transition or change on a day-to-day basis. For a transfer student this would include such things as developing friendships and choosing a major.

• **Moving out:** marks the passing or end of the change or transition, and likely signals a new moving in period. For a transfer student his might be leaving college to begin a career or entering graduate school.

These concepts are particularly relevant to this study, because all participants have passed, or will eventually pass, through these three stages. Understanding where a student is within these stages can help explain their experiences and feelings. It is also important to understand that transitions continue throughout an individual’s life.

The following figure illustrates how the three stages of transition form a continuous or circular loop.
Adapted from Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman (1995)

*Figure 1. Schlossberg’s 3 Stages of Transition.*

While this particular study focuses on “moving out” from the community college and “moving in” to the four-year environment, students will eventually “move through” and out of college. Leaving college prompts another “moving out” period as students “move in” to the working world and so on.

**Four Coping Strategies – the 4 Ss**

This study will particularly focus upon what Schlossberg calls coping strategies. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory outlines four areas that determine a person's ability to cope successfully with a transition (see Figure 2). These are described as the 4 S’s: Situation, Self, Support and Strategy and they all impact the quality of an individual’s transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995).
Adapted from Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman (1995)

*Figure 2. Schlossberg’s Four Coping Strategies.*

- **Situation:** refers to how an individual views the transition including their perception of the transition as either positive or negative. This can also include the individual’s perception of the timing of the transition and whether the individual perceives the transition as voluntary or involuntary.

- **Self:** describes the strengths and weaknesses the individual brings to the transition including previous experience, sense of control and resilience.

- **Support:** includes the support available to the person in transition from either people or an institution. It should be noted that support could be positive and/or negative, either a help or hindrance.

- **Strategies:** are defined as the coping methods the individual uses to manage the stress of the transition.
Thus the 4 S’s provide a powerful tool for analyzing personal and environmental assets and deficits in any given transition including the transfer student transition.

Several researchers have applied Schlossberg’s Transition Theory to higher education settings. Powers (2010) used the theory to explore the experience of non-traditional males who dropped out of the University of Nebraska and their perceptions of the 4 S’s while moving in, moving through and moving out of the college process (p. 93). Another set of researchers at Kansas State used Schlossberg’s Transition Theory with veterans with the goal of helping the institution better understand and serve student veterans (Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011). Tovar and Simon (2006) used the framework in a mixed methods study that examined the complex lives and transition experiences of Latino students on academic probation at the community college.

Clearly, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory can be used in a variety of settings with a wide range of students. It provides a helpful framework for assessing a student’s situation and for understanding how to assist students as they face changing situations such as transferring to a new institution.

Summary/Conclusion

While many transfer students will likely succeed at college without additional support services, many others will simply give up, perform poorly, or disappear altogether from college. The research reveals that transfer students face a wide range of challenges to overcome as they adjust to a new institution. Some may experience
the first semester dip in GPA known as transfer shock. While there has been a great deal of general literature about college persistence and graduation, most of it is quantitative in nature and focuses on comparisons between transfer and freshmen students. Further qualitative studies are specifically about the transfer transition, the lived experience of transfer from the student perspective and how the transition experience can be improved for transfer students. This study helps fill this gap in the literature especially as it concerns students who experience transfer shock.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The transition from one institution to another is often a critical time period for students. It is quite common for transfer students to experience a first semester dip in grade point average as they transition to a new academic and social environment, a phenomenon described in the research as transfer shock (Diaz, 1992; Hills, 1965).

This study explores the community college transfer student transition and the phenomenon of transfer shock. The overarching research question was: What are the experiences of community college transfer students as they transition to Chico State? The overall goal was to better understand students’ experiences around transfer from the CCC system to Chico State and, ultimately, to use this information to inform services for transfer students.

Since the ratification of the 1960 Master Plan for Education, community college transfer students have played a key role in California’s system of higher education. According to the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC), significant numbers of students use California’s community colleges as a gateway to four-year universities and completion of their bachelor's degree. Therefore, it is key that continued efforts are made to understand what can help or hinder the transition process. Educational leaders and policy makers at four-year institutions need the data provided by studies such as this one in order to provide improved programs, policies and support for transfer students so these students avoid transfer shock and ultimately persist and graduate.
The following chapter will: a) outline the overall research approach and design of the study, b) describe the setting and context for the study, c) explain how participants were selected, d) clarify how data collection and analysis were conducted, and e) address research challenges faced by the researcher including the ethical protection of research participants.

**Research Design and Approach**

This is a qualitative study. Qualitative research emerges from a social constructivist worldview in that, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). While quantitative research is often used to provide a broad explanation of behavior and attitudes, qualitative research focuses on unique, individual experiences. Kuh and Andreas (1991) note that while quantitative studies are useful in describing student behavior in terms of numbers, qualitative research describes student behavior in words and allows for a fuller, richer picture of a process or experience (Creswell, 2009). A key advantage of qualitative research is its ability to explore how individuals describe, react and give meaning to events or processes in their own words. Since the goal of this study is to better understand how individual students experience the transfer process, a qualitative approach is a logical choice.

This study is also phenomenological in nature. According to Merriam (2009), all qualitative research is phenomenological to some extent in that it seeks to explore individuals’ lived experiences. Phenomenological research is defined as “a strategy of
inquiry in which the research identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). The procedure involves closely studying a small number of subjects with a common experience. In the context of this study, the common experience is transfer from a community college. The task of the researcher is “to depict the essence or basic structure of the experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). The goal of this type of research is to better understand the lived experiences of participants. Ultimately, the reader should come away feeling that they understand what it is like to experience that particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).

The study employed semi-structured, open-ended interviews with individuals to elicit rich, detailed accounts of their transition experiences. Conducting in-depth individual interviews allowed the researcher to obtain information about student perceptions and experiences not easily captured by quantitative measures such as close-ended surveys. According to Townsend (2008), individual interviews are an important means of ascertaining students’ perceptions of their experiences and can provide helpful information in designing interventions.

It should be noted that individual interviews were selected over focus groups because it was thought that the group dynamic of a focus group might hinder students’ individual expression of their experiences, especially if those experiences are negative. It was also believed that personal interviews would provide more anonymity, and thus richer results, as students might be more reluctant to disclose personal information or
share difficulties with peers in a group setting than in a confidential, one-on-one interview.

Setting and Context

The study took place at CSU, Chico a public rural, residential campus in Northern California. Chico State is part of the 23-campus California State University system and 95% of its students come from within the state. (Chico Quick Facts, 2011). Chico State has 12 counties in its service area and is fed by several neighboring community colleges including Butte College, Yuba College, and Shasta College.

In fall 2010, total enrollment was 15,989 with 14,757 undergraduate students. In terms of gender, slightly more women attend Chico State than men, 51% of those enrolled are women and 49% men. Chico State is a fairly heterogeneous campus; 61% of its students are white. The next largest group are Hispanics which account for 15% of the student population, followed by 5% Asian, 2% African American/Black, 1% Native American and 1% Pacific Islander. Approximately 3% of students identify as multi-ethnic (Chico Quick Facts, 2011).

The student body is also young with only 14% of undergraduates over the age of 25, and economically fairly well off compared to students in the rest of the CSU System. In 2009-2010, only 35% of Chico State students received financial aid compared to the 60% of students system-wide (CSU System Chancellors Office, 2011).

The three most popular majors on campus are business, psychology, and liberal studies and the institution is primarily a teaching institution with a student to faculty
ratio of 25 to 1 (Institutional Research, 2011). Sixty-two percent of all freshmen live in on-campus housing and the majority of students live within a two-mile radius of campus.

In fall, 2011, Chico State welcomed a total of 3,782 new students of whom 2,429 were freshman and 1,353 were upper division transfer students. In other words, 35% of incoming students were upper division transfers.

**Participant Selection**

Purposeful, criterion sampling was used to select participants in the study. As noted earlier, phenomenology examines an individual’s first person, lived experience around a particular phenomenon and then seeks to find commonalities or shared meanings around the experience (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, the chosen data collection method was criterion sampling, as all participants needed to have had a similar experience (e.g. transferring from a community college to Chico State and experiencing transfer shock) in order to share their perception of the experience. Participants were then purposefully selected to meet a variety of demographic characteristics and ensure a wide range of experiences.

Participant access and selection were considered carefully before beginning this study. Because the intent was to ask interviewees to reflect back upon their fall 2011 transition experiences, students were contacted and interviews were conducted immediately after first semester grades posted in January 2012. Transfer students were then interviewed during the first two weeks of the spring 2012 semester regarding their fall 2011 transition to Chico State.
The Institutional Review Boards of California State University, Sacramento and California State University, Chico approved this study. Permission was received from the Vice Provost for Enrollment Management and the Director of Academic Advising at Chico State to pull student data from Academic Advising office data sets (see Appendix A). The purpose of the study was to better understand the transfer transition particularly the factors that might contribute to transfer shock. Therefore, students who experienced a severe drop in performance upon transfer were selected for interview. Participants were selected according to the following criteria:

1. Participants must have transferred from a California Community College to CSU, Chico in fall 2011 as first semester transfer students.
2. Participants must have completed 60 or more units at the community college and there were of junior standing.
3. Participants must have ended the fall 2011 semester on academic probation meaning their cumulative or Chico GPA was below a 2.0.
4. Participants must be in disqualification range for their grade level (1.85 GPA for juniors) meaning they risk being excused from the University if they do not bring their GPA above this level by the end of spring 2012.

There were 128 students who met the above criteria and who were part of the pool from which potential interviews were selected. Purposeful sampling was then used to select for demographic variation and diversity among interview participants. According to Creswell, this allows for a greater range of application of the findings by
research consumers (2009). The researcher worked to ensure that the interview pool was diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity and first generation college student status.

The ultimate goal was to find 10-12 students who met the research criteria who were willing to be interviewed. To achieve this goal, the researcher first sent an introductory e-mail (see Appendix B) to 60 possible participants explaining the nature of the study and inviting them to participate in an interview. The official Chico Wildcat mail account of the student was used since it is the official correspondence method of the University.

Students who responded to the e-mail and indicated they were willing to participate in the study were contacted via phone to set up an interview time. Convenience sampling was also utilized in that students who responded to the e-mail request and whose schedules could accommodate the interview process were selected first. It should be noted that second e-mails and follow up calls were made to ensure a variety of participants in terms of gender and ethnicity, since mostly white males answered the initial e-mail. Using this process, 15 students originally agreed to be interviewed. However, two students cancelled at the last moment so ultimately 13 students participated in the interview process.

Data Collection

A semi-structured interview protocol was used to provide consistency among the interviews conducted, and to ensure that student privacy and confidentiality were protected. Before the interview began, interviewees were provided a copy of the consent form that explained the details of the study, the voluntary nature of their
participation, and the measures taken to protect their identity (see Appendix C). The consent form was read aloud to each participant as he or she followed along. After the reading of the consent form, participants were asked if they had any questions or concerns. Participant’s permission to audio-record the interview was requested and secured. Each participant was asked to sign the consent form before proceeding. Before the verbal interview began, participants were also asked to complete a brief, 15-item demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E). They were also allowed to select a pseudonym that was used to protect their identity throughout the process.

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide with several main questions as suggested by Creswell (2009). Several probe or sub-questions were used as well (see Appendix D). The interview questions were designed to explore students’ transition experiences, as well as their expectations, perceptions, beliefs and assumptions about what attending school at CSU, Chico would entail. Interview questions were intentionally open-ended in order to elicit rich responses. General questions were followed by more specific follow-up questions regarding problems students may have encountered, as well as successes and supports they may have enjoyed during the transition process.

All of the interviews were conducting in a private office on campus. Interviews varied from 40 minutes to 65 minutes in length. The researcher took careful notes and each interview was audio-recorded using digital audio. Each interview was recorded in its entirety and transcribed verbatim within 48 hours. The researcher personally transcribed seven of the audio-recordings. The remaining six were transcribed by a
professional transcriber. Transcriptions ranged in length from 10 to 25 pages. Each transcript was reviewed for accuracy. Each interviewee was also offered the opportunity to review their transcript to ensure that it reflected their true perspective. However, none of the 13 interviewees followed up on this offer.

**Data Analysis**

The next step was to analyze and code the data. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) compare the steps in the coding process to a staircase. Each step on the staircase moves the researcher from a lower to a higher and more abstract level of understanding. “The central idea of coding is to move from raw text to research concerns in small steps, each step building on the previous one” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 35). Although there are numerous ways in which qualitative researchers can analyze data, the process described by Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) was selected for its simplicity and clarity. They identify seven basic steps in the coding process: (a) raw text, (b) relevant text, (c) repeating ideas, (d) themes, (e) theoretical constructs, (f) theoretical narrative, and (g) research concerns.

Once the data from each interview was fully transcribed in raw text form, the researcher began by reading each transcript carefully several times. The first reading allowed the researcher to obtain a general sense of the information, the individual, and the situation as recommended by Creswell (2009). Subsequent readings ensued with the researcher writing notes and ideas in the margin or transcripts.

Then relevant text related to the research concerns of the study were cut and pasted to a separate document. In this way, conversations regarding the weather and
other topics unrelated to the research topic were eliminated from consideration. In order to be thorough, the relevant text was organized and grouped by each of the five research questions.

A detailed analysis of the relevant text was then undertaken to find similar words, phrases or repeating ideas related to each research question. Repeating ideas which occurred in either a single manuscript, or across interview transcripts, were underlined. Special attention was given to ideas that were repeated by multiple participants.

The next step involved organizing repeating ideas along common categories or themes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2009). Repeated themes within each of the five research questions were noted. The researcher also went back and reviewed the data in light of the four S’s- Situation, Self, Supports and Strategies - outlined in the theoretical framework, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory.

In such a manner, large amounts of data in the form of text were reduced into recurring patterns and themes (Creswell, 2009). Sub-themes were then organized into larger more abstract themes or constructs. Finally, constructs were organized into a theoretical narrative which describes what the researcher learned about each of the questions. “The narrative is the culminating step that provides the bridge between the researcher’s concerns and the participant’s subjective experience” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 40). The goal was to weave participant’s own words into the narrative. This was done using quotes taken directly from the interview transcripts to illustrate each of the themes and sub-themes.
Validity and Reliability

According to Creswell (2009), validity and reliability do not carry the same connotations in qualitative research as they do in quantitative research. Qualitative reliability involves making sure that the researcher’s approaches are consistent and reliable. Two of the suggested reliability procedures that were utilized in this study include: (a) checking transcripts for transcription mistakes, and (b) making sure codes are consistent via intercoder agreement or crosschecking (Creswell, 2009). The researcher reviewed each transcript carefully and spot-checked those transcribed by the professional transcriptionist against both the researcher’s notes and audio recordings to ensure for accuracy. The researcher also asked a colleague who works in the field of education to review the transcripts for code agreement.

Validity means that the researcher checks the accuracy of the findings. Creswell offers eight primary strategies for establishing validity including: (a) triangulation of data from different data sources, (b) member checks, (c) use of rich, thick description, (d) clarification of potential researcher bias, (e) presentation of any discrepant information that runs counter to themes, (f) prolonged time in the field, (g) peer review, and (h) use of an external auditor (Creswell, 2009, pp. 191-193). He recommends that researchers combine several strategies to increase the authenticity and credibility of their findings.

Three of the recommended verification strategies were utilized in this study: (a) clarification of researcher bias, (b) presentation of discrepant ideas, and (c) peer review. It was hoped that a fourth strategy, member checking, might be used as well,
however, none of the interview participants responded to the researcher’s offer to review their interview transcript for accuracy.

**Clarification of Researcher Bias.** Since the researcher is the data collection instrument in a qualitative study, it is inevitable that interpretations reached were influenced by the researcher’s past experiences and beliefs. For verification purposes, it is important for researchers to note any past experiences, biases, prejudices that may influence the findings of the study (Creswell, 2009). In this particular study, the researcher was clear from the outset of her affiliation with the Academic Advising office. A statement regarding the researcher’s employment was included in the written consent form provided to each participant before the interview (see Appendix C). A statement regarding the role of the researcher is also included below under potential researcher challenges.

**Presentation of discrepant information.** Quotes were pulled from each transcript to illustrate and support each theme. Ideas that were shared by multiple participants were emphasized and quantified. However, individual ideas or experiences that ran counter to the key themes were also included. This served to validate the experiences of all the study participants who each have a unique story to tell. These less common themes were often outlined in the findings as sub-themes. Participants may have experienced a particular phenomenon in a different way than other study participants. The researcher made sure that this was reported upon.

**Peer review.** According to Cresswell (2009), this process involves asking another person to review the data and the researcher’s interpretation of the data to
ensure the congruency of findings and interpretation with the raw data. In this study, a third party who works in the field of education was asked to review the data to see if conclusions reached by the researcher seemed reasonable based upon the data. Additionally, a qualified instructor with considerable experience in qualitative research supervised the researcher throughout the course of the study.

**Research Challenges**

In every study there are challenges to be overcome. Two challenges faced in this study were the role of the researcher and the ethical protection of participants.

**Role of Researcher**

“To a large extent, the validity and reliability of a study depend upon the ethics of the investigator” (Merriam, 2009, p. 228). Therefore it was important that the study was carried out with a great deal of professional integrity and rigor (Merriam, 2009). As noted previously, interpretations reached by the researcher are always influenced to some extent by the researcher’s past experiences, beliefs and frame of reference. It is common in phenomenological research for researchers to write about their own experiences in order to ‘bracket’ them prior to interviewing others (Merriam, 2009, p. 93). In such a manner, “Prior beliefs about a phenomenon of interest are temporarily put aside, or bracketed, so as not to interfere with seeing or intuiting the elements of structure of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 25).

As noted earlier, it was clearly acknowledged that the researcher is employed at Chico State and serves as an academic advisor and orientation coordinator in the Academic Advising Office. While this insider position allowed for some ease of entry
and access, this affiliation also raised the question of potential bias. Therefore, careful measures were taken to minimize conflict of interest and increase neutrality.

First of all, students who were unknown to the researcher, and with whom the researcher had no previous advising contact were selected for the study. This made it easier for the researcher to remain neutral and objective when collecting data about student responses and reactions.

Additionally, several safeguards were utilized during the interview process to reduce potential bias and safeguard participants. First, participants were assured of the confidentiality of information collected during the interview process; Students were identified by pseudonym both in audio recordings and written notes so their real name was never associated with their responses. The interviews also took place in a private office within the Academic Advising office. Students did not need to reveal their real reason for visiting the office and were able to enter and exit without notice. Second, the researcher worked to create rapport and a safe and trusting environment with each interviewee so as to facilitate honest and forthcoming responses from participants. Before each interview began, participants were fully informed of the purpose and goal of the study and were advised of their right to stop the interview at any time, or to refuse to answer any question without penalty. They were ensured that their responses would not be connected to or impact their academic records at Chico State. They were asked if they had any questions or concerns before the interview began. Once the interview concluded, there was a debriefing where participants were allowed to add anything they may have left out. They were also given the researcher’s contact
information if they wished to add anything at a later date. They were also asked permission by the researcher to contact them in the future if further clarification or details were necessary to ensure that the researcher’s findings were congruent with their experiences. Participants were provided with the opportunity to review, edit, and/or amend their responses, though none of them followed up on this offer.

**Ethical Protection of Participants**

Interviewing carries both risks and benefits to the study participants. One of the risks is that in-depth interviewing may trigger feelings that the participant’s privacy has been invaded, or participants may reveal more than intended during an interview. Painful memories around an experience might surface during an interview even if the topic seems neutral or benign (Merriam, 2009). To address this possibility, participants were advised, both in the consent form and in the interview debriefing, of resources on campus available to assist them should they experience any discomfort. During the consent process, interviewees were also advised that they could halt the interview at any time, opt out, or decline to answer any question without consequence.

It was also noted to participants that the interview process might pose some benefits to them including valuable self-knowledge and insight. Finally, participants were told that their honest and open input was greatly valued and that it had the potential to create a positive difference in the support services and experiences of future Chico State transfer students.
Conclusion

This study was designed to provide a better understanding of the transfer student transition including student expectations and perceptions of college life, as well as differences between the community college and Chico State. The goal was to fully explore the transitional experiences of transfer students who experienced transfer shock as well as to identify helps or hindrances to their adjustment to a new college environment. It is hoped is that the information gathered from this study will assist campus leaders and policy makers in the creation of new programs and support services for transfer students.

It is important that campuses address the transfer population proactively (Ishitani, 2008). Community colleges are a key pathway into postsecondary education for nearly half of all undergraduate students in the nation, including a preponderance of low-income and minority students (Scrivener & Coghlan, 2011). The percentage of students of color at the community college is growing (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). It is logical to consider that the number of transfers of color will rise as well. “With the increasing population of students of color in the community college, it is imperative that leaders use this demographic information to prepare their institutions to address the needs of these groups” (Nevarez & Wood, 2010, p. 155).

Leaders and policy makers at four-year institutions must look closely at the transfer function, the transfer transition and at support services for transfers so this important group of students obtain degrees.
Low-income and many minority students have less access to high-quality secondary education that would help prepare them for college. Once prepared, they are less likely to enroll in college, and once in college, they are less likely to complete their degrees. When they do complete their degrees, they are likely lower-level degrees, such as certificates and associate degrees, rather than baccalaureate degrees. (Bailey & Morest, 2006, p. 2)

Providing support to transfer students from the community college is essential to helping low-income, minority students achieve a degree, and obtain a better life for themselves and their families.
Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

For many of the state’s underrepresented minorities, low income, or non-traditional students, the transfer function plays a pivotal role in college access (Laanan, 2004, 2006, 2007). Since post-secondary degree attainment is positively linked with the quality of a host of long-term outcomes such as higher earnings, labor-market success, health status, voting behavior and civic engagement (Pascarella, 2006), it is critical that these students experience a smooth transfer so they are able to persist and graduate.

Yet the transfer transition and avoiding transfer shock can prove quite challenging. Previous research has established that students often struggle upon transfer and experience a first semester dip in GPA known as transfer shock (Diaz, 1992; Hills, 1965). However, there is little specific information as to why experienced students with a proven college track record have difficulties upon transfer.

This chapter reports on the findings of a qualitative research study designed to explore the experience of students as they transitioned from the California Community College to Chico State, particularly those who experienced transfer shock. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students in order to answer the following research questions:

1. How do transfer students characterize their transition experience?
2. What are transfer students expectations as they enter Chico State?
3. What differences between the two- and four-year institution do transfer students report?

4. What types of helps and hindrances to their transition do students report?

5. What additional types of support might be offered by the institution to aid them in their transition experience?

Because entering a new college represents a significant transition in a student’s academic and personal life, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Schlossberg et al., 1995) was used as a guiding framework to examine students’ perceptions of their situation, self, support, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college transfer process. This theory postulates that the four S’s – situation, self, support and strategies – strongly influence the ability of the individual to cope during a transition. The researcher sought to explore if there were any significant similarities in the four S’s for students who experienced transfer shock. To accomplish this goal, participants in this study were asked to reflect on their transfer experience after finishing their first semester at Chico State and to share their expectations, perceptions, struggles and challenges in their own words.

In the following chapter the researcher will:

1. provide a profile of the participants,

2. describe the process by which the data were gathered, recorded and analyzed,

3. present the findings related each research questions along with a discussion of recurring themes,
4. discuss findings related to the theoretical framework, and

5. summarize the entire process.

Profile of Participants

Demographic Survey Results

All 13 interview participants shared the common characteristic of being new first-semester transfer students entering Chico State from a California Community College in fall 2011. In addition, all study participants had completed between 60 and 90 units of college work and were thus classified as juniors.

All of the participants entered Chico State from the CCC in clear academic standing meaning all had GPA’s above a 2.0. In fact the average transfer GPA was 2.94. Another commonality was that all students struggled academically their first semester and experienced the drop in GPA known as transfer shock. All interviewees ended their first semester at Chico State on academic probation, meaning their cumulative or Chico GPA was under a 2.0; and in disqualification range, meaning their cumulative or Chico GPA had fallen below the 1.85 level required of students with junior status. The average Chico GPA of study participants after their first semester at Chico State was 1.4.

Of note is the fact that none of the students interviewed were in academic difficulty with their cumulative GPA. The average cumulative GPA was 2.67 - well above the 2.0 that triggers academic probation. None of the participants had a cumulative GPA below a 2.0 and two participants still had cumulative GPA’s above a 3.0 even after having a difficult first semester at Chico State. However, in each case, it
is the student’s *Chico* GPA which places them in jeopardy of academic
disqualification. According to Chico State academic policy, either a student’s
cumulative or her Chico GPA can trigger academic probation and disqualification (see
Table 2). It should be noted that in all tables and throughout this section, pseudonyms
are used to protect student identities. Also, there were a number of different community
colleges represented in the study. However, in order to protect the identity of the
participants, no specific community college will be mentioned by name. There is also
no specific analysis in terms of type of community college because no salient
differences were found in students’ experience.
Table 3

*Participant Pre and Post Transfer Grade Point Averages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pre-Transfer CCC GPA</th>
<th>Post 1st semester CHICO GPA</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Post 1st semester CUM GPA</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>.825</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valeria</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atticus</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Demographic summary.** Prior to the start of the interview, participants were asked to complete a brief 15-item questionnaire (see Appendix E) regarding their basic demographic characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity. The questionnaire also included two questions which asked them to rate the difficulty or ease of their academic and social transition on a five point Likert scale.
The participants ranged in age from 18-26 with an average age of 21.9. Six of those interviewed were female and seven were male. Six participants identified as first-generation college students. In terms of ethnicity, five participants were white, five were underrepresented minorities, two indicated more than one ethnicity, and one participant declined to state his ethnicity.

All but three of the 13 participants were living away from home while attending Chico State. Five of the participants indicated they moved away from home for the first time to attend Chico State. The remaining five participants indicated that they already lived away from home while attending the community college and prior to transfer.

In terms of work for pay, 10 participants worked at least part time while attending the community college. However, only seven participants indicated they were working while attending Chico State. Four students stopped working completely when they transferred to Chico State and three reduced their work hours upon transfer. Only one student began working upon transfer to Chico State from the community college.

Participants represented a wide range of majors from a variety of colleges. It should be noted that students’ intended major is listed, rather than their official major of record. This is because the researcher discovered during the interviews, that at least two participants indicated they planned to change their major soon (see Table 4).
Table 4

*Key Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>1st Gen</th>
<th>1st time away</th>
<th>Hrs per wk working at CC</th>
<th>Hrs per wk working at Chico</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Two or more – White/ Native American</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>Communication Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic/ Latino</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>Kinesiology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Decline to State</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic/ Latino</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Nutrition &amp; Food Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Environmental Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valeria</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic/ Latino</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>Child Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Two or more - Black &amp; Latino</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Exercise Physiology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atticus</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Geology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Academic and social transition.** Since 2007, institutional data has been collected via Student Voice regarding students’ orientation and transition experience in the form of a retrospective survey administered to all new freshmen and transfer students near the end of their first semester. Most of the survey questions ask students to reflect back on their orientation experience. However, two questions on the Student Voice survey ask students to reflect on their academic and social transition to the
university. A quick descriptive analysis of the institutional data indicates that both freshmen and transfer students experience very similar levels of academic transition difficulty. However, freshmen report much greater social transition difficulty than transfer students. Overall, the Student Voice data shows that the academic transition is more difficult for transfer students than the social transition (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Student Voice Data: Freshmen and Transfer Academic & Social Adjustment Difficulty*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfers</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher decided to add the same two questions to the demographic questionnaire administered to study participants to see if the findings were consistent. As in the Student Voice survey, study participants were asked to rate the difficulty or ease of their academic and social transition on a five-point Likert scale ranging from very difficult to very easy.
The findings substantiated the institutional Student Voice data. Overall, study participants reported more academic transition difficulty than they did social difficulty. The average difficulty score for the academic transition was 3.3, while the average difficulty score for the social transition was 2.0 (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Participants’ Academic & Social Transition Reported Via Likert Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Academically, how would you describe your transition from your previous school/college to Chico State</th>
<th>Socially, how would you describe your transition from your previous school/college to Chico State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>4 - Somewhat difficult</td>
<td>1- Very Easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>3- Neither easy or difficult</td>
<td>2- Somewhat Easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>4- Somewhat difficult</td>
<td>4 -Somewhat difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>4- Somewhat difficult</td>
<td>3 -Neither easy or difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>3- Neither easy or difficult</td>
<td>2 -Somewhat easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>1- Very easy</td>
<td>1-Very easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>2- Somewhat easy</td>
<td>1-Very easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>4- Somewhat difficult</td>
<td>1-Very easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>5- Very difficult</td>
<td>3-Neither easy or difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>4- Somewhat difficult</td>
<td>3-Neither easy or difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valeria</td>
<td>4- Somewhat difficult</td>
<td>3-Neither easy or difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>2- Somewhat easy</td>
<td>2-Somewhat easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atticus</td>
<td>3- Neither easy or difficult</td>
<td>1-Very easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Difficulty Score</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eight of the 13 participants indicated that it was either a somewhat difficult or very difficult *academic* transition for them from the community college to Chico State. In contrast, only one participant of the 13 indicated that the *social* transition to Chico State was somewhat difficult. Four students reported that the social transition was
neither easy or difficult, and eight students indicated that the social transition was either somewhat easy to very easy (see Table 7).

Table 7

Participants’ Self-Report of Their Academic and Social Transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic, How would you describe your transition from your previous school/college to Chico State?</th>
<th>Socially, how would you describe your transition from your previous school/college to Chico State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very difficult</td>
<td>Very difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat difficult</td>
<td>Somewhat difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither easy or difficult</td>
<td>Neither easy or difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat easy</td>
<td>Somewhat easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Easy</td>
<td>Very Easy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher also compared the self-reported transition difficulty for students across various demographic characteristics using the five point Likert scale including: (a) gender, (b) first generation college student status, and (c) ethnicity. The only demographic where there was any noticeable difference was gender. On average, females reported greater difficulty than males in both their academic and their social adjustment. For reported academic adjustment difficulty, the average female score on the Likert scale was 3.8, while the male average was 2.8. For reported social adjustment difficulty, the female average was 2.6, while the male average was 1.6. There were no major differences between first generation and non-first generation college students, nor were there any noticeable differences reported by white versus underrepresented minority students.
Narrative Profiles of Participants

A brief narrative description of each participant follows in order to help familiarize the reader with each student’s background and the circumstances surrounding their transfer before presenting the findings of the study.

**Veronica.** Veronica is 21-year-old female who identifies herself as both white and American Indian. Veronica moved out on her own to attend community college full-time and to play softball. Her mother lives locally. She is a first generation college student. She was motivated to do well at the community college because a minimum GPA was required in order to participate in sports. Participating in softball also required her to spend a lot of time on campus and she met most of her friends via the team. She did not transfer to Chico State immediately from the community college but went to Chicago and played softball. When her knee was injured, she returned and began attending community college again and worked 21-30 hours a week until she was able to transfer to Chico State. She attended a late orientation session at Chico State and had difficulty finding open classes in her major. She took whatever classes she could get to meet the 12-unit financial aid minimum. Later, she changed her entire class schedule to accommodate her work schedule. Upon taking several graphic design courses, she became disillusioned with her major. She stopped going to class entirely her first semester and started working more instead. “It was horrible. It really sucked, knowing I didn’t really want to be a part of that (major) anymore but I still had to go through with those classes because it was after the deadline and I couldn’t afford to give back the financial aid. So I just tried to stick it out and I ended up working too
much and not focusing on school.” She failed all of her classes her first semester but is continuing in spring and plans to change majors from Graphic Design to Kinesiology.

**Eddie.** Eddie is a 21-year-old Latino male who attended the community college for three years directly out of high school. He is a Kinesiology major and is dressed in sports gear and carries a yoga mat. He is a first generation college student. While attending community college, he lived at home with his family, averaged 14-15 units per semester, attended class regularly, worked 21-30 hours per week, went to the gym a lot and says he never earned below a 3.0 GPA. He did not live near his community college campus. He says at the CCC he would often stay on campus much of the day because he didn’t want to commute back and forth. He says he transferred to Chico State because he was ready to leave his hometown and “move on.” He moved to Chico and into an apartment with some high school friends. He attributes Chico’s social atmosphere, turning 21 and leaving home for the first time as key contributors to his first semester academic troubles. “I moved from a rural to a social environment….I think the social transition was pretty much what destroyed me. I just pretty much got out of control.” He says that at home his mom would wake him up to go to class and that his parents held him accountable for his studies. At Chico, he lived within walking distance of campus and says he often felt lazy and bored his first semester and would not go to class. He also did not work 21-30 hours per week as he did at the community college. Instead, while attending Chico State he worked only on weekends. He also reported that it was difficult to study in his apartment with his friends and neighbors partying and socializing. “I made a big error last semester. I had
two exams one Friday and friends came on Thursday and said let’s go drink. That was a horrible idea. I ended up going to those two midterms with a hangover. I don’t know why I let that happen. I wasn’t planning to stay out that late or drink that much. It just happened. I do regret that moment there.” Still, he describes the transition as “pretty easy. He attended orientation and says he knew about resources such as advising, tutoring and counseling. “I just didn’t use ‘em, I knew about them. I just never made time for them.” He plans to get a job this semester to keep himself busy.

**Claire.** Claire is an 18-year-old Hmong female. Neither of her parents went to college. She has three older siblings who all attended some college. Her older sister graduated with a bachelor’s degree but both her older brothers dropped out after a few semesters because they had families to support. She took classes at the community college during her last year in high school via a college connection program and did very well earning mostly As and Bs. She also earned advanced placement credit which explains how she as able to transfer to Chico State as a junior after attending only one year at the community college. She was conditionally admitted at first until it could be determined that she met all the requirements. At one point, she was told she wasn’t going to be able to attend Chico State in the fall, an experience she describes as traumatic. However, she managed to get everything sorted out at orientation regarding her admission status. She is a business major but is also taking classes so she can apply for the nursing program at Chico State. Business is her back-up plan if she does not get into nursing. In the fall, she took a full-load of classes at Chico plus two classes at the community college so she could continue working her on-campus job at
the CCC. However, trying to balance classes on both campuses and trying to work 22-25 hours a week proved too much for her and she found herself in academic difficulty. Transportation was also an issue. She must take public transportation to Chico State, which she dislikes. Her parents, who she describes as very traditional Hmong, do not approve of her taking the bus as they feel it is not safe. Most days she tries to catch a ride with her siblings, her uncle or her boyfriend but last semester this sometimes proved challenging and she missed some classes. She is not working this semester and is taking fewer classes in order to recover her GPA.

**Isaiah.** Isaiah is a 22-year-old male who declined to state his ethnicity. He is light skinned and has blue eyes and blond hair. He has one younger sister. He moved from Southern California to attend Chico State. He says he originally didn’t want to go college out of high school but his girlfriend at the time signed him up for GE classes as a surprise “That was the best thing that came out of the relationship.” During his first year at the community college he worked 20 to 40 hours per week as a personal banker. “It was kind of a privilege being able to work at a professional job at the age of 18.” He decided he wanted to attend Chico State after visiting his best friend who was attending here. The lower cost of living along with the comprehensive disability support services offered at Chico State (he has severe ADD) helped him to confirm his decision to move away from home and he transferred to Chico State as sociology major. He found the prospect of autonomy and living away from home for the first time “scary but exhilarating.” He reported being a decent B student at the community college but found classes at Chico State much harder making for a difficult first
semester, “I was in some courses that were expecting me to read an hour and a half a week at some points, and asking for a lot more work and higher quality work.” He also found living away from home for the first time challenging. He says he lacked self-control and partied a lot because drinks were cheap and the environment was social. “Just not having my parents tell me not to go out on a Tuesday night was a big change.” He also noted difficulty with living alone, and with balancing cleaning, cooking and bills. “I never understood the amount of effort it takes to live by yourself.” He also feels that moving to northern California was a big culture change. However, he feels that moving away from home to go school is allowing him to grow more than if he stayed at home and commuted to a local college.

Xavier. Xavier is a 21-year-old white male. He grew up locally and is the youngest of four children. Both his parents and one of his siblings attended college. He lived at home and attended the community college full-time for three years after high school and received an AA prior to transferring to Chico State as a psychology major. He says he was “extremely nervous” about the transition. He did attend orientation but still found that selecting and registering for appropriate classes was very difficult. He was particularly troubled by the articulation of courses from the community college to Chico State and the fact that transcripts are not officially evaluated until mid semester. He says he did not understand exactly what courses he should take his first semester and feels he would have benefitted greatly from one-on-one major advising. He found Chico State very different than his community college, which he described as isolated and out in the country with lots of parking and a more
“laid-back” atmosphere. In contrast, Chico State is in the center of town, much larger, with no place to park. “Parking is a pain in the butt and you’re going from 5,000 kids to 15,000.” He noted that some of his teachers at the community college warned him that instructors at Chico State might be “a bit stuck up because they have doctorates.” However, so far he has found his teachers “extremely friendly.” Academically, he did notice that coursework was more demanding at Chico State than at the community college. At the community college, he says he was able to get “decent” grades just by attending class and skimming his books. In contrast, classes at Chico State are much harder. He feels his social transition has been somewhat easy. Since he grew up locally, he knew 35 to 40 people attending Chico State before he ever arrived and he reported having little difficulty meeting people. He says that next semester he plans to read more and to ask for help if he needs it which he tends not to do because he is “stubborn and likes to figure things out on his own.”

Alex. Alex is a 23-year-old white male. He is one of two children who grew up in the Bay area. He is the first person in his family to go to college. He says he barely graduated from high school, and when he did, he worked construction for a year. He was promoted three times on the job that year and realized he was intelligent and could do well in school. He said that all the older guys on the construction site encouraged him to go do something he really cared about so he moved from the Bay Area to go to community college to achieve his childhood dream of becoming a fire fighter. He is currently a volunteer fire fighter but realized that he needed a four-year degree to move up in his field. He had a 3.0 GPA at the community college prior to
transferring. Looking back, he says he loaded himself much too heavily his first semester at Chico State taking 18 difficult units while volunteering 72 hours at the firehouse, taking an EMT course and training for a triathlon. “I didn’t balance myself all that very well.” He was averaging 4-5 hours of sleep a night and his attendance suffered. “I know what it takes to do well and I know I wasn’t doing it and I just felt pressure over me….I was so burnt out and tired. I just never came up to par with what I needed to do.” This semester he vows to make a change. “If I were to use all the resources that you (Chico State) offer, even one of the resources, it would help.”

Austin. Austin is a 24-year-old white male from Southern California. He went to a community college about a mile from home immediately after high school. He experimented with different classes because he didn’t know what he wanted to do. He attended the community for six years and took 18-4 units per semester and working 21-30 hours per week before transferring. He was very excited to “finally get out of community college. It almost felt like a trap sometimes. You know, like taking classes that didn’t really challenge me at all or taking GE classes.” Everything changed when he found the major that he loved - economics. Chico was his first choice. However, his GPA was slightly below the minimum required for out-of-service-area transfer students so he didn’t find out if he was accepted until right before school started. He attended orientation and moved away from home and up to Chico State with two friends neither of whom are Chico State students. He worked fewer hours (11-20 per week) while attending Chico State than he did at the community college but still struggled especially with one particularly fast-paced, upper division course. Instead of
talking to the professor or asking for help, he says he “retreated into myself a bit.” Though classes were harder, he found that utilizing services such as admissions, financial aid and records, and making friends was easier in a college community like Chico, “People go out together, have fun together. At a community college... you don’t make friends on campus much.” Since transferring to Chico State, he has joined several clubs and joined a fraternity which he says has helped a lot. “I like that I have this connection with a group of people on campus – like minded people that I can go to. . . .”

Jacob. Jacob is 22-year-old male of Hispanic/Latino descent. He is a first generation college student from Southern California where he lived at home with his parents and worked 21-30 hours per week while going to community college for 3½ years as recording arts major. When he decided he would not be able to get a job in that field, he decided upon a major in nutrition instead. He applied to several schools and decided upon Chico because he had friends here. He was looking forward to transferring but describes the transition as “pretty difficult.” Taking upper division courses for the first time and switching majors was “a bit jarring at first.” He also struggled with living away from his parents for the first time and managing his time. “You have complete and total freedom. It’s really easy to abuse that. I think specifically that’s where my downfall was.” He stopped working when he moved to attend Chico State “Looking back at community college, I was much busier then. Here, just having school, it kind of made me lazier than I thought…. . . .” He found big differences in the social environment. “There is a social life here. Community college
doesn’t really have one. Here there is much more opportunity for seeing your friends, for slacking off and going out partying.” He says he now has a better understanding of how to manage his time next semester, “I just have to keep myself busy.”

**Charlotte.** Charlotte is a 21-year-old white female. She was born in Los Angeles but at age 15 moved to live with her father in Northern California. She says she moved away from home when she was 16, finished high school and then went to community college. She says she had a wonderful experience and teachers at the community college and she completed her AA. She planned to go to Humboldt State but had to wait out a year when her application was rejected at the last moment. During that time, she went back to the community college and took prerequisite courses for her major and worked to save money. The next fall she decided to major in biology at Chico State over Humboldt State. She took a heavy load of intense science courses and felt ill-prepared. “It was more like surface education at my junior college and here it was really delving into the nitty gritty and I felt like the students around me knew more than I did, so I felt like I came with a disadvantage and so I did really poorly.” She says her community college was smaller and felt more personal. After her first semester at Chico, she realized she needed to change her major to environmental science. “I couldn't hang with the (biology) requirements. I ended up changing my major because school for me is a financial investment and if I feel like it’s going to take another two years that I hadn’t planned for financially - that is just not feasible for me.” She went to orientation but feels strongly that more hands-on
advising and help with course selection, particularly within her major, would have helped her avoid the overload that was her downfall her first semester.

**Crystal.** Crystal is a 23-year-old white female. She grew up locally and went to the local community college for five years before transferring to Chico State. She spent a lot of time at the community college because she was unsure of her major. She was thinking of nursing at first but ended up switching to accounting before transferring to Chico State. She did on-line orientation rather than attend an orientation session. However, her father, a Chico State alum, gave her a tour of campus and showed her how things work. Though she still lives at home the transition was significant. She reports being “shocked” by the change in environment. “I feel like I am used to a smaller-type environment and I come over here and it’s just so spread out and there’s a lot of people and a lot of traffic and I’m not used to that.” Since she had been successful at the community college, she felt like she knew what she was doing but found that classes were much harder and more fast-paced at Chico State than at the CC. The larger size of campus and of her classes at Chico also posed a challenge and made it more difficult for her to connect with professors. She took three upper division courses her first semester, which she found really hard. Still, she was pleasantly surprised at the social atmosphere at Chico State, “I don’t know, you just feel more closer to the people at Chico than you do to the people at (the community college).” She feels she will do better this next semester since she plans to take a lighter course load.
Valeria. Valeria is 22-year-old Latina who grew up locally and went to community college for three years. She also did a college connection program as a senior in high school and completed most of her remedial and general education coursework. She says she planned to transfer earlier but did not pass a math class required for transfer so her admission was delayed. She says she was looking forward to the transition but was apprehensive at first. One of the biggest surprises was the friendliness of students and staff on campus. “I am not really friendly so it is a little bit hard for me to make friends but I felt more welcome here than I did at the community college.” She says she has made more friends at Chico State than at her community college. In terms of academics, she feels like she worked much harder and learned more at Chico State her first semester than she did at the community college but still her grades dropped. She used to get A’s at the community college. At Chico State she got mostly C’s and failed one class her first semester. She attributes some of her struggles to her lack of writing skills since she lives in a Spanish-speaking home, “My parents don’t speak any English at all. My father doesn’t know how to read. But they are super supportive. They say, ‘oh you should go to college so you don’t have to work like us.’” She is retaking the class she failed with the same instructor in spring and feels she can do much better now that she has adjusted to the more difficult workload.

Delilah. Delilah is a 26 year old who describes herself as a “blacktino” – a combination of black and Latino. She is a first generation college student and is the only one on her mom’s side of the family to graduate from high school and to get an
associates degree. She does not have contact with her father’s side of the family. She
attended the community college after high school for three years down south and got
an AA degree. She worked for three years but found her job very tedious and
repetitive. She decided to move to Chico with some friends from home who were
planning to attend Chico State. She moved to Chico but was unable to attend school
for a semester because she had only completed 59.5 units of the 60 units needed to
transfer. She went to a local community college instead to make up the difference. She
describes the transition as “nerve-wracking.” However, overall, she felt the social
atmosphere at Chico State was very receptive, friendly and open. She also felt like
students are more busy and goal oriented at a four-year institution where “everybody
here has a purpose” compared to the community college where “there are a lot of
wanderers.” She has changed majors several times over the course of her college
career. She originally thought she wanted to major in psychology but has since
decided to major in exercise physiology with a minor in Spanish. She attended
orientation but felt it as too far from the beginning of school to remember much. Her
biggest issue was that she had to register late due to a financial aid issue so she was
unable to get into the classes she needed for her major. Since she could not take a full
load of classes, she decided to work part-time for a previous employer over an hour
and a half away. Commuting that far to work and attending school proved extremely
challenging. She says she is happy to be continuing her college journey though she
feels very old on a campus where most students are in their early 20s. “My railroad
tracks were never straight, they were snaky, but now I am here and it makes me happy.”

**Atticus.** Atticus is a 21-year old black male who after high school lived at home and spent two and a half years attending a community college in southern California. He got his AA degree before transferring to Chico State. He applied as a philosophy major because he was planning to go to law school but changed his mind after working for a lawyer over the summer. He attended orientation at Chico State and switched majors to geology because he loved the one geology course he took at the community college. He says he was looking forward to transfer to Chico State because, “I was sort of tired of being in the same city all my life and doing the same thing over and over.” He was excited to try a new major but acknowledges that he didn’t really know what he was getting into. “For the most part, moving over here, deciding to be a geologist was sort of taking a dart and throwing it at a random spot.” He did not have many of the undergraduate classes that would have helped with his major and he enrolled in four difficult science classes with labs his first semester for a total of 18 units. He worked very hard and still couldn’t keep up. In retrospect, he feels he should have only signed up for 13-14 units due to the new major but, at the time, felt he could handle it because he had taken 21 units successfully at the community college. He says his biggest challenge was time management especially since it was his first time living away from home. While he was not really involved and “didn’t really partake” of the social life at the community college, since being at Chico State, he has joined several major related clubs and volunteers at the local
science museum. In contrast to his academic transition, his social transition has been very easy, “Given this is a college town, it sort of hard *not* make friends.”

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Phenomenology examines an individual’s first person, lived experience around a particular phenomenon and then seeks to find commonalities or shared meanings around the experience (Cresswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Therefore the chosen data collection method was criterion sampling. All participants needed to have had a common experience (e.g. transferring from a community college and experiencing transfer shock) in order to compare their perception of the experience. Purposeful sampling was also used to ensure that participants with a variety of demographic characteristics including gender, ethnicity, and major were included in the sample.

Once all the interviews were conducted and transcribed, the transcripts were then analyzed to determine if there were similarities or differences among participant responses.

Transcripts were reviewed, analyzed, and coded in their entirety, as well as by individual interview question. This process was used to uncover any repeating ideas among participant responses. These repeating ideas were organized into key themes and later into sub-themes related to the literature and theoretical framework in the manner described by Auerbach & Silverstein (2003). Since the theoretical framework for the study is Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, the transcripts were also analyzed by Schlossberg’s 4 S’s (situation, self, support and strategies).
Key Findings: Research Questions

The primary research question for this qualitative, exploratory study was: What is the experience of community college students who exhibited transfer shock as they transitioned to CSU, Chico? Since a goal of the study was to better understand transfer shock, students who experienced transition difficulty (as evidenced by GPA) and who ended their first semester on AP and in DQ range were specifically selected to be interviewed. There were five primary interview questions along with secondary question probes to help elicit answers and clarify the questions (see Appendix D).

The findings from each of the five key questions are summarized both in narrative and table form in five topic areas: (a) attitude toward transfer, (b) expectations around transfer, (c) differences between the community college and Chico State, (d) helps and hindrances to transition, and (e) additional supports needed. To guide the reader, a table which outlines the themes and subthemes that arose from each of the five primary interview questions is included (see Table 8).

Students’ own words about their transfer experience are woven throughout the discussion in this next section. Quotes were taken from interview transcriptions which best illustrate each point and the concepts under discussion. A full listing of responses to each interview question is also noted in table form at the end of the dissertation (see Appendix F).
### Table 8

**Guide to Themes & Sub-themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Area &amp; Questions</th>
<th>Themes &amp; Sub-themes</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude Toward Transfer</strong></td>
<td>A. Positive emotions&lt;br&gt;B. Negative emotions&lt;br&gt;C. Mixed emotions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question 1: Tell me about your transfer experience.</td>
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<td>• What was it like transferring from a two-year to a four-year institution?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How would you describe or characterize the transition?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Expectations Around Transfer</strong></td>
<td>A. No clear expectations&lt;br&gt;B. Expected slightly more difficult coursework</td>
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<td>Question 2: What were your expectations as you entered Chico State?</td>
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<td>• Please explain how your expectations compared to reality.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Did you encounter any surprises? If so, please describe them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How did your transition meet or not meet your expectations?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Differences Between CCC &amp; Chico State</strong></td>
<td>A. Academic differences&lt;br&gt;B. Social differences&lt;br&gt;C. Differences in campus culture</td>
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<td>Question 3: Tell me about your experience at your community college compared to your</td>
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<td>experience at Chico State?</td>
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<td>• How did your community college prepare you to transfer to Chico State?</td>
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<td>• Please describe any differences you encountered (Academically, personally, socially?)</td>
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<td><strong>Helps &amp; Hindrances to Transition</strong></td>
<td>A. Helps &amp; supports&lt;br&gt;B. Hindrances or challenges&lt;br&gt;C. Additional support needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question 4: Please describe any helps or hindrances to your transition experience.</td>
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<td>• Tell me about any particular challenges you faced.</td>
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<td>• Did you find anything (or anyone) particularly helpful in helping you manage the</td>
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<td>transition?</td>
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<td><strong>Additional Support Needed</strong></td>
<td>A. Adjustments to admissions &amp; outreach&lt;br&gt;B. Additional advising resources&lt;br&gt;C. Policy adjustments&lt;br&gt;D. Transfer workshop&lt;br&gt;E. Miscellaneous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question 5: What could Chico State have done as an institution to better support your</td>
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<td>transition?</td>
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Question 1: Attitude Towards Transfer

According to Schlossberg, an individual’s perception or view of a transition as either positive or negative, desired or dreaded, can greatly impact their ability to cope (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The idea is that those who view a transition more positively will fare better in the transition process.

For the purposes of this study, students were asked to characterize or describe their feelings and expectations regarding transfer in their own words. The words used by the 13 participants to describe their transfer experience were very revealing about their view of the upcoming transition. To organize the data and relate it to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, the researcher assigned a positive or negative value to the words used and plotted the student responses to illustrate the widely contrasting emotions students had about their transfer experience (see Appendix F). An examination of the data reveals that most participants expressed a wide range of emotions to describe their transfer experience including: (a) positive emotions, (b) negative emotions, and (c) mixed emotions.

Positive emotions. The bulk of students viewed the transition as highly positive. Eleven of the 13 participants used the words “excited” or stated that they were “looking forward” to transferring. Several specific examples highlight the sense of anticipation and excitement that students reported feeling as they approached the transition:

- “It was exciting at first. New place, you know, new scenery and everything.” (Crystal)
• “I was really looking forward to transferring. It was exciting to be knowing that I was going to a four-year college.” (Jacob)

• “It was exciting. I was the first person in my family to be able to go (to a four-year college). I was looking forward to it. I was very excited.” (Alex)

All three of these students are looking forward to the change and two students, Jacob and Alex, also note a sense of pride and accomplishment that they were now able to transfer to a four-year institution.

**Negative emotions.** While exciting for some, for other students the transition process was fraught with paperwork as well as the unknown. Ten of the 13 participants used words with negative connotations regarding the transition. Several students noted difficulties with the admission process which added to their overall stress level regarding the transition. One student, Charlotte, described the bureaucratic transition from the community college as “hellish.” She had originally intended to go to Humboldt but was told in June that her fall admission was denied.

• “I was supposed to go to Humboldt State, and at the last minute, literally in June when I was going to move in July for an August starting, they contacted me and said I forgot to fill out a form and rejected my application. I was like.” You are kidding me. I was so excited to go there and then they just like shattered me.” (Charlotte)
She had to wait out an entire year and rethink her plan. She decided to apply to Chico instead. In the interim, she tried going back to the community college but had financial aid issues.

- “I had to do a series of appeals that were rejected for financial aid. So I didn’t have any more money after that and there wasn’t any point in going to school if I wasn’t going to get any more money for it right? So then I just worked for that entire year, and then… I applied to Chico State and was accepted the following fall.” (Charlotte)

Charlotte reported that the admissions process was extremely difficult and time consuming. She felt it put her behind a whole year in terms of her academic progress.

Another student, Claire, was originally admitted to Chico but her admission was conditional and she got an e-mail over the summer saying she had not met the admission requirements which meant she would not be able to attend Chico State in the fall as planned.

- “I sent in my official transcripts and everything, but somehow they didn’t get it… So I got a bit sacred and I had to call a couple of times…. I was a bit freaked out… It was a bit difficult because I thought I have everything taken care of….” (Claire)

Claire had to provide her transcript information again and visit several offices while she was at orientation to get the issue sorted out. The anxiety of the whole experience was exhausting for her and negatively impacted her perception of the transition.
While other students didn’t necessarily have trouble with the admissions process they found all the paperwork needed for transfer a hassle as articulated by Alex:

- “It was a pain! All the forms and meeting and counselors – just non-stop.
Every second there was something I had to do – or something I hadn’t done yet.” (Alex)

Five of the students interviewed said they felt intimidated or frightened by the prospect of attending a university for the first time and used the words “afraid or scared” when describing how they felt about the transition to the four-year institution.

**Mixed emotions.** For many students, the feelings about transfer were mixed combining both apprehension and excitement, agony and ecstasy. Eight students reported such varied feelings towards the transition and described it using a combination of positive and negative adjectives:

- “I was looking forward to it but I was a little bit afraid at first.” (Valeria)
- “It was scary, and at the same time, it was exhilarating and I would say there was definitely a component of being overwhelmed….” (Isaiah)
- “I was looking forward to it…on the same hand, I didn’t know exactly what I was getting into.” (Atticus)

They may have been looking forward to the transition as a positive event in their lives but these comments indicate that they still had some concerns about the unknown.
Question 2. Expectations Around Transfer

Student’s apprehension level may have been influenced by their expectations of the transfer experience. Schlossberg contends that an individual’s expectations of a transition situation can influence their ability to handle the transition smoothly. “A transition is not so much a matter of change but of the individual’s perception of the change” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 28). Expectations can definitely color experience and so the researcher felt it was important to find out what students expected as they entered Chico State. Perhaps transfer students’ difficulties might be due to unrealistic expectations or perceptions about the four-year institution. To ascertain this, students were asked to reflect on their expectations prior to transfer. Students had more difficulty answering this question perhaps due to the reflective nature of the question, or perhaps because students couldn’t recall their expectations clearly. Overall, student’s answers regarding their expectations around the transfer experience were quite vague and non-committal. It does occur to the researcher that perhaps the answers were vague because student expectations about transfer were vague and unclear. Upon analysis, student responses to this question fell into two sub-themes: (a) no clear expectations, or (b) slightly more difficult coursework (see Appendix F).

No clear expectations. What became clear to the researcher is that most transfer students lacked clear expectations in regards to academics at the time they transferred from the community college to Chico State. Over half (seven) of the 13 students interviewed indicated they did not have any fixed expectations around attending Chico State. Some students said they hadn’t really thought about it. Others
said they expected their Chico State experience to be very similar to their community college. Schlossberg terms this as neutral or benign expectations about the situation. (Schlossberg et al., 1995). A transition is only a transition if it is defined so by the person experiencing it, according to Schlossberg’s framework. These students didn’t originally view the move as a major transition in their lives. Instead they expected to go about their business as usual. They expected to just carry on as the following exemplars illustrate:

- “Um well. I didn’t really have any expectations for it. I was just like…uh…just kinda going with the flow.” (Eddie)
- “I wasn’t sure. I honestly wasn’t sure at all what to expect. I mean I expected that I’d have courses….nothing out of the complete ordinary. I guess I didn’t really have too many high expectation types of things. I am the kind of person who goes with the flow.” (Jacob)

Some saw Chico State as merely a necessary next step in their education, a natural progression that was normal and expected.

- “I didn’t really have any expectations….just continuing my education.” (Xavier)
- “I was expecting that there was going to be school in a similar fashion to what I had back home.” (Isaiah)

Two students said that they purposefully tried not to have high expectations so they were not disappointed if the situation didn’t live up to their hopes.
• “I try not to go into things with many expectations because sometimes you get disappointed.” (Austin)

• “I didn’t really think too much about it. I just knew I had a goal in front of me and I wanted to achieve it. I really didn’t want too much out of it. I wasn’t like – oh I hope I meet the girl of my dreams and stuff life that – I didn’t have any of those kinds of thoughts.” (Alex)

Of note is the fact that six of the seven participants who expressed no clear expectations around their transfer were male and only one was female.

**Expected slightly more difficult coursework.** Still another group of students had expectations of a slightly more demanding academic environment. Nearly half (six) of the 13 respondents indicated they expected classes would be somewhat harder at a four-year institution. However, what appears to be lacking is a clear indication of exactly how much harder. Students did indicate that they expected more difficult, individualized coursework and more reading. Yet, it is obvious that they also lacked a clear idea as to how they planned to cope or address the increased rigor.

• “I knew it was going to be harder. I guess I was expected it to be difficult. I thought I would be more challenged.” (Charlotte)

• “I thought it would be harder - a lot more fast paced.” (Crystal)

• “I expected it be more - more lecture for sure and more individual work.” (Claire)
Five of the six students who anticipated additional academic rigor were females. Only one male indicated that they expected more rigorous classes. “The relationship between gender and the transition process is complex” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 59). Many observers have suggested that men are socialized to hide emotion and deny problems while, women are given greater freedom to express their feelings. In this study, female participants were more willing to express their expectations and concerns than the males who generally appeared to avoid thinking about their feelings or expectations around transfer.

**Question 3. Differences Between CCC and Chico State**

So how did student expectations live up to reality? Would students find Chico State similar to their community college? Would things be pretty much the same? Or would students find the academic environment more difficult as they expected? To explore this, students were asked to describe the differences they experienced between their community college and Chico State. Schlossberg claims that transitions are more difficult to the degree to which the transition alters or impacts an individual’s daily life or routine (Schlossberg et al., 1995). It was thought that if students reported a great difference between their community college and Chico State, it might help explain any transition challenges.

It is clear from the data that students experienced a number of surprises. They entered the situation expecting the academic work to be the same or slightly more difficult. While they expected more difficult course work, many students still expressed surprise or shock at the degree of academic rigor they encountered. They
didn’t have a realistic expectation of how difficult the academic work would be, or how much academic work there would be, at Chico State. Not all the surprises reported by students were negative; nearly all the interviewees reported being positively surprised by both the social life and the atmosphere at Chico State.

Overall, responses about the differences between the two-year and four-year institution fell into three major themes: (a) academic differences, (b) social differences, and (c) differences in campus culture. Finding related to each of these three themes are also divided into smaller sub-themes (see Appendix F).

**Academic Differences.** Students found numerous academic differences between the community college and Chico State. The amount of academic rigor was a major paradigm shift or culture shock for students. One student (Isaiah) commented that academically Chico State “was a completely different world” than the community college. Student comments regarding the specific academic differences students encountered fell into three clear, but inter-related, sub-themes: (a) more difficult, independent coursework, (b) larger class size, and (c) less instructor accessibility.

**More difficult coursework.** In general, participants reported finding Chico State courses more difficult than work at the community college. Ten of the 13 participants made comments on the increased difficulty and level of academic rigor at the four-year institution. While the comments vary, many transfer students noted that they had to read, study and generally exert much more effort at Chico State than they did at the community college. In most cases, this increased effort was still was not enough to earn them good grades as the following excerpt illustrates:
• “I’ve never studied my butt off before, and for this Organic Chemistry class, it was like a whole new language and a whole new thing. *I tried so hard and still failed so miserably*, so I guess that was the biggest kind of let down, it was like I really put more effort into anything than I had ever put in my whole life, and still didn’t succeed.” (Charlotte)

Charlotte explained that if she put in the work at the community college, she was awarded good grades. Since she worked hard, she received good grades and typically averaged above a 3.0. It was very different at Chico State where she tried her hardest and studied her hardest and still was unable to achieve the grades she desired.

In addition, instead of commenting directly on the difficulty of classes at Chico State, some participants some focused on the lack of rigor at the community college. Students generally found that community college courses were easier and required less reading as illustrated in these excerpts from Isaiah and Xavier. They both indicate that they were not accustomed to exerting as much effort reading at the community college.

• “I think what I really wasn’t ready for was the amount of extra outside reading I had to do. That was the biggest transition for me. From reading 10-15 pages a week for a class - to reading 50 or 60. That just completely blew my expectations out of the water….I was a decent B student at home. And I actually doubled the effort this past semester.” (Isaiah)
Like I said, I didn’t have to read any of my books (at the CC) I might have looked at them, skimmed them, but I didn’t have to really read them. I got by with just going to class and paying attention.” (Xavier)  
Like Isaiah, Xavier was also not accustomed to large amounts of reading at the community college. In fact, he reports not reading at all. He says he passed just by attending class regularly and listening to lectures.

Three participants commented that the bar was set higher by professors at Chico State than at the community college. Comments from Delilah and Veronica illustrate some of the differences they experienced in the standards set at the two-year versus the four-year level:

- “At a community college it’s way more lenient, it’s more forgiving, they’ll let you make it up. Whereas here, it’s like no exceptions, no late papers, no nothing….” (Delilah)

- “I think from Chico State…from a state college or university to a community college, they definitely expect a lot more out of you. At (the community college), you could probably get away with a little bit less… I mean less working, less hard work….” (Veronica)

The idea that at Chico State students are required to work on their own with less instructor support and explanation than at the community college was expressed by four participants and is evident in the following excerpt:
• “It’s very independent. I’m not used to that. I’m used to the teachers at (the community college) They would kind of walk you through each step. Here you’ve got to do it on your own you know.” (Crystal)

Crystal indicates that, at the community college, she received more instructor support. Teachers walked through each assignment step by step. Claire also noticed the difference in the number of assignments and the degree of instructor involvement at Chico State. She described how there was little opportunity for regular feedback because the class grade was based upon just a few assessments. This made it more difficult for her to determine how she was doing in the class.

• “There was really no homework assigned (at Chico State) and you were just basically by yourself, and it was just the midterm, the final and maybe a few papers and that’s it. That’s your grade.” (Claire)

One reason for fewer assessments and feedback may be due to larger classes. Professors in big classes may not be able to offer multiple assessments due to the sheer numbers of students in class.

**Larger campus/class size.** Large class size was another difference or sub-theme under academic differences frequently noted by students. While Chico State is a small to medium-sized campus in terms of the CSU System, students often found it larger and busier than their community college. Four students commented on the bigger class size at Chico State. For some students, it was the first time they had experienced a class in a large lecture hall with several hundred other students. While students may have expected classes to be bigger at Chico State, it was still shocking
and or surprising for them to them to walk into campus and/or a large classroom for the first time as the following comments illustrate:

- “I was really shocked to see on my first day how many students were walking around and everything. It was kinda crowded. It was really big and really spread open – the campus. I didn't realize because my (CC) wasn’t that big.” (Crystal)
- “One class was in a huge auditorium…I had never been in anything like that with little tiny chairs… That was crazy for me to be in a class of that size.” (Veronica)
- “The bigger classes…I mean I expected it but it was still surprising when I entered my chemistry class and there’s like 200 kids in that class.” (Jacob)
- “Classes were bigger here. At least one of them was a lot bigger. Which I thought was cool you know. Like I was at Stanford or something…an auditorium with a hundred or something people but, yeah, it’s definitely difficult because you can’t talk as much and ask any questions but I don’t really ask many questions in the first place.” (Alex)

The large class size may be impressive, but Alex also indicates that it also made student-teacher interaction more challenging, a comment that was echoed by other students.

**Professor accessibility.** Five participants reported that they felt teachers were less accessible, available and approachable at Chico State than at the community
college. Many note the larger class size as contributing to a lack of connection as the following two quotes demonstrate:

- “And accessibility of professors… you know, after class (at the CC) I was able to just go up to a teacher and talk to them about something I had or ask a question. But when you move from a 20-person classroom to a 100-person classroom, it’s totally different.” (Charlotte)

- “I felt I got to know my professors more over there at the CC. I felt like I could connect to them more over there. I know here, the classes I do have, some of them are big, so it’s harder for the teachers to connect on that kind of a level… I think the community college was better for me for one-on-one type of things” (Crystal)

Clearly the large class size has a detrimental impact on students’ feelings that they can ask questions and talk with the professor. However, most of the students who commented on the impact of large classes on professor accessibility, also noted that they realized that they could meet with the professor via office hours if they wished.

**Social differences.** The social environment was the second area of major difference between the community college and Chico State noted by students. All 13 interviewees said they felt that Chico State was more social than their community college. Several students contrasted the active Chico State social environment with the lack of social life they experienced at the community college as noted in the following exemplar:
• “I guess community college is interesting because there is no social interaction. I mean you have your friends from your classes but you don’t see them outside of class that often. At community college we all have our own separate lives going on. We are not all based in a five-mile radius of the school…so I think that is one of the biggest differences here. There is actually a social life that goes along with your school life.” (Jacob)

Other student responses around the differences in the social atmosphere at Chico State centered around two sub-themes: (a) ease in making friends, and (b) more social distractions.

*Ease in making friends.* Eight of the students interviewed said they found it was easier to meet people and make friends at Chico State than at the community college. They noted that other students were very friendly and commented that they had an easy time making friends. Neither Austin and Valeria had such an easy time making friends in the past at the community college:

• “People here have been very friendly, easy to make friends with, I did not anticipate going out as much as I have…. I have never been one to go out much and I also figured that because I am older than a lot of the students here, I wouldn’t really want to but, with the friends I’ve made, it’s exciting at the end of the school day to just go out and hang out for awhile…. At a community college, or at least at my community college, it’s like you had your friends that came with you from high school and your work friends but you don’t make friends on campus very much.” (Austin)
• “I would say that I have been making friends more than I did at (the CC) If not friends, than at least people who I can say hi to and touch bases with. Considering that I am just beginning my second semester here and I already know a lot of people from my major or people that I see around too. That didn’t happen at the (CC).” (Valeria)

The ease in developing friendships and a social life at Chico State was a pleasant surprise for students. According to Schlossberg, the importance of social support is key to handling the stress that accompanies transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). It is likely that the positive social environment might have served to mitigate some of the stress and difficulty of transfer.

**More social distractions.** While the friendly, social environment was a significant advantage for most students, five students noted that the lively social atmosphere could also be a distraction from their studies. They wanted to make friends and partake of the social environment which sometimes took them away from doing their homework or studying.

• “And then socially, I felt like everybody’s involved here and I felt like you kinda got to go with that. Everybody would go down the street after class and they would go for a sandwich or something and I would have homework to do and studying to do but I would go down there.” (Crystal)

Eddie experienced a very distracting living environment because he had friendly neighbors who liked to party and wanted to include him. This made it extremely
difficult for him to focus on his school work. In fact, he noted that he had to go to the library if he wanted to accomplish any studying at all.

- “The apartment we live in, there are people all around us. Our neighbors are partying right downstairs and it’s really hard to ignore that. Someone knocks and says ‘come on downstairs’ you know I didn’t want to be rude (chuckles). It just mostly that, as far as studying, it was not wise to be around the apartment studying. Just the surroundings made it really hard to study.” (Eddie)

Isaiah comments on the accessibility of cheap alcohol which created an incentive to party rather than to focus on school.

- “When you come from LA if you want to go to a bar its $35-$40 a night. Coming up here and drinks are 25 cents from 9-10. You know you have a lot more incentive to go out…It wasn’t the fact that I couldn’t control myself, it was the fact that I thought I could still do a mediocre job in school and have a lot of fun - too much fun I should say.” (Isaiah)

Two other students note the party atmosphere and attribute some of their transition difficulties to turning 21. Attaining legal drinking age for the first time in a college town was clearly a distraction for both Eddie and Charlotte:

- “I think it was like the fact that I turned 21 when I moved up here and I was not 21 down there. And all my friends also turned 21 like right when I started school. That made a big difference…just like…just going out with
them and just going to bars and stuff compared to...we didn’t really do that before. No one was old enough.” (Eddie)

- “I mean, there is a lot of fun going on in Chico. It’s easy to be distracted in Chico, whereas, where I was from was a very small community and just turning 21, so there’s a lot of things that kind of affected me.” (Charlotte)

While the comments from these students indicate they are pleased with the social environment, they noted they felt peer pressure to socialize especially when alcohol was involved.

**Differences in campus culture.** Campus culture was the third main area of difference students found upon transferring from the community college to Chico State. Seven of the 13 interviewees commented upon differences they noticed in the campus culture or environment between the community college and Chico State. The comments fell into three sub-themes: (a) friendlier, welcoming atmosphere, (b) impact of a residential campus, and a (c) more motivating environment.

**More friendly AND welcoming atmosphere.** Three students said that they were surprised at how friendly, respectful and nice people were in Chico. Students found that people were more willing to answer questions and were generally more open and courteous than at the CCC. Several students attributed this to cultural differences between southern California and northern California culture.

- “Depending on where you come from – people are jaded or closed off – not a lot of people like to talk but here people are really receptive. *People are a
lot more friendlier, more open, more willing to answer questions and not look at you like you are an idiot.” (Delilah)

- “I think the biggest surprise was how much nicer and more courteous people are around each other and that was a really good surprise. I really wasn’t expecting it…. The culture change from Palm Desert to Chico was pretty great. I’ve noticed that too. People are nicer…maybe it’s just a Chico thing.” (Austin)”

Impact of a residential campus. Three other students attributed the difference in campus culture to the fact that Chico State is a residential, rather than a commuter, campus. Most students live within a five-mile radius of campus which contributes to the feeling of closeness. It also allows for more social interaction and a greater sense of community.

- “Also, the campus climate… I live four miles from campus here and I am almost considered a commuter. That is not something I was used to. Like at my community college, people would drive 20 miles to school and I was pretty local. Now I am on the complete other side of town to campus and everyone I know lives within walking distance to school. I think as far as the college community goes…it makes it a bit closer of a community. People go out together, have fun together.” (Austin)

- “I think if I went to school in say San Diego or Cal State Long Beach, I wouldn’t feel like I’ve gone away to school, which is important if you’re a transfer student for a couple of reasons. You know, traditionally, when you
go off to school, it’s more of a time of focusing I guess on a specific path whether it be academically or personally, and I think when you get a change in culture, and a change in norms. It helps you focus and narrow down why you moved away. It’s feeling as if you’ve made that transition.

I know a lot of people from the school I went to which is 15 miles away on the freeway and it is like they have never transferred.” (Isaiah)

- “At the community college we all have our separate lives going on. We are not all based in a five mile radius of the school so I think that is the biggest difference.” (Jacob)

Students who commuted to the community college were especially aware of the impact of a residential campus situated in a college town compared to a commuter campus where students’ school and home lives are separate. The residential environment contributed to their feelings that they were having a real, traditional college experience.

**More motivating environment.** The final sub-theme in terms of the differences in campus culture was around goal orientation. Four study participants noticed a difference in student attitudes towards school. They felt that students had more purpose, goal and drive at Chico State than at the community college. One student, Delilah is particularly eloquent on the topic of the campus environment.

- “It (the CC) felt more like a second high school than it did a college but that’s because the people who go there are mainly people who are still talking about high school things. So as an older female, I kind of feel like
Aunt Jemima right now. It’s more like they don’t have any kind of experience with anything. In a two-year, it’s like you are trying to find your goal instead of already having it.” (Delilah)

Delilah notes that students seem to have a greater sense of purpose and motivation on a university campus compared to what she experienced at the community college.

- “There’s a lot of differences in the sense that universities – you just feel more like an adult. You just feel like it. You can be an observer and can see people having their day planned out. I am a people watcher. You can just see that people are doing this, they are doing that. They have a plan or have a schedule. They are going this way or that way. There is always somebody going, going, going. There are not a lot of people who are just wandering.

At the community college there are a lot of wanderers – a lot.” (Delilah)

She compares and contrasts the motivation level of students at the community college and notes that perhaps the reason for the difference is that many students are still trying to figure out what they want to do while attending the community college. They may not yet have decided on a major or see a real purpose to their education. In contrast, she observes that nearly everyone at Chico State appears to have a clear goal.

- “Everybody here has a purpose. At least it feels like that. Everyone has something they need to do for sure. Do or die type of thing. At the community college it’s like take as much time as you need. Whereas here, it’s like, time is not enough!” (Delilah)
Alex echoes Delilah sentiments about students’ motivation at Chico State compared to the community college he attended.

- “(The CC) has a lot of people who don’t want to be there. That’s it. And there was also a lot of childish stuff going on. Like during Halloween, you’d see sword fights in the cafeteria and stuff…I don’t know…I just feel more comfortable here. I mean it’s not a great difference but it is definitely something I feel. People are more serious about it (school) here. Really it’s just people’s attitude. I mean like people carry themselves differently here, talk differently here. People have more confidence. People are savvier. I don’t think people are too satisfied with being at a community college. It’s a stepping stone to something they don’t really know if they are going to get to.” (Alex)

**Question 4: Helps and Hindrances to Transition**

It is clear from the data that students experienced significant differences between their community college and Chico State. This next question explored how students coped with those differences – it was aimed at learning about supports and/or obstacles that students faced during the transition process. Students were asked if they found anything particularly harmful or helpful as they moved from the community college to Chico State. The responses fall into two key themes: (a) helps and supports, and (b) hindrances or challenges (see Appendix F). It should be noted that overall, students reported more hindrances than helps. This makes sense when one considers
that students who experienced first semester academic difficulty (such as those interviewed) would report more hindrances or obstacles than supports.

**Helps and supports.** Despite academic difficulties which landed them on academic probation and in disqualification range after their first semester, students did note some things that they perceived were of help to them during their transition experience. Supports generally feel into three subcategories: (a) student support services, (b) family and friends, and (c) campus involvement.

**Student support services.** When individuals think of support, they generally think of people, according to Schlossberg et al. (1995). However, Chico State, like most universities, has a range of support services for students such as academic advising, the student learning center, the counseling center and financial aid. Overall, students who utilized support services their first semester reported being very pleased with the quality of services offered. Four of the 13 students interviewed mentioned that they used support services such as counseling, advising and financial aid and found them to be quite helpful. In Austin’s case, he found student support services at Chico State much more helpful and efficient than at the community college:

- “Teachers and such at my community college were very, very willing to help but the counseling department, admissions and records…it was like pulling teeth to try and get anything done with them. It was much easier here. I’ve had to go to the financial aid office several times. I am always able to see someone. They always have clear answers for me. I had to go to the financial aid department at my community college pretty much once a
week for my first few semesters there. I finally stopped going to them. It was painful.” (Austin)

One student Charlotte says she found disabled student services helpful but that she didn’t use the services or realize she had ADHD until the end of her first semester.

- “I even went to see somebody, and I was recently diagnosed with ADHD, so I realized I had a learning disability that they say…you know…people live their whole life with it, and it’s totally fine, but then they’re in this extremely demanding college environment, and it really comes out in that setting. So I never felt like I had that before, and then just recently…So I’ve gone through the process and actually just got enrolled with the DSS services. So hopefully that will really provide me with some assistance in terms of exams, hopefully I can get a little bit more time and I think that will really help.” (Charlotte)

However, eight students reported that, while they knew support services existed, they did not access or pursue services. This was a topic of particular concern which is detailed later under hindrances to transfer.

**Family and friends.** Seven of the 13 students interviewed indicated that their social support system helped them though the transition whether it was friends, parents, co-workers or a significant other. Social support can be a major buffer to help individuals cope with stressful transitions (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Two of the students who identified as first generation college students commented on their parental support despite the fact their parents did not attend college themselves.
“My parents don’t speak any English at all. They just finished elementary school. Well, my Mom did. My dad doesn’t know how to read. But my parents are super supportive. They say, oh you should go to school so you don’t have to work like us.” (Claire)

“My mom definitely was helpful by far. I would call my mom, you know, freaking out and she’d say like ‘Son, it’s OK you messed up. Just get through the semester. You know who you really are. It’ll be fine.’ She’s a good mom.” (Alex)

Still other students relied on friends to help them through the transition to a new college environment.

“Just my friends have helped me. There are some points where you feel like you are on the outside looking in and those two or three friends pull you in and make you see that it’s not you on the outside.” (Delilah)

“Just my friends who came here before me (helped me) I got help from my one friend…she came here the semester before me” (Crystal)

While having friends pre-transfer was helpful, some students noted that getting involved with a club or organization on campus also helped them meet new people.

Involvement. Two students noted that getting involved with campus clubs helped them feel more comfortable about attending Chico State. Both students got involved with clubs related to their major and one student also volunteered with the local history museum. Austin describes how getting involved has helped him make friends on campus.
• “The fraternity has helped a lot. If I have questions about a particular class or what classes I should take I always have someone to ask. I like that I’ve this connection with a group of people on campus—like minded people that I can go to. I mean I have my two best friends living with me but they are not really much help when it comes to what classes to take…so having that network of friends on campus that I truly trust, that helped a lot.” (Austin)

He also says that his involvement with clubs has made him more enthusiastic about school.

• “Two or three weeks into last semester I joined the economics club on campus and made some friends in there. We just have fun as economists do and, uh, I also joined one of the business fraternities on campus and I have done a lot of stuff with them. We have done stuff on campus, community service stuff off campus, events, all kinds of stuff and that, I think, has really made me excited about being at school.” (Austin)

Hindrances or challenges. It is not surprising that the study participants reported numerous hindrances or challenges to their transition process since they all experienced transfer shock. The hindrances noted in the data fell into five sub-themes: (a) living away from home, (b) time management, (c) personal motivation, (d) issues with their major, and (e) advising-related issues.

Living away from home. One of the most significant difficulties that hindered transfer students was living away from home for the first time. This entails balancing
new found freedom and learning basic life skills such as budgeting, food preparation and cleaning. Five students indicated they moved away from home to attend Chico. Four of the five, all males, noted in their interview that moving out of their parent’s home was a major life adjustment which caused them considerable difficulty during their first semester.

- “I mean, I never understood how much effort and time is takes to live by yourself. Another surprise I would say would be the amount of distractions you have when you live alone and that’s something I was not ready for in the least…having to balance keeping a clean living environment…So keeping it all up…you know, bills etc… it’s just a lot more than you’re used to. Even doing my laundry was something I had to acclimate to, that I wasn’t prepared for necessarily…” (Isaiah).

- “I just felt like when I got here I was very clueless on how to live on my own. I am OK with laundry but cooking was one thing I had trouble with…I’d also say budgeting…I certainly have never been on my own before and I never really had a lot of training like from my parents in terms of helping me understand budgeting, or getting my schedule.” (Jacob)

**Time management.** In addition to living on their own, a number of students had trouble with time management. They had trouble balancing between work and school and/or a more demanding work load. Three students attributed their academic difficulty to the fact that they were working long hours while trying to be a student. Veronica worked two jobs that usually totaled about 30 hours a week.
• “I had never had to work so much just to try and stay afloat….it was kind of hard to balance my time between school and work so…That was my biggest problem, just trying to balance my time.” (Veronica)

Claire was not only attended school at Chico State but was also taking two classes at the community college so she could continue with her on-campus job there.

• “It was a bit difficult because it was like every day I had tons of homework to do and also I had work every other day. And so I had to get everything done before that night, or before that day for something, and then my scheduling was always like the last minute because I had so many things going on that I don’t remember some of them.” (Claire)

Delilah originally planned to quit her job and focus on school. She went back to work when she didn’t get all the classes she needed to progress toward her major. She figured she might would work part-time and go to school part-time, a plan which did not serve her well because her job was over 1 ½ hours away.

• “I was going to quit before I even moved to Chico but then they called me back. We’ll work with your schedule. I was like OK sure. It was like mental suicide trying to drive that far. I lost my mind somewhere along that highway because we had to be at work at like 4:30 in the morning.” (Delilah)

**Personal motivation.** Three students (all males) reported difficulty with staying motivated. Two of them said they struggled because they had stopped working and were not busy enough so they got bored and lazy. All three students who noted a
lack of personal motivation moved away from home for the first time to attend Chico State.

- “I got lazier…that’s pretty much what I noticed. Here, I think the big difference is sometimes I am bored or find myself not doing something. I get off at two. If I was home, I would usually work from three to ten, then go onto the gym until almost one and then just come home and falling asleep. Here I can’t fall sleep until two or three in the morning. I think it’s just because I am bored. I have nothing to do from two until I go to the gym here around ten. I’ll study maybe for a little bit but I just have some much time that I don’t know what to do with it and its bad…I have to be doing…I like to be doing something usually.” (Eddie)

- “I think I am the type of person who when I don’t have a lot of things going on - I get kinda lazy. Looking back at community college I was much busier then. I had work and school and while I am here, I just have school. I think just having school, it kind of made me lazier because I thought oh I can just do this late and I got into this cycle of procrastinating and sort of just blowing things off.” (Jacob)

- “I’ve always had an issue with making sure I get homework done on time and it’s the same here as it was at the community college. I did get behind in a couple of classes lasts semester but other than that, I haven’t really felt challenged in school, just by my own lack of work ethic.” (Austin)
**Issues with their major.** Two students discovered during their first semester that they were in the wrong major. The major was not what they expected, or they found the major they had chosen too academically demanding. Both students indicated that they had not taken many courses at the community college in the major prior to transfer so the difficulty of major coursework was a surprise. One student (Atticus) reported taking only one major course at the CCC before deciding upon a major.

- “I guess when I was getting into the classes, in the first month of school, I kinda started figuring out that it wasn’t the major that I had decided to go for… the major wasn’t what I wanted. But I didn’t realize that until halfway through the semester and then I just kind of lost interest in those classes. It was horrible. It really sucked knowing that I didn’t really want to be a part of that (major) anymore but I still had to go through those classes. That’s when my grades dropped, and I stopped going to classes.” (Veronica)

- “I had to change my major just because I couldn’t hang with the requirements – the full year of chemistry requirements and things like that. So I ended up changing my major because school for me is a financial investment, and if I feel like it’s going to take another two years that I hadn’t financially planned for, that’s just not feasible for me… But I’m glad I switched majors. I feel that the department I’m in now, environmental science versus biology is a little less competitive and a little bit more friendly…. ” (Charlotte)
Advising-related issues. Finally, obtaining appropriate advising was an obstacle for six of the 13 study participants. This generally manifested itself as a problem in students taking courses out of proper sequence, or signing up for unit loads that were inappropriately heavy. Heavy course loads proved particularly painful for students in the sciences. Atticus had only taken one course in his major at the community college and then took four hard science courses with labs at Chico State.

- “For the most part, everything sort of went along. However, academically, classes…like I took a little more than I could handle. Like in junior college, I was used to taking 21 units per semester, and this semester I decided to take 18 with 4 labs. With just changing from humanities to a science, it was completely different. I didn’t really acknowledge that, so…it just sort of made my experience more…a little stressful, more work, and I wasn’t really super familiar with Geology, again I had only had one course (at the CC).” (Atticus)

Charlotte felt like she should have been advised differently in terms of her science coursework.

- “I spoke with people, I picked my classes, they were like, ‘What did you take? Oh, you’ll be fine.’ And so I think like if somebody had looked at my transcript, they might have said, ‘You know, you seem like you’ve taken more environmental biology classes than molecular biology classes, and you’re going to be a little bit behind on the molecular/cellular aspects of biology.’” (Charlotte)
She also had trouble with course sequencing and prerequisite courses, both problems that might have been avoided with proper advising.

- “Probably having to like backtrack. It’s difficult being the age level I am and then being in the upper division…like my 400 level classes, but then taking like…you know… a 100 level class because I just didn’t get that…I should have taken those at my J.C. when I was younger, but I just took what I wanted, so now it’s difficult because you’re in a class with either a bunch of freshmen or a bunch of really older people. So I have this kind of strange gradient of classes that I’m taking. It doesn’t seem to flow like the way it should have if I had planned my whole four-year shebang four years ago basically.” (Charlotte)

Veronica didn’t find out she took classes out of order until mid-way through her first semester. As a result she struggled in classes where she did not complete the prerequisites.

- “Like I thought I was supposed to take all of those classes first, and she told me that I shouldn’t be taking those classes in that order. My advisor told me I should have taken a class that was in a different part of the section. If I had taken that class first, it would have helped me understand everything else. So the fact that I took classes that I wasn’t quite ready for that’s what also didn’t help out a lot too.” (Veronica)

Crystal struggled with taking more demanding upper division coursework for the first time and thinks she might have been advised to adjust her course load accordingly.
• “I went down on my grades. You know, over at Butte, I took three to four classes usually, and here, I took five classes my first semester. I learned the hard way. Well, three of them were upper division, and two of them were classes that I didn’t take at Butte, and the upper division ones were really hard. So that was kind of different. I probably should have done less of a workload.” (Crystal)

Not asking for help. The final sub-theme under hindrances was related to students’ ability to recognize that they needed help and to ask for assistance. While many students said they knew support services were available, few availed themselves of the services. Eight of the 13 students interviewed specifically acknowledged that they didn’t use support services even though they knew they were available. They either felt they could do it alone, or just didn’t take the time to seek support services out:

• “I didn’t really use any help here. You guys have so many things but I just didn’t use it. It I were to use all of the resources you offer, even one of the resources you offer, it would definitely help. Chico State has all the stuff and more to really help us succeed and do well.” (Alex)

• “I didn’t really talk to the counselors or anyone up here. I pretty much came to class and that’s what I did. I didn’t really use any support services. I knew about them. I just never made time for them.” (Eddie)

According to Schlossberg’s transition framework, strategies are coping mechanisms used by individuals to deal with life strains and difficulties while
undergoing a transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Coping strategies are related to individual’s sense of self-esteem. A lack of self-esteem can cause an individual to avoid admitting that they have a problem for fear of looking bad in the eyes of others, or it can cause individuals to avoid a problem entirely in helpless self-resignation. Both Veronica and Austin knew they were in trouble but both avoided dealing with situation:

- “Most of my problems were that I didn’t know where a lot of the places were. I mean, I knew where the library was but that was one of the only places that I really knew about. And I knew you could get tutoring but I wasn’t always sure where you could go to do that. I should have asked more but I just didn’t and then fell into working so much that I just kinda let school slip.” (Veronica)

- “I should have gone to the professor and talked to him and taken care of the problem but I didn’t. I just kept to myself and stopped going to class.” (Austin)

Conversely, an excess of self-esteem can lead individuals to believe that they can solve the problem entirely on their own with no outside help..

- “I’m pretty stubborn. I was like, “Oh, I can do this.” (Atticus)

- “I didn’t really use any services. I don’t usually look for help. I like to try to figure things out on my own. Which is sometimes a bad thing…not asking for help when I really should. Maybe it’s just the stubbornness in me. Maybe I should have gotten tutoring when I noticed I started struggling
in classes…or talking to my professors…seeing if there was anything I

could have done.” (Xavier)

Six of the eight students who indicated they did not ask for help were men.

**Question 5: Additional Support Needed**

The final question asked interviewees to consider what was missing in terms of
needed support. They were asked what they think might have helped their transition,
in particular, what Chico State as an institution might have done to smooth their
transfer process. The responses to this question were varied although there were some
common themes identified: (a) adjustments to admissions and outreach processes, (b)
additional advising resources, (c) policy issues, and (d) transfer workshops. The rest of
the suggestions were combined in a miscellaneous category noted in the Appendix
(see Appendix F).

**Adjustments to admission and outreach.** The data reveal that students have
some concerns about admissions and outreach based on their experiences. One
student, Valeria, said that she felt that the admissions requirements should be the same
for all applicants. She found that another student was admitted without the math class
that she was held accountable to complete prior to admission. She felt this was
extremely unfair.

- “I also think they should make the requirements for admission the same. I
  was talking to this girl and she was taking a math class but I thought you
  had to finish math before you transferred and I was talking to another girl
and she had to take a science course and I thought – what? - I thought you had to finish that before you came here. I wish I had known that.’(Valeria)

Both Delilah and Austin, students from southern California indicated that they think Chico State should send admissions recruiters to more schools including those in southern California.

- “I mean every school has its school that they have more connections with. Luckily for me I had a school this year that had a lot more connections to Chico and had a lot more information on it than say if I wanted to go to CSULB. They usually have more information on universities that are closer to the community college than further out. I think that’s a plus and a minus though because, seeing how there are so many different universities and colleges in California but at the same time I think there should be a lot more information say if I wanted to go to Long Beach. You know what I am saying? Like for a person that wants those options.” (Delilah)

Additional advising. Six of the 13 students interviewed noted that they would like to see more advising resources including general and major advising. Students would also like more individualized, one-on-one advising. Several study participants thought that the choice of visiting an academic advisor should not be left up to the student but should be mandatory.

- “I think it would be requiring them to sit with an advisor. I mean, like not leaving the door open but making it a requirement for every transfer student to see someone and at least talk about – one-on-one- because I
think they would pay a lot more attention like that compared to like at orientation where you don’t have any time to ask questions really.” (Eddie)

- “Make it mandatory to meet with a counselor/advisor the first two weeks of school. Mandatory!” (Xavier)

According to Austin, one reason to make advising mandatory is that students may have had a bad experience in the past with advising at their community college.

- “You know you have all these resources around you and, especially for transfer students, because I did not view the counseling department, or any other departments at my community college as being very useful because when I tried to use them, I didn’t get anywhere. So I kinda had the same mindset coming here and when I was actually forced to go do it. I was like oh they are actually really helpful here. I know a lot of community college students who have said the same thing.” (Austin)

He supports mandatory advising because he thinks transfer students won’t seek advising unless they are required to seek it.

- “So, again, I think being forced to go to these resources would at least help. Being forced sounds weird but what I mean is making it a requirement because, I mean, you know its there, you know where it is but you just don’t go and use it unless you are required.” (Austin)

**Policy issues.** Students felt quite strongly about the academic probation policy. Two expressed surprise to find themselves on academic probation because their cumulative GPA was still above a 2.0. They were not aware of the policy and felt the
University should communicate better to new transfer students regarding both academic probation and plus and minus grades since many community colleges do not utilize such grades. All four students felt that academic probation should not be triggered by a student’s Chico GPA. Instead, they felt that the policy should instead consider a student’s cumulative GPA as illustrated by the following exemplars:

- “Well, this would be more of a personal thing for me, but for the academic probation thingy. I would say to just look at the cumulative GPA instead of the Chico State GPA.” (Claire)
- “Yeah, the whole thing about being placed on academic probation after your first semester. I wished they looked at the classes you took and kind of like where you came from, especially as a transfer student, and give you a little bit more leniency in your first semester. Obviously, coming from a 3.5 and higher, to one bad semester, I don’t think it’s fair to place someone on academic probation and now, it’s stuck. I have to look at it every single time I log onto my student portal until I get an A+ at the end of this semester. So I feel if they could just give a little bit more of a cushion, maybe if next semester, I kept getting F’s, then talk to me about academic probation…but one semester I don’t think is fair.” (Charlotte)

Transfer workshops. Students had a range of ideas about what types of programs could be implemented to assist transfers. Several felt that a life-skills workshop would help transfer students living away from home for the first time. Two mentioned that requiring students to attend a sample class might alert them of the
academic rigors to come. One student mentioned that they thought it would be helpful to require a check in point for transfer students several weeks into the semester.

- “I would have a program for transfer students – after a month or certain amount of time - to see how they are doing, to see if they need help or need any services. Sometimes transfer students are afraid to ask questions. They might feel like people will think you (transfers) should know that by now.”

(Valeria)

**Key Findings: Schlossberg’s Transition Theory**

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory describes how individuals move through and cope or adapt to various transitions in their lives. A transition is defined by Schlossberg as “any event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 27). Since, moving to a new institution impacts all these areas to varying degrees, the researcher thought that examining the data in terms of this guiding framework might shed some light on the transfer transition.

According to Schlossberg, four major sets of factors influence the ability of an individual to cope during a transition: Situation, Self, Support and Strategies. In other words, everyone has a unique situation, is a unique person with a unique way of approaching the world, has some kind of support system and uses coping strategies regardless of whether they are effective or not (Schlossberg et al., 1995). It is important to note that under this framework, each of these factors can be either assets or liabilities to an individual’s ability to cope with a transition.
It is also important to underline the key role of perception. “A transition is not so much a matter of change as of the individual’s own perception of the change” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 28). In other words, one individual might view transfer as an exciting new challenge, while another might perceive it as an obligation or something that is being forced upon them. They might feel confident and ready to handle the change, or they might feel out of control.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) have outlined some questions related to each of the four S’s to better understand their impact on the individual (see Table 9).

Table 9

*Questions Related to Schlossberg’s Four S’s*

| Situation | Does the individual view the transition as positive, negative, desired or dreaded?  
|           | Timing - Did the transition occur at a good time in the individual’s life? Is it on-time or off schedule?  
|           | Did the individual have control over the transition?  
|           | Did the individual experience a significant role change such as moving away from home?  
| Self      | Are they able to deal with the world in an autonomous way?  
|           | Are they optimistic?  
|           | Self-efficacy – Does the individual feel in control of their responses to the transition?  
|           | What are the individual’s personal demographics including gender, ethnicity?  
| Supports  | Does the individual feel supported? If yes, What kinds of support does the individual have?  
|           | Does the individual have a range of supports?  
|           | Were support really helps?  
| Strategies| Does the individual use effective coping strategies? What kind of strategies does the individual use to cope?  
|           | Does the individual use a range of strategies or just one?  

Adapted from Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, 1995
Answers to the questions regarding the four S’s indicate how an individual is equipped to manage a transition. So how did the 13 interviewees fare? Though many of the findings have been outlined in the previous section, the most significant findings related to each of the four S’s will be briefly outlined below:

**Situation.** For most of the interviewees, the transfer situation was viewed as a positive change. Eleven of the 13 of the individuals in the study indicated that they were ready for the transition. They were looking forward to transferring to Chico and continuing their education. Schlossberg discusses the positive or negative valence of the trigger or impetus for the transition (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Schlossberg et al., 1995). For example, firing is a negative or unexpected trigger, while retirement is likely a positive, planned-for trigger. For most of the participants in the study, the transition to Chico State is not an unexpected transition but rather one that was carefully planned.

What about the timing of the transition? “As noted, most adults have built-in social clocks that are their barometers to judge whether they are ‘on-time’ or ‘off-time’ with respect to family, career and self-issues (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 54). Three transfer students expressed concern about their age and said they felt older than other students.

- “It was a little weird, though, just because given that I live on campus, I just felt extremely old being around…living around younger people. And I just feel more mature than most people.” (Atticus)
• “I wish I could have come sooner. I am going to graduate next May and I am going to minor in Spanish too. I am going to try and do my major in three semesters. I just feel like I have been in college forever.” (Valeria)

• “So as an older female, it kind of like, I feel like Aunt Jemima right now” (Delilah)

A feeling of lack of control over the transition was a problem noted by four study participants. There was some last minute confusion regarding admission and or financial aid which proved very disorienting and frustrating for students who thought they had their plans in order. Several students reported struggling to resolve admissions issues and reported feeling frustration as to what they perceived as a lack of control over their transfer plans.

The most significant finding regarding situation involves what Schlossberg calls role change which is always accompanied by stress (Schlossberg et al., 1995). For five of the interviewees, transfer involved moving away from home for the first time – a change which clearly impacted their roles and daily routines. Away from parental support and influence, students struggled with routine housekeeping skills and with living independently. It is clear that moving away from home is a significant transition for students whether they do it at age 18 or age 21, either as freshmen and transfers. The only difference is that older transfers are often expected to be better equipped to handle this transition than freshmen.

Self. According to Schlossberg, demographics such as gender, ethnicity and age can play a role in an individual’s ability to cope with a transition. “An individual’s
personal and demographic characteristics – socioeconomic status, gender, age, stage of life, and state of health – bear directly on how he/she perceives and assesses life” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 58). No information was collected in this study about students’ socio-economic status or state of health. All of the students in the study were at a similar life stage in terms of being unmarried with no children. All but one participant fell within the “traditional” college age range of 18 to 24 years old. There were also no specific findings related to ethnicity. However, there were some differences in responses related to gender. As previously noted, women reported more struggles in terms of their academic and social transition. When questioned about the degree of difficulty they experienced, women reported a full point more difficulty than did men on a five-point Likert scale. On academic difficulty, the female average was 3.8 compared to the average male score of 2.8. On social difficulty, the female average was 2.6 compared to the average male score of 1.6. However, it should be noted that these are self-reported difficulty scores. Perhaps these differences can be attributed to socialization. Schlossberg notes that men are generally socialized to hide emotions and deny problems while women are given greater freedom to express their feelings (Schlossberg et al., 1995). It could be that women don’t really experience more difficulty, they just feel freer to express the difficulty they experience than men.

Under the factor of self, Schlossberg also discusses psychological resources. These are the personality characteristics such as optimism, self-efficacy and commitment that people draw upon to help them withstand difficult times
(Schlossberg et al., 1995). While none of these were measured in this particular study this would be an worthwhile and interesting topic for future study.

**Supports.** “The importance of social support is often said to be the key to handling stress” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 67). However, it should be noted that support can come in many different forms and it can be either positive or negative. “The types of support people receive are classified according to their sources: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and the institutions and/or communities of which people are a part” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 67).

None of the 13 study participants were married but seven of the 13 students interviewed indicated that they had some sort of personal support during the transition either friends, family, co-workers or a significant other such as a boyfriend or girlfriend. Three students were still living at home so their social network and parent support was still intact. However, for the five students who moved away from home for the first time, the transition represented a significant change in their support network. The fact that they lived out of reach of direct parental influence made a difference to students in terms of their study habits.

- “I think just having the thought of my parent there constantly was much more encouraging to me to get my work done. That was one of the major driving forces at the community college.” (Jacob)

- “My parents held me more accountable…so like mom she would actually wake me up to go to class (at the community college)...I just wasn’t able to
find the time to actually go to class or to follow the study habits that I did at home (at Chico State).” (Eddie).

One type of support that was underutilized was institutional support services. Only four of the 13 students utilized on-campus support services to assist them during their transition. However, 11 of the 13 said they planned to use support services, such as advising or tutoring, in the future.

**Strategies.** The most significant findings in terms of the four S’s were that students either had very few strategies in their arsenal to adapt to changes, or the strategies they did utilize were ineffective. When difficulties arose during the transition, two students indicated that they just stopped going to class (Veronica and Austin). Probably the most ineffective strategy was trying to go it alone. Eight of the 13 students indicated that they did not ask for help and three indicated that they were in a state of denial. They thought if they tried harder they would do better. Or they simply ignored their academic issues, hoping they would go away when, in fact, their academic issues tended to snowball.

- “Maybe I just didn’t think about it or think it would be me. I was like whatever…like I’ve ever gotten below a 2.0. Like before this, I had only had one D and a couple C’s total in my college career/ It just blew by my head and I didn’t really think about it. I didn’t think it (academic probation) would apply to me.” (Alex)
• “I basically just sort of worked harder like…I don’t know…I was sort of putting in effort for the most part, it was just like “Oh, I’ll be fine if I take a break,” (Atticus)

• “I mean, I knew where the library was but that was one of the only places that I really knew about. And I knew you could get tutoring but I wasn’t always sure where you could go to do that. I should have asked more, but I just didn’t and then I fell into working so much that I just kinda let school slip.” (Veronica)

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the data from a study aimed at better understanding the transition experiences of transfer students who experienced the phenomenon of transfer shock. Thirteen students were selected using criterion and purposeful sampling to participate in semi-structured interviews. Demographic information and brief biographies of each student were collected to compare and contrast similarities and differences among the students who were interviewed. Participants ranged from 18-26 years old and represented a variety of ethnicities – five were white, five were URMs and three either declined to state or reported more than one ethnicity. Six were female and seven were male. Six were first generation college students. Five of the students interviewed moved away from home for the first time to attend Chico State and seven of the 13 participants worked part-time while attending Chico State.
While each participant had a unique story to tell, students all shared the common experience of transfer shock, meaning their GPA dropped significantly in their first semester upon transfer. All were on academic probation and within disqualification range according to their Chico GPA; however, all were in clear standing with their cumulative college GPA’s.

The goal of the study was to create a better understanding of the experience of transfer students who transition from the community college to Chico State, particularly those who experienced transfer shock. The research questions included:

1. How do transfer students characterize their transition experiences?
2. What are transfer students’ expectations as they enter Chico State?
3. What differences do transfer students report between the two and four-year institutions,
4. What types of helps and hindrances to their transition do transfer students report?
5. What additional types of support might Chico State offer to aid them in their transition?

The data from each of the interviews was collected, transcribed and analyzed in order to answer each of these research questions, as well as to examine how students’ perceptions related to the theoretical framework, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and the four S’s: Situation, Self, Supports and Strategies.

The findings revealed important information about participant’s expectations, experiences, helps and hindrances during their transition to Chico State from the
community college. Participants expressed many commonalities in their experiences. While the literature emphasizes that both students’ academic and social integration are key to their success, the findings clearly show that students transferring to Chico State experience more academic than social difficulties. The findings are summarized into five key topic areas: (a) attitude toward transfer, (b) expectation around transfer, (c) differences between the CCC and Chico State, (d) helps and hindrances to transition, and (e) additional support needed.

Students’ attitudes around transfer were mostly positive. They were looking forward to the change. Yet, overall, their expectations were low. They did not have a clear vision or picture of what life at the four-year institution will be like. Many expected the academics at the four-year institution to be fairly similar to the community college. Some said they expected classes to be a bit harder. As experienced college students, transfers may not anticipate any transition difficulties. After all, they’ve proven themselves successful so far at the community college.

They were often surprised and shocked when they encountered significant differences between the community college and Chico State. They found classes much more rigorous and difficult. There was a large gap between student expectations and reality. Students vastly underestimated the increased challenge of upper division courses. For many study participants, it was the first time they have taken any courses in their major and/or their major was not at all what they expected.

Living away from home for the first time appeared to play a significant role in student adjustment. Students had a hard time with basic life skills such as cooking,
cleaning and budgeting, and also struggled with autonomy and managing their time. Some lacked motivation and skipped classes while away from the watchful eye of parents for the first time, something they say they rarely did at the community college.

Luckily, most of the study participants experienced Chico State as a warm and friendly place where it was easy to have fun, to develop a social life and to make friends. They commented on the beauty of campus or the pride and sense of belonging. They also found that other students were more motivated and goal oriented than they were at the community college. In fact, the only social difficulty that students reported experiencing was the distraction of an active social life amid a highly social, residential college atmosphere.

Students had a number of ideas and suggestions as to what types of additional support the University might offer to transfer students. Students felt very strongly about the current policy regarding academic probation and felt it should be altered or at very least felt that the University should do more to communicate and warn students about the academic probation policy. They also indicated that they would benefit greatly from more one-on-one advising and felt that advising should be mandatory, instead of optional, for transfer students. Students felt that orientation should be adjusted to include more life skills and a mock class. Finally, they also suggested that some check-point with campus officials be established mid-way through the first semester to assess how transfer students are coping with the transition.

Based on the data collected and analyzed in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 will offer recommendations on how to address some of these issues and how to improve the
experience of transfer students. The information attained from the data collected in this study will suggest new ways to prevent students from experiencing transfer shock as well as suggest changes in policy and practice that could reduce transfer shock and improve transfer persistence and graduation.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

California’s education system is clearly not keeping up with the demands of the state economy for skilled workers. By 2025, California will face a shortage of over 1 million college degree holders needed to fuel its workforce, according to estimates from the Public Policy Institute of California (Johnson, 2012). It is critically important that California’s system of public higher education produces as many college graduates as possible to meet this growing workforce need.

The system is designed such that most college-bound students in the state begin their education at a CCC (Carey, 2012). They must transfer to a four-year institution to complete their degree, a process that has become increasingly difficult due to budget-related enrollment cuts at the CSU and UC. Students that manage to cross the transfer hurdle still face big challenges as they adjust to a new college environment. Some struggle and experience a first semester drop in GPA known as transfer shock. As a result, it may take them longer to graduate or they may drop out entirely. Better ways are needed to ensure that students who transfer to a four-year institution succeed and ultimately cross the finish line to achieve a degree.

Transfer students are an important segment of Chico State’s undergraduate population. In fall 2011, Chico State welcomed approximately 1,400 transfer students to campus, a number that represents 36%, or about 1/3, of Chico State’s total incoming new student population. Despite their numbers, less attention has traditionally been focused on transfer students than on freshmen students in terms of programs and
services. For example at Chico State there are about a half dozen programs designed to help freshmen adjust. In contrast, there is little programming for transfer students beyond orientation. Instead, transfer students are generally expected to jump directly into the new college environment with little support. As experienced college students who have already proven their abilities at the community college, it might be assumed that transfers require less attention and support than freshman students (Duggan & Pickering, 2007-2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

However, this is often not the case. While transfer students generally graduate at higher rates than students admitted directly from high school, a considerable number of students struggle upon transfer. Historically at Chico State, anywhere from 11-15% of new transfer students are in disqualification range after their first semester (see Table 10). Once a student’s GPA dips, it can be difficult for them to recover and get back into clear standing. They may get discouraged and drop out, or be disqualified due to poor grades.

Table 10

*First-Year Students on Academic Probation and (Subset) in DQ Range After 1st Term*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FIRST TIME STUDENTS</th>
<th>TRANSFER STUDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td># AP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 2007</td>
<td>2771</td>
<td>626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 2008</td>
<td>2765</td>
<td>600</td>
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<tr>
<td>F 2009</td>
<td>2505</td>
<td>545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 2010</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F 2011</td>
<td>2429</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data from Academic Advising AP/DQ Data Sets
At the point of transfer, both the student and the state have invested a considerable amount of time and money in the student’s education. From the student perspective, they have paid tuition, perhaps borrowed money and invested energy in a pursuit of a degree. It is essential that they carry on and earn that degree. From an economic perspective, it costs the state approximately slightly more than $5,000 per year to support one full-time student according to the CCC Chancellors office (2012). Any loss of potential college graduates, or delay in graduation, costs the state money. Educational leaders should make every effort to provide the necessary support so that the maximum number of transfer students obtain degrees.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to investigate the transition experiences of students transferring from the community college to Chico State focusing on those who experienced transfer shock. This study explored students’ general perceptions and expectations around transfer, differences between the two-year and four-year institution, and helps and hindrances to their transition. The ultimate goal of the study was to better inform policy and services for future generations of transfer students at Chico State.

There is a formidable body of research around the transition to college especially around the freshman first year experience. Much of the transfer student literature is quantitative in nature and focuses on predicting success in college, or on establishing the existence of the transfer shock phenomenon. Less research exists that is qualitative in nature and that focuses on students’ lived transition experience. This study fills a gap in the literature in that it seeks to explain the reasons why transfer
students from the community college experience difficulty upon transfer. It points
directly to changes and programs the institution might implement to help students
avoid transfer shock and to ensure that they persist and graduate.

This study used one-on-one, semi-structured interviews to explore factors that
assisted or impeded transfer students as they transitioned from the community college
to a university setting. The theoretical framework, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory,
proposes that an individual’s ability to cope with a significant transition in their life is
linked to their perceptions of their situation, self, support and strategies. The data was
examined to see if this might inform the college transfer process.

The following chapter provides an interpretation and discussion of the findings
presented in Chapter 4. It includes:

1. The significance of the findings in terms of the literature and practice and
   policy at Chico State,

2. Seven clear recommendations for action,

3. A discussion as to how recommendations are tied to the three key
   objectives of Sacramento State’s doctoral program in Educational
   Leadership,

4. Suggestions for future research,

5. Researcher reflections, and

6. A brief summary.
Interpretation of the Findings

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted to better understand the transfer transition experience. All 13 study participants shared the common experience of transfer shock and ended their first semester on academic probation and in disqualification range. The overarching research question was: What was the transition experience of students who exhibited transfer shock upon transferring from the community college to Chico State? The findings were organized around five themes which mirror the research questions: (a) attitudes towards transfer, (b) expectations of transfer, (c) differences between the CCC and Chico State, (d) helps and hindrances to transition, and (e) additional support needed.

Attitudes towards transfer. According to Schlossberg, attitude and perception play a key role in an individual’s ability to deal with a major transition (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Schlossberg et al., 1995). While most students in the study were looking forward to transfer with positive anticipation, other students reported feeling a great deal of apprehension, or had mixed attitudes as they approached transfer. It is clear from the data that this anxiety was greatest when students experienced some sort of difficulty with the transfer or admission process. For example, several students reported that they were conditionally admitted. Four students told stories of being left hanging until the last moment, being told they might not be accepted, or of having to change their plans due to admissions issues.

The implications are clear. The admissions process is difficult and complicated for transfer students. Some of these difficulties may be inherent to the process and
may be unavoidable. It’s also possible that admission difficulties may be due to negligence or misunderstanding on the part of the student. Still, every effort should be made on the institutional side to communicate more clearly with students during the admissions process and to provide additional support for transfer students particularly around course articulation and transfer credit. Communication efforts might also be directed pre-transfer while students are still at the community college so they are better informed about admission requirements and how courses will transfer. More communication about course pre-requisites, the differences between the Chico and cumulative GPAs, and the support services available to transfer students should be emphasized.

**Expectation of transfer.** Student expectations are key to a smooth transition. High expectations are important for everyone, for the well prepared and unprepared, for the bright and well motivated, as well as those who don’t want to exert themselves. When teachers and institutions set high standards for themselves and for students, everyone learns more. (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 226)

While high expectations are important, *realistic* expectations are also key as students transition to a new environment. Knowing what to expect can help or prevent a student’s experience of shock or confusion. “Realistic expectations also include realizing that there might be a temporary period of downward mobility” (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 240). Students may be coming from a community college where they got good grades, had an established network of friends, or where they were
leaders on campus. They should anticipate a period of adjustment and change according to Chickering and Schlossberg (1995).

However, the findings illustrate that students often had unrealistic expectations for their transfer experience. They expected Chico State to be pretty much the same as their community college. They expected that life and school would go on as usual and they completely underestimated the challenge ahead of them. This complacency set them up for difficulty, particularly in terms of their academics. Instead of pro-actively preparing themselves or gearing up for more rigor, they planned to go with the flow and to carry on as they had at the community college.

It is obvious from the data that helping students set realistic expectations for their transfer experience is vital to helping them avoid transfer shock and accomplish a smooth transition. The setting of expectations needs to be a collaborative effort between feeder community colleges and Chico State. CCC advising programs and transfer centers need to better prepare students for more difficult college work. Orientation programs at Chico State need to communicate with students more clearly and forcefully about what to expect in terms of academic rigor and about differences in academic policies.

**Differences between the CCC & Chico State.** A big issue was that students expected Chico State to be very much like their community college. This was clearly not the case. Students reported vast differences between the community college and Chico State in terms of academics, social life and the overall campus climate.
While there were differences reported in all three areas, differences in academics clearly created the most difficulty for students. Bigger, more rigorous and demanding classes with less instructor interaction proved quite problematic for students. Students often struggled with more reading and more independent coursework. Attending classes in large lecture halls with hundreds of other students led to perceptions of less instructor accessibility, interaction and contact. Taking major and/or upper division coursework, or classes with difficult labs also proved extremely challenging for students.

In contrast, differences in the social life at Chico State, as well as the campus climate, were reported in largely positive terms by students. Students noted being pleased by the ease they had in making friends and establishing social connections at Chico State. However, it is evident that social connections related to school were more helpful and less distracting to students rather than connections made over alcohol, or in a party environment. As such, the institution should make an early concerted effort to connect and involve transfer students in positive, campus-related programs, clubs and activities. An effort should also be made to connect them with other transfer students.

**Helps and hindrances to transition.** Most individuals need support in order to effectively manage a transition. In fact for many, social support is the key to handling transition-related stress (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). While students did report some supports, they clearly experienced more hindrances to their transition experience.
In the support category, students indicated that campus support services, family and friends and campus involvement all played a positive role in their transition. While the University cannot, and should not, intervene with student’s personal relationships, it can play a role in making sure that new transfer students are informed about campus support services and in helping them become engaged in the campus community. It can also provide them with more organized opportunities to meet other transfer students.

As noted earlier, students reported a number of hindrances or challenges to their transition. By far the biggest challenge reported by students was living away from home for the first time. Moving out and away from parents was hard and students struggled with basic life skills. The challenge of this transition cannot be underestimated. Since transfer students are typically older than freshman entering directly from high school, it is often assumed that they are better equipped to deal with living away from home. The findings illustrate that this not the case - moving from home is a huge transition regardless of the age of the individual. Out of reach of the direct daily influence of parents, students reported difficulties with attending class regularly and with staying motivated. This is important to keep in mind when planning orientation sessions for transfer students. Programming on life skills should be offered at orientation and also perhaps during the first few weeks of classes.

Time management also proved rough for students. Students reported having too little time because they were trying to balance work and school, or they reported having too much time on their hands and they became bored and unmotivated.
Academic advisors and leaders at orientation can play a key role in advising students about life/work balance and about time management strategies.

Despite having achieved junior status, some students were still unsure about their major. Upon entering Chico State, some students took major courses for the first time and were disillusioned with their choice of major. From an institutional standpoint, it is often incorrectly assumed that transfers are quite clear on their major having had two years to ponder it while at the community college. However, students may have focused mainly on general education coursework at the community college, and may have selected a major without much assistance, or without having completed significant coursework in the major. Providing students with more major-related advising is one area in which the University can improve significantly.

Overall, it appears that obtaining the proper advising was a sticking point for many students. Study participants reported not knowing how advising worked or where to seek advising. While many reported receiving advising at orientation, this occurred in a group setting. Instead, students indicated that they wanted one-on-one, individual help particularly within their major. In some cases, students reported that major advisors were not as effective as they could be because they were not familiar with general education requirements. The delivery of academic advising services to transfer students both at orientation and throughout the school year is an area where Chico State must direct more resources.

The findings illustrate that, even when students are aware of services, they still may be reluctant to ask for help. They may not have realized they needed help, or they
felt they could manage on their own. Some transfer students felt like they should already know how to manage in college and were afraid of being viewed as ignorant if they asked. A norm must be established that it is entirely normal, expected and perhaps even required that students seek help. The University must become more intrusive with its help and support for transfer students by requiring a check-point early on the semester with advising or other student services entities.

**Additional help needed.** Students had a number of ideas as to how the University might better assist transfer students. Students’ responses regarding what the University might do to better support transfer students fell largely into three main areas: (a) changes in admission and outreach, (b) additional advising resources, and (c) suggestions for orientation and other workshops. Each of these areas will be addressed more completely later in the recommendations section, combined with suggestions from the researcher.

**Schlossberg’s Four Ss.** The conceptual framework for this study was Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. This theory postulates that students’ perception of the four S’s: Situation, Self, Supports and Strategies are critical predictors of their ability to cope with a transition effectively (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Schlossberg et al., 1995). The data was also analyzed related to the four S’s and the findings, along with the implications, are described below.

**Situation.** According to Schlossberg, the Situation or timing of the transition plays a vital role in students’ ability to cope. In terms of Situation, transfer students may feel that they are behind or off schedule in comparison to native students. Several
transfer students reported feeling old and out of place. To address this, the University could sponsor some sort of social event to connect transfer students who are at different stages of baccalaureate completion, those just entering, those who have been at Chico State for a while, and those about to graduate. This might help them feel like they are not alone and that their situation is not necessarily unique.

**Self.** According to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, the *Self* variable includes demographic characteristics that can impact a student’s ability to cope with a transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). There are some demographic trends related to transfer shock. Of the 128 junior transfer students who were on academic probation and in disqualification range after their first semester, there were a disproportionate number of underrepresented minorities and men.

Overall, in terms of ethnicity, 61% of all Chico State students are white and only 39% fall into the URM category. Yet, of those students on AP/DQ range after their first semester, exactly half (67) were white and half (67) were URM. Overall, in terms of gender, 51% of Chico State students are women and 49% are men. Yet more men 58% (74) and only 42% (54) women were on AP and in DQ range after their first semester upon transfer.

Interestingly, among study participants, more women reported academic transition difficulty than men. It may be that men just didn’t report their difficulty. This is consistent with Schlossberg’s idea that women may feel more freedom to express their emotions and difficulties than men. Implications include how the University conducts outreach and communicates with students in terms of advising.
Students may not feel comfortable revealing that they are in academic difficulty, or may not feel comfortable asking for help. Establishing a required check-in point or mandatory advising might help identify transfer students who are experiencing problems but who are reluctant to seek assistance.

**Support.** Mandatory advising might also help students in terms of Schlossberg’s third S – Support. A key finding in this area was that students participating in this study often under-utilized campus support services. Establishing a policy around required advising in the first few weeks of the semester could serve two purposes:

1. Students would have time to drop inappropriate courses or adjust their course load, and
2. Advisors might be able to address potential struggles early on and connect students with the appropriate support services such as tutoring or counseling.

**Strategies.** Overall, the findings related to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory point to more assertive, pro-active communication and outreach to transfer students. This is a population that may not realize it is in difficulty and, in some cases, may not possess a wide range of coping strategies. Transfer students may feel overly confident or may be afraid to ask for help. They may also have had poor experiences with campus support services at their community college negatively impacting their willingness to seek help now. Campus policy and practice, as it relates to transfer student advising and communication, needs to be examined and adjusted.
Program Objectives

This study has important social justice implications. The age-old American ideal of attending college full-time and living on campus with parental assistance, is true for only about a quarter of today’s students. (Johnson, Rochkind, Ott, & DuPont, 2009). More and more students are starting their education at the community college level. According to Laanan (2004), the transfer function is essential to maintaining access to higher education for many who would otherwise not be able to attend college. Many students attend community college after high school because they are ineligible for admission to a four-year college. Still others may be low-income students who cannot afford to go directly to a four-year university. A large proportion of community college students are ethnic minorities, non-traditional students and others who may have been educationally, economically or socially-disadvantaged (Laanan, 2004; Turner, 1988, 1990, 1992). The community college provides an important gateway for these students to transfer to a four-year institution. They are not being well served, if after the transfer, they are allowed to falter and drop out short of graduation.

Transformational Leadership

Clearly, transformational leadership is required to proactively address transfer success issues. According to Nevarez and Wood (2010), transformational leaders have some key traits:

1. They have vision,
2. They utilize a team approach,
3. They lead by example,
4. They strive to motivate and empower followers,
5. They challenge themselves and others, and
6. They work towards the highest good.

As this study reveals, leaders at Chico State need to examine why the transfer population is underserved compared to freshmen in terms of transition programming. Leaders must also explore what programs and practices can be implemented to better support transfer students and prevent transfer shock.

During the current budget crisis, the temptation is to cut programs rather than expand them. The findings of this study reveal that there are clear leadership needs around the planning and implementation of new programs for transfer students on the Chico State campus. Transformational leaders will use solid data and sound reasoning to back up any plans to extend transfer programs.

**Data-Driven Decision Making**

Due to their past college success, one might expect transfer students to fare better than freshmen in their first semester. However, the data reveal that first time transfer students experience only slightly lower AP & DQ rates than first time freshman students and, unlike freshmen students, transfer students have less time to recover.

At Chico State, transfer students are held to the higher GPA requirement of 1.85, compared to the freshman GPA standard of 1.5. Thus, transfers who experience transfer shock and find themselves in AP/DQ range after their first semester are at
significantly greater risk of being disqualified from the university and of ending their college careers.

Until recently, little has been done to address this problem. Two years ago, Chico State’s Academic Advising Office implemented a required workshop for students on academic probation. Careful tracking is being done to determine the effectiveness of the workshop and whether this type of intervention effective in helping students get off AP and persist in college. Until this question can be answered, it will be difficult for leadership to justify the cost of this type of intervention. Data is essential to support this type of budgetary decisions about programs and interventions.

It is also important that the data around transfer students be disseminated to key audiences across campus. The researcher believes that many key stakeholders are unaware of the difficulties faced by transfer students. Data from this study should also be shared with faculty members who provide major advising to transfer students. Data can also be used to inform and improve campus support services for transfer students. For example, the data gleaned regarding advising and orientation can inform the timing of advising interventions and the topics that are covered at orientation.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

Finally, it is important that policy and practice be changed to reflect current realities, rather than outdated perceptions or ideas. According to Nevarez and Wood (2010), there is a misperception that community college students are older. However, data shows a decline of middle-aged to older students. Eighteen year-old students
continue to make up the majority of students attending the community college (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). Most of these students will still be in the traditional college age range (18-24 years old) upon transfer to Chico State as were 12 of the 13 study participants. They will have many of the same problems and issues as freshmen including indecision about their major and living away from home for the first time.

Policies around transfer students require re-examination and change. Suggested changes include but are not limited to policies around admission, evaluation of transcripts, orientation and advising. However, in these fiscally challenging times, even the most visionary transformational leader will have difficulty changing policy without strong data to support change. Studies such as this one are critical to provide clarity and insight into why students struggle upon transition and to examine how the University can best support transfer students. This study provides data around which policy decisions can be made and lays the foundation for future studies around transfer issues at Chico State.

**Recommendations for Action**

What should be done in light of this new information regarding the transfer student experience? There are seven key recommendations for action based upon the findings of this study. It should be noted that these recommendations closely mirror the findings of the CSU, Chico New Student Orientation Task Force which met in 2005 at the direction of the University President to examine the freshman transition to campus. The task force outlined seven stages or points of socialization for new Chico State freshmen (a) recruitment, (b) summer orientation, (c) arrival on campus, (d), first
week of classes to mid-term, (e) mid-term to end of first semester, (f) second semester of freshman year, and (g) Sophomore year. The task force then made recommendations specific to each of these seven stages focused on how the institution might help new freshmen students orient to college life.

It should be noted that the Task Force did not make any recommendations about regarding the orientation and socialization of transfer students. The findings of this study clearly point to the fact that new transfer students, like freshmen, also struggle in their transition to college. In fact, many experience transfer shock. Thus, a new socialization framework for transfer students is proposed. This model or framework closely mirrors the model for freshmen but focuses specifically on helping transfer students manage a smooth transition from the community college to Chico State. Like the 2005 freshman model, the recommendations for the transfer model are sequential in nature and fall along a continuum. The recommendations begin when students are still at the community college and follow students through the recruitment, admission and orientation processes. The recommendations conclude at the end of students’ first semester on campus. Thus recommendations are aimed at all three stages of transition outlined in Schlossberg’s Transition Theory: moving out, moving in and moving through.

The seven recommendations are:

1. Increase communication at the community college,
2. Re-examine admissions/evaluation practices;
3. Make adjustments to orientation,
4. Provide early structured opportunities for connection,

5. Implement early mandatory advising,

6. Bolster faculty advising and,

7. Create a plan to disseminate transfer data campus-wide.

The following table illustrates how each of the first six recommendations is aimed at a specific time period in the transfer student transition. The seventh recommendation, data dissemination, is intended to occur along the entire continuum and throughout the process of moving out, moving in and moving through.

Table 11

*Transfer Socialization Model and Recommendations in Relation to Schlossberg’s Three Transitional Stages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moving out</th>
<th>Moving In</th>
<th>Moving Through</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Community College</td>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>5. Week 1 to Mid-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Mid-term to end of semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Arrival on Campus</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase communication at CCC level</td>
<td>Reexamine admissions/evaluation practice</td>
<td>6. Bolster faculty advising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make adjustments to orientation</td>
<td>Provide structured connection opportunities</td>
<td>Require early mandatory advising</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide structured connection opportunities</td>
<td>Require early mandatory advising</td>
<td>Bolster faculty advising</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Throughout Transition Process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Disseminate data to regarding transfer students</td>
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</table>

**Recommendation 1: Increase Communication at the Community College Level**

The findings of this study reveal that students are not clear on what to expect when they transfer to the four-year institution. They expect Chico State to be very similar to their community college and they experience a certain amount of shock and dismay when they discover it is much different, particularly in regards to academic
demands. The differences in climate and demands between institutions and the resulting disconnect can hinder persistence. One of the most important implications of this research is that there must be additional collaboration and communication between feeder community colleges and the receiving four-year institution if students are to adjust successfully upon transfer. It is recommended that leaders from the community college and Chico State explore ways to work together to communicate these academic expectations more clearly to potential transfer students. The expectation for more rigorous, demanding coursework at the four-year institution should be clearly articulated well before a student is ready to transfer at the community college level.

A comprehensive, fully staffed transfer center at the community college with flexible hours could serve as a clearing house for this type of information. Advising staff at the four-year institution should look for ways to communicate and collaborate with staff at transfer centers to help support a seamless transition between institutions. One way to accomplish this would be through regular visits to feeder community colleges.

Ultimately, in addition to clearly communicating expectations, the hope is for educational leaders to work together to better prepare students at the community college level for transfer. Potential transfer students might be intentionally advised into more rigorous courses to help develop reading skills and habits and to help them explore potential majors.
Recommendation 2: Re-examine Admissions/Evaluation Practice

Overall, more communication and outreach to students is needed throughout the entire admissions and transfer process. The bulk of admissions efforts and outreach is generally focused at the high school level. More outreach should be conducted at the community college to ensure that students are well-informed about transfer course and GPA requirements.

The findings also revealed that students are largely unaware of differences in policy regarding the academic probation and disqualification and that both the Chico and cumulative GPA count. More communication and outreach should be conducted with potential transfer applicants at the community college level regarding academic policies so there are fewer surprises.

In addition, current practice is to complete the official evaluation of transcripts for transfer students six to eight weeks into the semester. This means that transfer students pick their first semester of classes without an official transfer credit evaluation. The result is that students may take unneeded or duplicative courses. They may also be unaware that they lack certain soft prerequisite courses. Providing transfer students with transfer evaluations sooner will help them avoid costly and time consuming mistakes in their course selection process.

Recommendation 3: Make Adjustments to Orientation

Orientation programs play a critical role in students’ transition according to Nevarez & Wood (2010). Currently attendance at summer orientation programs is not mandatory. Typically, between 59 and 75% of new transfer students attend. It is not
reasonable to require all new transfer students to attend a summer program. Travelling to Chico is an extra expense that could place an unnecessary hardship on students who are low-income, who live far away or who must work over the summer. Still, some sort of orientation program should be required of all transfers. If students cannot attend a summer orientation session, they should be required to complete on-line orientation or a mini-orientation that occurs the first few weeks of school.

Interestingly, all of the participants in this particular study did attend an orientation session of some kind. Yet the study findings reveal that were still unaware of differences in academic policies between Chico State and their community college. Clearly, better communication about these differences is needed at orientation. The findings illustrate that one of the biggest dangers for transfer students is that they may assume they already know how things work at the new institution. They may assume that policies are the same as they were at the CCC. The study findings reveal that transfer students were largely unaware that both their Chico and their cumulative GPA matter. They are also unaware that plus and minus grades impact their GPA since many community colleges do not award these grades. Requiring orientation, and providing increased communication at orientation about some of these policies are steps towards helping bridge this information/knowledge gap.

Also revealed in the findings was the need for orientation to include a life skills component. At least four study participants indicated that managing this part of the transition was challenging for them. A life skills workshop should be offered as an orientation option to transfer students living away from home for the first time to help
them manage their budget etc. Orientation programs might also include a segment on time-management and a mock class to help students orient to and prepare for more rigorous classes.

**Recommendation 4: Provide Structured Connection Opportunities**

Although students reported a smoother social transition, they still indicated that they wanted more opportunities to meet other older transfer students like themselves. They are entering a system where native students already know one another. Most native students have established social networks from living in the residence halls and from being on campus for two years. Transfer students may feel isolated and like they are on the outside especially since most live off campus. Currently, the main venue for transfers to connect with other transfer students occurs within the major and these opportunities vary from department to department.

It is suggested that a series of transfer receptions or other events be offered at the beginning of school to provide opportunities for transfers to connect with each other and to meet other students outside their major. These might be purely social in nature. However, a workshop format could also provide a venue for informing students about campus support services and involvement opportunities.

**Recommendation 5: Implement Early Mandatory Academic Advising**

Effective advising can play a key role in student success. In fact, college students consistently rate academic advising as one of the most important aspects of their college experiences (NSSE, 2005; Noel-Levitz, 2009). Academic advisors are in a position to challenge and support advisees who might be struggling.
While transfer students do receive academic advising from a major advisor at orientation, not all transfers attend orientation. In fact, transfer students tend to attend orientation at lower rates than freshmen. In 2011, 89% of newly admitted freshmen attended a summer orientation session, compared to 71% of newly admitted transfer students.

All study participants participated in some sort of orientation either summer orientation or on-line orientation. However, at summer orientation, academic advising is provided in a group setting and several study participants said they would have preferred one-on-one help from an advisor for assistance with course selection and program planning.

Also, current practice is such that transfer transcripts are not fully evaluated until 6 to 8 weeks into the semester. Transfer students and their advisors do not know exactly how community college coursework transfers to Chico State until this official evaluation is complete. While it is strongly recommended to students at orientation that they plan to meet with an advisor individually during their first semester, this meeting is voluntary and must be initiated by the student. Students can opt to see an advisor in the Academic Advising Office on a drop in basis if they wish. However, it is not required. Most study participants, 11 of the 13, did not see an advisor during their first semester. In retrospect, seven participants said they wished they had met with an advisor and three participants said academic advising should be made mandatory for new transfer students.
Ideally, it is recommended that advising be required of all transfer students prior to registration or, at very least, early on in the semester when students still have time to adjust their schedule or course load without penalty. This type of early intervention is key in helping students avoid academic issues. Of course requiring all transfers to see an advisor during the first half of the semester would require significant additional advising resources. However, the researcher believes that mandatory advising would likely result in more appropriate course selection and thus decreased time towards graduation for transfer students. Another option is to establish a mid-semester check-in point for transfer students. Although it would be too late for students to drop classes, a required meeting with an advisor might offer opportunity for them to obtain help or services if needed such as tutoring.

**Recommendation 6: Bolster Faculty Advising**

Proper advising in the major and connection to faculty is critical to transfer student persistence and success (Cedja, 2004). While general academic advisors can help with overall course selection and academic policy, major advisors are the ones who really know details about courses in the major. As noted earlier, if students attend orientation, they are provided with an opportunity to meet in a group setting with a major advisor. The findings showed that for most study participants this was not enough – they wanted individual help. Students wanted to sit down one-on-one with a major advisor to ask about course selection and plot out their coursework. This study revealed that student-faculty advisor contact is vitally important to students. Five of the study participants made mention of the key importance of faculty advising and at
least two students noted that they wished faculty advising was more readily available. Two students commented that, while they thought their faculty advisor was nice or well-meaning, they were not always knowledgeable about general education and academic policy.

This could be due to the fact that advising is sometimes a low priority for faculty. Faculty advising may be viewed as an extra, unrecognized duty. One way to address this would be to make advising part of the request for tenure and promotion (RFTP) process. Faculty might be more motivated to provide advising if it was explicitly written into their job duties and if they were recognized financially for their efforts. In addition, currently there is also no organized system for training major advisors resulting in varying advising quality and knowledge across departments. Establishing a campus-wide training program for major advisors to share best practices would help address this issue. Training should be on-going and should include a diversity component that provides faculty with the information they need to be sensitive to cultural and other differences.

**Recommendation 7: Create a Plan to Disseminate Transfer Data Campus-Wide**

Disparities in programming for new freshman and transfer students lead the researcher to believe that the campus community is not fully aware of the needs of transfer students and the fact that many struggle in their first semester after transfer. The researcher believes that information about the difficulties and challenges experienced by transfer students, particularly the data around transfer shock, must be shared before needed change can occur. The findings of this study, as well as the data
from the Student Voice survey, should be shared with key stakeholders including staff, faculty, administrators and students in order to inform decision making. There are several key arenas where information about transfer students might be shared with faculty including the annual Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Conference (CELT) held on campus. The researcher plans to submit a proposal to present at session at this conference regarding the study findings. Another good way to reach staff and key administrators would be to include a session on transfer data at the annual Admissions Update provided at the start of each school year. Finally, a way to reach faculty advisors would be to sponsor a training and recognition event around advising. In addition to sharing the data on transfer students, faculty could also be recognized for their advising efforts and share best practices around advising. Lastly, the data must be shared with students. One of the problems this study revealed was that transfer students don’t know what they don’t know. In other words, transfer students are largely unaware that there are any gaps in their knowledge or expectations. Transfer students may encounter problems because they think they already know about college compared to freshmen who freely admit they don’t know anything. To address this issue, it is suggested that a presentation regarding transfer myths and realities based on the research findings be presented at orientation and at other transfer student events.

Suggestions for Further Research

While engaged in the research process, nearly every researcher uncovers something they wish they would have included their study. This was certainly the case
for this particular researcher and several opportunities for further study are recommended.

While this particular study focused on students who experienced transfer shock during their first semester, it would be very informative to also interview students who did not experience transfer shock. This would allow the researcher to compare and contrast the transition experience of both populations and their perceptions of situation, self, support and strategies. A potential research question could be: What are the differences in the transition experience for transfer students who experienced transfer shock compared to those who did not experience transfer shock? Perhaps something could be learned from students who managed the transition more seamlessly. A comparative study could reveal differences between how and why some students successfully adapt to the college transition and others do not.

It would also be very enlightening to follow students beyond their first semester to see if they recovered from transfer shock and persisted at the university. Did it actually take them longer? What strategies did they use to overcome their initial academic difficulties? While this type of longitudinal study might pose some methodological challenges, it would be quite interesting to see how many transfers on AP and DQ after their first semester eventually go on to graduate and to ask them about their experiences and strategies.

Another area for future research would be to compare and contrast the first semester transition experiences of transfer students to that of freshmen. This would allow the researcher to determine if there are significant differences between the two
populations, and if so, to learn more about the nature of those differences. This particular study was based on the assumption that these two populations are quite different in terms of their transition experiences. However, as this study revealed, living away from home for the first time may be the most significant transition for students regardless of their freshman or transfer student status. A potential research question might be: How is the transfer student transition different from the freshman student transition?

A study which includes an examination of student’s academic preparation at the community college prior to transfer and how this preparation impacts transfer shock would also be very instructive.

Also, since this study found that males and URMs were disproportionately represented in the first semester AP/DQ (transfer shock) population, future studies might focus on this disparity in order to understand the causes of this discrepancy.

**Researcher Reflections**

Since the researcher is the primary means for data collection in any quantitative study, it is important to have clear understanding of the researcher’s life experiences and perspectives (Merriam, 2009) The researcher who conducted this study works in Academic Advising Programs at Chico State as an Academic Advisor and Coordinator of Orientation Programs. She has served in that position for seven years. As part of her job duties, she regularly meets with new transfer students at summer orientation. She also meets with students during one-on-one advising appointments and sits on academic standing committees for students who have been
disqualified and wish to be reinstated to the University. She is a white female who herself was a transfer student.

As such, she approached the research with unique insight and perspective as to the myriad of problems encountered by transfer students. While the study served to confirm prior beliefs held by the researcher about transfer students, there were clearly some valuable insights gained. Transfer students at orientation frequently indicate that they already know how things work in a college setting. They expect that Chico State will be similar to their community college. In the advising setting, they frequently express disbelief when they find out that a policy or procedure at Chico State is different than at their community college.

A pleasant surprise was how willing students were to talk with the researcher about their transfer transition. The researcher expected that participants might be reluctant to discuss their academic difficulties. Instead, students were quite free in talking about their experiences and in many cases seemed rather relieved to have the chance to talk about the challenges they faced as transfer students. In fact, three participants have already initiated further contact with the researcher seeking academic advice. This clarified in the researcher’s mind the value of personal connection and the need for more active outreach with the transfer population. Students want to connect and talk but, left to their own initiative, may not do so.

It should also be noted that this is action research. The researcher purposefully selected this topic to inform her daily work. She has the ability to implement some of
the changes recommended in this study, particularly those around advising and orientation.

**Summary and Conclusion**

Transfer students play a key role in our educational system and it looks like their numbers will only continue to rise along with the state’s population. It is important to the state economy that students who transfer are able to persist, graduate and enter the state workforce. Institutions and educational leaders require a clearer understanding of the transfer student transition in order to create policies and programs that will assist them and to help them avoid transfer shock.

This chapter outlined the implications related to the findings from a qualitative study about the transfer student transition from the community college to Chico State. Students who were on AP and in DQ range after their first semester were interviewed and the findings carefully analyzed. Students reported many differences between their community college and Chico State, many unexpected. Those unanticipated differences, particularly in the academic arena, created numerous difficulties for transfer students. In many cases, their perceptions of situation, self, supports and strategies also impacted their transition.

Though transition programming is typically focused on freshman students attending college straight out of high school, this study makes it clear that more attention must be focused on first-time transfer students, particularly those living away from home for the first time.
There are seven key recommendations for action based upon the findings of this study beginning at the community college level through students’ first semester at Chico State:

1. Increase communication at the community college,
2. Re-examine admissions/evaluation practices;
3. Make adjustments to orientation,
4. Provide early structured opportunities for connection,
5. Implement early mandatory advising,
6. Bolster faculty advising, and
7. Create a plan to disseminate transfer data campus-wide.

It is suggested that all of these recommendations be implemented on the Chico State campus. The information gleaned from this study about the transfer transition is vitally important to educational leaders. There are considerable social and economic benefits of providing a college education to as many individuals as possible. Transfer college completion is also a social justice issue, since the transfer population may not have experienced the economic and social advantages afforded native students. Implementing these changes to transfer programs will require transformational leadership and the careful use of data to drive decisions around transfer policies and practices. It is hoped that this study will inform practice and programs for many future generations of Chico State transfer students.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Supervisor Permission Letter
September 1, 2011

Dear IRB/Human Subjects Committee Members,

Ms. Rebecca Berner, Academic Advisor and Orientation Coordinator at California State University, is also a candidate for the doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy at California State University, Sacramento. As part of her doctoral studies, she is conducting research on the transition experience of students transferring from the California Community College to California State University, Chico. The aim of this qualitative study is to better understand the experience, perspectives, challenges and reflections of transfer students after their first semester on California State University, Chico campus. The hope is that this research might inform programs and services relating to transfer student success including orientation programs.

I hereby grant Ms. Berner permission to conduct research that involves contacting and conducting interviews with selected transfer students for her dissertation project. I also allow Ms. Lorraine Smith, Director of Academic Advising, to provide Ms. Berner with the contact information (e-mail and phone number) of potential participants for this study. Initial contact with potential participants will be made via e-mail and participants will be selected who respond and agree to participate in the study. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, participant names will not be known or used at any time. Instead, a pseudonym will be assigned to each participant to protect their identity. Participant responses will be known by number only — actual names will never be associated with a number. All interview materials will be destroyed 6 months upon completion of this project and data will be kept in a locked file cabinet. In addition, participation in the study will be clearly stated as voluntary. Participants have the option not to answer any question, or to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

By exploring the transfer student transition, we can better understand how the university can enhance our service to this important population. I support Ms. Berner’s endeavor and trust that she will maintain the highest standard of confidentiality throughout and after this project. Findings from this study will add to the body of literature around transfer students. If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Ms. Berner at (530) 989-6331 or her faculty sponsor at CSU, Sacramento, Dr. Caroline Turner at (916) 278-3580, or the Director of Advising at CSU, Chico, Ms. Lorraine Smith at (530) 898-5712.

The California State University
Sincerely,

I, Meredith Kelley, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management at California State University, Chico, give permission to Rebecca Berner to conduct this research and complete this study as noted in this letter.

Signature

[Signature]

Date 9/23/11

The California State University
APPENDIX B

Introductory E-mail
Hi there,

My name is Rebecca Berner and I am Chico State’s Orientation Coordinator, as well as an advisor in the Academic Advising Office at Chico State. As part of my doctoral degree, I am studying the transition experience of students from the community college. If you are willing, I would like to conduct a brief interview with you in next couple of weeks about your transfer experiences.

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes and will be conducted in my office on campus in Student Services 220 at a time that is convenient to you. No preparation for the interview is needed – just your honest answers to the following questions:

1. Please tell me about your transfer experience.
2. What were your expectations as you entered Chico State?
3. Tell me about your experience at your community college compared to your experience at Chico State.
4. Please describe any helps or hindrances to your transition experience.
5. What could Chico State have done as an institution to better support your transition?

All responses will be kept strictly confidential and your name will never be associated in any way with the information collected.

Participation in the interview is completely voluntary but I hope you’ll agree to participate in this study. Your answers and input may help Chico State better serve and support future generations of transfer students!

If you would like to participate, or have any questions about this research, please contact me, Rebecca Berner, at (530) 898-6331 or by e-mail at rberner2@csuchico.edu. If you prefer, you can respond by hitting reply to this e-mail. I am hoping to set up interviews very soon – so your quick response is greatly appreciated. I hope to hear from you soon!

Thank you and happy spring semester! Rebecca Berner
APPENDIX C

Consent to Participate in Research
Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in research which will be conducted by Rebecca Berner, a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at California State University, Sacramento who also works as an academic advisor and orientation coordinator at California State University, Chico.

The study will investigate the transition of college transfer students from the California Community College to CSU, Chico. You will be asked to participate in an interview and answer questions about your transition experience to CSU, Chico. You will be asked about your perceptions regarding the differences between the community college and CSU, Chico, and about your expectations around transferring to a four-year institution. You will also be asked to identify any helps or hindrances you experienced during your transition to CSU and will also be asked to reflect upon what additional services might have proved helpful to you in the transition process.

If you agree to be contacted, you may be asked to participate in a private, one-on-one guided interview around these topics. The interview could last up to one hour and will be conducted in a private meeting room in the Student Services Center by the researcher at a time which is mutually convenient.

Some of the items in the interview may seem somewhat personal but you can skip any question if you want to and you can stop the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable with no risk of penalty or negative consequences. Your honesty and openness are appreciated, but you will always have the final say in how much you choose to reveal during the interview, and in what questions you feel comfortable answering. If you have any concerns related to any items in this research, you may contact the on-campus Counseling Center in Student Services room 430, or by calling (530) 898-6345.

Please be assured regarding the confidentiality and anonymity of any information you choose to share during the interview process. You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study and there is no penalty or incentive for answering questions either negatively or positively. No notes of what you say or do in the interview will impact you academically or be attached in any way to your academic record. In fact, you will be identified only by a pseudonym and your responses to the interview questions will be known by number only - so your actual name will never be associated with a number.

With your permission the interview will be audio taped. Those tapes will be destroyed within six month of completion of the study. Until that time, they will be stored in a locked file cabinet in an office to which only the researcher has key card access. Any notes taken during the interview process will also be kept in the same secure, locked location and destroyed six months after the study is complete.

Please note that the researcher works in the Academic Advising office at CSU, Chico. However, no note of your participation will be recorded in any way on your academic record and no information about your interview will be shared with any other advisor in the office. You have been specifically selected to participate because you have had not previous contact.
with the researcher and so can feel free to answer questions in an unbiased manner. You also need not have any further contact with the researcher if you so wish, as students are free by academic advising office policy to request a particular advisor on future visits.

By participating in this research study you may benefit by gaining additional insight into factors affecting your success at CSU, Chico, or you may not personally benefit at all from participating in this research. However, it is hoped that the information provided by you and others will be beneficial in designing programs to help future transfer students manage the transition to CSU, Chico.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Rebecca Berner at (530) 898-6331 or by e-mail at rberner2@csuchico.edu or the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Caroline Turner at csturner@saclink.csus.edu. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in the research.

__________________________________  __________________
Signature of Participant              Date

I also give my consent for this interview to be audio-taped

__________________________________  __________________
Signature of Participant              Date
APPENDIX D

Interview Guide
Interview Guide

1) Tell me about your transfer experience.
   - What was it like transferring from a two-year to a four-year institution?
   - How would you describe or characterize the transition?

2) What were your expectations as you entered Chico State?
   - Please explain how your expectations compared to reality.
   - Did you encounter any surprises? If so, please describe them.
   - How did your transition meet or not meet your expectations?

3) Tell me about your experience at your community college compared to your experience at Chico State?
   - How did your community college prepare you to transfer to Chico State?
   - Please describe any differences you encountered (Academically, personally, socially?)

4) Please describe any helps or hindrances to your transition experience.
   - Tell me about any particular challenges you faced.
   - Did you find anything (or anyone) particularly helpful in helping you manage the transition?

5) What could Chico State have done as an institution to better support your transition?
   - Was there anything you wish you would have known?
   - Imagine yourself as President of the university, if there was one thing you could change at Chico State to help your transition– what would it be
APPENDIX E

Demographic Profile Questionnaire
Demographic Profile Questionnaire

1) Age _________

2) Ethnic group/race:
   ☐ American Indian
   ☐ Asian
   ☐ Black/African American
   ☐ Hispanic/Latino
   ☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
   ☐ White
   ☐ Decline to State
   ☐ Nonresident/Alien

3) Gender
   ☐ Male
   ☐ Female
   ☐ Transgender
   ☐ Decline to state

4) Marital Status
   ☐ Single
   ☐ Married
   ☐ Other

5) Number of Children______

6) Are you the first (i.e. neither of your parents/guardians or siblings have attended any college) in your family to go to college
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

7) Major: ______________________

8) What community college did you transfer from? ______________________

9) Did you live away from home while going to community college? ☐ Yes ☐ No

10) Are you living away from home while attending Chico State? ☐ Yes ☐ No

10A) If yes, are you living:
   ☐ on campus ☐ off campus?

11) How would you characterize your enrollment at Chico State:
   ☐ Full time (12 units or more)
   ☐ Less than full time (less than 12 units)

12) How many hours did you work for pay on average per week while going to community college?
   ☐ Zero
   ☐ 1-10
   ☐ 11-20
   ☐ 21-30
   ☐ 31-40
   ☐ More than 40 hours

13) How many hours do work for pay on average per week while attending Chico State?
   ☐ Zero
   ☐ 1-10
   ☐ 11-20
   ☐ 21-30
   ☐ 31-40
   ☐ More than 40 hours

14) Academically, how would you describe your transition from your previous school/college to Chico State:
   ☐ Very easy
   ☐ Somewhat easy
   ☐ Neither easy or difficult
   ☐ Somewhat difficult
   ☐ Very difficult

15) Socially, how would you describe your transition from your previous school/college to Chico State:
   ☐ Very easy
   ☐ Somewhat easy
   ☐ Neither easy or difficult
   ☐ Somewhat difficult
   ☐ Very difficult
APPENDIX F

Summary of Key Findings
### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

**Guide to Themes & Sub-themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Area &amp; Questions</th>
<th>Themes &amp; Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Attitude Towards Transfer**  
Question 1: Tell me about your transfer experience.  
- What was it like transferring from a two-year to a four-year institution?  
- How would you describe or characterize the transition? | A. Positive emotions  
B. Negative emotions  
C. Mixed emotions |
| **Expectations Around Transfer**  
Question 2: What were your expectations as you entered Chico State?  
- Please explain how your expectations compared to reality.  
- Did you encounter any surprises? If so, please describe them.  
- How did your transition meet or not meet your expectations? | A. No clear expectations  
B. Expected more difficult coursework |
| **Differences Between CCC & Chico State**  
Question 3: Tell me about your experience at your community college compared to your experience at Chico State?  
- How did your community college prepare you to transfer to Chico State?  
- Please describe any differences you encountered (Academically, personally, socially?) | A. Academic differences  
4. More difficult, independent coursework  
5. Larger class size  
6. Less instructor accessibility  
B. Social differences  
3. Ease in making friends  
4. Social distractions  
C. Differences in campus culture  
4. Friendlier, more welcoming atmosphere  
5. Impact of a residential campus  
6. More motivating environment |
| **Helps & Hindrances to Transition**  
Question 4: Please describe any helps or hindrances to your transition experience.  
- Tell me about any particular challenges you faced.  
- Did you find anything (or anyone) particularly helpful in helping you manage the transition? | A. Helps & supports  
4. Support Services  
5. Support of family/friends  
6. Involvement  
B. Hindrances or challenges  
6. Living away from home  
7. Time management  
8. Lack of motivation  
9. Issues with major  
10. Advising |
| **Additional Support Needed**  
Question 5: What could Chico State have done as an institution to better support your transition?  
- Was there anything you wish you would have known?  
- Imagine yourself as president of the University, what would you change? | A. Adjustments to admissions & outreach  
B. Additional advising resources  
C. Policy adjustments  
D. Transfer workshop  
E. Miscellaneous |
**Question #1 Findings: Attitude towards Transfer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Descriptive words</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>It was rough…I felt kind of lost …</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>It was pretty easy, I was ready to move on, it was time.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>I was excited to come here.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>It was scary and at the same time exhilarating</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>I was extremely nervous. It was enjoyable, a different experience.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>It was a pain.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>I was nervous. I was excited to finally get out of community college.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>I was really looking forward to transferring. It was exciting to know that I was going to a four-year college; It was difficult, it was jarring at first.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>It was hellish.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>It was exciting at first, It just shocked me, it was different.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valeria</td>
<td>I was looking forward to it, I was a little bit afraid at first.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>Excited, It’s kind of nerve racking.</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atticus</td>
<td>I was looking forward to it, I was excited, It was easy, fun and stressful</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Question #2 Findings: Expectations of Transfer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations of Transfer</th>
<th>Students had no vision it would different than at the community college, had a lack of expectations, or viewed transition as next step in education.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Theme 1: No clear expectations (7) | I didn’t really think or have any big thing in mind when I came up here. I thought it was going to be just going to school. (Eddie)  
I didn’t really have any (expectations). I was just continuing my education. (Xavier)  
Nothing really out of the complete ordinary. I guess I didn’t really have too many high expectation types of things. I am the kind of person that kind of goes with the flow. (Jacob)  
I was expecting that there was going to be school in a similar fashion to what I had back home. (Isaiah)  
I really didn’t think too much of it. I just knew I had a goal in front of me and I wanted to achieve it. I didn’t really want too much out of it. (Alex)  
I don’t know, just overall to be a little more healthy, work a little hard, sort of be away from home and just sort of improving myself. (Atticus)  
I was fairly open since I have been to multiple colleges. (Delilah) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 2: More difficult coursework (6)</th>
<th>Students expected bigger classes with more rigorous, fast-paced, individual coursework than at the community college.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Like I said, I knew it was going to be hard so I expected it to be a lot more difficult. I knew there were going to be bigger classes, more students and a bigger campus that I was not familiar with.... (Veronica)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I expected it be more - more lecture for sure and more individual work. (Claire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I was expecting classes to be a bit tougher. (Austin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I knew it was going to be harder. I guess I was expected it to be difficult. I thought I would be more challenged. (Charlotte)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I thought it would be harder - a lot more fast paced. (Crystal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I was thinking it’s going to be harder but told myself you can do it if you just put the work in and recognize that it is different than a community college. (Valeria)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Differences Between the CCC and Chico State

#### Theme 1: Academic Differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme 1: More difficult, coursework (9)</th>
<th>Students found Chico State courses faster paced and more difficult than courses at the CCC and required more independent work.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Academic-wise, Chico State is much more challenging in terms of the rigor of the classes. (Charlotte)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The classes at the four-year are harder. Like I said, I didn’t have to read any of my books (at the CC) I might have looked at them, skimmed them, but I didn’t have to really read them. I got by with just going to class and paying attention. I have some classes at Chico State where you’ve got to read or you’re in trouble. (Xavier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The two-year college is different - It’s easier with the workload. The four-year college requires more time to do your homework and stuff.... I feel like I learned more last semester than I did the whole time at (the CC). (Valeria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I think what I really wasn’t ready for was the amount of extra outside reading I had to do. That was the biggest transition for me, especially academically. From reading 10-15 pages a week for a class to reading 50 or 60. That just completely blew my expectations out of the water. I was expecting that each course would maybe give me 35 minutes of outside reading a week, and that was probably tripled. So in terms of the actual difficulty academically...I underestimated it. It was a lot harder than I thought.” (Isaiah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- It was a lot more fast paced. It’s very independent. I’m not used to that. I’m used to the teachers at Butte. They would kind of walk you through each step. Here you’ve got to do it on your own, you know. I wasn’t used to that. (Crystal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- There is definitely more of a workload when you come to University. You better step your game up.... At the community college its way more lenient, it’s more forgiving, they’ll let you make it up. Whereas here, it’s like no exceptions, no late papers, no nothing.... At a university, there are higher standards. If you are not here for the big leagues than you don’t need to be here.... It’s definitely more of a workload when you come to a University especially because you are considered to be independent. (Delilah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The workload was heavier. It was a lot of reading to do myself...you do a lot of reading.... There was really no homework assigned (at Chico State) and you were just basically by yourself, and it was just the midterm, the final and maybe a few papers and that’s it. That’s your grade. (Claire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I think from Chico State... from a state college or university to a community college, they definitely expect a lot more out of you. At (my CC) you could probably get away with a little bit less... I mean less working, less hard work....(Veronica)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- So I realized it was a lot more independent than I had experienced in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the past, that nobody was there to hold your hand necessarily. But
other than that, academic-wise, Chico State is much more
challenging. The rigor of the classes themselves. (Charlotte)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme 2: Larger campus/class size (4)</th>
<th>Students commented on both the larger size of campus and the bigger classroom size.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Well of course, the community college is much smaller than Chico...there were not nearly as many people. Smaller class sizes...that sort of thing. The bigger classes...I mean I expected it but it was still surprising when I entered my chemistry class and there’s like 200 kids in that class. (Jacob)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Once class was in a huge auditorium...I had never been in anything like that with little tiny chairs... That was crazy for me to be in a class of that size. (Veronica)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Classes were bigger here. At least one of them was a lot bigger. Which I thought was cool you know. Like I was at Stanford or something...an auditorium with a hundred or something people but, yeah, it’s definitely difficult because you can’t talk as much and ask any questions but I don’t really ask many questions in the first place. (Alex)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I was really shocked to see on my first day how many students were walking around and everything. It was kinda crowded. It was really big and really spread open - the campus. I didn’t realize because (my CC) wasn’t that big. I feel, and now when I come over here, there’s a lot of people, a lot of big classroom sizes. I was shocked by that...I had one class, and it was like in a stadium seating - that was really surprising. (Crystal)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme 3: Less professor accessibility (5)</th>
<th>Professors are less accessible, harder to get to know, there is less student/teacher interaction than at the CCC.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I definitely had more access to teachers at the community college. (Atticus)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is more like one-on-one (at the CC) and here, you’re just like a number or face to your professor...or so it seems like it. (Claire)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I felt I got to know my professors more over there at the CC. I felt like I could connect to them more over there. I know here, the classes I do have, some of them are big, and so it’s harder for the teachers to connect on that kind of a level. (Crystal)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• And accessibility of professors... you know after class, (at the CC) I was able to just go up to a teacher and talk to them about something I had or ask a question. But when you move from a 20-person classroom to a 100-person classroom, it’s totally different. (Charlotte)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At the community college I was more used to being able to get personal attention because of the smaller class size (Jacob)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Theme 2: Social Differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme 1: More social interaction (8)</th>
<th>Students report on the ease of developing friends and having a social life at Chico State and a lack of social life at the CCC.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I guess community college is interesting because there is no social interaction. I mean you have your friends from your classes but you don’t see them outside of class that often. At community college we all have our own separate lives going on. We are not all based in a five-mile radius of the school...so I think that is one of the biggest differences here. There is actually a social life that goes along with your school life. (Jacob)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I never felt like I belonged or was completely accepted (at the CC) I never really felt like I was in a place (like Chico) where people are so chill. People (at Chico) are like that’s how you are - that’s how I am. You’re you; I’m me...we can still hang out. (Delilah)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s a lot more social here than it was at my CC just because there is more stuff to do here than there is there, so I moved from a rural to a more like social atmosphere (Eddie)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People here have been very friendly, easy to make friends with, I did not anticipate going out as much as I have.... I have never been one to go out much and I also figured that because I am older than a lot of the students here, I wouldn’t really want to but, with the friends I’ve made, it’s exciting at the end of the school day to just go out and hang out for a while.... At a community college, or at least at my community college, it’s like you had your friends that came with you from high school and your work friends but you don’t make friends on campus very much. (Austin)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And generally speaking over here, given that this is a college town, it’s sort of hard not to make friends. (Atticus)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would say that I have been making friends more than I did at (the CC) If not friends, than at least people who I can say hi to and touch bases with. Considering that I am just beginning my second semester here and I already know a lot of people from my major or people that I see around too. That didn’t happen at (CC). (Valeria)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t get involved much at the community college but I have gotten involved here. Two or three weeks into last semester I joined the economics club on campus and made some friends in there. I also joined one of the business fraternities on campus and I have done a lot of stuff with them. We have done stuff on campus, community service stuff off campus, events, all kinds of stuff and that, I think, has really made me excited about being at school. (Austin)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wasn’t really involved at all (at the CC) like I just sort of really got in and got out. Did nothing really. I didn’t really enjoy it. I didn’t really partake in the social stuff. It didn’t really appeal to me, especially at the junior college level. (Atticus)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Sub-theme 2: Social distractions (5) | The apartment we live in, there are people all around us. Our neighbors are partying right downstairs and it’s really hard to do...to ignore that...someone knocks and says “come on downstairs” you know...I didn’t want to be rude. It just mostly that. As far as studying ...it was not wise to be around the apartment studying. Just the surroundings made it really hard to study...I got lazier...that’s pretty |
much what I noticed. I didn’t really feel like anything really changed...just like the fact that...I guess you could say that I got overwhelmed by the socializing out here but that’s pretty much it

(Eddie)

- When you come from LA if you want to go to a bar its $35-$40 a night. Coming up here and drinks are 25 cents from 9-10 – you know you have a lot more incentive to go out...It wasn’t the fact that I couldn’t control myself, it was the fact that I thought I could still do a mediocre job in school and have a lot of fun - too much fun I should say. (Isaiah)

- I mean, there is a lot of fun going on in Chico. It’s easy to be distracted in Chico, whereas, where I was from was a very small community and just turning 21, so there’s a lot of things that kind of affected me. (Charlotte)

- And then socially, I felt like everybody’s involved here and I felt like you kinda got to go with that. Everybody would go down the street after class and they would go for a sandwich or something and I would have homework to do and studying to do but I would go down there. I don’t know. You just feel closer to people at Chico they you do at the CC. (Crystal)

- Here there is much more opportunity for seeing your friends, slacking off and going out partying really. (Jacob)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 3: Differences in Campus Climate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtheme 1:</strong> More friendly &amp; welcoming (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Well, I did actually feel more welcomed here than I did at the community college. It might be because people show more respect to other people here...I think some people think that if you are at a community college than you aren’t really smart or something like that. If you are at a four-year college they treat you better because it is a more prestigious type thing. (Valeria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Depending on where you come from people are jaded or closed off - not a lot of people like to talk - but here people are really receptive. People are a lot friendlier, more open, and more willing to answer questions and not look at you like you are an idiot. (Delilah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I think the biggest surprise was how much nicer and more courteous people are around each other and that was a really good surprise. I really wasn’t expecting it.... The culture change from Palm Desert to Chico was pretty great. I’ve noticed that too. People are nicer...maybe it’s just a Chico thing. (Austin)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Sub-theme 2: Residential atmosphere (3) | - Also, the campus climate... I live four miles from campus here and I am almost considered a commuter. That is not something I was used to. Like at my community college, people would drive 20 miles to school and I was pretty local. Now I am on the complete other side of town to campus and everyone I know lives within walking distance to school. I think as far as the college community goes... it makes it a bit closer of a community. People go out together, have fun together. (Austin) |
- I think if I went to school in say San Diego or Cal State Long Beach, I wouldn’t feel like I’ve gone away to school, which is important if you’re a transfer student for a couple of reasons. You know, traditionally, when you go off to school, it’s more of a time of focusing I guess on a specific path whether it be academically or personally, and I think when you get a change in culture, and a change in norms. It helps you focus and narrow down why you moved away. It’s feeling as if you’ve made that transition. I know a lot of people from the school I went to which is 15 miles away on the freeway and it is like they have never transferred (Isaiah)
- At community college we all have our separate lives going on. We are not all based in a five-mile radius of the school so I think that is the biggest difference. (Jacob)

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<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme 3: More goal orientation (4)</th>
<th>Students notice that there is more motivation and purpose among Chico State students.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I seem to have a grudge against junior college just because it felt like the environment wasn’t really motivated, and I talked to people there, and they say they are there for their fifth year. It was moderately depressing, but over here, people seem to know what they want to do with life. (Atticus)</td>
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<td>• I thought it was a better atmosphere than (CC). (CC) has a lot of people who don’t want to be there. That’s it. And there was also a lot of childish stuff going on. Like during Halloween, you’d see sword fights in the cafeteria and stuff...I don’t know...I just feel more comfortable here. I mean it’s not a great difference but it is definitely something I feel. People are more serious about it (school) here...Really it’s just people’s attitude. I mean like people carry them differently here, talk differently here. People have more confidence. People are savvier. I don’t think people are too satisfied with being at a community college. It’s a stepping-stone to something they don’t really know if they are going to get to. (Alex)</td>
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<td>• There’s a lot of differences in the sense that universities – you just feel more like an adult. You just feel like it. You can be an observer and can see people having their day planned out. They are going this way or that way. There is always somebody going, going, going. There are not a lot of people who are just wandering. At the community college there are a lot of wanderers – a lot. Everyone is just there to be there. Everybody here has a purpose. At least it feels like that. Everyone has something they need to do for sure. Do or die type of thing. (Delilah)</td>
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<td>• I feel like the situation...maybe the social norms and maybe the culture that is present in northern California, is much more academically oriented than it is in southern California” (Isaiah)</td>
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Question #4 Findings: Helps & Hindrances to Transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helps &amp; Hindrances to Transition</th>
<th>Question #4: What types of helps or hindrances to their transition to student’s experience?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 1: Helps/Supports</strong></td>
<td>Students report positive contact with campus support services such as academic advising, counseling, admissions and financial aid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme 1:</strong> Support Services (4)</td>
<td>I would definitely say that Chico is a lot more organized in terms of everything. It runs a lot more efficiently in terms of getting things done, getting appointments with people, registering for classes. (Isaiah)</td>
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<td>I found everything in the student services center helpful....I was recently diagnosed with ADHD...So I’ve gone through the process and actually just this morning got enrolled with the DSS services ....I think that will really help. (Charlotte)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teachers and such at my community college were very, very willing to help but the counseling department, admissions and records...it was like pulling teeth to try and get anything done with them. It was much easier here. I’ve had to go to the financial aid office several times. I am always able to see someone. They always have clear answers for me. I had to go to the financial aid department at my community college pretty much once a week for my first few semesters there. I finally stopped going to them. It was painful (Austin)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I went to see my advising counselor from my major and she explained to me all the courses I needed to take and prerequisites. It helped...Sometimes I wish I had done it before at the community college. (Valeria)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme 2:</strong> Support of family/friends (7)</td>
<td>Having support from friends, family, significant others and co-workers helped students manage the transition.</td>
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<td>Just my friends have helped me. There are some points where you feel like you are on the outside looking in and those two or three friends pull you in and make you see that it’s not you on the outside. (Delilah)</td>
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<td>Just friends who had come here before (helped me). I talked to them. <em>I got help from my one friend...she came here the semester before me</em>” (Crystal)</td>
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<td>I was a little worried about making friends up here but I’d say finding a group of people was the biggest help to me. (Jacob)</td>
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<td>My parents don’t speak any English at all. They just finished elementary school. Well, my Mom did. My dad doesn’t know how to read. But my parents are super supportive. They say, oh you should go to school so you don’t have to work like us. My boyfriend goes to school here and that’s huge...He is always willing to give me a ride...he is always willing to be there for me and also my co-workers. They supported me. Whenever I needed the days off to just take a break or something, they would always say, “Academics come first.” (Claire)</td>
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My dad, he actually brought me over here and took a tour. He went here and so he kinda walked with me through it. I should have taken the tour, but I just wasn’t available, you know but my dad really helped me out with it. (Crystal)

My mom definitely was helpful by far. I would call my mom, you know, freaking out and she’d say like “Son, its OK you messed up. Just get through the semester. You know who you really are. It’ll be fine.” (Alex)

I’m lucky that my boyfriend is also a student. We both transferred from the same J.C. He’s a math major, and so we support each other in that sense. Of course, we want to go out and have fun, but we have a lot of homework due, so we kind of bitch about homework together. (Charlotte)

Sub-theme 3: Involvement (2)

Students noted that getting involved in campus activities helped them transition

- Getting involved really helped me out, helped me figure out what I wanted to do. (Atticus)
- The fraternity has helped a lot. If I have questions about a particular class or what classes I should take I always have someone to ask. I like that I’ve this connection with a group of people on campus - like-minded people that I can go. (Austin)

Theme 2: Hindrances/Challenges

Sub-theme 1: Living away from home (4)

Students struggled with the challenges of living on their own for the first time and being accountable for themselves.

- I mean, I never understood how much effort and time is takes to live by yourself. Another surprise I would say would be the amount of distractions you have when you live alone and that’s something I was not ready for in the least…having to balance keeping a clean living environment…So keeping it all up…you know, bills etc…. it’s just a lot more than you’re used to. Even doing my laundry was something I had to acclimate to, that I wasn’t prepared for necessarily. (Isaiah)
- My parents held me more accountable…so like Mom she would actually wake me up to go to class and I ended up going to class a lot because my parents being there forced me to go…. It was moving away from home and I think it was like the fact that I turned 21 when I moved up here and I was not 21 down there. And all my friends also turned 21 like right when I started school. That made a big difference - just going out with them and just going to bars and stuff compared to - we didn’t really do that before. No one was old enough before. (Eddie)
- Overall, it was a good time…a learning experience living away from home…because living at home, everything was sort of easy. like…well, it was just what I was used to it – so it just felt easier to me. (Atticus)
- I just felt like when I got here I was very clueless on how to live on my own. I am OK with laundry but cooking was one thing I had trouble with….I’d also say budgeting…. I certainly have never been on my own before and I never really had a lot of training like
from my parents in terms of helping me understand budgeting, or getting my schedule. I think just having the thought of my parents there constantly was much more encouraging to me to get my work done - that was one of the major driving factors at the community college. (Jacob)

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<tr>
<th>Sub-theme 2: Time management (7)</th>
<th>Students say managing their time and balancing school and work was very challenging.</th>
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<td>My personal challenge was time... time management... Sort of how I planned things. I guess I sort of overestimated my time. And I wasn’t managing... and due to me not managing or planning my time, it made things harder, falling back asleep, forgetting to eat, etc. (Atticus)</td>
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<td>I would say the only real bump I had was understanding how I was going to have to work on my school work from now on... how I am going to have to keep myself busy. I never really understood that until very recently... when I look at my work/school schedule back then (at community college) Now I just realize I have to keep myself busy. (Jacob)</td>
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<td>Honestly, a huge problem of mine was that I loaded myself way too heavily... it was packed... it was terrible. I didn’t have a life. I was on overload... It’s kind of difficult to balance. I am someone who is competitive and I want to be the best at everything in front of me and so I do triathlons, fire stuff and school and all of them I just kind of wanna be the best and its hard. I didn’t balance all that very well. (Alex)</td>
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<td>I had never had to work so much just to try and stay afloat.... it was kind of hard to balance my time between school and work so... That was my biggest problem, just trying to balance my time. (Veronica)</td>
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<td>I think the reason I struggled a bit was mostly just I needing to sort of try hard and be better at my time management. It was nothing Chico did.... it was just me. (Jacob)</td>
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<td>It was a bit difficult because it was like every day I had tons of homework to do and also I had work every other day. And so I had to get everything done before that night, or before that day for something, and then my scheduling was always like the last minute because I had so many things going on that I don’t remember some of them. So it was always like a last minute thing sometimes. (Claire)</td>
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<td>If you are always looking down and like full speed ahead you are going to miss a lot of stuff so you kinda have to remember that school is important - yes - but life it important too. Mixing the two - finding the balance between the two is what is important. (Delilah)</td>
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<td>Sub-theme 3: Personal motivation (3)</td>
<td>Students note feeling lazy and like they had less to do at Chico State than at the CCC.</td>
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<td>• I got lazier...that’s pretty much what I noticed. Here, I think the big difference is sometimes I am bored or find myself not doing something. I get off at two. If I was home, I would usually work from three to ten then go onto the gym until almost one and then just come home and falling asleep. Here I can’t fall sleep until two or three in the morning. I think it’s just because I am bored. I have nothing to do from two until I go to the gym here around ten. I’ll study maybe for a little bit but I just have some much time that I don’t know what to do with it and its bad...I have to be doing...I like to be doing something usually. (Eddie)</td>
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<td>• I think I am the type of person who when I don’t have a lot of things going on - I get kinda lazy. Looking back at community college I was much busier then. I had work and school and while I am here, I just have school. I think just having school, it kind of made me lazier because I thought “oh I can just do this later” and I got into this cycle of procrastinating and sort of just blowing things off. (Jacob)</td>
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<td>• I would think, OK tomorrow I will do this. Then a week would go by and I still hadn’t done any of the things I said I was going to do. Then another week would go by. So I just never came up to par with what I needed to do. (Alex)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Sub-theme 4: Issues with Major (2)</th>
<th>Students were disillusioned with their major</th>
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<tr>
<td>• I guess when I was getting into the classes, in the first month of school, I kinda started figuring out that it wasn’t the major that I had decided to go for...the major wasn’t what I wanted. But I didn’t realize that until halfway through the semester and then I just kind of lost interest in those classes. It was horrible. It really sucked knowing that I didn’t really want to be a part of that (major) anymore but I still had to go through those classes. That’s when my grades dropped, and I stopped going to classes. (Veronica)</td>
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<td>• I had to change my major just because I couldn’t hang with the requirements – the full year of chemistry requirements and things like that. So I ended up changing my major because school for me is a financial investment, and if I feel like it’s going to take another two years that I hadn’t financially planned for, that's just not feasible for me. ...But I’m glad I switched majors. I feel that the department I’m in now, environmental science versus biology is a little less competitive and a little bit more friendly. (Charlotte)</td>
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Sub-theme 5: Advising-related issues (6)

Students struggled with course sequencing, course load and taking upper division coursework for the first time.

- And I didn’t really know...like I needed to see a counselor this last year, and needed to see what classes I needed to take...and I didn’t know where the business advising was. That I had to find out through a friend. (Crystal)

- Probably having to like backtrack. It’s difficult being the age level I am and then being in the upper division...like my 400 level classes, but then taking like...you know...a 100 level class because I just didn’t get that...I should have taken those at my J.C. when I was younger, but I just took what I wanted, so now it’s difficult because you’re in a class with either a bunch of freshmen or a bunch of really older people. So I have this kind of strange gradient of classes that I’m taking. It doesn’t seem to flow like the way it should have if I had planned my whole four-year shebang four years ago basically. (Charlotte)

- Like I thought I was supposed to take all of those classes first, and she told me that I shouldn’t be taking those classes in that order. My advisor told me I should have taken a class that was in a different part of the section. If I had taken that class first, it would have helped me understand everything else. So the fact that I took classes that I wasn’t quite ready for that’s what also didn’t help out a lot too. (Veronica)

- However, academically, classes...like I took a little more than I could handle. Like in junior college, I was used to take 21 units per semester, and this semester I decided to take 18 with 4 labs. With just changing from Humanities to a science, it was completely different. I didn’t really acknowledge that, so...it just sort of made my experience more...a little stressful, more work, and I wasn’t really super familiar with Geology, again I had only had one course. (Atticus)

- I went down on my grades. You know, over at the CC, I took three to four classes usually, and here, I took five classes my first semester. I learned the hard way. Well, three of them were upper division, and two of them were classes that I didn’t take at the CC, and the upper division ones were really hard. So that was kind of different. I probably should have done less of a workload. (Crystal)

- I had taken a couple of major classes at the community college my last few semesters when I switched over to nutrition but this was my first time taking upper division courses. (Jacob)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Sub-theme 6: Not asking for help (8)</th>
<th>Students don’t know about the availability of support services, or don’t use them or ask for help.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most of my problems were that I didn’t know where a lot of the places were. I mean, I knew where the library was but that was one of the only places that I really knew about. And I knew you could get tutoring but I wasn’t always sure where you could go to do that. I should have asked more but I just didn’t and then fell into working so much that I just kinda let school slip. (Veronica)</td>
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<td>I’m pretty stubborn. I was like, “Oh, I can do this.” (Atticus)</td>
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<td>I should have gone to the professor and talked to him and taken care of the problem but I didn’t. I just kept to myself and stopped going to class. (Austin)</td>
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<td>Like I didn’t know they had services for tutors, for writing to proofread my papers but it is my fault for not asking. (Valeria)</td>
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<td>I am the type of person who will avoid talking to other people when I can. I don’t know why I am like that. It’s just sort of my personality. I know services were available to me but it was just more me not taking the opportunity. (Jacob)</td>
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<td>I didn’t really use any services. I don’t usually look for help. I like to try to figure things out on my own. Which is sometimes a bad thing…not asking for help when I really should. Maybe it’s just the stubbornness in me. Maybe I should have gotten tutoring when I noticed I started struggling in classes…or talking to my professors…seeing if there was anything I could have done. (Xavier)</td>
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<td>I didn’t really use any help here. You guys have so many things but I just didn’t use it. It I were to use all of the resources you offer, even one of the resources you offer, it would definitely help Chico State has all the stuff and more to really help us succeed and do well (Alex)</td>
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<td>I didn’t really talk to the counselors or anyone up here. I pretty much came to class and that’s what I did. I didn’t really use any support services. I knew about them. I just never made time for them. (Eddie)</td>
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## Question #5 Findings: Additional Support Needed

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<tr>
<th>Additional Support Needed</th>
<th>Students want more consistency in admission requirements and more out of service area recruitment</th>
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| Theme 1: Adjustment to Admissions/Outreach (3) | - I also think they should make the requirements for admission the same. I was talking to this girl and she was taking a math class but I thought you had to finish math before you transferred and I was talking to another girl and she had to take a science course and I thought – what? I thought you had to finish that before you came here. I wish I had known that. (Valeria)  
- I mean every school has its school that they have more connections with. Luckily for me I had a school this year that had a lot more connections to Chico and had a lot more information on it than say if I wanted to go to CSULB. They usually have more information on universities that are closer to the community college than further out. I think that’s a plus and a minus though because, seeing how there are so many different universities and colleges in California but at the same time I think there should be a lot more information say if I wanted to go to Long Beach. You know what I am saying? Like for a person that wants those options. (Delilah)  
- Definitely sending recruiters to more places. I don’t know that any Chico recruiters came to my school. I mean, it is pretty far. Ten hours away. I mean I understand but in an ideal world…and...I can’t really think of anything else I would change. (Austin) |
| Theme 2: More advising resources (6) | Students would like more one-on-one faculty advising and/or think advising should be mandatory |
|                                | - Faculty advising was helpful but it was like me and another 40 of us in a classroom. It’s not like it was one on one or anything. (Xavier)  
- I mean you can’t go to every individual person and tell them exactly what they should do or shouldn’t do or classes they should or shouldn’t take. I think the only thing you can really do is like be able to offer more support when someone has a certain major actually let them be able to talk to a major advisor more. (Veronica)  
- Oh yeah. I would go talk to advising and also the major advising. Just because I had no idea what classes I needed to take difference. That would have helped a lot had I done it first. (Eddie)  
- I think it would be requiring them to sit with an advisor. I mean, like not leaving the door open but making it a requirement for every transfer student to see someone and at least talk about one-on-one because I think they would pay a lot more attention like that compared to like at orientation where you don’t have any
time to ask questions really. (Eddie)

- The only thing that I would say that could be done better is maybe requiring students to go to the Career Center and the counseling center their first semester. I spoke to a faculty advisor at my orientation and she was very helpful but also speaking to another faculty advisor who was helping me set up the rest of my classes was very helpful. Also, I went to the career center for my fraternity and also just looking at going to a seminar and just being forced to go to these resources helps you realize they are actually there rather than just being told. You know you have all these resources around you and especially for transfer students because I did not view the counseling department or any other departments at my community college as being very useful because when I tried to use them – I didn’t get anywhere. So I kinda had the same mindset coming here and when I was actually forced to go do it. I was like “Oh – they are actually really helpful here.” I know a lot of community college students who have said the same thing. Their community college counseling department was not very helpful whenever they tried to get something done. You talk to a different person each time and you had to re-explain the situation and you just got never got anything done. So, again, I think being forced to go to these resources would at least help. Being forced sounds weird but what I mean is making it a requirement because, I mean, you know it’s there, you know where it is but you just don’t go and use it unless you are required (Austin)

- Make it mandatory to meet with a counselor/advisor the first two weeks of school. Mandatory! (Xavier)

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<th>Theme 3: Policy adjustments (4)</th>
<th>More information/warning about academic probation/disqualification, consider changing policy to base AP/DQ on cumulative GPA only.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I guess something that transfer students don’t realize that is there is now a Chico GPA. I did not see that coming, I thought there was one GPA. I messed up one semester and I slip up again and I can’t raise those lower ones and I could end up disqualified? I had no clue I was on the chopping block. That’s something I would definitely tell people about. I had no clue. (Alex)</td>
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<td>• Well, this would be more of a personal thing for me, but for the academic probation thingie. I would say to just look at the cumulative GPA instead of the Chico State GPA. (Claire)</td>
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<td>• Yeah, the whole thing about being placed on academic probation after your first semester. I wished they looked at the classes you took and kind of like where you came from, especially as a transfer student, and give you a little bit more leniency in your first semester. Obviously, coming from a 3.5 and higher, to one bad semester, I don’t think it’s fair to place someone on academic probation and now, it’s stuck. I have to look at it every single time I log onto my student portal until I get an A+ at the end of this semester. So I feel if they could just give a little bit more of a cushion, maybe if next semester, I kept getting F’s, then talk to me about academic probation...but one semester I don’t think is fair.</td>
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**Theme 5:**
Transfer workshops (7)

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<th>Students would like a course to help them with living away from home for the first time and have other suggestions for workshops and orientation</th>
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<td><strong>(Charlotte)</strong></td>
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<td>The big difference was how the GPA is calculated. I didn’t know the point system. Like at (the CC) a C minus or a C plus was just the same as a C. I didn’t know that a C minus was minus points compared to like a C or C plus I just barely found that out yesterday. I didn’t know how that worked. I just figured it was like (my CC). As long as you get C’s or better you are fine. I didn’t know that like for a junior you can’t get less than a 1.85 - that was surprising to me. I didn’t know about the disqualification. I figured it was similar to (CC). (Eddie)</td>
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<td><strong>Jacob</strong></td>
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<td>Honestly, I would probably make a mandatory class for transfer students specifically on home living because honestly I think my home living definitely impacts how I am doing in school. I think the stress of home, of living on your own, really does impact the way you do in school and I think some sort of class would help.</td>
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<td><strong>Isaiah</strong></td>
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<td>I was thinking that if they had a day, like if you are transferring, you could have the experience of going to a day of classes here, to see what it is like. That would give transfer students a better idea; I mean a lot of their fears would go. They would see that it is just like a regular class; it’s just that it’s more upper division. They could see how it feels and they could get to know the instructors and see how they teach the classes as well.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Valeria</strong></td>
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<td>This is going to sound weird, but maybe...I don’t know if this is even practical, but I remember in middle school transitioning to high school, like we had a day thing where we did a practice run of like your first semester of high school. Maybe that would help students maybe get a feel of it.</td>
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<td><strong>Atticus</strong></td>
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<td>I feel like I would have a workshop for those transfer students and tell them what they should be expecting. Have some kind of workshop and just let them know I guess. If there was one, I would have went to it, and I would have tried to prepare myself a lot better.</td>
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<td><strong>Claire</strong></td>
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| I would have a program for transfer students – after a month or certain amount of time - to see how they are doing, to see if they need help or need any services. Sometimes transfer students are afraid to ask questions. They might feel like people will think you
**6. Miscellaneous suggestions (4)**

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<th>Students offer a range of creative suggestions as to how to help future transfer students.</th>
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<td><strong>Get transfers together:</strong> Like hold events to get people around the campus and meet other people. I mean it’s important to meet people inside your major but it’s also important to meet people out of it. Just so you get a different perspective. Trying to get people together would be something I would want to do. Particularly transfer students because as a freshman, you come in and take all the GE’s you meet everyone, you are sort of ping ponging around but as a transfer student, its solid ground. Here’s my roots – that’s it. (Delilah)</td>
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<td><strong>More Communication:</strong> Maybe start early when the last semester at their community college; try to get them involved then. Like send out e-mails to them and just try to encourage them on just keeping up with all the information. Make sure they have their classes picked out, and they know what they want to take. (Crystal)</td>
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<td><strong>Lower Tuition:</strong> I guess I would probably say try not to raise the tuition so much because that was one factor that I wasn’t sure if I was going to transfer or not, because I knew it was going to be so much more expensive than if I just stayed at Butte and tried to do what I could at Butte. I did as much as I could at Butte, and I was reaching a cap, so that’s why I kinda had to transfer. Yeah, stop raising tuition. (Charlotte)</td>
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<td><strong>Bikes:</strong> I wish they would have told me to ride my bike earlier to get that cardio in so I wouldn’t be struggling trying to ride my bike now. That’s for sure. Be active. Because here – you are required to be active. The parking structure – no – trying to find a parking spot – no. I definitely would rather ride my bike in the rain. It’s a crummy bike but it gets me there. Yeah – be more active especially cause you walk around and you see everybody and they all look like they are in shape. (Delilah)</td>
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</table>
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