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**INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND TRANSFER
EFFORTS AT TOP COMMUNITY COLLEGES HOSTING INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES**

by

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Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND TRANSFER EFFORTS AT TOP COMMUNITY COLLEGES HOSTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Alejandra Diaz-Rangel
Old Dominion University, 2020
Director: Dr. Chris R. Glass

The number of international students enrolled at community colleges across the U.S. has significantly shifted in recent years. As a result, higher education institutions across the country have developed and integrated rationales for attracting and retaining international students to their campuses. The purpose of this research study was to examine international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts taking place at community colleges in the U.S. The data that influence the international student recruitment, retention, and transfer plans set forth by community colleges in the U.S. was collected from decision makers at 15 U.S. higher education institutions through the means of a single-case study research design. This qualitative research design gathered the data through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews conducted during the fall of 2019 and the spring of 2020. Once collected, the data revealed the recruitment, retention, and transfer rates of international students at community colleges in the U.S. The limitations of this study derived from the specificity of the research design since only decision makers at 15 higher education institutions in the U.S. were interviewed. Interested audiences may include higher education administrators, faculty, staff, students, researchers, academic advisors, recruiting agents, policy makers, and governmental officials seeking to expand the presence of international students in community colleges in the U.S and those who are interested in globalization and international education.

Keywords: community college, university, international students, decision makers, higher education institutions, decision-making process, internationalization, recruitment, retention, transfer, enrollment management

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Serafico and Vicenta Diaz. Fueron sus esfuerzos y sacrificios que me han ayudado a llegar a donde estoy. Ustedes me han apoyado incondicionalmente, y nunca terminare de agradecerles por todo. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Tomas Rangel, who has been right next to me through all of the ups and downs. This dissertation is as much mine as it is yours. Additionally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, Natalia. You motivated me to pursue a dream that at one point seemed unrealistic. I hope to make you proud. Last, but certainly not least, this dissertation is dedicated to my “FAM BAM”. The gatherings, check-ins, and adventures made the process all the less stressful. Los quiero mucho.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Enrollment Trends	9
Significance of International Students in U.S. Higher Education	14
Purpose of the Study	16
Research Question	18
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	19
International Student Recruitment	20
International Student Retention	28
International Student Transfer	33
Implications and Discussion	35
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	37
Research Method and Design	37
Data Collection	42
Validity and Reliability	46
Data Analysis	48
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS OF FINDINGS.....	50
Introduction.....	50
Recruitment, Retention, and Transfer Efforts.....	51
Themes: Strong Partnerships, Individualized Support, and Clear Pathways.....	55
How the Interconnection of Efforts and Themes Lead to Strategies	75
CHAPTER V: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION.....	78
Introduction.....	78
Answering the Research Questions	84
Implications and Recommendations.....	86
Conclusion	94
REFERENCES	97
Appendix A: Invitation to Participate.....	103

Appendix B: Interview Protocol	104
Appendix C: Consent Form	106
Appendix D: Demographic Questionnaire.....	109

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1 Participants and Settings by Pseudonym	41
2 The Interconnection of Efforts and Themes Lead to Strategies	76

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Recruitment to Retention to Transfer	52
2. Interconnection of Themes	75
3. Ideal Version.....	79

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

One job is created in the U.S. for every six international students enrolled at community colleges across the country (NAFSA, 2018). This number is significant when compared to the national average: three jobs created for every seven international students enrolled across two-year (community college) and four-year (university) higher education institutions in the country. According to NAFSA (2018), this is supported by spending occurring in the following sectors: “higher education, accommodation, dining, retail, transportation, telecommunications, and health insurance” (p. 1). As such, it is estimated that international students attending U.S. community colleges helped to create approximately 13,970 jobs during the 2018-2019 academic year as a result from their enrollment. Additionally, this student population enrolled in community colleges across the country contributed approximately \$2.6 billion to the U.S. economy during this timeframe (NAFSA, 2019).

Furthermore, international students greatly contribute to the U.S by improving communication and collaboration efforts between Americans and people of other nationalities, providing global perspectives and supporting innovations and programming on campuses for domestic and international students alike (NAFSA, 2018). Overall, the contributions that international students bring to the U.S. add to the cultural and academic values that this student population conveys to higher education institutions and the surrounding communities (Mamiseishvili, 2012; NAFSA, 2018). Not surprisingly, these contributions trigger an ambitious competition for this student population amongst higher education institutions across the U.S. and, understandably, all over the world (Abella, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

According to Evelyn (2005), “two-year institutions have tapped into a global market that is ripe for educational alternatives, enrolling students from around the world who see advantages in a cheaper route to a four-year degree, an environment much more forgiving of English-language deficiencies, and student populations high in ethnic diversity” (p.1). Although the recruitment of international students may have started in hopes of diversifying higher education institutions, developing global partnerships, and advancing scholarship for domestic and international students alike, the pressure of competition amongst countries has made the recruitment of international students “a profit driven activity” (Viggiano, López, Vázquez, & Levin, 2018, p. 73).

As such, international student enrollment trends are expected to continue increasing and as enrollment numbers increase, so does the surplus of choices among U.S. higher education institutions (Viggiano et al., 2018). For the purposes of this study, the focus will fall on international students holding F-1 Visas only. According to Wit (2012), it is necessary for the community colleges in the U.S. to distinguish themselves as international students have a surplus of choices among community colleges and universities nationally and internationally. As a result, higher education institutions and governments should be working diligently to ensure that the factors international students consider when enrolling at a particular higher education institution are acknowledged and met by the institutions (Wit, 2012).

Community Colleges

According to Raby and Valeau (2016), community colleges are a critical entryway to higher education in the U.S. for current and future employees. Community colleges in the U.S. provide students the general education courses, occupational training, and workforce

development necessary to be competitive in the job market (Raby & Valeau, 2016). For many students, including international students, community colleges remain their only option to obtain higher education (Harder, 2010; Raby & Valeau, 2016), exposure to other cultures and customs, and the opportunity to improve their soft skills and grade point average (GPA) (Mullin, 2017). Unlike their university counterparts, community colleges have the power to grant access to international students of lower socioeconomic status (SES) since they are nonselective and relatively inexpensive (Mullin, 2017).

Challenges for Community Colleges in the U.S.

Despite the many benefits community colleges provide international students, less than half of all the undergraduate students in the U.S. enroll into community college in order to reach their academic and career goals (Mullin, 2017). In 2018/2019, 1,095,299 international students were enrolled in higher education institutions across the U.S (Institute of International Education, 2019). Of the international students enrolled, only 86,351 students were enrolled at the community college level across the country (Institute of International Education, 2019).

Although community colleges in the U.S. offer attractive opportunities for international students, this student population faces some challenges. The challenges that may deter international student enrollment at these institutions include the unfamiliarity of the “2+2” model, the lack of rankings, low tuition costs, name of the institutions, and a limited campus life (Jennings, 2017).

According to Jennings (2017), the community college “2+2” model is an unfamiliar model outside the U.S. and Canada. The model consists of spending two years at the community college level to earn an associate degree, then transferring to a traditional university to earn a bachelor’s degree. According to Zhang (2015), the “2+2” model is unique to the U.S. education system and not fully understood by international students outside the country. Additionally,

many students may have challenges when attempting to transfer credits earned at the community college to higher education institutions outside the U.S. (Zhang, 2015).

Furthermore, for international students outside the U.S., the lack of “rankings” associated with U.S. community colleges also creates a barrier in determining the institutions’ worth, in comparison to other well-accepted higher education institutions in the U.S. and abroad (Jennings, 2017). As a result, many decision makers at the community college level believe that U.S. consulate officials are often less inclined to grant U.S. student visas to students admitted to community colleges than to universities, possibly on the assumption that the former are less accomplished or serious about their studies than those admitted to a university (Jennings, 2017, pp. 63-64).

For the purposes of this study, *decision makers* will be the term used to refer to executive leaders, administrators, directors, designated school officials (DSO), coordinators, managers, faculty, staff, career coaches, academic/transfer advisors, counselors, recruiting agents, and committee board members that may have any authority over the international student recruitment, retention, and transfer process. Additionally, decision makers are influential in carrying out the mission, policies, governance, internationalization strategies, and organizational changes at their respective institutions (Viggiano et al., 2018).

In addition to the community colleges’ lack of rankings, the low cost of tuition may convey a low-quality education compared to U.S. higher education institutions that charge a higher tuition rate (Jennings, 2017). In terms of the image for U.S. higher education institutions, “the name ‘community college’ generally conjures up the image of a vocational college or a continuing education-type school in most countries” (Jennings, 2017, p. 63). As such, these institutions tend to generally be commuter colleges with limited campus life. Many international

students refrain from enrolling at these institutions because they are under the impression that community colleges will not be able to meet their specific and often personal and academic needs (Jennings, 2017).

Furthermore, the state's economic health is typically the determining factor for the amount of funding received by higher education institutions across the state (Raby & Valeau, 2007). Since, in the U.S., higher education institutions compete for funding with the K-12 system and other federally funded programs, community colleges have experienced significant budget cuts. Not only have the budget cuts negatively affected programs for international students at their institutions, but the personnel that would have normally supported these programs are often limited to focusing on immediate needs, rather than focusing on broader issues (Raby & Valeau, 2007). Additionally, these institutions have had to eliminate some faculty positions, course offerings, and/or services rendered to students. More drastically, some U.S. higher education institutions have even had to close their campuses altogether. According to Rosenbaum (2017), U.S. higher education institutions are at the mercy of the state and federal government. These cuts pose a serious problem for community colleges where federal support and tuition dollars are the main sources of income for the institution. As such, these U.S. higher education institutions will need to find alternative sources of revenue to supplement the budget cuts (Rosenbaum, 2017).

In addition to the state's overall economic health, funding at community colleges is also based on their full-time equivalency (FTE) (Mullin, 2017). FTE is used to calculate enrollment based on the students' credit load. For example, while a full-time student accounts for one FTE, a part-time student accounts for a portion of a credit, based on how many credits they enroll in during a particular semester. According to Mullin (2017), FTE across the U.S. decreased faster

than did overall enrollment between 2010-2017, since full-time enrollment decreased faster than did part-time enrollment. As such, funding is a major concern for U.S. higher education institutions, and in order to compensate for the decline in state funding, community colleges and universities across the country have increased their tuition (Mullin, 2017).

Therefore, the decreases in funding and the increases in tuition have shifted the costs from the state to the student (Abella, 2015). Reasonably, this shift has discouraged students, especially students from low-income families, from enrolling in U.S. higher education institutions altogether. In 2016-2017, full-time in-state undergraduate students enrolled at public universities in the U.S. paid an average of \$9,650 per year in tuition and fees. In comparison, international students paid 2.5 times more in tuition, totaling \$24,930 per year in tuition and fees (Abella, 2015). Understandably, the tuition rates international students pay, in comparison to what in-state students pay, can be seen as a 'short-term solution' for higher education institutions struggling with funding cuts in the U.S. and around the world (Abella, 2015). International students pay more than domestic students because they are considered out-of-state students.

In order to resolve some of the economic problems community colleges face due to budget constraints at the state and federal level, decision makers are focusing their attention on international student enrollment efforts as institutional strategies (Viggiano et al., 2018). In other words, decision makers are interested in increasing international student enrollment as an increase in enrollment essentially increases the U.S. higher education institutions' revenue. In sum, Viggiano et al. (2018) found that decision makers have prioritized the economic benefits that international students bring to their U.S. higher education institutions over the benefits of increased diversity on campus. Some community colleges do not even extend access to less affluent international students if all the institution seeks to enroll is students who can pay the full

price to generate more revenue. As such, these community colleges contradict the open access mission of their institution and diminish some of the socioeconomic and overall diversity of their student population (Adnett, 2010).

Another challenge that U.S. higher education institutions face, particularly community colleges, is based on how international students view the U.S. in comparison to other countries (Han, Stocking, Gebbie, & Appelbaum, 2015). According to Han et. al. (2015), the U.S. may no longer remain the top destination for international students interested in higher education in part due to the global competitiveness to enroll international students and the restrictive nature of the U.S.'s immigration policies (Han et. al., 2015). Nevertheless, many international students continue to seek a U.S. education, and they do so because of the educational system's inclusivity to this diverse student population.

Political and Institutional Debate

Nevertheless, and despite all the contributions international students bring to the U.S., as a whole, not every party is in agreement with the importance of enrolling international students at community colleges in the U.S (Raby & Valeau, 2007). Even though enrolling international students at community colleges is very important, some may reconsider its benefits due to global terrorism, health concerns, and immigration issues (Raby & Valeau, 2007). Additionally, some U.S. higher education institutions have seen a decline in international student enrollment due to the social and political climate that has caused recent travel bans and created personal safety concerns involving international students (Saul, 2017).

Moreover, Raby and Valeau (2007) speak about the concern that arises when decision makers believe that community colleges should focus mainly on their geographic region, rather than tend to international communities. In other words, some decision makers believe that the

community college's purpose is exclusively to help the advancement of the "community," and not the populations outside those boundaries. Notably, not all decision makers think this way. Based on the research, communities are no longer restricted to geographical boundaries, but instead are seen as global entities that should take precedent over constrained communities (Raby & Valeau, 2007).

Furthermore, the perception that some decision makers have on the financial benefits international students provide for U.S. higher education institutions, encourages them to ignore the "financially struggling international students as a population in need of assistance" (Viggiano et al., 2018, p. 80). This, in turn, has decision makers failing to recognize the important aspects of international student retention efforts when the focus is solely placed on international student recruitment. According to Viggiano et al. (2018), some decision makers only perceive international students as a source of revenue, rather than recognize that this student population may be struggling financially. In order to justify their views, decision makers view the challenges international students face as motivators for academic achievement (Viggiano et al., 2018).

While, theoretically, anyone qualified can attend a community college, decision makers have constructed a policy that targets international students who can pay full tuition. In other words, decision makers tailor the services offered at community colleges to privileged international students so that they can then justify price discrimination based on said privilege. Viggiano et. al. (2018) calls this process the international access paradox. In sum, decision makers perceive international students as less financially needy, thus creating challenges for this student population when attempting to enroll at said institution. As a result, diversity is evidently

minimal at community colleges across the country, when compared to their university counterparts (Viggiano et. al., 2018).

Enrollment Trends

Over the past several years, the number of international students pursuing higher education in the U.S. has seen significant shifts in enrollment. According to Anayah and Kuk (2015), in 2001, over 500,000 international students were enrolled at higher education institutions across the U.S. In 2011, international student enrollment increased by 32 percent, resulting in an increase of 723,277 students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions over the 10-year span. Just a year later, the number increased by 5.7 percent (Anayah & Kuk, 2015), resulting in the U.S. being the top destination for international students when compared to other nations. In 2018/2019, the total number of international students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions continued to increase (Institute of International Education, 2019). Of the 1,095,299 international students enrolled, approximately 269,383 international students enrolled for the first time at U.S. higher education institutions (Institute of International Education, 2019).

Despite the high numbers of international students enrolled in higher education institutions across the U.S., some institutions are witnessing decreased international student enrollment numbers. In particular, community college enrollments are declining, while public and private, not-for-profit university enrollments are increasing (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Between 1993 and 2003, the international student enrollment at U.S. community colleges increased about 60 percent, from approximately 60,000 to 97,000 international students (Evelyn, 2005). Interestingly, this was “double the overall growth for international students at all postsecondary institutions” (Evelyn, 2005, p. 2). Nevertheless, international student enrollment in community colleges across the U.S. decreased by

approximately 15 percent between 2010 and 2017 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Of the 1,095,299 international students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions in 2018/2019, only 86,351 of those international students were enrolled at community colleges across the country (Institute for International Education, 2019). Therefore, concerns have arisen in regard to the finances at community colleges since some U.S. higher education institutions have relied heavily on international students in the past for tuition revenue (Saul, 2017).

Furthermore, the economy and the unemployment rate are also factors affecting student enrollment as they are critical when analyzing overall enrollment numbers. Shortly after the peak unemployment rate of 10 percent following the Great Recession community colleges across the country peaked in enrollment in 2010 with approximately eight million students enrolled. Ever since, student enrollment in community colleges across the U.S. has decreased significantly (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019).

Community College International Student Demographics

Understanding the demographics of students enrolled at community colleges in the U.S. is very important to help recognize where a decrease in enrollment happens. Additionally, this may provide some insight into a particular student's interest in enrolling at a specific institution. For example, in 2018/19, the academic level trends of international students enrolled across U.S. higher education institutions were undergraduate students (431,930), graduate students (377,943), non-degree seeking students (62,341), and Optional Practical Training (OPT) students (223,085) (Institute of International Education, 2019). This is important to note as community colleges only enroll undergraduate and non-degree seeking students.

According to Institute of International Education Open Doors report (2019), most international students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions are men. Men make up 56.1 percent of the international student population across U.S. higher education institutions. This percentage is slightly lower in community colleges across the country, at 51.2 percent. In terms of enrollment status, 94.1 percent of international students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions are full time, compared to only 89.4 percent at community colleges. Furthermore, 93 percent of international students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions hold F Visas, while only 4.1 percent hold J Visas, and 2.9 percent hold other types of visas. In regards to the visas international students have that are enrolled at the community college level, 92.4 percent of international students hold F-1 Visas, while only 0.9 percent hold J-1 Visas, and 6.8 percent hold other types of visas. According to the U.S. Department of State, the “F-1 Visa is for students attending a full-time degree or academic program at a school, college or university” and the J Visa “is for individuals approved to participate in work-and-study-based exchange visitor program.” For the purposes of this study, the focus will fall on international students holding F-1 Visas only. Additionally, 8.5 percent of international students are married across U.S. higher education institutions. These percentages decrease to 5.5 percent when considering international students enrolled at community colleges across the country (Institute of International Education, 2019).

Interestingly, the leading places of origin for international students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions has shifted in recent years. According to the Institute of International Education Open Doors (2019), the majority of international students come from China (18.6 percent), Vietnam (11.0 percent), Japan (5.8 percent), South Korea (5.6 percent), and Mexico (3.9 percent).

Leading U.S. Higher Education Institutions

In order to help identify enrollment trends at the community college level, being aware of the institutions that international students more commonly select is very important. The leading community colleges and/or systems across the country that international students enroll in are Houston Community Colleges System (5,645), Lone Star College System (3,165), Santa Monica College (3,062), De Anza College (2,515), Montgomery College (1,804), Valencia College (1,799), Miami-Dade College (1,749), Northern Virginia Community College (1,614), Green River College (1,476), and Orange Coast College (1,391). (Institute of International Education, 2019). Comparably, the top U.S. higher education institutions hosting international students are New York University (19,605), University of Southern California (16,340), Northeastern University-Boston (16,075), Columbia University (15,897), and University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign (Institute of International Education, 2019).

According to the Institute of International Education (2019), the majority of international students attend U.S. colleges and universities in California (161,693), New York (124,277), Texas (81,893), Massachusetts (71,098), Illinois (53,724), Pennsylvania (51,818), Florida (45,957), Ohio (37,314), Michigan (33,236), and Indiana (29,083) (Institute of International Education, 2019).

Sources of Funding and Fields of Study

In 2018/19, the primary sources of funding for international students came from personal and family resources (57 percent), current employment (20.6 percent), U.S. colleges or universities (16.8 percent), foreign government or university (4.3 percent), foreign private sponsor (0.6 percent), U.S. private sponsor (0.2 percent), U.S. government (0.2 percent),

international organizations (0.1 percent), and other sources (0.3 percent) (Institute of International Education, 2019).

During this same timeframe, the selected fields of study for international students were engineering (230,780), business and management (182,170), math and computer science (203,461), social sciences (84,320), physical and life science (81,580), fine and applied arts (63,097), health professions (35,446), intensive English (22,026), communications and journalism (24,017), and other fields of study (86,057). (Institute of International Education, 2019).

Based on the popularity of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs, one-third of STEM students enrolled in post-graduate studies in the U.S. are foreign-born (Han et al., 2015). According to Chang and Kono (2015), “STEM fields combine to draw the largest pool of international students to the U.S. (p.1). As such, a global competition for this specific student population has immersed

Fortunately for U.S. higher education institutions, many international students interested in pursuing a degree in STEM, particularly graduate-level engineering and science, seek enrollment at these institutions (Han et al., 2015). The attraction may be due in part to better career opportunities international students have after obtaining a STEM degree. (Han et al., 2015). As such, Han et al. (2015) state that changes in immigration policies need to be made if the U.S. plans to retain the top talent from around the world in their higher education institutions, particularly community colleges.

As a response to the need to draw more international students to STEM programs at U.S. higher education institutions, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) amended its F-1 nonimmigrant student visa regulations on OPT for this specific student population. According to

the latest update, “the final rule allows such F-1 STEM students who have elected to pursue 12 months of OPT in the United States to extend the OPT period by 24 months (STEM OPT extension” (p.1). Furthermore, the rule also requires the implementation of formal training by employers, proof of international students seeking degree programs, and wage protection. The extension was first enacted in 2008 and updated in 2016.

Significance of International Students in U.S. Higher Education

According to a qualitative study conducted by Fitzer (2007), academic, cultural, and financial benefits derive from enrolling international students at U.S. higher education institutions. Three of the most important motivators in enrolling international students identified include: the prospect to form a more internationalized and diverse campus, the opportunity for international students to use their diverse skills and abilities for the local economy’s labor needs, and the financial gains in times of severe budget constraints nationwide (Viggiano et al., 2018).

First, domestic students greatly benefit from their exposure to international students as they get introduced to new worldviews, improve their cognitive abilities, and become better prepared for the workforce (Mamiseishvili, 2012; Viggiano et al., 2018). Overall, internationalization advances the mission of the community college to expand student knowledge (Raby & Valeau, 2016). Additionally, exposure to the diversity in the globally competitive economy can prepare domestic students for the workforce. As such, community colleges are interested in internationalizing their campuses by enrolling international students. However, and despite the call to increase internationalization at community college across the country, internationalization efforts have lagged behind at community colleges when compared to universities (Harder, 2010). Yet, internationalization is an inherent part in serving the local

community as a whole since academic quality and learning environment is significantly improved by internationalization (Raby & Valeau, 2016).

Second, the open access mission and low tuition rates of community colleges create an ideal situation for the “growing middle class of developing nations” (Viggiano et al., 2018, p. 72). According to Mullin (2017), open access in U.S. higher education means that all are afforded a pathway to obtaining a college education. For many, open access serves to decrease intergenerational poverty, thus benefitting the student and the community. Nevertheless, despite the well-known commitment to open access that community colleges embrace, Viggiano et al. (2018) claim that budget constraints at the state and federal level have forced community colleges to find new ways to generate new sources of revenue. As decision makers at community colleges across the country pursue new sources of revenue, “they drift from their traditional open access mission toward a mission of economic development” (Viggiano et al., 2018, p. 72).

Finally, international student enrollment at U.S. community colleges is a source of much-needed revenue (Viggiano et al., 2018). U.S. higher education institutions, specifically community colleges, are not simply interested in building a global community of learners, but are also interested in increasing their tuition revenue. As mentioned above, U.S. higher education institutions greatly depend on international student enrollment for their financial stability. Knight (2013) states that although internationalization can easily be linked with financial factors, U.S. higher education institutions should not simply view international students as a means to increase their revenue, but should focus their attention instead on the institutions’ diversification and prioritize a quality education.

International student enrollment is essential to community colleges as international students pay a larger tuition rate than domestic students (Hegarty, 2014) and in most states across

the U.S., community colleges actually get to keep the revenue (i.e., tuition, living expenses) generated by international student enrollment (Evelyn, 2005). Although certain outcomes of an increase in international student enrollment trends are hard to predict, the revenue generated from international student enrollments have experienced a thriving increase in recent years (Jennings, 2017).

The enrollment of international students in a specific location promotes globalization and direct expenditures to the community where students live and to the businesses that employ this student population once they graduate and enter the workforce (Jennings, 2017). Per year, international students spend an average of \$13 billion, of which \$2 billion is kept by community colleges across the country. For example, Los Angeles Community College located in Los Angeles, and Bunker Hill Community College located in Boston, each generate over \$3 million in revenue from their international students per year (Evelyn, 2005). Due to the significance of these contributions, higher education institutions across the country have intensified their efforts to enroll international students (Hegarty, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

Despite the popularity of community colleges amongst some international students, overall student enrollment has dropped since 2011 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). The enrollment decline has been linked to a decrease in high school graduates and the lack of students' interest in attending college versus finding employment. As such, in order to compensate for the drop of enrollment, U.S. higher education institutions are integrating specific strategies to increase international student enrollment number at their institutions, including community colleges. Some of these strategies include participating in recruitment fairs, offering academic support, connecting potential students to international alumni, faculty, and

staff, and facilitating the transfer process of international students to universities (Anayah & Kuk, 2015).

In comparison with existing literature on international students' academic and social experiences and institutional adjustment, research on international student retention and transfer rates has been limited. In fact, some federal agencies and well-renowned databases do not even report such data on international students studying at community colleges. However, evidence exists that international students are still enrolling at high rates in community colleges (Anayah & Kuk, 2015; Lau, Garza & Garcia, 2019). The international student enrollment at certain U.S. higher education institutions may be due to their recruitment efforts. However, this factor may not be the case for some community colleges.

As such, the purpose of this study was to conduct research on the importance of recruiting and retaining international students at the community college level. Furthermore, this research study was conducted to provide a better understanding on the strategic importance of transferring international students to universities, especially from a financial perspective. Overall, it is important to understand the recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts set in place by community colleges across the U.S. to help these institutions effectively meet the needs of this student population.

As such, the results of this study can help enhance and strengthen the recruitment, retention, and transfer rates of international students at the community college level across the country. In addition, it can help improve the education efforts of U.S higher education institutions, producing an increase in understanding of internationalization across national boundaries. The findings of this study will also help shape international initiatives and strategic planning at global institutions. Other contributions of this study may include providing an

integrated point of view that may tackle the process decision makers have when establishing organizational changes and improvements to their international student services and support. Finally, this study may add data to the limited research that currently exists involving international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts at the community college level (Schulte & Choudaha, 2014). As Hagedorn, Purnamasari, and Eddy (2012) state, the “United States is in time of flux and change, but community colleges may be uniquely poised to respond” (p. 159). With the current growth of international students at U.S. higher education institutions, an examination of the recruitment and retention efforts set in place by the community colleges across the U.S. and the transfer rates of this student population were necessary to help these institutions become the top choice for many international students seeking higher education.

Research Question

To ensure that community colleges are relevant to international students seeking a U.S. higher education and are ready to provide services to international students, it was important to acknowledge and understand the enrollment, retention, and transfer efforts, if any, that are taking place at top community colleges hosting international students across the country. As such, the following research question was formulated to help explain the efforts implemented by community colleges: How are international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts currently being implemented by top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S? At the conclusion of the research study, the researcher gained a clear understanding of the recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts set in place by the decision makers at top community colleges hosting international students across the country.

CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on the significance international students have in U.S. higher education institutions. Significant to this review is the financial impact international students have on U.S. higher education institutions, the benefits international students provide these institutions, and the importance in establishing an effective international enrollment management plan.

In the past 10 to 15 years, the influx of international students has been very important to the U.S. higher education landscape for several reasons. First, a decrease in student funding for higher education has U.S. higher education institutions seeking to diversify their income from international student tuition (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). In addition, in the wider economic context, U.S. higher education institutions are looking to increase their enrollment to supplement the rapidly decreasing and aging population of skilled workers (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). After all, Hagedorn, Purnamasari, and Eddy (2012), note that “as the country’s major broker of less-than baccalaureate technical training, the nation’s community colleges are arguably the appropriate venue for the training needed to alleviate shortages” (p. 154).

According to Hagedorn et al. (2012) an interrelated threat is that if the U.S. higher education system cannot produce an ample and sufficiently trained workforce, industry and innovation will increasingly be located in other parts of the globe that are better prepared to provide the necessary resources, thereby robbing the U.S. of its global prominence. As a result, public higher education institutions across the country must increase their global standing when competing for international student enrollment to establish themselves as internationalized institutions, specifically community colleges.

Even though community colleges have followed the general “American institutional trends in international student recruitment” (Jennings, 2017, p. 62), it has taken them longer than universities to get into the market. Nevertheless, community colleges have been engaged in the global education for more than two decades now. For example, in the academic year 2015/2016, less than 10 percent of the approximately one million international students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions were enrolled at community colleges in the U.S. (Jennings, 2017). These numbers are low since community colleges seek to enroll international students at their institutions based on international students’ high retention rates, commitment to their studies, and involvement on campus (Evelyn, 2005; Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007).

Additionally, international students are more likely to take their education more seriously than domestic students since they come from far away to complete their education (Evelyn, 2005). Most favorably for U.S. higher education institutions, most international students do not tend to work, providing them the opportunity to immerse themselves in the campus life and surrounding community (Evelyn, 2005, p. 4). Nevertheless, while it is important to understand why community colleges seek to enroll international students at their institutions, it is just as important to understand why international students seek a foreign education in the first place (Hagedorn et al., 2012).

International Student Recruitment

As the enrollment of international students across the U.S. increases, it is important to also understand why international students seek an education in the U.S., especially at the community college level. “Though some community colleges have stepped up their recruitment efforts – specially to compensate for a slight drop in international enrollments after September 11, 2001 – other factors are contributing to the enrollment explosion” (Evelyn, 2005, p.1).

Several studies have been conducted to study the factors international students take into consideration when making a decision on which higher education institution to attend. As Renn and Reason (2012) point out, “students do not enter college as ‘blank slates;’ they come with attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and motivations that influence how they experience college” (p. 19). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) explain that the global pattern for international students to enroll at a higher education institution is contingent upon “push and pull” factors. According to their research, the push factors operate inside of the source country. This initiates the decision-making process of the students to pursue international education. For example, some push factors include the rigorous admission policies in the country of origin and the country of origin’s inability to accommodate the demand for higher education. In essence, these factors, particularly economic and social factors, push students to study abroad since their educational opportunities may be limited in their country of origin (Han et. al., 2015).

On the other hand, it is the pull factors that operate in the host country, making it attractive to the international students. According to Han et. al. (2015), the pull factors perceived as benefits by international students include cost, environment, geography, and social links to the higher education institution. Despite the enrollment shifts for international students in U.S. higher education institutions, the popularity of community colleges may be a result of the following pull factors: lower tuition rates, the resources for research that are accessible in developed countries, the ability to transfer to a university, and the opportunity to live and study at various geographical locations across the U.S (Anayak & Kuk, 2015).

For the purposes of this study, the focus was set on the “pull” factors. This was done with the intention of identifying how the community colleges within the U.S. are able to increase their international recruitment and retention efforts. While many factors influence international

students' decision-making process, research demonstrates that the following factors are the most influential to international students when choosing to enroll at a particular higher education institution in the U.S: location, finances, institutional image and reputation, advice from relatives and friends, access and admission, coursework, and employment and career opportunities (Anayah & Kuk, 2015; Branco & Soares, 2016; Daily, Farewell & Kumar, 2010; Hagedorn et al., 2012; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Maringe, 2006; Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007).

Location

According to a study conducted by Mamiseishvili (2012), location is the primary factor international students consider when choosing to enroll at a particular higher education institution, particularly community colleges. Some decision makers at higher education institutions located in New York City and the Washington D.C. area, are often cited stating that they do not lift a finger to recruit international students (Evelyn, 2005). Community colleges located in urban metropolitan areas tend to attract more international students than do community colleges in rural areas (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Notably, Northern Virginia Community College, one of the 23 colleges within the Virginia Community College System, (VCCS), has been ranked among the top community colleges to enroll the greatest number of international students in the U.S (Jennings, 2017). This was done with minimal recruitment efforts on behalf of the institution. To their advantage, the campus is conveniently located in the Washington, D.C. area, attracting international students with greater ease (Jennings, 2017).

For the higher education institutions that are located in less populated areas, having strong recruitment efforts is very important if they wish to increase their international student enrollment numbers. They must have a strong recruitment plan in process, be able to provide

student support for international students (i.e., student housing, advising services, programs), and have the support from the decision makers at their institutions (Jennings, 2017).

Furthermore, Jennings (2017) notes that “finding an ethnic community with a culture similar to one’s home ... having access to familiar food, music ... good public transportation, abundant nearby housing, [and] good weather” (p. 67) can be significant factors adding to the retention of international students. In regard to housing options, Jennings (2017), points out that most community colleges in the U.S. are commuter campuses, thus creating an obstacle for international students in obtaining varied housing options. Unlike domestic students, international students may not have family or friends living in the area with whom they can reside. As such, community colleges must have strong host families available to take in international students or have abundant apartment rental units surrounding their campuses (Jennings, 2017).

Finances

According to Maringe (2006), international students seem to be adopting a more consumerist approach than they have in the past as they consider their options on which higher education institution to attend. Due to some “financial downturns both in the United States and throughout Asia – which accounts for the most foreign students in American colleges – have forced many prospective students to seek a less-expensive American degree” (Evelyn, 2005, p.1) Most of the international students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions come from Asia, comprising 40 percent of all enrollment at these institutions (Renn & Reason, 2012).

Data also supports the fact that the fundamental factors that aid international students in the decision-making process to attend a higher education institution include financial assistance such as tuition, scholarships, and financial aid (Bista & Dagley, 2015; Daily et al., 2010;

Maringe, 2006). In order for some international students to consider enrolling at community colleges, Jennings (2017) stated that tuition must be affordable. It is important for the community colleges to note that most international students come with the intention of transferring to universities. As such, they must be able to afford what is typically a two-year enrollment at a community college plus a two-year enrollment at a university. According to Jennings (2017), “the total costs of an American bachelor’s degree earned by international students in a ‘2+2’ transfer program typically run between \$130,000 (Purdue University, Washington State, University of Minnesota) and \$175,000 (University Southern California, Cornell University, and University of California Berkeley)” (p. 65). With these numbers in mind, community colleges can reevaluate their tuition rates and determine how to better stand out to increase international student enrollment.

Overall, the research noted that students consider the financial implications (Maringe, 2006) and affordability (Anayah & Kuk, 2015; Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2011) when choosing to enroll at a particular higher education institution. In a study conducted by Mamiseishvili (2012), affordability was among the top three factors international students consider when enrolling in community colleges. The research suggested that “students consider programmed and price related issues as more important than other elements of universities marketing mix” (Maringe, 2006, p. 466). Nevertheless, Daily et al. (2010) also note that finances alone do not influence an international student’s decision to attend a particular higher education institution in the U.S. or abroad.

Image and Reputation

Other researchers state that the most influential factors international students take into account when choosing to enroll at particular higher education institutions in the U.S. include the

image of the city, the institution, and the program of study (Bista & Dagley, 2015; Daily et al., 2010; Han et al., 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002;). Multicultural studies have produced findings that suggest that the decision-making process of attending a particular higher education institution is dependent on how attractive the host government and institution can be in the eyes of the international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). International students' university and course choices depend on the positioning, recruitment, and marketing implemented by the higher education institutions (Maringe, 2006). Additionally, many international students rely on ranking systems to help them determine their preferred institutions, even if admission into these institutions is unrealistic at the time (Jennings, 2017).

Consequently, Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) suggest that some countries, including the U.S., and their higher education institutions are working hard on their image and reputation by seeking to improve their innovative strategies, immigration procedures, employment, and residency to attract these students because it is factors such as these that motivate international students to apply to one country or institution over another.

Relatives and Friends

Branco and Soares (2016) note that other than referring to a higher education institution's website to gain access to the institution's image and reputation, international students consult with professors or former or current students at the institution of their choice. The researchers note that interpersonal sources of information are of great influence in the decision-making process. As a result, "individual universities are positioning themselves as 'global' by developing and promoting their networks" (Middlehurst, 2013, p. 33). Many decision makers credit "word of mouth" to their institutions' international student enrollment increases, including community

colleges (Evelyn, 2005; Han et al., 2015). After all, very few community colleges actively recruit international students (Evelyn, 2005).

According to Daily et al.'s (2010) research, recommendations from family and non-family members play a role in the decision-making process of international students enrolled at the eight different U.S. universities that they studied. These interpersonal sources included friends, relatives, and non-family members living in the destination area and at their country of origin. According to the results from a study conducted by Anayah and Kuk (2015), family influence is very important to the decision-making process of international students to study abroad. Parents, in particular, made the decision to send their students abroad to make their children more competitive in the marketplace (Anayah & Kuk, 2015).

Access and Admission

According to research, community colleges have been and should continue to be institutions of access. Some studies have found that international students attend certain higher education institutions based on institutional accessibility and easier admission requirements (Anayah & Kuk, 2015; Bista & Dagley, 2015; Daily et al., 2010; Teranishi et al., 2011).

According to Jennings (2017), "shortage of seats available in high-quality universities and the lack of high-paying jobs for university graduates at home are two major push factors" (p. 62).

Daily et al.'s (2010) research proved the high level of importance that access has on the decision-making process of 50 international students representing 27 countries in their study.

In addition to easier access, Anayah and Kuk (2015) claim that international students are attracted to community colleges that provide guaranteed admission or guaranteed transfer opportunities to specific universities. They also state that many international students seek admission at U.S. higher education institutions if they have difficulties being admitted to local

institutions in their country of origin. Additionally, many students take advantage of the guaranteed admission opportunities. Both domestic and international students have the opportunity to complete their four-year bachelor's degree by completing their first two years at a community college, then completing their last two years at a university (Jennings, 2017).

Coursework

According to a study conducted by Mamiseishvili (2012), coursework was among the top three factors international students consider when enrolling in community colleges. International students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions are often drawn more to the business, engineering, and information technology programs, however, other programs (e.g., aviation, health care, hospitality) are also sought after by international students (Jennings, 2017).

As such, it is important for community colleges to broaden the programs offered at their institutions to attract more international students. Particularly, “in European countries where rigid systems of higher education force students to choose a college major as early as high school, the flexibility of American community colleges appeals to some students” (Evelyn, 2005, p. 5). In general, the community college experience provides students the ability to explore, grow, and develop any necessary skills to make these lifelong decisions easier.

Employment and Career Opportunities

In a study conducted by Han et al. (2015), the participants, who were international students, indicated that despite the importance of any personal reasons, it was professional motives that were the most important in their decisions to study the U.S. In the study, the top two factors that influenced the decision-making process of international students included the various career opportunities and the quality of higher education that the U.S. provides. Additionally, the quality of U.S. higher education institutions is reflected in the professional networks that are

formed, the availability of mentorship and advising, and the various employment opportunities (Han et. al., 2015).

As such, other important factors that can influence an international student's decision-making process include on-campus employment (Bista & Dagley, 2015), post-graduation employment (Bista & Dagley, 2015; Daily et al., 2010), and prospective career opportunities (Maringe, 2006). Many international students believe that by studying abroad, they gain a better education, increase their competitiveness in the marketplace, and have an easier time landing a job post-graduation in the U.S. and in their country of origin (Anayah & Kuk, 2015).

Abella (2015) expressed that gaining an education abroad "is no longer viewed as a 'public good' but as a 'private' one, with gains from education most likely to flow to the individual rather than his or her country of origin" (p. 191). As a result, international students are seeking to enroll at higher education institutions that will benefit them personally and professionally (Abella, 2015). According to Wilhelm (2012), "international experience generally increases the confidence of any student, both academically and socially" (p. 35).

International Student Retention

Non-traditional students, particularly international students, make up a significant portion of the student population at many community colleges across the country (Barnett, 2010). Nevertheless, retention rates are significantly lower for this student population at community colleges than they are at universities (Barnett, 2010). In part, the low retention rates may be a result of the students' age, enrollment status, finances, and/or challenges with culture and language. In general, community college students, particularly international students, are much more likely to experience challenges in their path to success and completion than would students enrolled at universities (Barnett, 2010).

Two out of three international students are enrolled in one of only 200 colleges or universities across the U.S. (Schulte & Choudaha, 2014). Unfortunately, many of these higher education institutions are relatively new at recruiting international students. As such, they may lack the personnel, resources, and services to increase the retention and overall experience of international students on their campuses. While these institutions may have focused their attention, energy, and resources on the recruitment efforts of “international student recruitment as a financial necessity, they often underestimate the investment required to improve the experiences of these students” (Schulte & Choudaha, 2014, p. 54) to improve retention and transfer rates.

Lau et al. (2019), clarify that while it is understandable that most if not all students enrolled at higher education institutions “experience normal developmental problems and concerns, international students encounter additional stressors due to acculturative stress and the demands for cultural adjustments” (p. 110). Although various factors may be integral to successful international student retention, research suggests that sense of belonging, encompassing academic and social integration, plays a vital role in retaining this student population (Lau et al., 2019). Additionally, Mamiseishvili (2012) acknowledged that an international student’s career plan, grade-point-average, and social and academic integration could be a positive predictor for his/her retention at a higher education institution.

Academic Integration

To the surprise of many, international students can be a vulnerable and often overlooked student population in the U.S. For example, some international students are experiencing the U.S. education system for the first time, while also struggling with adapting to a new culture and with learning the language (Hansen, Shneyderman, Mcnamara, & Grace, 2018). Notably, one of

the most significant issues experienced by international students studying at U.S. higher education institutions includes experiencing difficulties with the English language. According to Lau et al. (2019), “language barriers are not limited to listening and speaking in English, but also encompass reading and writing in English at the university level” (p. 110). Understandably, this may cause distress for international students that may have been previously high achievers in their countries of origin. Furthermore, expressing an idea or concern eloquently in the English language or attempting to understand certain colloquialisms may be stressful and confusing for some international students (Lau et al., 2019). As such, the academic and adjustment success of international students may be hindered by the language barrier.

In addition to language barriers experienced by international students, language barriers are also experienced by their academic advisors. Academic advisors tend to spend a lot of time reviewing general structures—to include transfer processes—to international students and these challenges result from the insufficient knowledge international students have of the U.S. higher education system (Zhang, 2015). Nevertheless, academic advisors play a vital role in the retention and success of international students (Zhang, 2016). The findings from a study conducted by Zhang (2015) further suggest that community college academic advisors understand that international students come with a unique set of challenges, in comparison to domestic students, however, academic advisors experience major challenges to include having the awareness of the difference in cultures and employing the right strategies in advising the international student population.

Despite all of the challenges, Kolvoord et al. (2016) conducted a study that highlighted some academic retention-focused interventions for international students. Such interventions include faculty-directed research projects, internships, mentoring, and tutoring. According to the

study, faculty-led research projects allow students the opportunity to participate in research that they might have otherwise missed, granting students the opportunity to learn new information and develop new skills (Kolvoord et al., 2016). Additionally, Rodríguez, Betancourt, Hinojosa, and Corona (2018) clarify that research experiences create significant benefits for students that go beyond developing expertise in a particular field. These experiences are as important for potential employers as is completing a graduate program. Internships, on the other hand, is another way for students to experience hands-on learning, while being able to apply the information learned in the classroom in a practical setting (Kolvoord et al., 2016).

Mentoring is yet another way for higher education institutions to retain students as mentoring is associated with a higher G.P.A. and a stronger bond created between the student and the mentor (Kolovoord et al., 2016). Rodriguez, Betancourt, Collins, Hinojosa, and Corona (2018), state that mentoring received from academic advisors proves to be helpful in the success of the students as it fosters a sense of confidence and awareness of available resources and career pathways. Additionally, Rodriguez et al. (2018) state that in order to engage and retain students, faculty serving as mentors is critical. Faculty members can differentiate experiences for students and strengthen student impact (Rodriguez et al., 2018). Finally, tutoring is an opportunity to enhance student learning while increasing student retention (Kolvoord et al., 2016).

Social Integration

Although academic integration is important, Jennings (2017) found that some international students focus on other factors that include personal relationships. For example, community colleges tend to offer smaller classes with a manageable faculty-to-student ratio, more individual support from the staff, and a less demanding academic environment with English-language assistance. Some important and often sought involvement opportunities that

attract international students include on-campus employment, clubs and organizations, and sports teams (Jennings, 2017).

Nevertheless, this student population faces challenges with overall engagement. Since most community college students are commuter students, they are less likely to be involved with extracurricular activities or interact with faculty and staff as would students enrolled at universities. (Barnett, 2010). According to Schulte and Choudaha (2014), attracting international students to higher education institutions in the U.S. is costly, however, so is the financial loss a higher education institution faces if international students are not retained.

Schulte and Choudaha (2014) claim that most international students who leave their higher education institution base their decision on the institution's reputation, and their challenges with finances and academics. Additionally, contributing factors that may also force an international student to leave include the lack of social support, isolation from friends and family, and discrimination. Additionally, international students are underrepresented and are more likely to be first generation college students (McKim et al., 2017). Research suggests that underrepresented students may lack the immediate family support needed to understand college life, seek resources, and overcome challenges. Understandably, these challenges impact international student retention (McKim et al., 2017).

According to research conducted by Lau et al. (2019), international students tend to experience great challenges and a deep sense of loss when they move to the U.S., leaving their families and friends behind. This, in turn, significantly influences the international students' psychological well-being, and social interactions with U.S., peers, faculty, and staff (Lau et al., 2019). These interactions play a vital role in their first-to-second year persistence

(Mamiseishvili, 2012). As such, it is imperative to conduct further research into how community colleges in the U.S. are retaining their international student population.

International Student Transfer

Although there is an abundance of research involving student retention and degree attainment at universities, limited research exists for international transfer students enrolling in their institutions (Zhang, 2017). Even though international students are traditionally attracted to universities, international students are among the students that utilize community colleges as a stepping stone to universities (Zhang, 2017). The option to transfer to a university after having completed their studies at the community college level has created a significant opportunity and educational pathway to international students who would otherwise not be able to do so (Zhang, 2017).

According to research, the majority of international students enrolled at community colleges across the country intend to transfer to universities (Zhang, 2017). Nevertheless, transfer students, particularly international transfer students, experience challenges integrating into campus life. As international students continue to enroll at community colleges and universities, this student population and its subgroups (e.g., international transfer students) merit more attention from higher education decision makers, policy makers, and the overall community (Zhang, 2017).

Interestingly, international transfer students are a unique subgroup of the international student population (Zhang, 2017). Knowledge on their transfer experiences and backgrounds are necessary to understand these students' lives post-transfer to universities. According to Zhang (2017), decision makers should be questioning who these students are, where they are from, what they need, what they expect, and how well the higher education institution can contribute to their

academic goals. Additionally, information on how this student population performs in higher education and “whether their educational pathways are different from or similar to domestic transfer students” (Zhang, 2017, p. 36) is needed for retention purposes since students who begin their studies at the community college level are less likely to obtain a bachelor’s degree upon transfer to a university.

According to Lau et al. (2019), the changing trend of international student enrollment at community colleges across the country creates the need to develop greater collaborations between community colleges and universities since transferring may be the goal of most international students. Greater collaborations will help ensure a smooth and steady transition between these higher education institutions (Lau et al., 2019). Jennings (2017) states that “admission pathways to competitive universities are essential for most U.S. community colleges wishing to recruit international students” (p. 64). It is important for international students to see the benefits of starting at the community college level and the ease of transferring to a university. Community colleges with strong transfer agreements have a major advantage in recruiting and retaining international students in this regard (Lau et al., 2019).

In a study conducted by Fink, Jenkins, D’Amico, and Giani (2017), the researchers analyzed six high-performing transfer partnerships. According to the results, their analysis resulted in three broad strategies: “a) make transfer a priority, (b) create clear programmatic pathways with aligned high-quality instruction, and (c) provide tailored transfer student advising” (p. 301). In order to create strong partnerships, it is imperative to make transfer a priority by connecting transfer to the mission of the higher education institutions, using available data to make the case to improve transfer partnerships, and investing in resources. In order to create clear programmatic pathways, higher education institutions need to collaborate to clarify

the pathway, prepare students for success in upper-level coursework, and regularly update and improve program maps. Finally, in order to provide tailored transfer student advising, the higher education institutions must prioritize community college and university advising practices (Fink et al., 2017).

Implications and Discussion

According to Schulte and Choudaha (2014), with the increase of international student enrollment came unforeseen student integration issues since many institutions, particularly community colleges, were unprepared to meet the needs of this student population. As a result, unsatisfactory experiences have led many international students to consider leaving the higher education institution before completing their studies, creating retention implications for the higher education institution. Nevertheless, international students help globalize the campuses of their chosen institutions (Wit, 2012). Therefore, in order to strengthen international efforts at community colleges across the U.S., it is important to tend to the needs and expectations of this student population. This, in sum, will also result in an increased understanding by decision makers at higher education institutions across international boundaries.

As such, understanding the factors that encourage international students to enroll in a particular higher education institution should be important to decision makers at these institutions. If not already achieved, the purpose, values, and goals set forth by international students must be revisited before moving forward with the international student recruitment process (Wit, 2012). After revisiting these segments, effective strategies can be set in place to ensure that both the international and domestic community on campus benefit equally (Wit, 2012). After all, international students have proven to add greatly to the U.S.'s society as a whole (Jennings, 2017). Yet, it is important to keep in mind that “there is no magic formula that

guarantees success; each college has its own unique strengths and weaknesses. The best programs, however, are usually created by an autonomous international program unit with enough independence, resources, support, and protection granted by college leadership to have a chance at being successful” (Jennings, 2017, p. 70).

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

To increase international student enrollment, higher education institutions must distinguish themselves to attract and retain international students from around the world (Daily et al., 2010; Maringe, 2006). Accordingly, community colleges across the U.S. must do the same to get international students through their doors and on with their education at their institutions. In order to identify the specific roles the community colleges in the U.S. play in recruiting, retaining, and transferring international students, the following research question was formulated to help explain the efforts implemented by the institutions: How are international student recruitment, retention and transfer efforts currently being implemented by top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S.?

Though some community colleges have developed an international student recruitment plan, many other factors are to credit for the international student enrollment fluctuations in recent years (Viggiano et al., 2018). The literature review did expose the significant role international student recruitment and retention efforts play at U.S. higher education institutions. Additionally, it showed the factors international students consider when choosing to enroll at a particular higher education institution. However, the research on the recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts carried on by community colleges across the U.S. is minimal.

Research Method and Design

In order to identify the existing efforts that the community colleges across the U.S. perform, a qualitative case study design was conducted. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research “further expands on the data analysis steps and the methods used for presenting the data, interpreting it, validating it, and indicating the potential outcomes of the study” (p. 184). The main reason for conducting a qualitative case study design was to provide a

more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the research problem. The idea behind this design was to learn about the issue from the decision makers at these institutions to obtain the information by addressing the research. This research design helped analyze the data to identify how top community colleges hosting international students in the U.S. are recruiting, retaining, and transferring this student population.

According to Yin (2018),

every type of empirical research study has an implicit, if not explicit, research design. A research design is *a logical plan for getting from here to there*, where *here* may be defined as the set of questions to be addressed, and *there* is some set of conclusions about these questions. Between *here* and *there* may be found a number of major steps, including the collection and analysis of relevant data. (p. 26)

The goal in conducting a case study is to collect, present, and evaluate the data, objectively. In other words, a research design is a ‘blueprint’ for the research. Through this research design, the researcher was able to approach the phenomena through the participants’ perspectives. In order to conduct a stronger case study and to maintain a case study’s focus, the researcher conducted a single-case study research design. This required careful investigation to “minimize the chances of misrepresentation and to maximize the access needed to collect the case study evidence” (Yin, 2018, p. 51).

The unique demand to conduct case study research resulted from the longing to understand intricate social phenomena. Overall, case study research recognizes the need to focus in-depth and to maintain a holistic and practical perspective on the case (Yin, 2018). Research methods can be utilized for three purposes – descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory case studies. Understanding when to use a particular method depends on three factors: the way that

the research question is presented, the control a researcher has over events, and the degree of focus on modern events in comparison to past events. For the purposes of this research design, the preferred research method was an explanatory case study. Explanatory case studies tend to answer “how” and “why” questions. These types of questions lead the researcher to the use of a case study research method since such questions deal with the tracing of operational developments over time (Yin, 2018).

According to Yin (2018), the definition of a case study is twofold. The first part of the definition covers the scope of the case study: a case study “is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2018, p. 15). The second part of the definition covers the features of the case study: a case study “copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points and as one result benefit from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide design, data collection, and analysis” (Yin, 2018, p. 15).

Overall, conducting a case study research design was ideal since it was the researcher’s desire to study some contemporary event and work with data that still has not been manipulated (Yin, 2018). Case studies rely heavily on direct observations and interviews. The observations are directed toward the events being studied and interviews are conducted on the people that are involved in the events. For the purposes of this study, the researcher worked exclusively with evidence gained from the interviews.

Settings and Participants

The settings and the participants were purposefully selected for the proposed study. According to Maxwell (2013), in purposeful selection, the participants and the setting were

deliberately selected to provide relevant information regarding the research question: How are international student recruitment, retention and transfer efforts currently being implemented by top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S? This study focused on four distinct community college systems and one university located across four states in the U.S. The community colleges within these systems selected for the study have been classified as national competitors that have shared similarities to include international student enrollment numbers. All community colleges are in the top 20 U.S. community colleges hosting international students. The university selected for the study has over 700 international students enrolled, representing approximately 90 countries worldwide. The university was selected to be a part of the study to learn how prepared international students were when they transferred over from a community college. The higher education institutions that participated in the study include Belle Haven Community College (BHCC) in Washington, Norfolk Community College (NCC) in California, Bee Lane Community College (BLCC) in California, Painter Community College (PCC) in Washington, Sunnyside Community College (SCC) in Texas, Eastville Community College (ECC) in Virginia, and Smithbeach University (SU) in Virginia. The community colleges represent four distinct community college systems: Boston Community College System (BCCS), Melfa Community College System (MCCS), Ames Farm Community College System (AFCCS), and Doughty Community College System (DCCS).

A total of 15 decision makers were interviewed on a one-on-one basis in fall 2019 and spring 2020. The list of participants can be found in Table 1. The researcher conducted 15 45-minute, semi-structured, open-ended question interviews intended to gather opinions and views from the participants. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Once completed, the transcriptions were checked by the participants to ensure accuracy in the transcriptions.

Table 1

Participants and Settings by Pseudonym

<u>Name / Gender</u>	<u>Site</u>	<u>Community College System/ University</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Years in Higher Education</u>	<u>Years at Current Higher Education Institution</u>	<u>Years in Current Position</u>	<u>Years Associated with Int'l Student Services</u>	<u>Highest Degree Earned</u>
<u>Shawn (M)</u>	<u>BHCC</u>	<u>BCCS</u>	<u>WA</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>Master's</u>
<u>John (M)</u>	<u>BHCC</u>	<u>BCCS</u>	<u>WA</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>Master's</u>
<u>Paula (F)</u>	<u>PCC</u>	<u>BCCS</u>	<u>WA</u>	<u>34</u>	<u>7.5</u>	<u>7.5</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>Bachelor's</u>
<u>Stacy (F)</u>	<u>PCC</u>	<u>BCCS</u>	<u>WA</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>34</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>Bachelor's</u>
<u>Rose (F)</u>	<u>NCC</u>	<u>MCCS</u>	<u>CA</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>Master's</u>
<u>Sara (F)</u>	<u>NCC</u>	<u>MCCS</u>	<u>CA</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>Master's</u>
<u>Charles (M)</u>	<u>BLCC</u>	<u>MCCS</u>	<u>CA</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>Bachelor's</u>
<u>Erick (M)</u>	<u>SCC</u>	<u>AFCCS</u>	<u>TX</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>Master's</u>
<u>Amanda (F)</u>	<u>ECC</u>	<u>DCCS</u>	<u>VA</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8.5</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>Master's</u>
<u>Silvia (F)</u>	<u>ECC</u>	<u>DCCS</u>	<u>VA</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>Doctoral</u>
<u>Kristen (F)</u>	<u>ECC</u>	<u>DCCS</u>	<u>VA</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>Doctoral</u>

Table 1 (continued)

<u>David</u> (M)	<u>SU</u>	<u>SBU</u>	<u>VA</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>Bachelor's</u>
<u>Janet</u> (F)	<u>SU</u>	<u>SBU</u>	<u>VA</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>Bachelor's</u>
<u>Raul</u> (M)	<u>SU</u>	<u>SBU</u>	<u>VA</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>Master's</u>
<u>Clara</u> (F)	<u>SU</u>	<u>SBU</u>	<u>VA</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>Master's</u>

Data Collection

Each higher education institution was contacted by email to identify the appropriate decision makers that oversee the functions of international student recruitment, retention, and transfer processes. The selection of the participants was based on the participants' expertise with international student services and enrollment. Once the participants were identified, the researcher contacted them via email with an explanation of the study's purpose and to determine their willingness to participate in the study (Appendix A). After committing to the study, the participants received a follow-up email outlining the material that would be discussed during the interview. Additionally, the participants received an informed consent form to review prior to the interview.

In order to be consistent throughout the interviews, a protocol was established for the interview process (Appendix B). The process included conducting the interviews and taking detailed handwritten notes. Prior to the interviews being conducted, the participants received the consent form (Appendix C) and a demographic questionnaire (Appendix D) via email.

The purpose of the demographic questionnaire was to gather information to include the participants' experience working in higher education, years at current higher education

institution, years in current position, years associated with international student services, and highest degree earned (Table 1).

Interviews

Once the researcher collected the demographic questionnaires from each participant and obtained copies of the signed informed consent form, data was collected via a series of recorded Zoom or phone interviews with each participant. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, depending on how much information the participant wished to share. The researcher conducted 15 semi-structured, open-ended question interviews intended to gather opinions and views from the participants. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. Additionally, the researcher took handwritten notes to highlight key points made by each participant. After the data was collected, the names of participants, higher education institutions, community college systems were removed and the data was analyzed. Finally, the transcriptions were checked by the participants to ensure accuracy in the transcriptions.

The interview questions were asked to find out how the participants viewed the impact international students have at the community college, surrounding community, and across the country. Furthermore, the interview questions were asked to find out the strategies that the participants viewed as being the most effective in recruiting, retaining, and assisting international students with the transfer process. Also, the interview questions were asked to find out the challenges the participants experienced in recruiting, retaining, and assisting international students with the transfer process. Finally, the interview questions were asked to inquire about the type of services needed for international students at the community college to be successful.

Role of the Researcher

The thought for this study came from the researcher's own professional experiences as a higher education administrator working directly with the international student population at a large university. During the time in this role, the researcher realized the impact that this student population had on the institution and the surrounding community. The researcher's interest in focusing on the international students at the community college level came about from the researcher's current employment at a large urban community college in Virginia. As such, the researcher was interested in conducting a qualitative study to learn how community colleges recruit, retain, and transfer international students.

According to Creswell (2014), "qualitative research is interpretative research; the inquirer is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants" (p. 187). In other words, including statements about the researcher's past experiences and biases with the research topic, the participants, or the site allowed the reader to understand the connection that exists between the researcher and the study. Self-reflection and bias identification done at the onset of the study by the researcher created an honest narrative and data collection process.

In order to conduct an effective data collection process, the researcher adhered to the following procedures: having a firm grasp of the issues being studied and conducting research ethically. It was imperative for the researcher to ask good questions, be a good listener, and stay adaptive (Yin, 2018). In order to have a firm grasp of the issues, the researcher aimed to interpret the data quickly with the purposes of understanding if the information is conflicting or lacking evidence. To conduct research ethically, the researcher remained honest, responsible, and avoided plagiarism or falsifying any data. Additionally, the researcher aimed for professional

competency to include knowledge of relevant research, awareness of personal limitations, credibility, and accuracy.

Also, the researcher adhered to asking good questions for the purpose of creating a rich dialogue with evidence, an activity that encompasses pondering the possibilities gained from deep familiarity with some aspect of the world, systematizing those ideas in relation to kinds of information one might gather, checking the ideas in the light of that information, dealing with the inevitable discrepancies between what was expected and what was found by rethinking the possibilities of getting more data, and so on” (Yin, 2018, p. 83).

To be a good listener, the researcher attempted to follow and understand what was said and meant by the participants. Qualitative “researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation, and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). As such, the researcher remained adaptive in hopes of discovering an informative link of thinking.

Protecting Human Subjects

As part of conducting research ethically, the researcher provided all participants an informed consent form to review and sign. The informed consent included information about their rights as participants, the purpose of the study and the procedures, confidentiality criterion, possible risks associated with the study, and expected benefits from participating in the study (Creswell, 2014). In order to gain access to the participants, the researcher sought and received permission to conduct this research from the Old Dominion University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Additionally, the researcher took reasonable steps to keep private information, such as

questionnaires and interviews, confidential. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of the participants and their higher education institutions. All data is being kept in locked file cabinets and password-protected server space for at least five years. The data will only be made accessible to the researcher and the IRB. Once the five years have passed, all data will be destroyed.

Interview Protocol

In order for the case study to be efficient, a case study protocol was utilized by the researcher. The researcher used an interview protocol to ensure that the same basic line of questioning was followed with each participant. The interview protocol directed the interviewee to answer the research question and to prompt useful data that added significantly to the study. The questions included an ice-breaker question, sub questions, probes for the sub questions, and a concluding general question to allow the participant to share any remaining remarks or opinions (Creswell, 2014). The following components were included in the interview protocol: a heading, questions, and a thank-you statement. The heading included the date, the location, and the names of the interviewer and the participant (Creswell, 2014). The protocol's outline helped determine the expected audience, topics, length of the study, and the extent of the documentation needed to facilitate the collection of the data. However, the researcher attempted to remain flexible with the case study as the plans can change (Yin, 2018).

Validity and Reliability

According to Creswell (2014), "qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects" (p. 201). Consequently, the researcher conducted the following strategies to check for

the validity of the findings: through use of member checking, providing of rich and dense descriptions, and clarifying biases (Creswell, 2014).

The researcher converged diverse sources of information and utilized the data collected to construct themes. Once themes were established, the process was able to add to the study's validity. Member checking was done via email communication with the participants to determine the accuracy of the transcriptions and findings. This process provided an opportunity for the participants to add any updates or changes, if necessary.

Providing rich and dense descriptions of the findings also added to the study's validity. The actual portrayal of the setting, for example, may have transported the participants to the setting and given the conversation a component of shared understanding and realism. Additionally, clarifying biases and presenting contrasting data were fundamental to the study's validity and reliability as it makes a transparent narrative that will resonate well with the audience. The researcher conducted these strategies specifically to create a more realistic and valid account of the study. This was done with the purpose of developing a greater in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2014).

In addition to checking for validity, the researcher checked for the reliability of the findings. The researcher examined transcripts to ensure that the information was transcribed correctly. Furthermore, the researcher was constantly comparing codes to ensure that the meaning of the codes was not shifted in the process of transcription (Creswell, 2014). In case study research design, the researcher attempted to “strive for generalizable findings or lessons learned—that is, analytic generalizations—that go beyond the setting for the specific case or experiment that has been studied. This form of generalization may be based on either (a) corroborating, modifying, rejecting, or otherwise advancing theoretical concepts that you

referenced in designing your case study or (b) new concepts that arose upon the completion of your case study” (Yin, 2018, p. 38). In other words, the researcher generalized from the case study, rather than from the actual case itself.

Data Analysis

After conducting the interviews, the researcher organized the data by transcribing the interviews and analyzing the data collected. In order to strengthen the findings, the researcher conducted the interviews, coded and transcribed the data, analyzed, and collected general ideas from the participants and interpreted the tone of the ideas. The analysis involved taking apart the data, deciphering, and piecing them back together to help explain the depth and trustworthiness of the study. The information extracted was placed into different groups to help reflect upon the varied themes and subthemes. The researcher searched for patterns, concepts, or insights that seemed favorable to the study.

Since qualitative research tends to produce rich and dense data, not all of the information was used in the study. Once the information provided was analyzed, the data was categorized based on codes emerging from the data analysis. The coding process helped generate descriptions and themes. The description involved specifying information about the participants, the setting, and/or events. The themes were also generated by the codes, emerging into three separate themes for the qualitative study. These themes helped produce the major findings for the study. According to Creswell (2014), “sophisticated qualitative studies go beyond description and theme identification and form complex theme connections” (p. 200). This is important because theme connections helped validate the study.

In order to guide the researcher through the analysis, he/she worked the data from the “ground up.” Rather than work with any theoretical propositions, the researcher poured through

the data collected. According to Yin (2018), “such an insight can become the start of an analytic path, leading you further into your data and possibly suggesting additional relationships” (p. 169). This inductive strategy produced significant benefits since the research involved collecting qualitative data. This is important because

the data may cover the behavior and events that your case study is trying to explain – typically, the ‘outcomes’ in an evaluative case study. Second the data may be related to an embedded unit of analysis within your broader case study (Yin, 2018, p. 169)

and this can lead the data to innovative concepts.

After analyzing the data, the researcher interpreted the results and any personal interpretations established by the researcher. Additionally, interpretations derived from comparing the findings in the literature or theories created an opportunity for the researcher to ask additional questions. Overall, these interpretations “can take many forms; be adapted for different types of designs; and be flexible to convey personal, research-based, and action meanings” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). Through interpretations, the researcher was able to take a holistic approach in answering the research question.

CHAPTER IV RESULTS OF FINDINGS

Introduction

Higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, have often struggled with funding to include the lack of state allocations, reductions of federal assistance, and budget decreases (Viggiano et al., 2018). Now, a new challenge has emerged in the form of student enrollment. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2019), the enrollment of domestic and international students at community colleges across the country has steadily declined since 2011. As such, community colleges have been searching for alternative sources of revenue to compensate for the decrease in enrollment, budget cuts, and state and federal support. As an alternative source of revenue, community colleges across the country are focusing their efforts on the overall enrollment of international students at their institutions (Anayah & Kuk, 2015). Nevertheless, an increase in international student enrollment at community colleges may create challenges for these institutions if they are not prepared to meet the needs of this student population. As a result, the lack of preparation may pose a threat to international student retention and transfer success (Schulte & Choudaha, 2014).

In order to provide a better understanding of the type of preparation needed to support this student population and meet the needs of the institution, the researcher conducted a research study focusing on the recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts conducted by top community colleges hosting international students across the country. Overall, the data collected provided an integrated point of view that tackled the decision-making process that decision makers have when establishing organizational changes and improvements to their international student services and support. These changes were expected to shape international initiatives and strategic planning at global institutions.

Furthermore, the data collected significantly contributed to the limited research that currently exists involving international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts at the community college level. Contributions included enhancing and strengthening the education efforts of U.S. higher education institutions, specifically community colleges to produce an increase in understanding of internationalization across national boundaries and improve finances in times of severe budget constraints.

Research Question

The remaining part of this chapter will discuss the study's findings based on the following research question: How are international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts currently being implemented by top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S.?

In order to fully answer the research question, it is imperative to understand the recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts implemented by top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S. and how these efforts lead to the identification of themes that result in the development of the strategies.

Recruitment, Retention, and Transfer Efforts

According to research, some community colleges are unprepared to meet the needs of this student population (Choudaha, 2014). Recruitment and retention rates for international students are significantly lower at community colleges and, as such, challenges in retention lead to challenges in transferring international student to universities (Barnett, 2010).

Nevertheless, and as it will become evident from the data collected from this study, community college can prepare to meet the needs of international students by implementing a clear and consistent layout from recruitment, to retention, to transfer. The layout identified for

recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts fit together in a linear model, as shown in Figure 1, and discussed in detail in the following section.

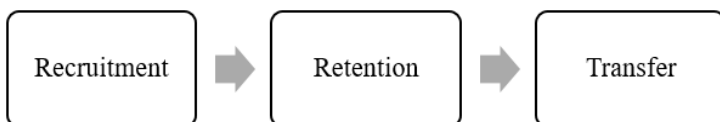


Figure 1. Recruitment to Retention to Transfer

Recruitment Efforts

The recruitment of international students has become increasingly important for U.S. higher education institutions, particularly community colleges. The interest to enroll this student population varies between higher education institutions; however, the recruitment of international students has created a fierce competition between higher education institutions in the U.S. and institutions abroad. Therefore, in order to distinguish themselves from other types of institutions, community colleges must identify and implement effective recruitment strategies to attract international students to their campuses.

According to research, the recruitment of international students is becoming increasingly important due to a decline in overall student enrollment, budget decreases, and state and federal reductions (Abella, 2015). Similarly, to domestic students, international students have a surplus of choices when it comes to choosing to enroll at a particular higher education institution (Viggiano et al., 2018). Therefore, higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, will have to identify and implement effective international student recruitment efforts to attract international students to their campuses.

To ensure that community colleges are being competitive in their recruitment efforts, many institutions have implemented several strategies with the purposes of recruiting more

international students to their campuses, all the while attempting to keep recruitment costs low for the institution. These strategies are interconnected with the following themes identified from the study: strong partnerships, individualized support, and personalized services.

Some of the top strategies conducted by the community colleges represented in this study to recruit international students include relying on the use agents, parental involvement, university collaborations, institutional support, and personalized services. More in-depth information will be provided on these strategies later in the chapter.

Retention Efforts

U.S. higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, dedicate a considerable amount of time, resources, and personnel to recruit international students. However, their job is not finished after successfully enrolling international students to their institutions. According to Janet, “it’s one thing to get the student there but if they don’t feel welcomed or appreciated and celebrated, then ultimately, they’re going to leave”. Amanda shared,

A lot of students, of course, don't finish their full associate's degree, whether it's domestic or international, um, because they kind of get in the system and they want to get onto university faster. And in some ways that's, you know, that's fine there, that's their choice. Um, but in other ways there's more advantage, you know, to kind of stay on and transfer and use those guaranteed transfer agreements.

Furthermore, John shared that upon arrival; most international students have the same concerns: “Where am I living? How can I contact my family? Where am I going to get my groceries? Where am I going to do my banking” and so forth. He stated that once students have answers to these basic-needs questions, “students are going to be more receptive to learning the mechanisms in place for choosing the degree, picking out classes for that degree” and

understanding the regulations they must follow to maintain an active status in this country. Additionally, students at John's community college have the option of enrolling in a college skills course, where students learn to properly navigate the library, their student account, and several other resources available to them on and off campus to ensure proper acclimation.

After all, acclimating to a new environment can be overwhelming for even the most seasoned traveler. John commented that international students experience "initial highs of coming to a new country ... and then there's inevitably a period of, um, backlash with struggles with culture and struggles with being away from what is familiar." In addition to having to acclimate to a new environment, international students also have to acclimate to a new educational system, said Erick. Charles mentioned that recruitment, retention, and transfer could be a problem when students are introduced to a new educational curriculum without the proper support set in place needed to guide this student population.

As such, these institutions must work diligently in retaining these students once they arrive on campus. Some of the top strategies conducted by the community colleges represented in this study to retain international students include relying on parental involvement, institutional support, academic support, peer support, opportunities for involvement, and early planning initiatives.

Transfer Efforts

In addition to retaining their international students, community colleges must also focus their attention on the transfer efforts set in place by the institutions to ensure a smooth transition for this student population. Community colleges must work diligently in supporting the transfer process for international students to ensure that they retain this student population by providing transfer options that are suitable for international students studying in the U.S. The community

colleges being represented by the participants in this study are currently implementing the following strategies to assist with the transfer efforts: university collaborations, institutional support, academic support, personalized services, and early planning initiatives.

In sum, community colleges must be prepared to handle the recruitment, retention, and the transfer process by developing a clear and consistent layout from recruitment, to retention, to transfer of this student population. Overall, community colleges will have to implement effective strategies to recruit, retain, and transfer international students (Wit, 2012). However, and in order to develop a clear and consistent layout, community colleges must understand the importance of the following themes identified from this study: creating strong partnerships, offering individualized support, and providing clear pathways.

Themes: Strong Partnerships, Individualized Support, and Clear Pathways

As previously mentioned, understanding the strategic importance of recruiting, retaining, and transferring international students at the community college level is imperative for decision makers, especially from academic, cultural, and financial perspectives. To support this statement, the study's findings will be discussed in much more detail in the following sections that represent the top three prominent themes of the study: (1) strong partnerships, (2) individualized support, and (3) clear pathways. These themes surfaced through data analysis and have created a better understanding on how decision makers at the community college level view the importance of recruiting, retaining, and transferring international students. Similarly, the data provided a better understating on how a university views the preparation international students receive at the community college level before they enroll at its institution. In this section, the researcher will discuss how the themes directly address the research question: How are the international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts currently being implemented by

top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S.? Then, the researcher will discuss the interconnection of the three themes.

Theme 1: Strong Partnerships

The first theme, strong partnerships, demonstrates how important the use of agents, parental involvement, and university collaborations are for the recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts implemented by the community colleges represented in this study.

The Use of Agents: If You Do It Well, It's Worthwhile. Many of the participants in this study referenced the use of agents as a popular recruitment strategy for their community colleges. Both Rose, from NCC, and John, from BCCS, mentioned that their community colleges use agents as part of their recruitment strategy to enroll more international students to their institutions. Rose stated that the agents' main role is to help international students navigate the application process. Additionally, John shared that "there's comfort in having someone who speaks your language to be able to help you through the process." However, he stated that his community college tries to "be a little bit picky about the agents we partner with" to ensure proper and ethical assistance in the recruitment of potential international students. Erick, from SCC, has in the past, taken up the role of agent for his institution due to the lack of adequate agent partnerships. Consequently, Charles, from BLCC, mentioned,

In fact, one of the things that we look for when it comes to agent partnerships is to ensure that they have a counseling model. You know, so we do a lot of vetting. We ask other institutions on their experience working with them. We do site visits, you know, to ensure, you know, to see what kind of operations that they're doing. Um, but oftentimes if I am pretty confident that they do have a counseling model where they're presenting all options to students and not the options that we have a commission with an institution

with, then those are the things that I'm looking for.

Furthermore, Sara, from NCC, believes that the use of agents is “financially feasible.” She shared that agents are typically “familiar with the school system there and the, um, the culture, then they’re able to do a better job of discussing [with] students and their families’ questions with them.” She commented that the “most successful ways we’ve recruited [international students] is by making connections with agents in other countries, who then market the program.” The way that her community college handles agents is via an incentive program. In other words, the more students that the agent recruits for the institution, the greater the pay for the agent. In sum, “if you do it well, it’s worthwhile,” said Janet, from SU.

Parental Involvement: Works Across the Board. In addition to use of agents, Stacey, from PCC, commented on the importance of involving the parents in the recruitment and retention process. Paula, from PCC, agreed on the importance of involving parents in the process by stating that, “what I think works across the board is being able to meet one-on-one with parents, you know, to, to be able to have that contact.”

As a result, and in order to ensure that parents are supportive of their children attending a specific higher education institution, Stacey shared the importance of providing prompt and adequate information so that parents can feel at ease, knowing that their children will be taken care of and are safe. Stacey shared,

About 10 years ago I started noticing that parents were coming [to orientation] with students. Well, we have nothing for the parents to do at orientation. We have orientation for our new students every three months. And all of a sudden, parents were coming with the students and well, that's awesome, but there wasn't anything there and the parents kept hovering all over the advisers saying, “well, why didn't my kid get that class and

why...? Oh my goodness. So I say, “let's have an orientation for the parents.” So now, for three days, the new students go through the orientation, campus tour, placement test, registration, immigration, advising, all that. I think it all depends. I have a whole day of lecture of how to pay tuition, how the U.S. system works, how students plan for university. So it's an orientation for the parents as well.

Furthermore, Stacey stated that parents are a big influence on the retention of international students because if parents are not comfortable with the higher education institution, they [parents] may switch the student to another institution. She said,

Parents have are a huge influence in the retention of ... in our retention strategies. Because if a parent feels like, my kid is not safe where he or she is or my kid is complaining about A, B or C, I'm going to change my kid. My kid is going to change. You know, the kid may be, the student may be 20 years old, but the parents still have that, you know, influence and, and I don't know, I don't want to say control, but you know, they, they're the ones that, they're the decision makers.

University Collaborations: Straightforward. In addition, to the collaboration with agents and parents, strong partnerships must also be built with universities. Shawn, from BHCC, shared that at his community college, relationships are purposely built with top universities to recruit international students and to provide this student population with good transfer options. In regards to recruitment efforts, some community colleges use these partnerships to their advantages when attempting to attract international students to their institutions. Amanda, from ECC, mentioned,

What I've found, um, just doing international student recruitment overseas is that, you

know, we're not really selling EVCC, right. I mean EVCC is not a name brand. You know, the community college itself is not, you know, the name that we're promoting. It's really the four-year institutions that we're, our students can transfer to, which is the community college approach that we take, not only at EVCC, but I've seen this, you know, time and again at other community colleges throughout the country, you know, there really to be effectively recruiting international students, they are creating partnerships with big name, uh, four year institutions and they're using those names and showing proof of transfer of students that have transferred from their community college to these large, you know, big name institutions.

Furthermore, Amanda mentioned that it is important for community colleges to create partnerships with out-of-state universities as well, in order to increase the options of “international students who often are more mobile and willing to go across the country.” As such, international students will be interested in enrolling at the community college if they know that the possibility of transferring to a top university of their choice may be an option.

Fortunately, the number of universities approaching community colleges for partnerships is increasing, said Amanda. David, from SU, explained that universities are more interested in recruiting international students transferring from community colleges because the cost is much lower than traveling abroad to recruit international students. Additionally, the interest universities have in partnering with community colleges is also a direct result of having a large visa-holding international student population already in the country, and in most cases, at a higher English proficiency rate than most students interested in enrolling at their institution from outside of the country, said Clara, from SU.

California universities, for example, have an interest in enrolling community college international students at their higher education institutions and, as such, have a unique layout of their transfer requirements. According to Charles, from BLCC, “it is so straightforward when it comes to transfer that you cannot mess it up.” The state has a system that clearly articulates the transfer requirements and courses needed for international students to seamlessly transfer to their universities from within the state and from other states, specifically Washington. Charles believes that California’s system is a leader “when it comes to transfer articulation for the students that I don’t see any issues why students wouldn’t be able to understand the transfer process.” In general, California is strategic with how it handles the international student transfer process. John, from BHCC, mentioned, “If community colleges are able to establish a connection with a prestigious university in the United States, or at least a university that is perceived to be prestigious, um, then that’s a recruitment strategy that has benefitted our campus.”

Many of the participants agreed with the importance of implementing this strategy as international students seriously consider their transfer goals before they even decide to enroll at a particular community college. For example, if an international student is hoping to enroll at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) for his/her bachelor’s degree, the student may first seek enrollment at a community college that has some type of partnership with the university for a smoother transition.

Finally, in an attempt to develop more partnerships with specific universities, some community colleges represented by the participants in this study organize university transfer fairs to which they invite universities from across the country. Paula’s institution hosts approximately 85 universities at its transfer fair from across the country, Canada, and some parts of Europe. Stacey, from PCC, proudly shared that her institution’s transfer fair is one of the best attended by

international students in the country and it is a direct result of the preparation that takes place weeks before the fair. After all, decision makers are aware that the ultimate goal of most international students is to transfer to a university so they work diligently to ensure a smooth transition. Paula made it clear that the number of universities that participate at the fair is due to space availability only and not because there is a lack of partnership interest. She shared,

So students are encouraged to meet with them [transfer fair representatives], their, you know, their first quarter, even though they're not graduating for two years, you know, so that they can find out, "Hey, is this really the university I want to go to?" Because many students can only name five universities in our country and we have over 4,000, you know, so we tell them "one, go talk to the rep, find out what the school is like, find out if they even have your major. Cause a lot of students assume, even Americans, that every university has every single major. So, if I'm a robotics major, not every university has robotics. So I need to find out what do I need to do to prepare to apply here. So we have that and students get extra credit from the different faculty on campus if they participate in the event. Plus it allows them to begin to develop a relationship with reps from institutions that they're interested in.

Amanda acknowledges that while the transfer fair serves as an opportunity for international students to connect with university representatives, it is the combination of meeting with the university recruiter and admissions representative that better support the international student population with the transfer process:

Although we do, ECC does run a large scale transfer fair, uh, we've decided that we will start creating our own international student transfer fairs. Um. This will be the third year we've done that, um, where we're looking at universities that are of course ones that we

have transfer agreements with and, but we're also opening up to other schools, um, that we do not have transfer agreements with, but are offering a transfer scholarships for international students or they're, you know, fairly large name institution that would be, you know, our students would be attracted to going to. And we're working directly with the international recruitment, um, representatives or admissions officers, you know, so, you know, these representatives, you know, know how to answer the questions for international students, you know, when it comes to visa and transfer. And, um, so it's, you know, specifically for them. And we've seen in the last several years an increase of, uh, uh, four year institutions reaching out to us, wanting to come and re, you know, recruit our students specifically. Um. So this year I think we'll have about 27 institutions coming from like 13 different states.

In sum, by developing strong partnerships with agents, parents, and universities, community colleges will have a much easier time recruiting, retaining, and transferring this student population.

Theme 2: Individualized Support

According to the data collected from this research design, community colleges must also provide individualized support for international students to support the recruitment, retention, and transfer of this student population. Individualized support is offered in the form of institutional support, academic support, and peer support.

Institutional Support: Very Powerful and Works Well with Students. According to John, from BHCC, another good recruitment strategy that has benefitted his community college is the collegiate experience the institution is able to provide their international student population. Charles, from BLCC, noted the importance of “focusing my recruitment efforts to

talk about the student experience here and that's been a lot more effective, um, than simply just talking about facts, statistics, and the generic things that people think a community college is all about." For example, Charles shared that his community college offers international students "a full-fledged global engagement center" that provides extensive international student support. John added that with the proper institutional support, international students will realize how much college personnel care about their goals, which is "very powerful and works well with students."

The level of support international students experience on college campuses also directly affects the institution's retention rates for this student population. As a result, it is imperative for higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, to provide international students with the appropriate resources to be successful. Nonetheless, effective retention with a focus on support requires the cooperation of several key personnel on campus. As such, many participants shared their experiences with having a "one-stop shop" for international students on their campuses. In other words, some of the community colleges represented in this study have created a space where international students can find any information they may be seeking in regard to immigration services, academic counseling, financial aid, and campus involvement. Sara, from NCC, believes that,

Retention is largely connected to, um, uh, making connections on campus with the faculty and with the peers, with their peers. Um, our office tries to be a one-stop shop so that it's easy for students to get that information so that they're not going from place to place, to place, to place looking for information. A student can come and talk to me any point. And say, you know, this is what I'm thinking about and I can talk to them for, you know, 30 minutes, an hour about what their options are.

Rose, from NCC, described the space further by adding that it is a place where students can receive immigration-related advising and academic advising; to ensure international students are “working towards their goals and then also evaluating what those goals are if they’ve changed”. Charles, from BLCC, added,

But in terms of overall student retention, I think for our campus to be very successful and retaining international students is really that specialized international student support.

Now with the F-1 Visa, there is a lot of services that we need to provide to international students, uh, such as international student orientation, advising them on their F-1 Visa regulations. And through that we are able to stay well connected with our international students throughout their entire enrollment. Um, so having that in place of strong international student services program has been really helpful in retaining um, international students.

In addition to the support mentioned above, institutional support also comes in the form of transfer centers. For example, John’s community college created a transfer center specifically to answer transfer application questions and review financial aid opportunities (i.e., scholarships, work-study programs). Due to the ratio between international student and transfer advisor, assisting all international students with all of their transfer questions at a single appointment can become a challenge. As such, having a transfer center fills any gaps that exist since students have the opportunity to continue the conversation and obtain more detailed answers from the experts at the transfer center. After all, David, from SU, mentioned that people who work with this student population do so because they have a real passion for assisting international students transfer into their institutions and be successful.

Academic Support: It’s Everything. In addition to receiving institutional support,

international students need academic support to ensure the retention of this student population.

According to Rose, from NCC,

Offering strong academic support. So I think, um, I think it's everything. I think it's the onset. Having students go through orientation, giving them, um, education about higher education systems in the United States, helping them understand like managing their expectations of what they can do and what they can accomplish at the college for, specifically for community college, helping them understand, um, what their options are, um, and then making contact with them throughout their time while they're here to ensure that they are on the right track to ensure that they are, you know, working towards their goals and then also evaluating what those goals are if they've changed, if they haven't changed.

Furthermore, Paula, from PCC, highlighted the importance of building a relationship with all students, particularly international students in order to ensure that this student population is aware of the value they hold at the community college. According to Paula,

Relationships can be built from simply reaching out to the students, taking the initiative to, um, help them to adjust to their new home, their new country, their new environment, their new educational system. And being able to provide the comprehensive support services that students, all students, need.

Furthermore, academic support also assists in the transfer of international students. Academic support comes in the form of transfer advising. As such, meeting with a transfer advisor will provide international students the option of reviewing their transfer options and creating a transfer plan. Amanda, from ECC, explained,

Each of our advisors has a cohort of students now that are their students. So it's their responsibility to be in communication, regular communication with that group of students, which gives a little bit level of, you know, of touch, I guess in personalization, um, to students.

Sara, from NCC, mentioned,

So having the ability at some point to sit down with a counselor who is going to talk to the students about exactly what they have to do in order to transfer. Um, that doesn't necessarily have to be the first thing that happens, but it is so necessary. I see so few students who are able to manage this whole system on their own.

According to Shawn, from BHCC, transfer advisors understand the specifics of many universities and the requirements needed for international students to successfully transfer to these institutions. While it may take extra time in reviewing every requirement and iteration of the process, the main role of the transfer advisors is to ensure that international students have the necessary tools to explore their options and make decisions on their own, even when the advisor is not available to assist, said John, from BHCC. He shared that as university decision makers, transfer advisors are a fundamental part of the international student transfer experience. He explained that international students working closely with transfer advisors at their community college face fewer challenges upon arrival to the university. In addition, John believes that as decision makers at their institutions, transfer advisors must provide international students with adequate and up-to-date information so that international students can make realistic plans in regard to their transfer options. Stacey shared,

Advising is pretty, pretty intense. Students are, have a lot of homework from our advisors, you know, they don't say, "Okay, come back. You'll see me next time." They

give them homework. "Next time you come back, you fill out these three exploratory sheets. What does the admission requirements for these different universities? What is the TOEFL?" You know, they give them homework because it's, it's like applying for a job, you know, you have to prepare.

Peer Support: Significant Influence. Expanding on the idea of providing international students with the adequate institutional and academic support to encourage retention, Sara, from NCC, and Silvia, from ECC, commented on the importance of also providing peer support for the retention of international students. In regard to peer support, Sara stated that her community college has created an ambassador program comprised of seasoned international students on campus. In other words, international students who have been on campus for more than one semester may be ambassadors and help the new international students experience a smooth transition on campus. She explained that the ambassadors are the “ones who recruit new members and interview them and accept them, and then they plan events for international students” to connect with other students, academic departments, and clubs on campus. Silvia mentioned,

Peer support, um, is very important in the retention of our students. When, um, international students are at the college, you know, they need the extra support from students, just like themselves. Peer support can have a significant influence in the success of international students. Also, it helps in their retention.

In sum, by providing international students with strong institutional, academic, and peer support, community colleges will have a much easier time recruiting, retaining, and transferring this student population.

Theme 3: Clear Pathways

According to data collected from this research design, the recruitment, retention, and transfer of international students is most successful when community colleges provide clear pathways for this student population. Clear pathways offer international students personalized services, opportunities for involvement, and early planning initiatives.

Personalized Services: The Key to Our Success in Recruitment. In addition to the use of agents, university collaborations, parental involvement, and institutional support, participants in the study mentioned that providing personalized services is an excellent recruitment strategy when prospective international students or their parents contact the community college. For example, Sara, from NCC, stated, “the key to our success in recruitment is that we are very personalized, hands on when people contact us. So, when people contact us, we work really hard to respond to their email in a timely manner or their phone call in a timely manner.” By receiving personalized services, prospective international students and their parents will be encouraged to learn more about the community college, and possibly even encourage others to look into a particular institution based on their own personal experiences. In other words, a positive experience for one student can also be an effective recruitment tool as it may encourage other students to enroll at a particular community college. According to John, from BHCC,

There’s nothing more powerful as the word from an international student who has already studied at your college...relaying their experiences to their peers, to their families. And we hope that, um, if that experience is positive, then that’s a good relationship that we’re creating between the two countries, as well, as just the student and the school.

Furthermore, Charles, from BLCC, stated

I think the most effective strategy, honestly, um, is to really just, it's really word-of-mouth, you know, um, definitely ensuring that we have support services here on campus.

Um, so we have a full-fledged global engagement center for international students and just letting them know that we do provide extensive international student support. I think is really the best strategy. Um, for um, for um, recruiting an international students for community college.

Shawn, from BHCC, believes that “providing a good environment and a good education service” will encourage international students to spread the word and encourage other students to apply to the same institution. Kristen, from ECC, commented that many times, relatives study at the same institution due to the positive experiences lived by the relative that arrived first on campus. For example, if an international student had a positive experience at a particular community college, he/she may encourage a younger sibling to enroll at the same institution solely based on how he/she perceived their experience on campus. Rose, from NCC, stated,

Because I think that, um, word-of-mouth is probably one of the biggest reasons why students will choose to go where they go. So, um, having a strong foundation, having a strong program at the college, having a strong support system for the student and, um, focusing on their success at the college will help continue to have more students coming in from other countries because that's how it's, a lot of times it's students been told by someone, you know, a family member, a friend, or you know, somebody they share their experiences and then more people will want to come. Um. Because I see a lot, I see that a lot with friends. I see that a lot with siblings, like family members.

Furthermore, Rose spoke about the importance of having international students understand that the transfer process is a personalized and individualized experience. In many cases, international students are under the impression that there is only one right way of transferring; however, the process tends to be very different for most students. For example,

Paula mentioned that at her community college, individualized transfer plans are created for every student, depending on the university they are interested in transferring to, and the discipline the international student chooses. Moreover, international students are encouraged by their transfer advisors to apply to a minimum of three to five institutions in order to have options in case their first or second option do not work out for the international student. She shared,

We create individualized transfer plans for students based on the universities they're interested in, based on the disciplines that they're interested in. So that, you know, students, um, don't waste their time and energy and money taking courses, um, that they don't need because every instant, every university is different. Even if I'm a mechanical engineering major, you know, and I'm applying to five universities, they can be slightly different in their entrance requirements. And so it's our responsibility to help teach students about the education system and to create a plan with them and to explain to them the system so that when they do transfer and they do get to university, they're going to know exactly what they need to do, you know. They're going to not need as much help.

Opportunities for Involvement: Helpful. By providing clear pathways, international students are made aware of the various opportunities for involvement on and off campus. Shawn, from BHCC, commented on the importance of creating a dynamic campus so that international students have a good experience on campus and in their classrooms. Additionally, he mentioned that the retention of this student population is a direct result of providing “a lot of opportunities for students to get involved with campus organizations, college-level organizations.” These meaningful interactions provide international and domestic students alike, opportunities for professional and personal growth. Raul, a university decision maker from SU, mentioned that international students transferring from community colleges have an easier time participating in

on-campus activities than international students coming from outside the country. He believes this is due to the exposure international transfer students have had with meaningful interactions.

Opportunities for involvement also aid in creating a more inclusive and culturally aware environment for students, faculty, and staff on campus. Furthermore, he added,

Students get involved with tutoring, volunteering, um, all the stuff like that, but it's, you know, helpful for college applications, transfer applications, but it's also kind of helpful for acclimation to higher education in America. Um, which I think is really important, but we don't always think of it as a, it's a real. Um, is it an explicit part of the student's work process.

In addition, other opportunities for involvement include hands-on training through the Optional Practical Training (OPT). While this is an excellent opportunity for this student population, many international students are unaware of this option. Amanda, from ECC, discussed the importance of making international students aware of their options as international students may do one year of OPT after they complete their associate degree at a community college and one year after they complete their bachelor's degree at a university. She stated,

A lot of students don't realize, um, that if they finish an associate's degree, they can take a year off and do a year of OPT, optional practical training, which as long as it's related to their field of study of their degree, they can work, uh, for one year, um, as part of their F-1 Visa. Then they could go on and do finish their bachelor's degree. And then again, that's a second degree. And that's the traditional year when the students do their opt training is after the bachelor's degree. So what we try to, you know, use as maybe a selling point is that they could essentially have two years of OPT you know, if they do their associates degree and then do their bachelor's degree. And of course if they continue, um, they can

have additional years.

In other words, the OPT experience can be extended if international students decide to start at the community college and then transfer to a university.

Early Planning Initiatives: It's Like Applying for a Job. Many of the participants in this study credited early planning to their success in retaining international students to their campuses and assisting with the transfer process. Stacey, from PCC, shared that “weekly workshops on how to successfully transfer to a university, how to choose a major, how to put your portfolio together, how to apply to STEM programs” are available for international students to be successful. For example, she stated that her institution has mandatory advising sessions for all new international students to begin planning the transfer process as soon as possible. After all, most of the international students enrolled at community colleges are interested in transferring, to which Erick, from SCC, agreed. Erick mentioned that most of his recent interactions with international students have revolved around the transfer process. As such, Erick works closely with university recruiters to ensure a smooth transition for his students. He also begins assisting the international students with developing transfer options early in the process.

According to Stacey, early planning is very intense because “it’s like applying for a job” Early planning consists of international students attending advising sessions where they are expected to prepare for the meeting and complete assignments. Such assignments include researching admission requirements for various universities, outlining what credits will successfully transfer, and understanding the application and financial packages.

Furthermore, early planning may consist of providing international students an opportunity to take a course to help them prepare for the transfer process. Sara, from NCC, described this course as a half-unit class where international students receive additional help in

researching different universities, admission requirements, and transfer agreements.

Additionally, Rose, from NCC, mentioned that throughout this course, international students receive assistance with reviewing timelines, and in some instances, reviewing the differences between public and private universities. Overall, early planning is a huge part in the success of the transfer process for international students among most of the community colleges represented by the participants of this study.

Furthermore, Kristen, from ECC, shared the importance of early planning to help international students plan their next move:

And so we try to help students understand the transfer process so that they have a better idea and they don't feel lost when it comes to the process of how to transfer out. Um. I used to teach the student development course and so in that course we try to help students understand that it, it's to their benefit to start thinking about transfer when they arrived so they're not wasting money and time in taking classes that are not necessary. So if you have an idea about where you want to go, start talking to your academic counselors, your faculty advisors so that you stay on track and that you're not here for, you know, extra time.

Raul, a university decision maker from SU, echoed Kristen's statement by mentioning the importance of making international students aware of their transfer options early in the process to ensure a smooth transition into a university. He also mentioned the significance that proper transfer planning has on the international transfer student's experience pursuing a bachelor's degree. Clara, another university decision maker from SU, explained that by receiving proper transfer planning, international transfer students save more money and avoid wasting time on taking classes that are not necessary for their desired degree once enrolled at the university.

David, also a university decision maker from SU, noted that most international students do not face severe challenges with their transfer into the university. This is partly due to the time they have had to adjust to an American academic environment as community college students and the opportunity to plan for the transfer with ample time.

In sum, by providing international students with personalized services, opportunities for involvement, and early planning initiatives, community colleges will have a much easier time recruiting, retaining, and transferring this student population.

Interconnection of Themes

As a result, from the data analysis, three major themes emerged from the study that interconnect and build upon one another. The interconnection of themes can be found in Figure 2. The first theme, strong partnerships, demonstrates how important the use of agents, parental involvement, and university collaborations are for the recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts implemented by the community colleges represented in this study. Consequently, due to the impact international students have on academic, cultural, and financial efforts, community colleges are offering individualized support, theme two, to their recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts. Individualized support is offered in the form of institutional support, academic support, and peer support. Furthermore, the recruitment, retention, and transfer of international students is only successful when the first and second themes are connected with the third theme, creating clear pathways for this student population. Clear pathways offer international students personalized services, opportunities for involvement, and early planning initiatives. Combined, the first, second, and third themes pave the way for community colleges represented in this study to ensure that their international students are successful.

Interconnection is demonstrated between the three themes by directly answering the research question: Top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S. are currently implementing international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts by developing strong partnerships, offering individualized support, and providing clear pathways.

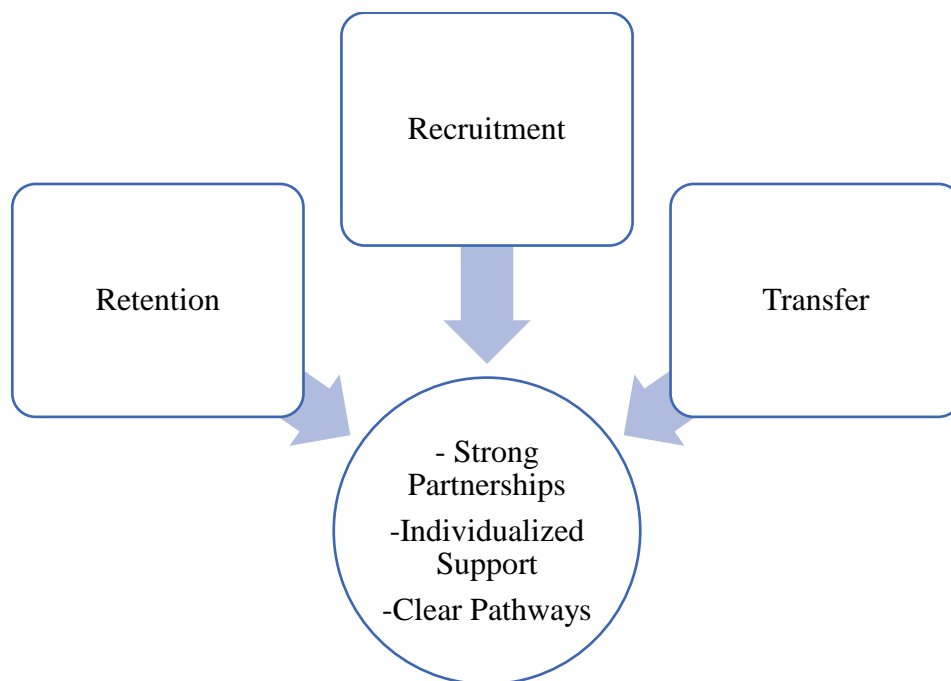


Figure 2. Interconnection of Themes

How the Interconnection of Efforts and Themes Lead to Strategies

In order to fully address the research question, it is important to acknowledge how the interconnection of efforts and themes lead to strategies (Table 2). According to the participants in the study, their institutions are ranked in the top 20 U.S. community colleges hosting international students based on the outcomes the interconnection of efforts and themes produce, which in this case, are strategies that these institutions implement to better support international students seeking an American education.

As mentioned earlier, the data revealed that the top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S. are currently implementing the following strategies: the use of agents, parental involvement, university collaborations, institutional support, academic support, peer support, personalized services, opportunities for involvement, and early planning initiatives.

Table 2

The Interconnection of Efforts and Themes Lead to Strategies

		Themes		
		<i>Strong Partnerships</i>	<i>Individualized Support</i>	<i>Personalized Services</i>
Efforts	<i>Recruitment</i>	Use of Agents Parental Involvement University Collaborations	Institutional Support	Personalized Services
	<i>Retention</i>	Parental Involvement	Institutional Support Academic Support Peer Support	Opportunities for Involvement Early Planning
	<i>Transfer</i>	University Collaborations	Institutional Support Academic Support	Personalized Services Early Planning
		Strategies		

The study's findings are important as they address the research question and provide pertinent information collected from 11 decision makers from four distinct community college systems and four decision makers from one university located across four states in the U.S. The list of participants and settings by pseudonyms is listed in Table 1. The data revealed that the top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S. are currently implementing their recruitment efforts with the help of agents, parental involvement, university collaborations, institutional support, and personalized services. The data also revealed that these community colleges are currently implementing their retention efforts with the help of parental involvement, institutional support, academic support, peer support, opportunities for involvement, and early

planning initiatives. Furthermore, the data revealed that these community colleges are currently implementing transfer efforts with the help of university collaborations, institutional support, academic support, personalized services, and early planning initiatives.

In sum, U.S. community colleges face a fierce competition among other higher education institutions in the U.S. and abroad. Charles commented, “there’s a lot more community colleges recruiting out there ... there are a lot more affordable educational options for students outside the U.S.” As such, community colleges must be prepared to meet the needs of international students and distinguish themselves from other higher education institutions worldwide.

CHAPTER V IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This section takes an in-depth look at the significance international students provide when enrolled at U.S. community colleges. As outlined in the literature review in Chapter 2, there is a significant amount of research conducted on the benefits of hosting international students in U.S. higher education institutions (Evelyn, 2005; Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). The participants of this study, also known as decision makers at their respective higher education institutions, voiced similar benefits experienced by their institutions that were supported by the literature during the interviewing process of the study. According to research, academic, cultural, and financial benefits derive from enrolling international students at U.S. higher education institutions (Fitzer, 2007). The benefits include the prospect to form an academic environment that is more internationalized and diverse, the opportunity for international students to use their culturally diverse skills and abilities to meet the needs of the economy, and the financial advances established in times of severe budget limitations (Viggiano et al., 2018). Due to these benefits, American higher education institutions have intensified their efforts to enroll international students to their campuses (Hegarty, 2014).

Nevertheless, it is imperative to keep an even focus on the academic, cultural, and financial benefits international students bring to the community college, surrounding community, and across the country. In order to explain the importance of keeping a well balanced approach in the overall enrollment of international students, the researcher has developed a framework (Figure 3) to demonstrate how the efforts (i.e., recruitment, retention, and transfer), themes (i.e., strong partnerships, individualized support, and clear pathways), and benefits (i.e., academic, cultural, and financial) must interconnect at every stage to create an ideal process.

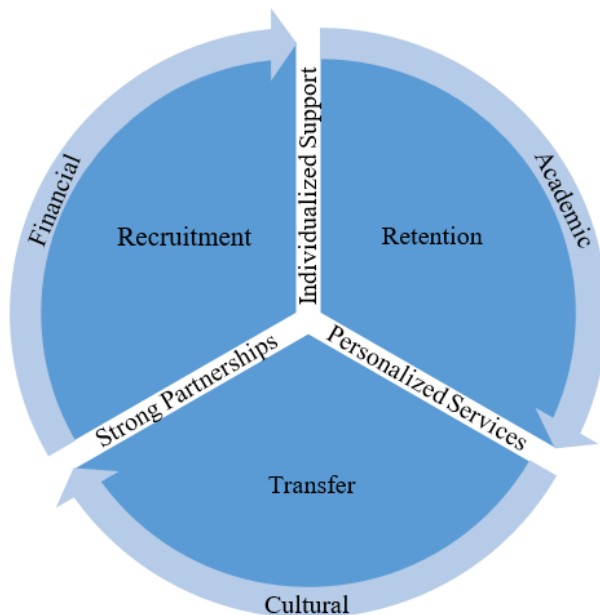


Figure 3. Ideal Version

Academic Significance

During the interview process, participants stated that international students strongly influence the academic aspect of the community college. According to Amanda, international students “are impacting our classrooms and our community by being here and bringing that conversation.” For example, Kristen from DCCS shared that the presence of international students at the community college creates “a lot of international and multicultural, um, engagement and programming.” At the university level, David stated that globalizing university campuses is a huge initiative in higher education. As such, transferring international students to their institutions from the community college is of utmost importance.

In fact, international students enhance the overall collegiate experience for staff and faculty, as well. Paula, another decision maker at a community college, shared that in addition to bringing a different perspective to campus, international students “have a lot to teach us and offer us.” She continued to share that the presence of international students “compels our faculty to

think about, you know, global outcomes, how to teach differently, how to teach for all students to understand.” At her particular community college, “global engagement, multiculturalism, diversity, equity, inclusion” are very important to its teaching and learning environments.

Due to the many academic benefits international students bring to the community college, surrounding community, and across the country, some community colleges place a heavier emphasis on the retention efforts of international students than they would on the recruitment and transfer efforts, causing in imbalanced process that would deviate from the ideal process shown in Figure 3.

Overall, international students encourage faculty and staff to “stretch themselves and look for different ways of learning ... and learn a bit from their students,” said Sara. Rose stated that teaching international students has helped “our faculty to think differently about how to teach somebody who is learning a new language. It does not necessarily mean that their knowledge or development is at a different place. It simply means that they’re learning something in a different language.” In sum, international students “provide a different world view,” said Rose.

Cultural Significance

On a cultural level, international students “shape what our college looks like on a day-to-day basis,” said John. According to the participants, international students add to the diversity of the higher education institutions simply by being present on campus. Hosting international students at U.S. higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, allows the institution to diversify their student body, said David.

Furthermore, several participants emphasized the impact that international students also have on the domestic student population. According to Shawn, the presence of international students at the community college provides opportunities for domestic students to get some

international perspectives. He shared that the presence of international students on campus may be the only encounter domestic students have of an international experience. In other words, “learning comes through direct contact” with different cultures, said Janet. Sara agreed by stating that these encounters are “very important and impactful because some of the people who attend community colleges have never been outside of their community or their state, or they have very limited exposure to the rest of the world.” Paula shared that “there’s so many students in this country, so many people in this country who have never traveled, who don’t possess a passport.” According to Sara, these exposures help domestic students “break down, maybe, some barriers or some fears that they and their family might have about the rest of the world through building personal friendships with their classmates who are from other, other parts of our globe.” Rose believes “that the experiences that students can have in the classroom with somebody from another country and another culture can hopefully impact them in a positive way.” As such, these interactions will better prepare students, particularly domestic students, for the ever-changing global landscape and aid in the internationalization efforts set in place by some higher education institutions across the country. Rose expanded on this topic with the following: “as they [domestic students] grow up to be future leaders, I think that it will help them to have a bigger perspective of the world and be more open to things like immigration policies.”

Furthermore, international students provide “insight into the experiences of people around the world, um, uh, that might not be represented in our community,” said Sara. According to John, international students are technically global ambassadors since they “have an opportunity to share their culture with us, um, also to experience what our culture is like in the United States.” Overall, international students have the ability to shape the perception others have of the U.S. and the perception the U.S. has of other nations worldwide.

Nevertheless, and as mentioned above, placing a heavier emphasis on a specific effort or benefit may imbalance the process for international students at community colleges.

Financial Significance

In addition to international student academic and cultural contributions, this student population greatly influences the community college, community, and country, on a financial scale. According to Viggiano et al., (2018), international student enrollment at U.S. community colleges is a source of much needed revenue. For many community colleges across the country, student enrollment, particularly international student enrollment, affect the operating budgets at the institutions, regardless of changing trends (Viggiano et al., 2018). While the financial impact may not be the same as it has been in the past, U.S. higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, still depend on the revenue generated from international student tuition. In fact, all the participants in this study supported this statement by claiming that international students greatly contribute to the financial benefits experienced by the community college, surrounding community and country as a whole.

Participants in the study noted that higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, benefit from the revenue international students bring to the institution. This is the case because international students “pay three times more than our resident students” said Paula. She shared that, unfortunately, some higher education institutions look at the international students just for the revenue that they generate. Shawn followed by stating that the revenue comes in the form of tuition dollars and the cost of living at the institution (i.e., housing, food, parking, health services). According to John, international students “really help the bottom line of our college because they’re paying, um, international tuition, which is more than what our, um, domestic students would pay.”

Most of the participants made it clear throughout the course of the interviews that community colleges are benefiting from international students' tuition revenue. Whether it would be revenue generated by international students to be used for the general funds of the community college or funding to be used for other related and unrelated campus initiatives, the financial impact is evident. While the participants shared that knowledge shared by the international students should be prioritized by all higher education institutions, priority tends to be given to the tuition revenue generated by this student population for the many benefits it provides. After all, the revenue generated from international student tuition is bringing additional and much needed income to higher education institution, in general, said Rose.

According to Sara, international students also contribute millions of dollars to the local economy. These contributions come in the form of room rentals, shopping, eating out, entertainment, and transportation use. Sara also shared that people are able to transform their homes or parts of their houses into international student dorms or apartment units to help pay for their mortgages. Kristen followed up with Sara's comment by stating that international students "spend their dollars there [community]". For example, the surrounding community benefits from the revenue generated by international students as they "rent apartments, buy cars, buy food," says Stacey. In sum, international students are "consumers in our community" said John.

In addition to affecting the community college and surrounding community, the presence of international students also influences the country as a whole, said Paula. According to Jennings (2017), international student enrollment supports direct expenditures to the community where students live and to the businesses that employ this student population. This is evident, as international students become tourists in this country, all the while maintaining full-time enrollment at their higher education institutions. According to Amanda, international students

tend to spend the funds they bring from outside the country. As such and per Charles' comment, the expenditures of this student population can contribute up to billions of dollars to the U.S. economy. Rose added that in addition to the purchases that international students make, they also pay state and federal taxes. According to NAFSA (2018), international students financially contribute to the following sectors: higher education, accommodation, dining, retail, transportation, telecommunications, and health insurance. Overall, international students enrolled at community colleges across the country contributed approximately \$2.6 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2019-2019 academic year. Furthermore, one job is created in the U.S. for every six international students enrolled at community colleges across the country.

In sum, international students significantly contribute to their higher education institutions, the surrounding community, and the U.S as a whole. As a result, higher education institutions within the U.S. and abroad are actively competing for the enrollment of this student population (Abella, 2015), prioritizing the recruitment efforts. As such, in order for community colleges across the U.S. to distinguish themselves as top choices for international students, they must focus their attention on a well balanced approach, as shown above, in Figure 3.

Answering the Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the research question: How are international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts currently being implemented by top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S.? Additionally, the study explored how decision makers at a university view the preparation international students receive from their community colleges, prior or transferring to the university.

The 15 participants of the study are decision makers at a U.S. higher education institution. The list of participants by pseudonyms can be found in Table 1. Each participant

offered invaluable insight into the enrollment efforts set in place by their higher education institution based on their experience working with the international student population. Although many similarities were noted among the participants of the study, the research also identified some differences. Overall, the data collected indicates that community colleges do recognize the importance of implementing recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts to meet the needs of this student population and of the needs of the community college. However, the data also revealed the challenges decision makers experience with recruiting, enrolling, and transferring international students.

The research question: How are international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts currently being implemented by top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S? was answered by asking each participant a protocol of 10 questions (Appendix D) to obtain pertinent information for this qualitative case study. To answer the research question, top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S. are currently implementing international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts by developing strong partnerships, offering individualized support, and providing clear pathways.

The research question was answered by collecting the responses from 15 participants who were asked 10 interview questions. The first, second, and third interview questions tried to find out how the participants viewed the impact international students have at the community college, surrounding community, and across the country. Although the questions produced a variety of responses from the participants, the significance of international students enrolled at U.S. community colleges includes academic, cultural, and financial gains.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth interview questions tried to find out the strategies that the participants viewed as being the most effective in recruiting, retaining, and assisting international

students with the transfer process. The data collected from the participants revealed that the recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts in assisting international students is instrumental to their success at community colleges. Furthermore, the data revealed that recruitment efforts most utilized by the community colleges represented in this study include the use of agents, university collaborations, and personalized services. Additionally, the support community colleges utilize to retain international students include parental involvement, academic support, peer support, opportunities for involvement, and early planning initiatives. Finally, the data revealed that transfer efforts implemented by the community colleges represented in this study include building university collaborations, and providing academic support, personalized experiences, and early planning initiatives.

The seventh, eighth, and ninth questions were asked to find out the challenges the participants experienced in recruiting, retaining, and assisting international students with the transfer process. Although several challenges experienced by the participants were discussed, the data highlights political limitations, underrepresentation, and misrepresentation as three of the major challenges community colleges face. These limitations are discussed in more detail in the following section.

The tenth and final question inquired about the type of services needed for international students at the community college to be successful. The data collected from this interview question, along with questions four, five, and six served as the foundation for the development of the recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts explained in Chapter 4.

Implications and Recommendations

The following section reviews the implications and recommendations for research as it relates to the data collected from this research study. Some of the implications derived from the

research include the possibility of obtaining biased responses and views from the participants and researcher, inaccurate information due to setting and participant articulation, a shift in process, and selectivity of the study. Furthermore, some of the recommendations developed for research include the need to develop stronger partnerships, individualized support, and clear pathways as they relate to the recruitment, retention, and transfer of international students.

Additionally, implications for practice/policy are provided in this section to include political limitations, community college underrepresentation, and misrepresentation of institutional services and offering. Recommendations for practice/policy are also provided in this section to assist in the expansion of best practices for the development of an enrollment management system, more community college representation, and a clearer, consistent, and realistic transfer plan.

Implications and Recommendations for Research

Some implications noted by the researcher while conducting the research study came in the form of data collection. Implications in this form of data collection include the possibility of obtaining biased responses from the participants due to the researcher's presence. In addition, incorrect information may have been collected during the interview because the information may have been filtered through the biases and views of the researcher and the participants.

Additionally, interviews, which were conducted in a designated place instead of the natural field setting, offered, "indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees" (Creswell, 2014, p. 191). Moreover, not all participants were equally articulate, insightful and/or comfortable with the presence of the researcher. This may have led to conveying inaccurate information during the interview process.

Another implication that may have arisen once the researcher entered the field and began collecting the data was a possible shift in the process. In addition, some anticipated ethical issues in the study revolved around selectivity. The findings were based on the self-reported perceptions of 15 decision makers at seven higher education institutions representing four distinct community college systems and one university across the U.S. Decision makers at community colleges and universities in different states or private U.S. higher education institutions may differ in perspectives.

Best Practices for the Development of More In-Depth Recruitment Strategies.

Based on some challenges the participants shared in their enrollment efforts to recruit, retain, and transfer international students, the study's findings highlight various components that warrant further research. Although the information derived from the interviews provided significant data on specific recruitment efforts, further research is warranted on how academic support, peer support, opportunities for involvement, and early planning affects the recruitment of international students. The contributions from this study now demonstrate effective recruitment efforts that work for top community college hosting international students, however, more research is needed surrounding the effect individualized support and clear pathways has in the recruitment of international students, if any.

Best Practices for the Development of More In-Depth Retention Strategies.

Furthermore, the interviews demonstrated effective strategies top community colleges hosting international students use to retain this student population. Nevertheless, more research is needed to understand how the use of agents, university collaborations, and personalized services affect the retention of international students. While the study shows effective retention strategies focusing on offering individualized support, more research is needed surrounding the effect that

creating strong partnerships and providing clear pathways plays a part in the retention of international students.

Best Practices for the Development of More In-Depth Transfer Strategies.

Additionally, the data collected from the interview revealed effective strategies top community colleges hosting international students use to transfer this student population. Nonetheless, more research is needed to understand how the use of agents, parental involvement, peer support, and opportunities for involvement affect the transfer of international students into universities.

Although the participants' responses indicate effective transfer efforts, more research is needed to understand the transfer process more in-depth.

Finally, more research is needed to study the international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts currently being implemented by top community colleges hosting international students in other community colleges, systems, and states/regions. In addition, more research is needed to learn about the perception university decision makers at various institutions across the country have on the preparation community college international students receive before transferring into their universities.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

As mentioned in the previous section, some of the implications that the participants in this study shared in regard to their experiences with the recruitment, retention, and transfer of international students includes political limitations, underrepresentation of the community college at a national and global scale, and misrepresentation of community college and university transfer process.

According to some participants, a narrative that is spreading around the world is that the U.S. is not welcoming to other cultures. Additionally, laws that benefit international students

have changed/been updated so that fewer visas are granted to this student population.

Unfortunately, the U.S. is “not as friendly or as welcoming as we have been, um, before our federal administration started coming out with wanting to build walls and creating different complications for people wanting to visit our country or to attend school in our country,” said Paula, from PCC. Stacey, also from PCC, agreed with Paula’s statement on the importance of fostering a deeper global awareness and acceptance of a more diverse student population. She believes “this country needs to be exposed to more diversity” as it is fundamental for the functionality of U.S. higher education institution across the country, specifically community colleges. Overall, Sara, from NCC, believes that by “bringing international students into our local community, um, can help expose our own, our own biases and what we need to work on in our community.”

Another major challenge decision makers have also noticed include the lack of knowledge people outside the U.S. have of the community college system. According to some participants, community colleges continue to lack the branding universities have on a global scale and as such, may not even be considered by some international students interested in pursuing higher education.

Furthermore, decision makers also noted that not many systems have such a clear layout of their transfer process, thus misrepresenting their services and offering. According to Stacey, some higher education institutions, particularly universities, “are notorious for hiding the information.” In other circumstances, requirements change without much warning. She described the process at these higher education institutions as a “moving target.” John, from BHCC, stated that the “changing landscapes of universities and their different requirements” could be very challenging for international students who oftentimes are already struggling with the application

process. In sum, Janet, from SU, mentioned, “consistency in the process would help students tremendously.”

Additionally, for many international students, the expectations for their transfer plans may be met with disappointing realities. For example, John shared that many international students believe that they have a higher chance of transferring to the UCLA or another high-ranking university simply by enrolling at a community college in California. Unfortunately, this is not the case for many students. Additionally, Rose, from NCC, mentioned that some international students expect to quickly move through the community college experience and then transfer to the university of their choice. However, in some instances, international students are required to take additional credits to meet a degree requirement or English proficiency level. As such, these “students will get a little fatigue in terms of the time it takes to transfer,” said Rose.

While avoiding these challenges is not entirely possible for all international students, community colleges can work on ensuring that international students receive the necessary information to make the best decisions they can make in regards to their educational options. After all, community colleges are “not the be all, end all” to international students’ higher education goals, said Amanda, from ECC. As such, helping international students overcome their challenges by creating a clear, consistent, and realistic process, community colleges will be able to enjoy the many contributions this student population offers.

Based on the challenges the participants shared in regards to the recruitment, retention, and transfer of international students, the study’s finding highlight the following recommendations that decision makers should consider when evaluating and/or altering practice services rendered to international students: best practices for community colleges to develop an

enrollment management plan, best practices for community colleges to gain more representation at the national and international level, best practices for community colleges to develop a clear, consistent, and realistic transfer plan, and best practices for creating stronger partnerships.

Best Practices for the Development of an Enrollment Management Plan. In order for the U.S. to continue to be the primary choice for international students looking for postsecondary education abroad, policy makers, recruiting agents, and advisors must consider developing an enrollment management plan that focuses on strategy and international recruitment and retention. Due to the financial resources, time, and energy that is involved in recruiting international students, higher education institutions must take into account the retention and transfer success rates of international students. In other words, these factors need to be considered when evaluating their enrollment management plans and international student recruitment efforts.

Enrollment management in higher education is a term used to examine an institution's enrollment policy. According to Baker (n.d), enrollment management may also be viewed as a higher education institution's plan for the recruitment and retention of the students needed to sustain the image, health, and academic quality of a higher education institution. Kalsbeek and Hossler (2009) define enrollment management as "a deliberate process of achieving an institution's preferred enrollment profile, starting by identifying the strategic purposes and mission of the institution, and then orchestrating the marketing, recruitment, admissions, pricing and aid, retention programs, academic support services and program development required to achieve those outcomes" (p.4). In other words, it is an institutional road map to achieving specific goals.

As such, the researcher recommends decision makers come up with best practices for how to develop an enrollment management plan at the community college level for the

recruitment, retention, and transfer of international students.

Best Practices for More Community College Representation. According to research, only a small fraction of the international students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions were enrolled at community colleges across the country (Institute of International Education, 2019). Based on the data collected from this research study, even though community colleges in the U.S. offer attractive opportunities for international students, these institutions lack representation at the national and international level. Some challenges community colleges experience that result in underrepresentation include the unfamiliarity of the “2+2” model, the lack of rankings, low tuition costs, name of the institutions, and a limited campus life (Jennings, 2017). As such, policy makers, governmental officials, and recruiting agents need to develop best practices for how to gain more representation at the national and international level.

Best Practices for a Clear, Consistent, and Realistic Transfer Plan. According to research, the majority of international students enrolled at community colleges are planning to transfer to a university (Zhang, 2017). In the case of Paula’s community college (PCC), 90 percent of the institution’s international students are interested in transferring to a university and from those who are interested in transferring, One-hundred percent actually transfer. Unfortunately, limited research exists on the transfer process for this student population. As such, the researcher recommends that policy makers and advisors develop best practices for how community colleges and universities can create a clear, consistent, and realistic transfer plan that can be applied across the board for all U.S. higher education institutions.

Best Practices for Creating Stronger Partnerships. Although studies have been conducted on the use of agents by U.S. higher education institutions (Ozturgut, 2013), particularly universities, little research has been done on the impact the use of agents has at the

community college level. Research on the impact the use of agents has on community college would provide significant insight on best practice for international student recruitment. Future research that incorporates the use of agents at the community college level might provide decision makers at these institutions detailed information on cost-effectiveness, benefits, and any possible challenges resulting from the use of agents as a recruitment strategy.

Furthermore, more research is needed to understand the best practices for maintaining an open and honest communication with parents. This would provide significant insight on the various strategies community colleges can utilize to better support this student population and their parents, alike. Furthermore, future research may address the impact parents have on the financial support this student population receives throughout their studies at the community college level and how that affects their retention.

While the participants representing the university in this study touched a bit on the readiness international transfer students demonstrate as they enroll at the university, more research is needed to provide significant insight on best practice for community college international student transfer efforts into universities. This includes the study of transfer credit equivalencies recognized at the national and international level by community colleges and universities, and transfer agreements established by U.S. community colleges and U.S. universities and universities abroad.

Conclusion

In conclusion, international students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, significantly impact the academic, cultural, and financial aspects of the institution (Fitzer, 2007). Furthermore, the international student impact expands to the surrounding community and across the country. The impact experienced by community

colleges motivates these institutions to enroll international students with the purpose of establishing a more internationalized campus, creating opportunities for this student population as they enter the workforce, and to profit from the revenue generated from international student tuition (Viggiano et al., 2018). As a result, the researcher believes that international students should begin their collegiate experience at a community college level and community colleges should be prepared to meet the needs of this student population, while benefitting from international student enrollment on an academic, cultural, and financial level.

In sum, international students greatly contribute to U.S. higher education institutions, specifically community colleges by internationalizing and diversifying the institution. Furthermore, international students have a positive effect on the diversity of college campuses, teaching philosophies, the collegiate experiences of domestic students, and the importance for our nation's politics. According to many of the participants in the study, international student enrollment at U.S. higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, will foster a deeper global awareness and acceptance of a more diverse population in this country. As the study and literature review demonstrate, international students benefit community colleges in several ways. Nevertheless, of all the contributions international students provide to community colleges across the country, economic contributions seems to be the most significant. As such, community colleges must distinguish themselves to attract international students to their campuses. Additionally, community colleges must be able to meet the needs of international students enrolled at their institutions and effectively assist them with the transfer process.

While the participants in the study shared several strategies, more research is needed to ensure that community colleges are prepared to recruit, retain, and transfer international students. Moreover, future research will provide a better understanding on how to develop stronger

partnerships, individualized support, and clear pathways. In sum, a lot more can be done to ensure that community colleges across the country are prepared to meet the needs of international students as they enroll at their institutions and prepare to transfer to a university.

Finally, the research question: How are international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts currently being implemented by top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S? can be answered by stating that the top community colleges hosting international students across the U.S. are currently implementing international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts by developing strong partnerships, offering individualized support, and providing clear pathways.

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Appendix A Invitation to Participate

Would you like an opportunity to share your experiences as a decision-maker at the community college level for international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts?

My name is Alejandra Diaz-Rangel. I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Foundations & Leadership department at Old Dominion University (ODU) in Norfolk, Virginia. I am conducting a research project to learn about the international student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts currently being utilized by community colleges in the United States.

I am writing to request your participation in my study. I am interviewing decision-makers at the community college level to discuss the enrollment strategies that have a positive impact on international students so that community colleges in the U.S. might better support international student recruitment, retention, and transfer.

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. I will ask you open-ended questions about your experiences as a decision-maker at the community college level. The interview will be relaxed and conversational. Interviews will take place via Zoom or over a phone conference, depending on your preferences and availability.

Your identity will be held in strict confidence. Additionally, in order to protect your institution's information, the institution's names will be coded to protect privacy.

Decision-makers who have worked at the community college level in international student services for no less than 3 years and are at least 18 years of age may participate.

If you agree to participate, please respond to this email at your earliest convenience. A copy of the study will be provided to your department for future academic programming once it has been completed.

The informed consent document has been attached for your review. If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at 757-901-5008 or arang004@odu.edu. I thank you for your time and consideration in this matter, and look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,

Alejandra Diaz-Rangel, M.S.Ed., N.C.C.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Participants will be composed of community college decision-makers tasked with international student recruitment, international student retention, and international student transfer services. In sum, decision makers that may influence the higher education institution's mission, policies, governance, strategies, and organizational changes will participate in the study.

Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Location: _____

Researcher Name: _____

Participant Name: _____

Introduction: The researcher will greet the participant and introduce herself.

Purpose: The researcher will then explain that the purpose of the current study is to learn more about the international student recruitment, retention, and transfer strategies currently being utilized by community colleges across the U.S.

Procedures: The researcher will also explain that open-ended questions will be asked in individual interviews. Interviews will last approximately 45 minutes, depending on how much information the participant wishes to share. Conversations will be recorded on a digital recording device and later transcribed. After the data are collected, names will be removed and the data will be analyzed.

Consent: Participants will be encouraged to share only information with which they are comfortable sharing. In addition, participants will be reminded that their privacy will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and that they may choose to disengage at any point. If they choose not to provide a pseudonym, the researcher will select one for the participant.

Interview Questions

Dialogue: A series of interviews will be conducted with decision-makers at seven higher education institutions across the U.S. Before any interview takes place, a demographic questionnaire consisting of five questions will be completed. Ultimately, a protocol of ten questions will be asked of each participant to obtain pertinent information for this qualitative case study.

Interview Questions:

1. What type of impact do international students have at the community college?
2. What type of impact do international students have in the community?
3. What type of impact do international students have in the country?
4. What do you deem to be the most effective strategies in recruiting international students?

5. What do you deem to be the most effective strategies in retaining international students?
6. What do you deem to be the most effective strategies in assisting international students with the transfer process?
7. What challenges is the community college facing in recruiting international students?
8. What challenges is the community college facing in retaining international students?
9. What challenges is the community college facing in assisting international students with the transfer process?
10. What type of services are needed for international students at the community college to be successful?

Conclusion:

- Turn audio-recording device OFF
- Thank participant for participating
- Answer any questions the participant may have about the study
- Give the participant a business card and encourage the participant to contact the researcher with any questions or additional information he/she thinks may be relevant to the study.

Appendix C Consent Form

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Dear Participant:

The purpose of this form is to give you information that may affect your decision to participate in this research study, and to record the consent of those who agree to take part in the research. You are being asked to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain the possible risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title: *International student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts at top community colleges hosting international students in the United States*

Primary Investigator: Chris R. Glass, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Educational Foundations & Leadership, Old Dominion University.

Investigator: Alejandra Diaz-Rangel, M.S.Ed., Doctoral Candidate, Educational Foundations & Leadership, Old Dominion University.

1. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:

As a decision-maker at a higher education institution, you are being asked to participate in a research study exploring the recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts for international students at your current higher education institution. Your participation will contribute to the knowledge surrounding the recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts currently being utilized by community colleges in the U.S. This study, entitled, *International student recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts at top community colleges hosting international students in the United States*, is conducted by Dr. Chris R. Glass and Ms. Alejandra Diaz-Rangel. Please note that if you are under 18 years old, you are not able to take part in this study. Additionally, please note that you must have been associated with international student services for at least 3 years prior to participation in the study.

2. WHAT YOU WILL DO:

Each interview will last approximately 45 minutes, depending on how much information you wish to share during the interview. The interview will be conducted in an informal manner, with open-ended questions that will allow you to talk about your experience(s). You may agree to be digitally recorded, or you may choose not to be digitally recorded during our conversation. Your identity will be held in strict confidence, and during data collection, researchers will arrange for private or semi-private areas for consent and to conduct the interview.

3. RISKS AND BENEFITS:

Since information will be coded and kept confidential, this study poses little to no risk to participants. However, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet

been identified. In order to keep information confidential, the researchers will code the information. Additionally, the researchers will take reasonable steps to keep private information, such as questionnaires and interviews confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

There are no direct benefits to the participants. Potential benefits include having the opportunity to contribute to the success of prospective international students enrolled at your community college. Additionally, as a participant, you may benefit from the self-reflection process. Participants will also benefit from engaging in the process of developing a voice for their experiences while contributing to the literature that explores the recruitment, retention, and transfer efforts set in place by community colleges across the U.S.

4. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The researchers will take reasonable steps to keep private information, such as questionnaires and interviews confidential. Any direct identification information, including your name, will be removed from the data when responses are analyzed. All data will be secured in locked file cabinets and password protected server space at Old Dominion University. The data will be accessible only to the researchers associated with this study and the Institutional Review Board. All data will be kept in a secure location for at least five years. Once the five years have passed, all data will be destroyed.

During analysis, pseudonyms will be used to protect the confidentiality of the participants. During dissemination, findings will be reported by theme or by pseudonym. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings and the results of this study may also be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the identities of all the research participants will remain confidential. Additionally, special care will be taken to ensure that contextual details do not give away your identity. Although every attempt will be made to keep your identification private, some distinguishing responses that you share and other comments may reflect your identity.

5. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY:

Your participation is completely voluntary. It is acceptable for you to disagree to take part in the study. Even if you agree to participate now, you are free to withdraw from the research study at any time. You may choose not to participate at all, or you may wish to answer some questions and not others. Your decision will not affect your relationship with your higher education institution or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

6. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY:

You will receive no compensation for participating in this study. The researchers are unable to give you any form of payment for participating in this study. The researchers want your decision about participating in this study to be absolutely voluntary.

If you agree to participate, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal

rights. However, in the event of harm or injury arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Alejandra Diaz-Rangel at 757-901-5008 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

7. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS:

If you have any questions about the research study or your participation, please contact Alejandra Diaz-Rangel at arang004@odu.edu or 757-901-5008.

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Adam Rubenstein, Assistant Vice President for Research Compliance, at 757-683-3686, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By signing below, you are indicating your voluntary participation in this study and acknowledge that you may: 1) choose not to participate in the study; 2) refuse to answer certain questions; and 3) discontinue your participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled 4) you are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, and that you understand your rights and responsibilities as a participant.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Name (Printed) _____

In addition, your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to allow your responses to be digitally recorded.

Signature _____ Date _____

8. INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this participant the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and I have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Name (Printed) _____

Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questions

1. How long have you been in higher education?
2. How long you been with your current higher education institution?
3. How long have you been in your current administrative role?
4. How long you have been associated with international student services (i.e. international student recruitment, international student and scholar services, and international student admissions)?
5. What is the higher level of education you have completed?