TIMELY DEGREE COMPLETION: THE SUCCESSES AND SETBACKS OF FIRST-GENERATION AND LOW INCOME TRANSFER STUDENTS

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A Dissertation

by

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SPRING 2016
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iv
DEDICATION

This dissertation is in honor of my ancestors and family members who endured life-threatening challenges and braved many hardships to be able to provide me the life with the many privileges that I have today. Additionally, this is also dedicated to my extended family, the many friends and colleagues, who provided me with the inspiration, motivation, and support that drove me to keep going. Further, my Cohort 7 family, you have made this educational experience the incredible professional, academic, and spiritual journey that it was and I could not have made it without you. Lastly, and most importantly, this is for the students as well as the educators who genuinely serve to better the lives of students; for it is because of the student we exist.
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Community College Transfer Student Experiences, Degree Completion, Student Leadership and Development, Student Engagement, Educational Equity.
Abstract

TIMELY DEGREE COMPLETION: THE SUCCESSES AND SETBACKS OF FIRST-GENERATION AND LOW INCOME TRANSFER STUDENTS

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The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine the successes and setbacks of first-generation and low income transfer students who completed their bachelor’s degree within two years upon transferring to the university. This study involved eight logistic regression models using 4,211 student records and 384 surveys as well as identified salient themes and sub-themes using qualitative methodology and analysis of the same 384 surveys and sixteen individual interviews. The three research questions were:

1. What factors are associated with completion of a bachelor’s degree within two years of transferring to a 4-year university, for first-generation college students from low income backgrounds?

2. What unique setbacks and successes did first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated within two years experience in comparison to other transfer students?
3. What recommendations do transfer students have to increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree?

The researcher used three conceptual frameworks that include social capital, resilience, and academic resilience as the lenses to explore the successes and setbacks of first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated within two years upon transferring. The quantitative results of this study concluded that the following factors were statistically significant and were associated with two-year degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students: (a) pre-transfer units (p<.05), the units that transfer students entered NCU with, (b) term 1 GPA (p<.05), the first term GPA, (c) term 1 enrolled units (p<.01), the amount of units enrolled in first term, (d) enrollment in winter courses (p<.05), taking NCU courses over winter break, (e) internships (p<.05), formal opportunities for professional development, and (f) senior writing course (p<.05), a writing course usually taken during final year. The qualitative results regarding unique successes of first-generation and low income transfer students graduating within two years were: (a) believing the degree will lead to upward mobility/better career, (b) engaging in exercise/activities that promote health/wellness, (c) concern for social justice, and (d) the helpfulness of financial aid. The unique setbacks of first-generation and low income transfer student graduating in two years were: (a) balancing family commitments and (b) challenges adjusting to university academics. The recommendations that transfer students had to increase transfer student graduation rates and reduce time to degree were: (a) stressing the importance of planning and being organized among students, (b)
developing students’ social capital by facilitating the inspiration/motivation/support they receive from others, (c) meeting the need to provide transfer students with support during their first-semester, and (d) reassessment of university logistics especially class availability. The researcher’s overall recommendations for action were: (a) to provide better communication with students prior to transferring, (b) develop a program, office, or service that aims at facilitating a positive and successful first-semester transfer student experience, (c) conduct a thorough assessment of university logistics and resources in relation to student enrollment and demand, and (d) facilitate a culture of inclusion and belonging across campus and beyond.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Vitae</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Students</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Community College</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Journey to The Four-Year University</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Four-Year University</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature Of The Study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework: Social Capital</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework: Resilience</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework: Academic Resilience</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Definitions</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Demographics of Student Records Data</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Race/Ethnicity of Student Records Data</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Parent’s Level of Education of Student Records Data</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Academic Information of Student Records Data</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Summary of Logistic Regression Models using Student Records Data</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Logistic Regression Model 1: All Transfer Student Demographics</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Logistic Regression Model 2: First-Generation and Low Income Student Demographics</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Logistic Regression Model 3: All Transfer Student Academic and Other Relevant Data</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Logistic Regression Model 4: First-Generation and Low Income Student Academic and Other Relevant Data</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Student Standing of Online Survey Participants</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Demographics of Online Survey Participants</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Gender Identity of Online Survey Participants</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Race/Ethnicity of Online Survey Participants</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Logistic Regression Model 5: All Transfer Student Helpful Resources</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
16. Logistic Regression Model 6: First-Generation and Low Income Helpful Resources (1 of 3).......................................................................................................................................................... 99

17. Logistic Regression Model 7: First-Generation and Low Income Helpful Resources (2 of 3).......................................................................................................................................................... 102

18. Research Question One: Factors Associated with Two-Year Degree Completion for First-Generation and Low Income Transfer Students................................................................................. 105

19. Student Standing of Online Survey Participants.......................................................................................... 108

20. Two-Year Degree Completion Status of Online Survey Participants ............................................. 108

21. First-Generation Status of Online Survey Participants ........................................................................ 109

22. Low Income Status of Online Survey Participants .................................................................................. 109

23. Mother's Level of Education of Online Survey Participants ................................................................. 110

24. Father's Level of Education of Online Survey Participants ..................................................................... 111

25. Reported Majors of Online Survey Participants ..................................................................................... 111

26. Most Helpful Programs/Services of Online Survey Participants .......................................................... 113

27. Overall Themes and Sub-Themes of Online Survey Participants .......................................................... 116

28. FGLI Online Survey Participants Graduated in Two Years - Theme: Personal Strategies and Support .............................................................................................................................................. 118

29. FGLI Online Survey Participants Graduated in Two Years - Theme: Personal Setbacks ........................................................................................................................................................................ 120

30. FGLI Online Survey Participants Graduated in Two Years - Theme: Support from Institution ........................................................................................................................................................................ 122
31. FGLI Online Survey Participants Graduated in Two Years - Theme: Setbacks from Institution .......................................................... 124
32. FGLI Online Survey Participants Graduated in Two Years - Theme: Helpful Programs/Services .................................................................................................................. 126
33. All Online Survey Participants - Theme: Personal Strategies and Support .......... 128
34. All Online Survey Participants - Theme: Personal Setbacks ........................................ 133
35. All Online Survey Participants - Theme: Support from Institution .................. 134
36. All Online Survey Participants - Theme: Setbacks from Institution ............. 136
37. All Online Survey Participants - Theme: Helpful Programs/Services .......... 140
38. Demographic Profiles of Interview Participants ............................................. 143
39. Overall Themes and Sub-Themes on Interview Participants ....................... 161
40. FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years - Theme: Personal Strategies and Support .......................................................... 163
41. FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years - Theme: Personal Setbacks .................................................................................................................. 167
42. FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years - Theme: Support from Institution .................................................................................................................. 168
43. FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years - Theme: Setbacks from Institution .................................................................................................................. 169
44. FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years - Theme: Helpful Campus Resources/Services .......................................................... 171
45. FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years - Theme: Personal Strategies and Support ................................................................. 172
46. All Other Interview Participants - Theme: Personal Setbacks......................... 175
47. All Other Interview Participants - Theme: Support from Institution............... 176
48. All Other Interview Participants - Theme: Setbacks from Institution ............ 178
49. All Other Interview Participants - Theme: Helpful Campus Resources/Services .... 180
50. Overall Themes and Sub-Themes of Qualitative Data ................................ 182
51. Research Question Two: Unique Successes and Setbacks of FGLI Transfer Students ........................................................................................................... 184
52. Research Question Three: Recommendations to Increase Graduation Rates and Reduce Time to Degree Using Theme/Sub-Theme Saliency ......................... 185
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Diagram of Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. College Student Populations Literature Review Diagram</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Qualitative Methodology and Analysis</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

“The flower that blooms in adversity is the rarest and most beautiful of them all.” (Walt Disney Company, 1998)

Once upon a time, earning a bachelor’s degree was simply a four-year journey filled with wonder, excitement, and discovery. It was the time in many people’s lives where they went to class, stayed up all night partying, searched for their true love, and built their launch pad toward a higher quality of life and socioeconomic status. While certain aspects of this college experience still exist, the relatively homogenous student population featured in this once upon a time has evolved into the enticing mixed salad that it is today which welcomes more people of color, students from working class families, and those who are the first in their family to attend and graduate college (Adelman, 2006; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; A. Cabrera, Burkum, & La Nasa, 2003).

For much of the United States’ history, four-year universities were at the forefront of America’s higher education sector (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). It was not until the early 20th century when the nation realized a need for a more educated workforce to compete globally, since only three-quarters of high school graduates chose to attend college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). To do so, the community college system was commissioned as a pipeline to increase the flow of Americans pursuing bachelor’s degrees by creating regional post-secondary educational institutions with the expectation that they transfer to a four-year university and complete their degree objective (American Association of Community Colleges,
2015; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011). Since then, the community college system has expanded to include over 1,100 campuses throughout the nation (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). Additionally, the community college system now prepares almost half of all undergraduate students pursuing a bachelor’s degree (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015; American Council on Education, 2012).

**Undergraduate Students**

In higher education, the two main types of undergraduate students are native four-year students and community college transfer students. A native four-year student is a student who starts their bachelor’s degree at a four-year university upon graduating high school. A transfer student is a student who begins their bachelor’s degree journey at a community college focusing on lower division requirements and then transfers and completes residual coursework at a four-year university. One may wonder why would a student start at a community college and then transfer schools if they could just start at a four-year university and not have to worry about transitioning. The simple answer is, it depends. But to a majority of the students who begin their bachelor’s degree journey at the community college, their primary reasons are due to family and household obligations, career or degree program uncertainty, insufficient knowledge about college, and more commonly, affordability and lower cost of attendance (Jacobs, 2004; Laanan, 2001; Lord, Coston, Blowers, Davis, & Johannes, 2012; Luo, Williams, & Vieweg, 2007;

On the national level, the six-year graduation rate of transfer students is 71% (American Council on Education, 2012) in comparison to native four-year students, which is 59% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). At face value, these numbers communicate that transfer students overall outperform native four-year students at earning bachelor’s degrees. However, these statistics also create a blind spot for transfer students coming from the most disadvantaged population, first-generation and low income. Such was the case in Engle and Tinto’s (2008) research which concluded that only 11% of first-generation and low income graduated within six years. Additionally, it is a common misperception of transfer students that they do not need as much support and guidance due to their prior academic experiences at the community college, which also negatively impacts the level of service and support for many transfer students, especially students who are the first in their family to attend college and/or have limited economic resources (Handel, 2007). Yet, despite the many challenges that first-generation and low income transfer students encounter, there is a group among these students that were able to identify the passion and perseverance to succeed and emerge not only with a bachelor’s degree, but also do so within a timely manner. It is this group of students for which this study is focused on, first-generation and low income community college transfer students who completed their degree at the university within two years.
The Community College

To develop a working understanding of the transfer student population at the four-year university, it is also important to develop an understanding of the academic environment from which they arrived from, the community college. The role of the community college has traditionally been a place known as “democracy’s open door (Griffin & Connor, 1994),” “postsecondary education’s Statue of Liberty (Rhoades, 2012),” and even “an entrée to pursuing the American dream regardless of one’s life circumstances (Rhoades, 2012).” It is through the community college that people have opportunity and access to higher education and in turn, a chance at achieving a higher quality of life. With over 1,100 campuses that exist today, the community college is the most affordable entry point to earning a bachelor’s degree for millions of Americans (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). It is estimated that nearly half of all undergraduate students started their college career at a community college for a myriad of reasons ranging anywhere from the institution’s lower cost of attendance to preserving the close distance between students and their family units (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014, 2015; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011; Rhoades, 2012).

While community colleges are referred to as two-year institutions that promote student transfers to four-year institutions, community colleges also provide career and technical education and educational opportunities for those seeking to enhance their specific occupation and vocational skills in fields such as business, healthcare, public
service, and visual and performing arts (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). In addition to career/vocational training, community colleges also award associate’s degrees, which symbolize completion of a course of study lasting about two years (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). More commonly, a major function of community colleges are to assist bachelor degree seeking students in completing lower division requirements of bachelor’s degrees and supporting their successful transfer to a four-year university and engage in the college experience (Rhoades, 2012).

**The Journey to The Four-Year University**

Beyond the illustrious image that popular culture has conveyed about college lasting only four years lies the truth in which earning the bachelor’s degree typically takes between four to six years to complete. As evidenced by the United States government’s 1997 implementation of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), bachelor’s degree completion rates extend beyond four-years and are reported as a six-year rate (Glenn, 2010). Why would a six-year rate be used for bachelor’s degrees if they are advertised as a four-year degree that is earned at a four-year university? The fact of the matter is, is that students are not completing these degrees in four-years which is why the reported rates have to be extended out. If this is the norm, then it is no wonder why some education systems face challenges graduating their students in a timely manner. Simply put, the faster the United States can produce
college graduates, the more highly skilled workforce they will have, which further translates into a higher performing economy (Alter, 2012).

Despite the pressures to graduate within four years, the journey to the university encompasses a series of endurance tests students must overcome. From the student perspective, the path leading to the bachelor’s degree is comparable to a yellow brick road experience, where the destination is perceived to be beneficial, but the arduous challenges and obstacles that lie ahead are unpredictable. To some students, facing a swarm of flying monkeys may sound less intimidating than transferring to a brand new four-year university and having to learn “new ropes” to succeed.

**The Four-Year University**

At four-year colleges, the two most common student populations that exist are undergraduate students, the overwhelming majority population on college campuses who seek a bachelor’s degree, and graduate students, those who have earned a bachelor’s degree and are pursuing a master’s or doctoral degree. Within the undergraduate student population, students are generally characterized into one of two main student groups: native students or transfer students. Native students, who also known as four-year students, are students who began their college career at a four-year university and tend to be in the age range of 17 years old to 19 years old. During the time of this study, the generation of the four-year students in the university are millennials and possess unique characteristics such as lack unstructured free-time, tend to be overly committed, are
constantly monitored, and have high academic expectations (Bland, Melton, Wellle, & Bigham, 2012; McGlynn, 2008).

Transfer students at the university are students who started their undergraduate career at a community college and then were successfully admitted to a four-year college. Similar to four-year students, transfer students arrive at the four-year university from a plethora of cultures, backgrounds, and educational and life experiences (Astin, 1984; Cabrera, Nasa, & Burkum, 2001; Jacobs, 2004; Moore & Shulock, 2009; Townsend, 2008). Transfer students are usually in the age-range of 20 years old to 25 years old, have undergone significant life experiences, held at least one part-time or full-time job, and are typically more intellectually mature as they have experience completing coursework in a post-secondary environment setting (Astin, 1984; Jacobs, 2004; Luo et al., 2007; Melguizo & Dowd, 2009; Moore & Shulock, 2011; Morrin, 2011; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Among the many challenges that transfer students encounter during their transition to the four-year college, lack of preparation in previous coursework can often present significant setbacks to degree completion (Moore & Shulock, 2009).

Additionally, when one begins their college journey being the first in their family to attend college or grow up in a low income household, the likelihood of completing their bachelor’s degree can easily flail and falter (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Duggan & Pickering, 2008; Hills, 1965; Ishitani, 2006). While many students within these backgrounds may not cross the finish line, there is a population of students who
persevere. This study seeks to examine the successes and stories of those who persevered, the community college transfer students from first-generation and low income backgrounds who earned their bachelor’s degree within two years upon entering a large public university.

**Problem Statement**

First-generation and low income students make up approximately 24%, or 4.5 million students, of the national undergraduate student population and are nearly four times more likely to drop out of college in comparison to students who were not first-generation or low income (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Additionally, almost half (43%) of first-generation and low income students dropped out of college within six years and of those, 60% of these student left after their first year (Engle & Tinto, 2008). What is most alarming about this student population is that their six-year bachelor’s degree completion rate is only 11% in comparison to the 55% that is achieved by their more advantaged peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008). These statistics signify multiple concerns: (a) that we are in danger of not having enough college-educated workers, (b) that our economy will be in danger if we do not do something about it, and (c) the economic and income gaps between different socioeconomic will grow further and further apart. Ensuring access is simply not enough for our socially and economically disadvantaged students. Support, intentionality and mentorship are a few of the many things that must happen for these students, who can and will transform our national and international economy.
It can easily said that the more college graduates a nation has, the higher the skills of its workforce and the higher performing their economy will be (Alter, 2012). While not as easy, focusing efforts to increase college graduation rates also bolsters the quality of life for low and middle class families. Earning a four-year degree can increase a person’s lifelong earnings by approximately $1 million in comparison to someone who only earned a high school degree (Alter, 2012). Thus it is critical to also produce college graduates within the middle and lower classes to close the achievement and socioeconomic gaps that exist. From the educational institution level, low graduation rates are problem for a several reasons including the inefficient use of state and federal funds that are used to subsidize the college cost of attendance, the overcrowding of students at institutions, and the skyrocketing contributions made to the national student loan debt (Moore & Shulock, 2011; Orfield, 1992; Varga, 2014). In conjunction with the national statistics of transfer student graduation rates and in alignment with the anticipated demand for college-educated people, too few low income and first-generation community college transfer students are completing their bachelor’s degree within two years upon transferring to a four-year university (Moore & Shulock, 2011; Orfield, 1992; Varga, 2014). Yet, despite the hurdles that interfered with these students’ journeys, there are still students who are successful.

**Nature Of The Study**

This study examined the successes and setbacks of community college transfer students from first-generation and low income backgrounds who earned their bachelor’s
degree within two years upon entering a four-year university. This study sought to inquire about their individual journey to the university, identify the challenges that they underwent and overcame, and explore the success strategies that they engaged in, developed, and/or sought out. Additionally, data analysis was also utilized and applied to this study to determine salient demographics and other factors that are common among these successful students in an attempt to determine if certain factors can predict two-year graduation from a four-year university. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

**Research Question One.** What factors are associated with completion of a bachelor’s degree within two years of transferring to a 4-year university, for first-generation college students from low income backgrounds? Factors will include:

A) student demographics (ethnicity, parent(s)'/guardian(s)’ level of education, first-generation status, low income status, living on campus)

B) academic and other relevant data (pre-transfer GPA, pre-transfer units earned, major by admit, major by graduation, changed major status, first term enrolled units, first term GPA, hours spent working per week, hours spent commuting per week, enrolled in summer courses, enrolled in winter courses)

C) student use of university programs and services (academic advising, 24 hour study hall, student body government, capstone classes/senior projects, career center services, developing positive relationships with faculty, developing positive relationships with staff, financial aid, fitness & wellness center, going
to professor office hours, internships, joining a student club, library services, tutoring, multi-cultural center, working on campus, on-campus events, undergraduate research, scholarships, serving as a student club officer, student counseling and health center)

**Research Question Two.** What unique setbacks and successes did first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated within two years experience in comparison to other transfer students?

**Research Question Three.** What recommendations do transfer students have to increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree?

To conduct this research, this study took place at a public university, further known as Northern California University\(^1\), located in California’s northern region with a highly diverse student body with the main ethnic groups as 35% White/Caucasian, 22% Latino, 21% Asian (Northern California University, 2015). The campus’ undergraduate student population was approximately 60% transfer student and, based on the Fall 2014 semester, had an undergraduate populations of nearly 30,000 students, of which, 36% were first-generation and 51% were low-income students (Northern California University, 2015).

To answer these research questions, the three conceptual frameworks of social capital, resilience, and academic resilience were used as lenses to dissect the inquiries. Social

\(^1\) Northern California University is a pseudonym for the campus at the center of this study
capital referred to the network and connections that transfer students have both within and outside of the institution (Coleman, 1988; Tinto, 1975). Resilience described the successful adaptation to the continuous challenges and obstacles that were presented to transfer students (Benard, 1995; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Masten, 2014; Yates & Masten, 2004). Lastly, academic resilience referred specifically to the attitudes and behaviors that transfer students utilized and applied specifically to the academic experience that motivated them throughout their collegiate experience (A. Martin & Marsh, 2003; Sandoval-Hernandez & Cortes, 2012).

**Conceptual Framework: Social Capital**

Bourdieu (1986) described social capital as one’s network of relationships such as family, friends, colleagues, professionals, counselors, etc. While transfer students from low income and first-generation backgrounds have rich social capital such as strong bonds with family and relatives, the social capital needed to navigate the rigors of academia can vary significantly.

**Forms of Capital.** In “Forms of Capital,” Bourdieu (1986) described the various environments that one interacts with as fields, such as a workplace or a college campus, and that each person possesses and utilizes the three forms of capital: (a) economic, (b) social, and (c) cultural, interchangeably to navigate the fields. Bourdieu (1986) described social capital as one’s network of relationships such as family, friends, colleagues, professionals, counselors, etc. Students from first-generation and low income backgrounds tend to have rich general social capital as their family supports are often
strong and unbreakable; however, their social capital related to higher education is rather limited. Some of the challenges these students may encounter would be finding answers to questions about college admissions or financial aid applications, finding suitable housing options around campus, knowing who or where to go to when encountering academic and personal challenges (Bourdieu, 1986; Varga, 2014). On the opposite end of the spectrum, a student who possesses a high degree of social capital would be able to utilize their personal network to seek advice and mentorship about college and possibly even be connected with internship opportunities and scholarship applications.

In the overall picture of transfer students from first-generation and low income backgrounds, social capital served as an opportunity to bring students closer towards degree completion. Some efforts to scale up student social capital include encouraging students to join student clubs and organizations, engage in professional development events related to their major, and develop effective working relationships with student-centered faculty and staff.

**Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital.** Similar to Bourdieu, Coleman (1988), known for his work proving that disadvantaged students of color learn best in well-integrated environments, shared his own research and perspectives regarding social capital. Firstly, he differentiated the three types of capital: (a) human capital, (b) physical capital, and (c) social capital. Specifically with social capital, Coleman (1988) explained it to the resources and networks that one draws upon and accesses in their family and community structures. Additionally, social capital was not something that is
easily assigned a value, but has value in and of itself in the sense that it can facilitate certain actions such as becoming connected with college success mentor and/or someone who is knowledgeable about completing college admission and financial aid applications.

Further in Coleman’s (1988) research, it was mentioned that social capital assists in the transformation of human capital, also known as people, in the sense that it aids through the use of micro-to-macro transitions such as a person wishing to work at a successful company being referred by a friend who has a connection to someone already working within such company. Another such example included South Korean students utilizing social capital as their means to amplify their radical movement and shift from modest individual protesting to large organized revolts. The role social capital played in this event was that it was the agent that helped multiply the movement’s members by using trust in a series of social networks or referrals to gain buy-in and build momentum around the movement. This can also be the case with community college transfer students in a way that circulates the messages and awareness about the institution’s academic support and services and commitment to their timely graduation.

Another aspect of Coleman’s social capital research includes obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of structures. In short, if person A does something for person B, in most cases, person B now has a perceived obligation to repay a favor for person A, who also has an expectation that person B will reciprocate the favor. In some cases, this may be construed as somewhat of a philosophical quid-pro-quo or tit-for-tat dynamic, but in most cases, a perceived level of trust is also included to ensure the
effective exchange of interactions by way of social capital. While not as directly compatible to this study, a certain aspect of this can be adapted to understand how first-generation and low income transfer students interact with their respective social networks, both academic and non-academic, related through trust, obligations, and expectations. Coleman’s (1988) social capital components were also used to examine qualitative responses of participants in the open-coding portions of this study.

In the university environment, social capital is represented in a variety of different ways. Firstly, it is as both Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) described as the series of networks and relationships that a person has and creates. One such example would be the utilization of social capital as means for students to find internships, job opportunities, scholarships, and even pathways to graduate school. In the previous example, students with a generous amount of social capital may have either reached out to their professors for such opportunities or vice-versa. Another common example of social capital occurs when professors proactively reach out to their students when they are struggling with the academic material or even just their overall progress in college. When professors and staff genuinely perform this act, students develop a level of trustworthiness with the university representative and eventually with the campus as well. This is significant because when students develop trust with the university and its faculty and staff, the more likely they are able to feel a sense of belonging, which can also lead to greater likelihoods of retention and persistence to graduation (Astin, 1984; Schlossberg, 1989; Tinto, 1975).
Additionally, the development of social capital directly related to higher education will greatly increase the opportunity to receive support and assistance during academic challenges and distress among first-generation and low income transfer students. From a greater perspective, first-generation and low income community college transfer students actually possess a great amount of social capital when entering the university (Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston, 2010); however, the social capital does not easily align to what is needed to be successful in college; such as a student asking their highly supportive parents who have never completed a financial aid form for help with federal grant and scholarship applications. Although this may pose a challenge and induce stress among many students, it is through experiencing them and successfully adapt to overcome these obstacles where they develop an incredible skill and ability, resilience.

**Conceptual Framework: Resilience**

As social capital was perceived to have a great presence among successful first-generation and low income transfer students, resilience was perceived to also have an important and refined presence among these students through a variety of different aspects. Resilience and grit are relative terms and are also two responses that can emerge from individuals who undergo and overcome significant levels of stress (Duckworth et al., 2007). As first-generation and low income transfer students undergo much stress during college, their level of grit and resilience is perceived to have played a significant role during their academic pursuit.
**Duckworth Grit Scale Study.** Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly (2007) provided research related to the concept of grit, which they defined as “passion and perseverance for long-term goals… despite failure, adversity, and plateaus.” Their research involved interviews with professionals across several different industries such as banking, academia, journalism, medicine and law, and sought to prove that grit was essential to high achieving individuals (Duckworth et al., 2007). Over the results of six various studies, Duckworth et al. (2007) found that: (a) grittier individuals tend to have higher levels of education than those with lower levels of grit, (b) older people tend to have higher levels of grit, (c) students with higher grit earned higher GPAs than their peers despite having lower SAT scores, (d) grit was the leading predictor for first summer program retention at West Point while self-control was the leading predictor for academic performance, and (e) grittier National Spelling Bee contestants outperformed their less grittier competitors. Additionally, Duckworth and her team also found that follow-through was the leading predictor of whether or not a student will take on a leadership position in college.

The grit scale study related to this transfer student study in an aspect similar to grittier spelling bee contestants. Duckworth found that the National Spelling Bee contestants who were grittier tend to outperform those with less grit despite their level of intelligence. When adapted to this transfer student study, it is this study’s hypothesis that first-generation and low income transfer students who graduate within two years at the four-year university possess a significant level of grit and resilience that pushed them to
where they are today. To identify these traits, responses collected through an open-ended survey question were analyzed and coded looking for this specific theme.

**Resilience Theory and Positive Psychology.** Yates and Masten (2004) discussed two prominent components in regards to resilience, which are adversity and competence. Yates et al (2004) described adversity as the negative circumstances or experiences that one undergoes during life whereas competence is the capacity to adapt and rise above the obstacles in their way. Additionally, it was because of resilience that determined the effectiveness of adaptability to encountered threats and obstacles (Masten, 2014; Yates & Masten, 2004).

Resilience research was also a catalyst for change and transformed the prior practices of crafting deficit-based models of intervention towards models that employ positive psychology (Yates & Masten, 2004). One such example included the practice of counselors who assisted their clients by identifying and cultivating their strengths to navigate through challenges in comparison to counselors who simply assist by only identifying problems and how to fix them (Rak & Patterson, 1996).

**Fostering Resilience in Children.** Benard (1995) defined resilience as the set of qualities that assist in the process of successful assimilation and development of “social competence, problem-solving, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose.” Additionally, Benard (1995) also conveyed that a child’s family, educational, and community environment can alter their ability to develop resilience. Benard (1995) also grouped factors that positively influenced resilience into three salient categories: (a)
caring and supportive relationships, (b) positive and high expectations, and (c)
opportunities for meaningful participation. Further, Benard (1995) also found that
schools that set high expectations partnered with high levels of support experienced
higher rates of student achievement. Engaging students in critical thinking and dialogue
as well as meaningful opportunities such as community service and peer helping also led
to positive student achievement outcomes (Benard, 1995).

Through a multitude of longitudinal studies, salient personality factors that emerged within resilient children were: (a) an active approach to problem solving, which enables ability to negotiate emotional and challenging experiences, (b) an ability to gain others’ positive attention, (c) optimism despite undergoing suffering, (d) sustained positive vision of a meaningful life, (e) ability to be alert and self-sufficient, (f) an orientation towards engaging in long-term experiences, and (g) being proactive (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Rutter, 1985, 2007; Werner, 1995). As cited in Morrison and Allen’s (2007) “Promoting Student Resilience in School Context,” Waxman, Gray, and Padron (2003) identified academic resilience as: (a) social and academic competence, (b) problem-solving skills, (c) sense of purpose, and (d) autonomy. Additionally, McMillan and Reed (1994) also contributed four other factors related to resiliency: (a) personal attributes (motivation and goal commitment), (b) positive use of time (extracurricular involvements and meeting deadlines), (c) family life (nurturing family environment and expectations), and (d) school and classroom learning environment (facilities, leadership, technology, and overall climate).
Alongside the previous research, resilience was an important concept to focus on for first-generation and low income community college students. As Duckworth et al (2007) found that grittier students performed just as well as students with higher intelligence. This suggested that being more resilient could lead to the same, if not better, results than just having a higher intelligence quotient. Resilience is also part of many first-generation and low income community college students’ journeys to the bachelor’s degree, as later literature in this study will indicate the additional challenges these students must undergo such as working to provide for their family while juggling a full academic course load (Townsend, 1995). Although Benard’s (1995) findings on resilience focused on the resilience development in children, this information may also be applied toward helping transfer students in their pursuit of a bachelor’s degree. Such example included the influence of caring and positive relationships on the successful assimilation to the new environment (Benard, 1995). While professors can provide the academic support for first-generation and low income students, it is their family and friends that can provide the social and emotional support they need to foster their resilience and overcome their personal obstacles which eventually link to the development of another necessary skill and ability, academic resilience.

**Conceptual Framework: Academic Resilience**

Whereas resilience was a more overarching conceptual framework, academic resilience is a further refined concept that is perceived to play a significant role among first-generation and low income transfer students. Particularly, academic resilience
referred specifically to the influences that directly affected the students’ academic progress, such as attending professor’s office hours or valuing the institution, whereas resilience generally referred to successful adapting to general challenges such as working to provide for family or coping with the loss of a loved one. In this segment, research involving academic resilience will be discussed, which will be eventually implemented into this study.

**Academic Resilience.** Martin and Marsh (2003) conducted a study to analyze academic resilience among 400 high school students from two different schools. In their research, they utilized Martin’s Student Motivation Wheel (A. J. Martin & Martin, 2003) which served as a foundation of crafting questions related to positive and negative influences on academic resilience. The positive influences, also known as boosters, of academic resilience were: (a) self-belief, (b) value of schooling, (c) learning focus, (d) planning, (e) study management, (f) persistence; while the negative influences, also known as guzzlers, were: (a) low control, (b) self-sabotage, (c) failure avoidance, and (d) anxiety. The study’s results were that the boosters strongly related to academic resilience were self-belief and persistence while the guzzlers strongly related to academic resilience were anxiety, failure avoidance, and low control (A. J. Martin & Martin, 2003). The themes identified by Martin and Marsh were used by the researcher during the analysis and coding phase of the qualitative research. Specific information regarding which influences and boosters were used for the quantitative and qualitative data components will be discussed in proceeding chapters.
Model of Academic Resilience. The Model of Academic Resilience described by Sandoval-Hernandez and Cortes (2012) provided a strong foundation in the exploration of the success strategies of disadvantaged transfer students. In their research, Sandoval-Hernandez and Cortes (2012) conducted a study of academic resilience that focuses on four dimensions: (a) personal, (b) family, (c) school, and (d) community. Within the personal dimension, Sandoval-Hernandez and Cortes conveyed that self-confidence and motivation in education are the two factors that create the most influential of the four dimensions. The second dimension of family includes emotional support, economic support, and parents as role models. In the third dimension, the authors noted social recognition, logistic support, and effective student-teacher relationships as the factors associated with influencing the school dimension. The final dimension of community encompassed the factors economic outlook and infrastructure (Sandoval-Hernandez & Cortes, 2012).

Sandoval-Hernandez and Cortez’s (2012) study also featured participants in four different countries: (a) Germany, (b) Luxemburg, (c) Sweden, and (d) France and used the 2006 Progress In Reading Literacy Study, which is an international comparative study that includes over 45 geographical regions in the world. The key findings from Sandoval-Hernandez and Cortes’ (2012) study concluded that the personal dimension of self-confidence and sustained motivation and interest in education were the most influential in determining resilience. Another strong indicator of resilience was the family’s ability to provide material support to their students, such as having a computer,
large amount of books in household, or newspaper subscription. In the school dimension, the most significant factor influencing resilience was student safety at school while the community dimension concluded that students in rural communities tend to be more resilient than their urban community counterparts (Sandoval-Hernandez & Cortes, 2012). The Model of Academic Resilience aligned with this study by using the four dimensions to identify the degree completion success strategies employed by transfer students from first-generation and low income backgrounds. When used as a framework for exploring academic resilience, these four dimensions provide a foundation in the design of survey questions that were used to identify grit and resilience of transfer students from first-generation and low income backgrounds who completed their university coursework within two years upon transferring.

Academic resilience was significant to this study as it helped to provide a lens to view the progress of first-generation and low-income transfer students towards earning their bachelor’s degree. Specifically, academic resilience focused on the student’s successful adaptation to challenges generally found within the higher education environment. As with Martin and Marsh (2003), many positive influences including self-belief, study management, planning and valuing schooling are perceived to have played a role in the success of first-generation and low income students. Similarly, these students tend to have many commitments and obligations (i.e. work and family) but also have to plan and set priorities to completing their degree in order to graduate in a timely manner. Sandoval-Hernandez and Cortes’ (2012) Model of Academic Resilience was also relevant
to first-generation and low income transfer students through their personal, family, school, and community dimensions. Also, these four dimensions are highly interactive with each other and are essential for first-generation and low income transfer students to successfully adapt to changes in their academic environments. For example, through the school dimensions factor, Sandoval-Hernandez and Cortes (2012) noted that effective student-teacher relationships were important to developing academic resilience; if a student experienced a lack of effective student-teacher relationships, their self-confidence and motivation can be adversely impacted, which could also trigger the utilization of emotional support in the family dimension to assist the student in coping with their challenging courses.

**Summary of Conceptual Frameworks**

Separately, each conceptual framework captured a significant portion of the first-generation and low income transfer student experience as well as guided the researcher in this study. Social capital included the network of relationships that transfer students have both within and outside of the institution (Coleman, 1988; Tinto, 1975). Resilience described the successful adaptation to the continuous challenges and obstacles that were presented to first-generation and low income transfer students (Benard, 1995; Duckworth et al., 2007; Masten, 2014; Yates & Masten, 2004). Academic resilience referred specifically successful adaptation of the new academic environment for transfer students (A. Martin & Marsh, 2003; Sandoval-Hernandez & Cortes, 2012). Individually, these frameworks represented an important aspect in the progress to the bachelor’s degree of
first-generation and low income transfer students; but together, the three conceptual frameworks demonstrated a series of lenses needed to conduct this study as illustrated by Figure 1.

As illustrated by Figure 1, the overarching framework encompassed social capital, the network of relationships that students have including but not limited to various types of relationships such as school, family, religious, and personal (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Tinto, 1975). These networks of relationships include a combination of formal and informal mentors, advisors, counselors and coaches that first-generation and low income transfer students acquire as they progress through the community college and into the university and beyond (Laanan et al., 2010). The importance of achieving a significant level of social capital is perceived to have been associated with the success of first-generation and low income transfer students as they were able to find the help and support they needed from others on their way to the bachelor’s degree.

Within social capital, the resilience framework is embedded and signified the ability to successfully adapt to challenges and obstacles (Benard, 1995; Duckworth et al., 2007). While resilience is not solely refined from social capital, a majority of resilience that transfer students developed may have strong roots tied to social capital. For instance, students who were successful in making the necessary adjustments to life challenges (i.e. health challenges or financial challenges) may have relied on their strong networks of support outside of the classroom (i.e. family, relatives, friends) to instill optimism, grit, and change of perception (Benard, 1995; Duckworth et al., 2007). Lastly, the academic
resilience framework is further refined from resilience and related well to the other conceptual frameworks, social capital and resilience. How academic resilience related to social capital was the role of effective relationships with faculty and staff and how this contributed to the success of students within the classroom (Benard, 1995; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Overall resilience related to academic resilience similarly through the motivation and commitment to successfully adapting to the new environment which brought the student closer to their educational goals (A. Martin & Marsh, 2003; Sandoval-Hernandez & Cortes, 2012). Further, academic resilience involved the specific attitudes and factors that transfer students utilized to positively progress to their degree, such as planning and being organized, visiting professor office hours, and being involved a student club.

Diagram of Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

Figure 1 Diagram of Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks
Operational Definitions

Associate’s Degree – An educational degree traditionally granted by community colleges that symbolize a completion of study lasting two-years (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015).

Attrition – The occurrence of declining student enrollment, drop-outs, extended leave of absence(s), academic dismissal, etc.

Bachelor’s Degree – An educational degree traditionally granted by four-year colleges that symbolizes a completion of study lasting four-years (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015).

Campus Labs - Online survey hosting website used by the researcher to collect quantitative and qualitative data.

Community College, Two-Year College, Two-Year Institution, or Junior College – An educational institution that primarily grants associate’s degrees, prepares students for transferring to four-year universities, and/or focuses on career and technical education.

Degree Completion or Graduation – The successful completion of the requirements needed to satisfy a bachelor’s degree.

Grit – Sustained high levels of passion and perseverance toward a long term goal without significant loss of motivation (Duckworth et al., 2007). In this study, grit focused on the participant’s passion and perseverance towards earning a bachelor’s degree.

First-generation Student – A student who was the first in their family to attend and/or graduate with a bachelor’s degree. In this study, first-generation students self-reported
that they are the first in their family to attend and graduate with a bachelor’s degree; this may include first-generation students who had a parent/guardian who attended college, but did not complete their bachelor’s degree.

*Low Income or Low Socioeconomic Status Student* – Socioeconomic status includes multiple factors such as income, power, and social class. For this study, students that are low income were identified by whether or not they met the federal Pell Grant eligibility guidelines using information provided by the university for the student record data and participants self-disclosing they qualified for Pell Grants on the online survey and interviews.

*Native Four-Year Student* – A student who began their college career at a four-year university immediately after graduating high school, also known as first-years or freshmen.

*Resilience* – Similar to persistence, resilience refers to the student’s individual efforts and motivation to overcome academic, family, personal, and financial challenges that present themselves their pursuit toward the college degree (A. Martin & Marsh, 2003)

*Student Engagement* – The relationship and/or connection between the student and their progress to earning their degree. Student engagement also involves in-direct academic influences such as their student organization, on-campus job, internship, etc. Typically, the more that students are engaged and invested in the university, the more likely they are to graduate (Astin, 1984).
Persistence – A student’s individual efforts and progress toward earning their bachelor’s degree despite various challenges and/or obstacles they encountered.

Retention – The institution’s efforts and progress toward maintaining student enrollment and persistence levels as well as minimizing the occurrence of attrition.

Time to Degree – The total amount of semesters and/or years spent towards achieving the bachelor’s degree. This study aims to identify strategies to reduce time to degree for first-generation and low income transfer students as well as all students.

Transfer Student – A student who begins their bachelor’s degree journey at a community college focusing on lower division requirements and then transfers and completes residual coursework at a four-year university.

University, Four-Year College, or Four-Year Institution – An educational institution that traditionally grants bachelor’s degrees as well as master’s degrees and doctoral degrees.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations

This study held several assumptions to be true including the integrity and truthfulness of its participants as well as that of the researcher and all involved parties. Another assumption was that this study relied tremendously on the ability of its participants to reflect upon their college experiences during their undergraduate degree at the institution. While their recollection of their past experiences may not be 100% retained, this study assumed that its participants provided information as accurate as possible and also stated any experiences they cannot remember or answer questions that they were not entirely certain about.
This study also had limitations in the sense that not every member of the cohorts
are surveyed which were due to a variety of reasons such as self-selection or technical
errors and difficulties. Another limitation of this study was that it was only conducted at
one university instead of multiple universities and multiple points in time.

The scope of this study involved participants who were community college
transfer students at Northern California University. Participants who were not first-
generation or low income community college transfer students were excluded from the
individual interview component, but were captured in the quantitative student records
data and online survey component, if applicable, as well as used to compare first-
generation and low income transfer student data to when appropriate.

The delimitations of this study included the researcher’s work experience that
spanned a total of nine years in student affairs, which included two years of service in an
educational equity program and two years coordinating a student peer-mentoring
program.

The Significance of the Study

Transfer students from first-generation and low income backgrounds experience a
variety of challenges that their counterparts do not always undergo; such as maintaining
employment while in college to support their family and/or self, juggling multiple family
commitments, a limited network of helpful and supportive people to contact, and a lack
of disposable income (Jacobs, 2004; Jehangir, Stebleton, & Deenanath, 2015; Laanan,
2001; Townsend, 1995). While literature and research exist on the individual or dual
overlap of disadvantaged student populations such as first-generation students (Bui, 2002; Chen & Carroll, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Greenwald, 2012; Johnson, 2010; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Peabody, Hutchens, Lewis, & Deffendall, 2011; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Thayer, 2000; Varga, 2014), low income students (Griffin & Connor, 1994; Lusardi, Mitchell, & Curto, 2010; Muraskin & Lee, 2004; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015b; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011; Orfield, 1992; Soria, Weiner, & Lu, 2014; Thayer, 2000; Varga, 2014), and community college transfer students (Berner, 2012; Duggan & Pickering, 2008; Gonzalez, 2013; Hills, 1965; Jacobs, 2004; Knoell & Medsker, 1965; Laanan, 2001; Laanan et al., 2010; Lord et al., 2012; Luo et al., 2007; Miller, 2013; Moore & Shulock, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011; Rendon, 1995; Townsend, 1995, 2008; Townsend, McNerny, & Arnold, 1993; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Turner, 1988, 1992; Universities, 2015; Wyner, 2006b), the intersectionality of all three student population identities at the university were relatively limited (Cabrera et al., 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Laanan et al., 2010). From an educational equity perspective, it is imperative to acknowledge the challenges that this population of students face as well as how to assist them in navigating through the many obstacles that they face (Wyner, 2006). Ensuring access to higher education for disadvantaged students is only one of many keys to unlock an overall successful nation, another important key is to ensure adequate follow through,
support, and successful completion for these students to bridge our national economic
and achievement gaps (Alter, 2012).

Rising student loan debt on the collective and individual levels were also another
concern especially since first-generation and low income students are high-risks of
accumulating debt and leaving college without finishing their degree (Soria et al., 2014).
Additionally, with the need for more college-educated people in the workforce, first-
generation and low income transfer students have the potential to create a new generation
of college graduates and can lift their families and communities to new heights (Alter,
2012; Orfield, 1992). Further, the importance of assisting transfer students from
disadvantaged backgrounds is being masked by the higher graduation rates that transfer
students overall reached, in comparison to their native four-year student counterparts
(Moore & Shulock, 2009, 2011; Morrin, 2011). However, this issue was more than just
to help first-generation and low income transfer students succeed but to also take steps
towards closing the achievement gap that separates middle and lower class families from
achieving greater success and a higher quality of life (Alter, 2012; Cohen & Brawer,
2003; Orfield, 1992; Wyner, 2006).

**Conclusion**

As there has been a demonstrated need to support transfer students from low
income and first-generation backgrounds (Cabrera et al., 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2003;
Laanan et al., 2010), so does it also become important to collect and contribute literature
and research relative to achieving this goal. In Chapter 2, a review of literature
pertaining to the various studies that involved relevant college student populations will be discussed; specifically looking into transfer students, first-generation students, and low income students. In Chapter 3, a blueprint of the mixed-method research approaches used in this study will be explained as well as rationalized to respond to this study’s research questions. In Chapter 4, an analysis of data will be featured and the findings relative to the research questions and conceptual frameworks will be presented. Chapter 5 provides the implications of the findings, provided recommendations for consideration, and a conclusion of the study.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

While there is vast existence of research involving community college transfer students, low-income students, and first-generation students separately, there is relatively limited literature focusing on the intersectionality of these three student groups. Coincidentally, there is much overlap of these identities among community college transfer students and most transfer students tend to be from a lower socioeconomic background, the first in their family to attend college, and be an underrepresented minority group (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011).

This literature review begins with a description of each of the following student populations: (a) transfer students, (b) first-generation students, and (c) low income students. A section involving the intersectionality of these three student groups immediately follows and provides an overall summation of the student population at the focus of this study, first-generation and low income transfer students. This chapter then closes with the role of degree completion, as well as degree completion indicators, and how it relates to the student success of first-generation and low income transfer students.

Transfer Students

The origin of transfer students dates back to the early emergence of community colleges. In the early 20th century, United States leaders realized the need for a more skilled and educated workforce as global economic competition was at the brink of many
challenges that they faced (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). In the 1980s and 1990s, the inquiries that policymakers and researchers had about transfer students revolved around “what are the educational institutions’ transfer rates?”, “what transfer policies and articulation agreements exist across states?”, and “what is the extent of the formalization and institutionalization of such agreements and policies?” (Laanan et al., 2010).

Today, research inquiries focus more on the lived experience of transfer students (Laanan et al., 2010), as transfer students account for nearly half of the undergraduate student population at four year universities nationwide (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011) and generally have less, if any, student support programs and resources than native freshmen students (Jacobs, 2004; Townsend, 2008). Despite certain campuses having a majority transfer student population, programming efforts to push the degree completion success needle forward for these students can sometimes be scarce or relatively non-existent. These circumstances are the case at various four-year college campuses such as Northern California University (NCU), the campus used as the research site for this study. At NCU, transfer students account for approximately 60% of the undergraduate student population (Office of Institutional Research, 2014) and has no campus-wide services or programs tailored specifically to serve mass amounts of transfer student populations. However, NCU does include pockets of programs and areas that serve smaller amounts of transfer students including one that focuses on the success of first-generation and low income community college transfer students.
Transfer students arrive at the four-year university with a richness of cultural, educational, and life experiences (Astin, 1984; Cabrera et al., 2001; Jacobs, 2004; Moore & Shulock, 2009; Townsend, 2008). As with most transitions into a new environment, transfer students experience unique challenges and opportunities. On a macro-level and in part to their overall higher graduation rates, transfer students are often a second-thought and receive an unannounced label as “the forgotten student” (Berner, 2012; Jacobs, 2004; Lord et al., 2012). This tends to be based on misperceptions of academic performance based on the assumption that prior college coursework signals ease of knowledge acquisition (Luo et al., 2007; Tinto, 1975; Townsend, 2008).

Another significant challenge that transfer students sometimes face is taking lower division classes that do not count towards a bachelor’s degree which caused setbacks to degree completion (Moore & Shulock, 2009). While it is in the best interest of students to complete coursework that meets bachelor degrees requirements, students sometimes completed coursework outside of their requirements for reasons such as personal leisure, curiosity, and/or unfortunately because they may not possess the social or cultural capital to know the difference. Eventually, students in these situations end up having to complete additional lower division classes and requirements to make up for what they did not complete at their community college. Additional barriers that exist for transfer student students include lack of academic preparation, inaccurate or outdated transfer advising, misperceived level of academic expectations and institutional rigor, and misaligned transfer policies and articulation agreements (Laanan et al., 2010).
In “Feeling Like A Freshmen Again: The Transfer Student Transition” by Barbara K. Townsend (2008), one of the most common misconceptions that university faculty and staff hold about transfer students is that they (transfer students) do not experience as much of a challenge with the university transition as freshmen do. One factor that is attributed to this misconception is the fact that transfer students usually have only a few general education courses to complete and tend to focus more on completing upper division major coursework (Townsend, 2008). This misconception ultimately leads to a blind spot for the institution by way of not taking into account the needs of their community college transfer student population. However, Townsend (2008) also presented information that showcased the similar confounding experiences that transfer students from two-year institutions to four-year institutions undergo to that of native students. Like native students, transfer students will have negative experiences if they are unable to enroll in the coursework they need as first-year students usually have the latest registration dates (Townsend, 2008).

Townsend (2008) also articulated transfer students as being more academically mature in comparison to their first-year native student counterparts in the sense that they are at school to get an education, not to party and engage in other related social activities. At first, this concept may strike itself as a barrier for transfer students to become involved with campus activities as they may not feel that the opportunities may not be as inclusive to them or aligned with their maturity level. However, through the eyes of educational
leaders, this can be considered an opportunity to identify additional merits and incentives to engage transfer students in on-campus activities.

Lastly, the concept of “feeling like a freshmen again” described the phenomenon which transfer students experience upon arrival at the university; they enter feeling unfamiliar with the policies, procedures, and culture of the campus (Townsend, 2008). This tends to once again become an undertone for faculty and staff in which they may perceive transfer students as already acclimated to the academic college environment from their previous institutions and would not need as much support. This may perhaps be why transfer students are sometimes identified as “the forgotten students” (Jacobs, 2004).

In summation, transfer students represent between 40%-50% of the national undergraduate student population, are usually in the age-range of 20 years old to 25 years old, have undergone significant life experiences, held at least one part-time or full-time job, and are typically more intellectually mature as they have experience completing coursework in a post-secondary environment setting (Astin, 1984; Jacobs, 2004; Jehangir et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2007; Melguizo & Dowd, 2009; Moore & Shulock, 2009, 2011; Morrin, 2011; Rendon, 1995; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Transfer students also have rich social and cultural capital that may not easily align with the capital required to easily progress through academia, especially due to most transfer students being first-generation students as well.
First-Generation College Students

Over the past two decades, colleges across the nation have experienced increasing numbers of first-generation students in their undergraduate population (Jehangir et al., 2015; Peabody et al., 2011). Greenwald (2012) noted that in 2007, approximately 17% of the United States undergraduates were first-generation. However, over the past eight years, that number has doubled and first-generation students now account for one out of every three college students (Jehangir et al., 2015). But who exactly are first-generation students?

Certain studies have characterized first-generation students as those whose parents never enrolled in college where as other studies classify first-generation students to include those who had parents to attend college but did not complete their degree objectives (Jehangir et al., 2015). For the purpose of this study, the latter definition will be applied and expressed. In comparison to those who are non-first-generation, first-generation undergraduate students possess several unique characteristics including: (a) being persons of color, (b) English as second language students, (c) immigrant family backgrounds, (d) single parents, and (e) financially independent (Bui, 2002; A. Cabrera et al., 2003; Jehangir et al., 2015). This indicates that first-generation college students also tend to be first-generation Americans which also increases the likelihood of having to undergo significant acclimation to a new language and culture (Bui, 2002). Cabrera, Burkum, and La Nasa (2003) also found that first-generation students tend to begin their academic career at the community college before transferring to the four-year university,
are typically not enrolled in full-time, and less likely to complete their bachelor’s degree objectives (Jehangir et al., 2015). Coincidentally, some of these setbacks can also be found within transfer student populations and low-income student populations.

Additionally, while there is much literature about first-generation students, the majority of research can be grouped into three categories: (a) pre-college expectations and planning, (b) the transition between high school and college, and (c) the effect of college experiences on persistence and graduation (Terenzini et al., 1996). The first category of research involves pre-college experiences and conveys the challenges and struggles that students have in this phase. Such challenges include possessing simple knowledge about the differences between college institution types, lack of familiarity with the college application process, lack of familiarity with the college selection process, level of family support and assistance, and level of household income to pay for college applications and/or campus tours (Jenkins, Miyazaki, & Janosik, 2009; Terenzini et al., 1996; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). It is also in this stage where students may not feel their grade point average is competitive enough to attend highly selective four-year universities, yet alone any four-year university, which can lead to their enrollment in the community college system or no higher education institution at all.

In the next phase, the transition from high school to college, research points out that first-generation students are also disadvantaged academically, tend to have lower grade point averages, are less likely to be persistent, and tend to take remedial courses their first year that usually do not count towards progress to graduation (Chen & Carroll,
It is also worth noting that aside from not having a family member to provide guidance and support through the rigors of academia, first-generation students experience a misalignment in the social and cultural capital needed to transition smoothly into college environment (Varga, 2014). For instance, the strong familial ties that first-generation students encounter in their home life may wind up being relatively ineffective when the student encounters the rigor associated with academia or undergo challenges and setbacks from seeking financial aid.

In the third research content area, the effect of college experiences on persistence and graduation is discussed. One study revealed that first-generation students felt more worried about failing classes than their peer counterparts who had at least one parent with a bachelor’s degree (Bui, 2002). In that same study, Bui (2002) also reported that first-generation students: (a) felt overall less prepared, (b) were more worried about financial aid, (c) felt as if they did not have much knowledge about campus life and student engagement, and (d) admitted to having to dedicate more time and energy to studying than their peer counterparts. While the results in this study concluded that first-generation students undergo rather significant challenges, the study also found several commonalties between first-generation and non-first-generation students include: (a) feeling confident in making personal decisions in college, (b) having working knowledge about the academic programs prior to attending college, (c) establishing social relationships and making friends in college, (d) possessing positive feelings about being a college student at their respective university, and (e) feeling a sense of belonging and
acceptance at their respective university (Bui, 2002). Lastly, the National Center of Education Statistics (2003) discovered that first-generation students were three times less likely to graduate college in comparison to non-first-generation students (Soria et al., 2014).

Overall, first-generation students represent a new wave of scholars that while they may have a steeper learning curve to undergo at the university, they have just as much, if not more, potential and passion to thrive and succeed in college. Coincidentally, one frequently associated commonality associated with first-generation students is that they also tend to be low income (Varga, 2014), which will be discussed in the next section of this literature review.

**Low Income/Low Socioeconomic Status Students**

Socioeconomic status encompasses several types of statuses beyond income including: power, privilege, and control (American Psychological Association, 2015). However, for the purpose of this study, low socioeconomic status and low income will be used interchangeably as the researcher is particularly interested in the role of financial and economic resources affects student pursuit towards the bachelor’s degree. Low socioeconomic students, or low-income students, tend to experience challenges related to academic preparation and economic capital (Moore & Shulock, 2011; Orfield, 1992; Varga, 2014). With academic preparation, students from low income backgrounds tend to complete primary and secondary education in systems where there is also a deficiency of effective educators, college and career readiness culture, and sometimes adequate
resource, facilities, and technologies that promote learning (Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2013; Varga, 2014). This tends to present a barrier for students because if students do not experience a nurturing academic or family environment that supports the pursuit of a bachelor’s degree, there is a significant probability that the student may not even consider college as a post-secondary opportunity or discontinue their enrollment (Varga, 2014).

Another aspect to take into consideration is economic capital. As low income students tend to not have as much expendable income, the opportunity to pursue activities that promote academic preparation, engagement, and development may also be limited (Astin, 1984). For instance, if a middle school or high school student wanted to participate in a summer science camp or in a summer college preparation academy, such endeavors may also involve a price tag that is beyond the student’s financial means. Along the lines of college preparation, low income students also tend to be less likely to engage in advanced high school academic programs such as Advance Placement (AP), honors, and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) (Jehangir et al., 2015). While some high schools make efforts towards reducing or eliminating the cost of AP and IB tests, students may not even know that they can earn college credit for passing these tests which can reduce the total amount of college units needed to graduate.

Economic capital deficiency can also present itself in the form of goods that the student may or may not possess such as transportation (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). There is also a likelihood that if a student does not own a vehicle or have reliable form of private transportation that they resort to using either public transit
systems or walking and biking to campus and other destinations. This significant amount of time that the students use commuting to campus and home can become taxing and take away time from studying. Lastly, in alignment with the deficiency of economic capital, students might also have to work to support their families as well and be encapsulated in a phenomenon known as environmental pull. In short, environmental pull is the occurrence of the nuclear family relying on the student to make significant contributions to the household through both financial obligations, such as working, or through chores and housekeeping duties, such as cleaning or babysitting younger siblings (Nunez & Elizondo, 2013). Environmental pull also places a student in a foundation-like role for their family in which without their significant contributions, the social, financial, and emotional structure of the family can be jeopardized (Nunez & Elizondo, 2013).

Along the lines of social capital, low-income students face challenges within and beyond the academic environment. As social capital describes the networks of an individual, the amount of social capital that can be applied toward higher education may also be deficient for students from low-income backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). As low-income families tend to not have college-educated head of households (Jehangir et al., 2015), the struggle to navigate the complexities from college and financial aid applications to the tutoring and academic support services available on campuses is an uphill battle all on its own. Of course, this is not to say that families are not willing to help and assist their students, it is just that they might not know exactly
how to do so and that the level of support and social capital they need are not easily aligned with that of what is needed at the four-year university (Jehangir et al., 2015).

Students from low-income backgrounds also struggle with financial literacy, which can also be traced to the lack of social capital (Jehangir et al., 2015). In their study, Lusardi, Mitchell, and Curto (2010) illustrated the lack of financial literacy of young people as well as the growing concerns for the rise of national student loan debt, in which between 1997 to 2007, the average debt increased from $9,800 to $19,200. This is particularly alarming for low-income and middle-income students as they have grown up in households with low amounts of disposable income and tend to not have adequate financial literacy or social capital to manage the financial aid packages they receive. From the researcher’s personal experiences, they have worked with certain low-income students who do not apply their financial aid money effectively and instead have made non-essential purchases or provided the funds to their family and/or friends without realizing the severity of consequences from their lack of financial management knowledge. Additionally, in Lusardi et. al’s (2010) study of young people overall, only 27% were reported to be proficient in basic financial concepts and understanding the different types of terminology ranging from inflation to risk diversification.

Also, Soria, Weiner, and Lu’s (2014) study discovered that low and middle income students tend to work more hours and typically off-campus, which can present challenges related to time management and developing effective study habits. Mortenson (2007) discovered that by 24 years of age, only 12% of low-income students earned a
bachelor’s degree in comparison to the 73% completion rate of higher-income peers (Soria et al., 2014). Further, the National Center for Education Statistics (2003) reported that only 7.5% of Pell grant recipients earned their bachelor’s degree within six-years (Soria et al., 2014).

Summary of First-Generation and Low Income Transfer Students

As evidenced, there is richness in research involving the separate populations of first-generation students (Bui, 2002; Chen & Carroll, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Greenwald, 2012; Johnson, 2010; Pascarella et al., 2004; Peabody et al., 2011; Terenzini et al., 1996; Thayer, 2000; Varga, 2014), low income students (Griffin & Connor, 1994; Lusardi et al., 2010; Muraskin & Lee, 2004; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015b; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011; Orfield, 1992; Soria et al., 2014; Thayer, 2000; Varga, 2014), and community college transfer students (Berner, 2012; Duggan & Pickering, 2008; Gonzalez, 2013; Hills, 1965; Jacobs, 2004; Knoell & Medsker, 1965; Laanan, 2001; Laanan et al., 2010; Lord et al., 2012; Luo et al., 2007; Miller, 2013; Moore & Shulock, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011; Rendon, 1995; Townsend, 1995, 2008; Townsend et al., 1993; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Turner, 1988, 1992; Universities, 2015; Wyner, 2006b); however, the intersectionality of all three student population identities at the university were relatively limited (Cabrera et al., 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Laanan et al., 2010). To best illustrate the salient traits of each population and overall, Figure 2 will be used to. As elaborated below, Figure 2, described the most
common characteristics of each of the three student populations as well as and overall profile of the intersectionality of the three student populations.

Review of Literature: College Student Populations

Figure 2 College Student Populations Literature Review Diagram

The significance of Figure 2 is that only a relative amount of research has sought to inquire how the characteristics of three student populations influence each other as well as inquire about the setbacks and successes of students who possesses the characteristics of all three. The first-generation and low income student faces many challenges that have stacked on one another and can impede the progress to the degree.

Through the transfer student literature, first-generation and low income students tend to be older students (Rendon, 1995; Townsend & Wilson, 2006) and more academically and developmentally mature (Townsend, 2008); this is particularly important for educators in
the sense that it is an opportunity to identify programs and services that appeal to this audience. For instance, using Astin’s (1984) student involvement research, programs and events for transfer students could be focused more on professional and career development as opposed to a glow-in-the-dark foam party social.

Additionally, this study’s literature review suggests that university programs should be free or at a very reduced cost, as first-generation and low income students tend to have limited amounts of disposable income. Further, through low income literature, first-generation and low income transfer students are also fairly preoccupied with necessary employment to provide for themselves and their families (Nunez & Elizondo, 2013). It is important for educators to also consider this when it comes to serving students as programs and support services that bear a financial obligation may not be as largely attended by first-generation and low income transfer students.

Another important consideration this literature review recommends is for educators to understand that employment is rarely an option for many first-generation and low income transfer students (Nunez & Elizondo, 2013). It is important for educational administrators to consider their hours of business operations to ensure that first-generation and low income students also have access to the support programs and services that their peers do so that they do not have to miss work and lose pay to get help the academic support they may need. Lastly, within the first-generation scope of literature, developing social capital for the university environment is very important for first-generation and low income students as they are the first one in their family to take
such journey. Building social capital among these students is an important strategy to making them successful as the faculty and staff can provide the needed mentorship, advice, and counseling to ensure students are set on the best path to their degree. As previously discussed, resilience is also another important factor that surfaces within social capital and the networks of relationships can act as a source of motivation and support for these students (Benard, 1995). Overall, first-generation and low income students present great promise toward achieving a college degree and eventually contributing to the success of society and its economy (Alter, 2012).

**Indicators and Strategies for Transfer Student Degree Completion**

As previously indicated, there is a significant need for college graduates (Alter, 2012). Through the lens of university administrators, the key to producing more college graduates is focusing on factors and systems that influence degree completion, which is a careful orchestration of organizations, systems, research, and policies at multiple internal and external levels (Moore & Shulock, 2009, 2011; N. Shulock, 2009; N. K. Shulock, J.;, 2014). To identify the salient indicators that guide students along the degree completion continuum, student retention and persistence research are required.

**Student Retention.** As a highly respected and accomplished scholar in student retention research, Tinto (1975) developed a retention theory that sought to reduce student attrition rates. Tinto based his model on Durkheim’s Theory of Suicide (1961), in which Durkheim identified that suicide is more likely to occur in individuals who are not effectively assimilated into society (Tinto, 1975). With retention, Tinto further went on
to convey the relationship between students and the academic and social components of college to the relationship between individuals experiencing suicide ideation and society. However, Tinto (1975) also cautioned that university’s academic and social components can sometimes be mutually exclusive in the sense that if a student has successfully integrated into the social aspect of the college environment and not the academic component, that student can be considered at risk for dropping out.

Tinto’s Retention Theory also identified two key factors in student retention: goal commitment and institutional commitment. Goal commitment is described as maintaining the focus and persistence on completing the bachelor’s degree whereas institutional commitment is seen as the level of pride and connection that the student has for their respective campus. While these two key factors serve as significant indicators for retention, Tinto also recognized the role of external forces that can influence a student’s goal and institutional commitment (1975) For instance, if a college student’s family member were to become diagnosed with cancer and accumulated large medical bill expenses, the student’s goal and/or institutional commitment levels could also become adversely affected and eventually falter. Tinto (1975) also draws upon cost-benefit analysis to illustrate what may be cycling through student’s minds who experience negative external impacts; in which case, students who may not understand the long-term benefits for their time and financial investments into a college degree, may fall short of graduation.
In “Transitioning Transfer Students: Interactive Factors that Influence First-Year Retention,” Luo, Williams, and Vieweg (2007), revealed that the following factors provided significant influence on first-year retention: transfer credit hours, transfer grade point average, college of last attendance, institutional scholarships, post-transfer grade point average (GPA) and earned credit hours (Lord et al., 2012). Furthermore, Zhai and Newcomb (2000) argued that among all factors, “a transfer student’s GPA is the best indicator of expected academic performance, while the student’s post-transfer GPA is the single most important measure associated with retention.” Therefore it is important to ensure that transfer students be supplemented with the tools and resources that prepare them to strive for academic excellence.

Additionally, through Luo et al’s research (2007), they discovered that junior transfer students from state public universities were about 14% less likely to be retained than those entering from large urban community colleges and that transferring students from out of state were 24% less likely to be retained than those from large urban community colleges. This interesting finding would prove to be very helpful when working with transfer students from public four-year institutions and out-of-state community colleges to ensure they are provided adequate knowledge of resources available aimed at supporting their studies.

**Persistence.** While retention focuses mainly on the institution’s efforts toward increasing degree completion, persistence refers to the student’s individual efforts and motivation to reach the finish line (Hagedorn, 2006). Among the various elements
associated with persistence include attitude, self-control vs. impulsivity, emotional commitment to education, and adaptability to change (as cited in Tinto, 1975). Several studies have also shown that grade performance is the most important stand-alone factor in determining college persistence (Ammons, 1971; Astin, 1972; Blanchfield, 1971; Coker, 1968; Greive, 1970; Jaffe & Adams, 1970; Kamens, 1971; Mock & Yonge, 1969).

Also, a leading factor in increasing the likelihood of college degree completion and persistence is the family’s background such as their quality of support and level of expectation and interest they place in the student’s journey to the bachelor’s degree (Tinto, 1975). One could also take into consideration that families with lower income statuses see the potential and value of a college education and its ability to provide social and economic mobility. Additionally, prestigious higher education institutions have also started offering full ride scholarships, tuition waivers, and/or highly attractive financial support to families from lower income statuses such as Princeton, Harvard, and Stanford (Harvard Gazette, 2013; Stanford News, 2015).

**Degree Completion Indicators.** When retention and persistence are successfully partnered, the result is degree completion. Through the various literature and research acquired, the following factors were described to have a positive effect on degree completion: (a) selecting a major at the end of the year, (b) maintaining a strong college grade point average, (c) strong college preparation in high school, (d) full time enrollment each semester, (e) taking summer classes, (f) completing college level math and English within the first two years of college, (g) having a parent with a bachelor’s degree.
degree, (h) attending college right after high school, and (i) high socioeconomic status (Adelman, 1999, 2006; Cabrera et al., 2001; Chen & Carroll, 2005; Moore & Shulock, 2009). Astin (1971) also conveyed that high school academic performance and class rank have been shown to also be an important predictor in college degree completion (as cited in Tinto, 1975). Degree completion indicators that were discovered to have a negative effect on progress to graduation include excessive withdrawals and registering for courses late (Moore & Shulock, 2009).

These indicators are important for educational administrators to consider as these can influence the setbacks and successes that their first-generation and low income transfer students experience. It is also evident that there is also a significant amount of indicators that influence degree completion before students arrive at the university, which also suggests that it may be too late to make a difference in these students’ lives on the first day of the semester. However, through many challenges that are stacked against students from disadvantaged backgrounds, there is a group of first-generation and low income community college transfer students who persevered and not only graduated college, but defied the odds and earned their degree within two years upon entering the university.
Chapter 3

METHODS

Introduction

This study’s mixed-method approach will be discussed and explained in this chapter. A mixed-methods approach uses both quantitative and qualitative methods in the design. This method was selected to provide two vantage points regarding transfer student experiences and to provide multiple entryways to different worldviews and experiences (Creswell, 2013). A quantitative design was selected to identify factors that research and literature suggested as indicators for degree completion as well as to compare and contrast factors of participants who emerged successfully despite their adversities. The importance of quantitative research in this study is to provide empirical evidence for recommendations on how to increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree for transfer students (Creswell, 2013). Regression statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data.

A qualitative design was also selected for a myriad of reasons. While a quantitative approach to observing and understanding the transfer student population could yield valuable empirical data, a qualitative approach is both desirable and appropriate as the understanding surrounding this occurrence is relatively limited (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, with qualitative research, the researcher’s interests are to unveil the stories and experiences “behind the numbers” that a quantitative approach could not easily discover and also seek to understand how the subject interpreted their
transitional experiences into the university (Merriam, 2009, 2014). In many respects, qualitative research provides a “voice for the voiceless” and seeks to pull in the “essence of human experiences” (Creswell, 2013). This study employed qualitative methods, specifically phenomenology. This type of design was selected due to the nature of the research question, which seeks to understand an occurrence, graduation within a timely manner for first-generation and low income students, with relatively limited knowledge (Merriam, 2009, 2014).

**Research Design**

This research design used a concurrent triangulation approach in which certain aspects of the quantitative method and qualitative method were conducted and analyzed in isolation of each other. The quantitative data includes two collections from two sources, student records data and an online survey. The student records data was retrieved from pre-existing records of Northern California University’s Fall 2012, Spring 2013, and Fall 2013 cohorts of new transfer students. Using regression statistics, several factors were analyzed to identify the most salient demographics and other factors of first-generation and low income transfer students who completed their bachelor degree requirements within two years versus non-first-generation and low income transfer students who completed their bachelor degree requirements within two years. The quantitative data collected and analyzed from the student record data and online survey responses were grouped into three main areas: (a) student demographics (ethnicity, parent(s)/guardian(s)’ level of education, first-generation status, low income, living on
campus), (b) academic and other relevant data (pre-transfer GPA, pre-transfer units 
earned, major by admit, major by graduation, changed major status, first term enrolled 
units, first term GPA, hours spent working per week, hours spent commuting per week, 
enrolled in summer courses, enrolled in winter courses), and (c) student use of university 
programs and services (academic advising, 24 hour study hall, student body government, 
capstone classes/senior projects, career center services, developing positive relationships 
with faculty, developing positive relationships with staff, financial aid, fitness & wellness 
center, going to professor office hours, internships, joining a student club, library 
services, tutoring, multi-cultural center, working on campus, on-campus events, 
undergraduate research, scholarships, serving as a student club officer, student counseling 
and health center).

The overarching goal of this study’s quantitative method was to determine the 
 salient factors that were associated with timely degree completion for first-generation and 
low income community college transfer students. Logistic regression was specifically 
selected to measure the individual level of influence each factor had on transfer student 
graduation rates, while controlling all other factors. Logistic regression is used when 
there is at least one categorical and/or continuous variable (student major, working, low 
inecome, first-generation) and the researcher wants to determine if variation in the 
dichotomous dependent variable (graduated in two years or less or not graduated in two 
years or less) causes variation in the independent variable (McDonald, 2015). Simply put,
logistic regression serves to determine what independent variables (demographics, academic data, helpful resources) are associated with the graduation in two years or not.

The qualitative data components were divided into two areas, an online survey and individual interviews. The online surveys were distributed to community college transfer students who were admitted to Northern California University during the Fall 2012, Spring 2013, or Fall 2013 semesters. The online survey takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete and consisted of a combination of 6 open-ended and 17 closed-ended questions. Participants who submitted completed surveys were also be eligible for a chance to win one of ten $20 Target gift cards. The individual interview component was conducted at Northern California University or at a mutually agreed upon location within 45 miles of NCU. Participants in the individual interviews indicated their interest in becoming part of the interviews through the online survey. Each individual interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and included 9 open-ended guiding questions. There was a total of sixteen individual interviews. While the online survey provided a wide range and breadth of responses, individual interviews were conducted to provide depth in the qualitative research component of this study.

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher relied on existing data and portions of the online survey to conduct the quantitative research and portions of the online surveys and interviews to conduct qualitative research. While the researcher worked in an area that focused on increasing graduation rates and improving retention, the researcher did their personal best to refrain
from any action that would cause or potentially cause a bias in the collection and interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative data. Participants in both the online survey and the interviews were provided consent forms that explained that any and all information that can identify them was kept as confidential as technology allows.

Additionally for the interviews, a pseudonym was used for the participant responses as well as for the written notes by the researcher. To further protect the participants’ confidentiality, the researcher also used a pseudonym for the name of the university. Additionally, the researcher interviewed several campus administrators and faculty members, off the record, to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon that existed at the university as well as to gain information and advice on how to conduct such a study.

The researcher used Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SSPS) version 23 as the primary software to analyze the raw data for the quantitative analysis purposes. An expert also assisted the researcher to double-check that the quantitative data and subsequent analysis were valid and reliable. Using the researcher’s university product license, the researcher used an online survey administrator, Campus Labs, to collect the responses for the qualitative research component. To analyze the qualitative data, the researcher used Dedoose, an online qualitative and mixed-method research software, to code responses, analyze for sub-themes, narrative patterns, and themes. Additionally, an outside researcher assisted the researcher in determining if the reported qualitative data findings and analysis produced similar codes, sub-themes, and themes.
Research Questions

Research Question One. What factors are associated with completion of a bachelor’s degree within two years of transferring to a 4-year university, for first-generation college students from low income backgrounds? Factors will include:

A) student demographics (ethnicity, parent(s)'/guardian(s)’ level of education, first-generation status, low income status, living on campus)

B) academic and other relevant data (pre-transfer GPA, pre-transfer units earned, major by admit, major by graduation, changed major status, first term enrolled units, first term GPA, hours spent working per week, hours spent commuting per week, enrolled in summer courses, enrolled in winter courses)

C) student use of university programs and services (academic advising, 24 hour study hall, student body government, capstone classes/senior projects, career center services, developing positive relationships with faculty, developing positive relationships with staff, financial aid, fitness & wellness center, going to professor office hours, internships, joining a student club, library services, tutoring, multi-cultural center, working on campus, on-campus events, undergraduate research, scholarships, serving as a student club officer, student counseling and health center)

Research Question Two. What unique setbacks and successes did first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated within two years experience in comparison to other transfer students?
Research Question Three. What recommendations do transfer students have to increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree?

Setting, Population & Sample

This setting of this study is at a large public four-year institution in northern California and will be referred to as Northern California University or NCU. The campus has a student population of approximately 30,000 students with a majority of the undergraduate population being transfer students (60%). For native four-year students, the four-year graduation rate is 8% and the six-year graduation rate is 41% (Northern California University, 2015). For transfer students, the two-year graduation rate is 18% and the four-year graduation rate is 58.2% (Northern California University, 2015). Additionally, 36% are first-generation and 51% are low-income students (Northern California University, 2015).

This study’s population included students who earned coursework from a community college and successfully transferred to a four-year public university in California. This study’s sample was specifically collected from all transfer students who began their semester at Northern California University in the Fall 2012, Spring 2013, or Fall 2013 semesters. The total maximum sample size for this study is 8,473 students (N = 8,473) (Northern California University, 2015). While the purpose of this study was to eventually identify opportunities on how to increase transfer student graduation rates and reduce time to degree for first-generation and low-income transfer students, all transfer students at Northern California University who started in the Fall 2012, Spring 2013 or
Fall 2013 may have been participants in certain portions of this study. It was important for the researcher to review data in both populations to determine if factors that were deemed successful for first-generation and low income students were uniquely successful or if those same factors also appeared with transfer students overall.

The purpose of selecting the Fall 2012, Spring 2013 and Fall 2013 entering transfer student cohorts at Northern California University was two-fold. First, selecting three cohorts of student groups as opposed to one provides for a stronger analysis and significant reduction of chance during the data analysis and interpretation of quantitative data (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, collecting qualitative data specifically from the three most recent cohorts increases the probability of collecting more accurate responses as the participants’ experiences are more recent.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

This research design used a concurrent triangulation approach in quantitative method and qualitative method were conducted and analyzed separately from each other and in no particular order. The student records data was retrieved from pre-existing records of Northern California University’s Fall 2012, Spring 2013, and Fall 2013 cohorts of new transfer students. To retrieve this data, a formal letter was created and submitted to the appropriate NCU administrator citing the specific student record data needed for this study as well as the IRB approval number for this study (see Appendix A). Once the student record data was received, the data was then analyzed using regression statistics, specifically logistic regression. To ensure reliability of
instrumentation for the quantitative approach, the researcher had an expert verify the researcher’s analysis and interpretation of data.

The qualitative data components were divided into two areas, an online survey and individual interviews. An NCU administrator distributed the researcher’s online survey using an email invitation (see Appendix B) to 8,473 transfer students from the Fall 2012, Spring 2013, and Fall 2013 cohorts. The online survey included 17 closed-ended questions and 6 open-ended (see Appendix C) and was completed by 384 participants, which yielded a response rate of 4.53%. The online surveys were estimated to take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. To ensure reliability of instrumentation, the researcher solicited feedback from randomly selected faculty, staff, and students, who did not meet the eligibility requirements of this study, regarding question structure and readability of questions. Further, after completion of coding and determining sub-themes and themes of the qualitative data, the researcher engaged in member-checking and asked an outside researcher to briefly review the qualitative data and analysis to determine if they also identified similar findings. At the conclusion of the survey, this study’s participants were provided an opportunity to enter a prize drawing to win one of ten $20 Target gift cards and indicate their interest to participate in an interview for this study. After the deadline to complete the survey had passed, the quantitative data from the survey was imported into an SPSS file while the qualitative data was imported into Dedoose for further analysis and coding.
To conduct the individual interviews, the researcher sent an email to all individuals who indicated their interest to participate in the study (see Appendix D). In the end, the researcher was only able to schedule and conduct sixteen interviews due to the lack of follow through from the total number of participants who indicated their interest to participate in a one-on-one interview. The individual interviews were conducted at Northern California University or at a mutually agreed upon location off campus within a 45 minute distance from the campus. Each individual interview lasted approximately 30-50 minutes and included nine open-ended guiding questions (see Appendix F). At the interview, participants were provided an additional consent form as well as an additional demographic survey (see Appendix E). The researcher used an audio recording device on a tablet to record the interview dialogue. Upon the conclusion of the interview, the researcher provided each participant with a $5 coffee gift card as a sign of appreciation for the participant’s responses. Within 24 hours of completing an interview, the researcher uploaded the audio file to a transcription software program and manually transcribed the entire dialogue between the participant and the researcher using transcription software and a transcription foot pedal the researcher purchased. Over eight hours of interview dialogue were transcribed into separate word processor documents. Once all interviews were transcribed, the researcher uploaded the interview transcripts into Dedoose for coding and sub-theme and theme analysis.
Data Analysis

For the quantitative analysis component for both student records data and online surveys, the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used. Through SPSS, logistic regression, also known as logit regression, was the specific regression model to identify salient factors that led to two-year degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students as well as other transfer students in the sample population.

For the qualitative analysis component, the online survey responses were imported into Dedoose and coded using the software’s highlighting and coding features. The interview audio recordings were manually transcribed by the researcher and also uploaded into Dedoose for coding. Each of the responses were read carefully and thoroughly and were grouped and coded for prominent and reoccurring themes and/or significances. During the coding process, identifying patterns, themes, and sub-themes was the primary objective of the researcher.

Protection of Participants

The data collected, analyzed, and interpreted under the quantitative aspect did not include any personal identifying information of the participations. To make this possible, an NCU administrator collected the necessary data for this study, removed any information that can identify a participant by a reasonable person (name, student ID number, email address, phone number, etc.), and distributed the surveys on behalf of the researcher.
The survey distributed to the study’s eligible participants included an electronic consent form (see Appendix C) that must be reviewed and agreed to before beginning the survey. Participants were also informed that in the informed consent form that their participation is completely voluntarily and they may withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. The survey does not collect any personal information, with the exception at the end of the form, which asks for participants to provide an email address to be entered into a prize drawing for submitting a completed survey and/or if they are interested in becoming part of the individual interview phase.

The online survey was electronically hosted on and distributed using a third-party service, CampusLabs, which was also used by researcher’s university under an enterprise-wide license. CampusLabs has an immaculate reputation for upholding the strictest protection for data and its participants and ensured that no one other than the researcher had access to the qualitative data collected for this study. The coding and analysis process took place using a third party mixed-method research software, Dedoose, which requires a password protected login. Additionally, coding and qualitative data analysis took place on a password-protected computer that only the researcher has access to.

The data collected and informed consent forms for this study were stored on a password-protected computer and/or a secure locked filing cabinet that only the researcher has access to. At the conclusion of the study, all raw quantitative and qualitative data collected, interpreted, and analyzed, for this study will be securely
destroyed within one year after the researcher’s successful completion of their dissertation defense or by June 2017, whichever date came first.
Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

In Chapter 4, this study’s quantitative and qualitative research will be presented. Each of the research questions in this study will be described as well as their relevant findings. Research Question One involved eight logistic regression models that drew upon quantitative data retrieved from 4,211 archived student records from the university as well as an online survey completed by 384 participants from the population in this study. Research Question Two involved qualitative data derived from the 384 online surveys as well as sixteen in-person interviews. Similar to Research Question Two, Research Question Three will also involve qualitative data acquired from the online surveys and the in-person interviews.

The overarching purpose of this study is to determine the successes and setbacks that first-generation and low income transfer students experienced as well as identify the significant factors that are associated with timely degree completion, within two years of transferring to a university for this student population. Students who graduated but were not first-generation and low income will be used as a group to compare findings toward to determine what factors are truly unique to first-generation and low income students. The findings of this study aim to inform and provide recommendations to higher education administrators seeking to improve graduation and retention rates of community
college transfer students at the university. The following research questions served as a

guide for this study:

**Research Question One.** What factors are associated with completion of a
bachelor’s degree within two years of transferring to a 4-year university, for first-
generation college students from low income backgrounds? Factors will include:

a) student demographics (ethnicity, parent(s)/guardian(s)’ level of education,
first-generation status, low income status, living on campus),

b) academic and other relevant data (pre-transfer GPA, pre-transfer units earned,
major by admit, major by graduation, changed major status, first term enrolled
units, first term GPA, hours spent working per week, hours spent commuting per
week, enrolled in summer courses, enrolled in winter courses), and

c) student use of university programs and services (academic advising, 24 hour
study hall, student body government, capstone classes/senior projects, career
center services, developing positive relationships with faculty, developing
positive relationships with staff, financial aid, fitness & wellness center, going to
professor office hours, internships, joining a student club, library services,
tutoring, multi-cultural center, working on campus, on-campus events,
undergraduate research, scholarships, serving as a student club officer, student
counseling and health center)
Research Question Two. What unique setbacks and successes did first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated within two years experience in comparison to other transfer students?

Research Question Three. What recommendations do transfer students have to increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree?

This research study used a concurrent triangulation approach in which certain aspects of the quantitative method and qualitative method were conducted and analyzed in isolation of each other (Creswell, 2013). The quantitative data included two collections from two sources, student records data and an online survey. The student records data was retrieved from 4,211 pre-existing records of Northern California University’s Fall 2012, Spring 2013, and Fall 2013 cohorts of transfer students who graduated. While this study was focused on first-generation and low income transfer two-year graduation rates at the university, records from non-first-generation and low income transfer students were used as a group to compare and contrast findings toward to determine uniqueness of findings. Additionally, the quantitative research used regression statistics and several factors were analyzed to identify the most salient demographics and other factors of first-generation and low income transfer students. The qualitative data collected in this study was retrieved from an online survey completed by 384 participants and interviews conducted with sixteen online survey participants. The survey was administered using an online survey distribution service, Campus Labs, and contained 17 closed-ended questions (quantitative) as well as six open-ended questions (qualitative). At the end of
the survey, participants had an opportunity to enter a raffle to win one of ten $20 Target gift cards as well as an opportunity to participate in a one-on-one interview for the study.

The interview participants in this study were selected based on a first-come, first-serve basis and were interviewed at the NCU campus or at a mutually agreed upon location. Participants were also provided a $5 at the conclusion of the study as a thank you for their participation. Each interview participant was also asked to complete an additional informed consent form, demographics survey, and respond to nine open-ended questions regarding their experiences as a transfer student as NCU. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were used to identify codes and themes using both online survey open-ended responses and interview responses using a mixed-method software known as Dedoose.

**Report of Quantitative Data**

**Student Records Data.** The quantitative data retrieved for this study was derived from two main sources, student record data and an online survey. This portion of the quantitative data report included 4,211 student records that were retrieved from Northern California University. All records were from community college transfer students who enrolled at Northern California University during the Fall 2012, Spring 2013, or Fall 2013 semesters and graduated from the university by January 1, 2016. This section begins with demographic profiles and descriptive statistics of the 4,211 student records followed by a report using regression statistics. Table 1 provides the total numbers of students from each of the three semesters as well as how many student records were
collected for total student graduated, first-generation and low income students, low income only students, and total amounts of students who graduated within two years. This information is helpful in providing a greater understanding of the types of student data records are involved in the quantitative student record analysis. A total of 4,211 records were the grand total amount of students who graduated at all from the original 8,473 records that were received from the university. To determine first-generation and low income status, the NCU administrator collected data from this population of student’s Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the researcher used the annual Pell Grant eligibility guidelines to determine low income status as well as the students’ reported parent(s)’ level of education to determine first-generation status.

**Table 1 Demographics of Student Records Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2012</th>
<th>Spring 2013</th>
<th>Fall 2013</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Students Graduated</td>
<td>2,354</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1,736</td>
<td>4,211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation Students</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Low Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Income Only Students</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1,064</td>
<td>1,296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>839</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1,062</td>
<td>1,966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated in Two Years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 collected information about the race and ethnicity of the student records, which were later used in the logistic regression under the independent variable “race/ethnicity.” It is also important to observe that the racial/ethnic demographics of the institution were also similarly represented among the student records data. As Table 2
indicated, Northern California University is a minority-majority institution, a university diverse in the sense that no one race or ethnic group accounts for at least half of the student body population.

Table 2 Race/Ethnicity of Student Records Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2012 (n=2,354)</th>
<th>Spring 2013 (n=121)</th>
<th>Fall 2013 (n=1,736)</th>
<th>Overall Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decline to State</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>4.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>16.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>17.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>7.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>1153</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>803</td>
<td>47.59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 represented parent(s)’ level of education of the student records data. As this table illustrates, almost half, 1,925, of the 4,211 total students who graduated from these three cohorts, had a mother with a college level education; whereas about one-quarter, 996, out of the 4,211 student graduates had a father with a college degree.

Table 3 Parent’s Level of Education of Student Records Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2012 (n=2,354)</th>
<th>Spring 2013 (n=121)</th>
<th>Fall 2013 (n=1,736)</th>
<th>Grand Total (n=4,211)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had Father with College Degree</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had Mother with College Degree</td>
<td>1,419</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>1,925</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 illustrates the academic information of student records data of the Fall 2012, Spring 2013, and Fall 2013 cohorts. As this table indicates, there is a degree of variation between fall semester and spring semester records, particularly with the average pre-transfer units that students earned entering NCU as well as first-term units enrolled in. This table also provides additional information about the academic and other relevant data independent variables (average pre-transfer units, average pre-transfer GPA, Term 1 average enrolled units, term 1 average GPA, summer course enrollment, and winter course enrollment) that will be used in this study’s logistic regression models.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2012 (n=2,354)</th>
<th>Spring 2013 (n=121)</th>
<th>Fall 2013 (n=1,736)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Pre-Transfer Units</td>
<td>73.23 units</td>
<td>101.93 units</td>
<td>88 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Pre-Transfer GPA</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1 Average Enrolled Units</td>
<td>11.69</td>
<td>11.79</td>
<td>12.46 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1 Average GPA</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took Summer Courses</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took Winter Courses</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Logistic Regression Models of Student Records Data. Upon receiving the student records data, the researcher conducted four logistic regression analyses using SPSS. A summary of the four logistic regression models is provided at the beginning of
In Table 5, **Model 1** involved a logistic regression using 4,211 records, transfer students who graduated, with the dependent variable as graduation in two years or not (1,0). Model 1 also included four independent variables (ethnicity, living on campus, first-generation status, and low income status) and reported that of the independent variables included in the regression, low income status ($p<.01$) was statistically significant and was associated with graduation within two years. Individual results and the researcher’s interpretation of findings for Model 1 will be further discussed later in this chapter, see Table 6.

In Table 5, **Model 2** involved a logistic regression using 522 records, first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated, with the dependent variable as graduation in two years or not (1,0). Model 2 also included two independent variables (ethnicity, living on campus) and reported that neither of the independent variables included in the regression were statistically significant or were associated with graduation within two years. Individual results and the researcher’s interpretation of findings for Model 2 will be further discussed later in this chapter, see Table 7.

In Table 5, **Model 3** involved a logistic regression using 4,211 records, transfer students who graduated, with the dependent variable as graduation in two years or not (1,0). Model 3 also included nine independent variables (pre-transfer GPA, pre-transfer units, term 1 GPA, term 1 enrolled units, took summer classes, took winter classes,
changed major, admitted major, and graduated major) and reported that of the independent variables included in the regression, statistical significance was reported for the following, meaning that these factors were associated with two year degree completion for all transfer students: pre-transfer units (p<.01), term 1 GPA (p<.01), term 1 enrolled units (p<.01), took summer classes (p<.01), took winter classes (p<.01), changed major (p<.01), admitted major: computer engineering (p<.05), graduated major: American Sign Language (p<.05), and graduated major: geography (p<.05). Individual results and the researcher’s interpretation of findings for Model 3 will be further discussed later in this chapter, see Table 8.

In Table 5, **Model 4** involved a logistic regression using 522 records, first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated, with the dependent variable as graduation in two years or not (1,0). Model 4 also included nine independent variables (pre-transfer GPA, pre-transfer units, term 1 GPA, term 1 enrolled units, took summer classes, took winter classes, changed major, admitted major, and graduated major) and reported that of the independent variables included in the regression, statistical significance was reported for the following, which also meant that these factors were associated with two year degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students: pre-transfer units (p<.05), term 1 GPA (p<.05), term 1 enrolled units (p<.01), and took winter classes (p<.05). Individual results and the researcher’s interpretation of findings for Model 1 will be further discussed later in this chapter, see Table 9.
## Table 5 Summary of Logistic Regression Models using Student Records Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Log. Regression Model</th>
<th>Total Population (n)</th>
<th>Independent Variables (IVs)</th>
<th>bold IVs achieved significant p values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MODEL 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1) Ethnicity (Declined to State, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African American, Multi-Racial, Latino/Hispanic, White/Euro-American, Native American, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Transfer Student</td>
<td>(n=4,211)</td>
<td>2) Lived on Campus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td></td>
<td>3) First-Generation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(See Table 6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4) <strong>Low Income</strong> (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MODEL 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1) Ethnicity (Declined to State, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African American, Multi-Racial, Latino/Hispanic, White/Euro-American, Native American, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation and Low Income Student</td>
<td>(n=522)</td>
<td>2) Lived on Campus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(See Table 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MODEL 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1) Pre-Transfer GPA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Transfer Student</td>
<td>(n=4,211)</td>
<td>2) <strong>Pre-Transfer Units</strong> (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic and Other Relevant Data</td>
<td>(See Table 8)</td>
<td>3) <strong>Term 1 GPA</strong> (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4) <strong>Term 1 Enrolled Units</strong> (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5) Took Summer Classes (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6) <strong>Took Winter Classes</strong> (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7) Changed Major (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8) Admitted Major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a. <strong>Computer Engineering</strong> (p&lt;.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9) Graduated Major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a. <strong>American Sign Language</strong> (p&lt;.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. <strong>Geography</strong> (p&lt;.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MODEL 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1) Pre-Transfer GPA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation and Low Income Student</td>
<td>(n=522)</td>
<td>2) <strong>Pre-Transfer Units</strong> (p&lt;.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic and Other Relevant Data</td>
<td>(See Table 9)</td>
<td>3) <strong>Term 1 GPA</strong> (p&lt;.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4) <strong>Term 1 Enrolled Units</strong> (p&lt;.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5) Took Summer Classes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6) <strong>Took Winter Classes</strong> (p&lt;.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7) Changed Major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8) Admitted Major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9) Graduated Major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable used in all four models was graduation in two years or not (1,0)
**Logistic Regression Model 1: All Transfer Student Demographics.** As shown in Table 6, direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of a number of factors, specifically demographic factors, on the likelihood of community college transfer students to complete their degree at Northern California University within two years. The model contained 4 independent variables (ethnicity, lived on campus, first-generation status, and low income status). The full model containing all predictors was statistically significant, $\chi^2 (11, N = 4,221) = 264.796$, $p < .01$, indicating that the model was able to distinguish respondents who graduated or did not graduate in two years from the university. The model as a whole explained between 9.6% (Cox and Snell R square) and 12.8% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in timely graduation status, and correctly classified 64.9% of cases. As shown in Table 6, only one variable made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model (low income status). The strongest predictor of graduating within two years at the university was a student’s Pell grant eligibility or low income status, recording an odds ratio of 3.441. This indicated that respondents who were low income were at least three times as likely to complete their degree within two years, controlling for all other factors in the model.

Additionally, this data may appear misleading in the sense that students “should attempt” to become low income because that is associated to timely degree completion. However, using this finding, it is important to consider that other factors that may be involved such as scholarships, grants, and loans that low income transfer students received and enabled them to complete their degree faster at the university. Further, this
The data also suggests that administrators and educational leaders should consider the influence of students’ low income status at their institutions. At the institution in this study, there may have been effective communication and services aimed towards helping transfer students who are low income and perhaps even the institution as a whole is cognizant of this factor and works to ensure that programs and events that support students are free or at a very reduced cost. Lastly, this finding also suggests that perhaps the university culture is very supportive of their low income students, which eventually led to timely degree completion.

**Table 6 Logistic Regression Model 1: All Transfer Student Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declined To State Ethnicity</td>
<td>-20.477</td>
<td>39985.667</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>-21.138</td>
<td>39985.667</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>-21.000</td>
<td>-21.138</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>-20.881</td>
<td>-21.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>-20.730</td>
<td>-20.881</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Euro-American</td>
<td>-20.625</td>
<td>-20.730</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>-20.561</td>
<td>-20.625</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>-20.729</td>
<td>-20.561</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived On Campus</td>
<td>-.234</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>.966</td>
<td>.326</td>
<td>.792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.794</td>
<td>1.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Income</td>
<td>1.236</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>167.348</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.441</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable used in this model was graduation in two years or not (1.0) (n=4,211)
Logistic Regression Model 2: First-Generation and Low Income Transfer

Student Demographics. As shown in Table 7, direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of a number of factors, specifically demographic factors, on the likelihood of first-generation and low income community college transfer students to complete their degree at Northern California University within two years. The model contained 2 independent variables (ethnicity and lived on campus). The full model containing all predictors was NOT statistically significant, \( x^2 (2, N = 522) = 12.291, p > .05 \), indicating that the model was NOT able to distinguish respondents who graduated or did not graduate in two years from the university. The model as a whole explained between 2.3% (Cox and Snell R square) and 3.2% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in timely graduation status, and correctly classified 61.7% of cases. As shown in Table X, no variables made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model. In comparison to all transfer students, first-generation and low income transfers did not have any statistically significant demographics, nor was significance achieved in the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients output, which provides an overall view of how well the model performs (Pallant, 2013). The researcher concluded that the lack of statistical significance may be due in part to the low sample size, 522, in comparison to the sample size for all transfer students, 4,211. Additionally, this model did not produce any statistical significant responses to answer Research Question One, “what factors are associated with two-year degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer
students.” Future opportunity for research could be to collect more student records to increase the sample size.

**Table 7 Logistic Regression Model 2: First-Generation and Low Income Student Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>-.181</td>
<td>.602</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.764</td>
<td>.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>-.272</td>
<td>.739</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>.713</td>
<td>.762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>.309</td>
<td>.642</td>
<td>.232</td>
<td>.630</td>
<td>1.363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>.445</td>
<td>.587</td>
<td>.576</td>
<td>.448</td>
<td>1.561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Euro-American</td>
<td>.554</td>
<td>.574</td>
<td>.931</td>
<td>.335</td>
<td>1.640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>.944</td>
<td>.988</td>
<td>.914</td>
<td>.339</td>
<td>2.571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>-.377</td>
<td>.872</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>.665</td>
<td>.686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived On Campus</td>
<td>-.679</td>
<td>.515</td>
<td>1.744</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>.507</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable used in this model was graduation in two years or not (1,0) (n=522)

**Logistic Regression Model 3: All Transfer Academic and Other Relevant**

**Data.** As shown in Table 8, direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of a number of factors, specifically academic and other relevant data factors, on the likelihood of transfer students to complete their degree at Northern California University within two years. The model contained 9 independent variables (pre-transfer GPA, pre-transfer units, term 1 GPA, term 1 enrolled units, taking summer classes, taking winter classes, changing majors, admitted major, and graduated major). The full model containing all predictors was statistically significant, $\chi^2 (9, N = 4,221) = 1054.190, p < .01$, indicating that the model was able to distinguish respondents who graduated or did not graduate in two years from the university. The model as a whole explained between 22.4% (Cox and Snell R square) and 30.0% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in
timely graduation status, and correctly classified 70.2% of cases. As shown in Table 8, only nine independent variables made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model (pre-transfer units, first-term GPA, first-term enrolled units, taking summer classes, taking winter classes, changed major, entering as a computer engineering major, graduating as an American Sign Language major, and graduating as a Geography major). The strongest predictors of graduating within two years at the university was taking winter courses, recording an odds ratio of 3.072. This indicated that students who took winter courses at the university were three times as likely to complete their degree within two years, controlling for all other factors in the model. The odds ratio of 1.850 for taking summer classes was almost 2, indicating that for students who took summer classes were almost twice as likely to graduate within two years from the university, controlling for other factors in the model.

With the nine statistically significant results, the researcher suggested the following findings. In regards to pre-transfer units being significant, this could suggest that attention must be given to transfer students before they even arrive at the university. The first-term GPA and units enrolled statistical significance findings draw attention to the importance of the first semester for transfer students as those who were successful in their first semester were more likely to graduate within two years. In contrast, the researcher also considered that perhaps if a student was already a successful student to begin with, that this finding may not be as truly significant as was reported in the logistic regression. What this also means is an opportunity to conduct qualitative research to find
the students who had strong first semesters for further information; nonetheless, in agreement with the results, the first term’s statistical significance communicates importance for educators to consider. Taking winter and summer courses, also known as classes offered in between the fall and spring semesters, reported significance as well. While these two independent variables were significant, the researcher also considered that perhaps students who engaged in coursework between the fall and spring semesters might have simply been more motivated to graduate in a timely manner.

Further, the significance of summer and winter courses should also be considered important for educational leaders as promoting these opportunities may lead to timely degree completion for their students. Another interesting finding in this logistic regression model was the significance of changing a major. Through the researcher’s professional experiences, changing majors had been viewed as more of a setback than a success; however, this statistical significance suggested that changing majors led to degree completion within two years for transfer students. This finding is supportive of other studies that demonstrated changing majors led to greater likelihood of graduation (Micceri, 2001; Murphy, 2000) and is also another important point for consideration as perhaps students who wanted to finish in a timely manner realized that in order to do so, they needed to change their major to one that better fit within their timeline. Lastly, the three majors that reported significance (admitted major: computer science, graduated major: American Sign Language, and graduated major: geography) suggested that these
areas of study may have additional stories behind the numbers, which is also an excellent opportunity for future research.

Further, the researcher considered that perhaps the faculty and staff associated with those three academic departments may have also played a role in the timely degree completion of their students, such as: (a) providing effective mentorship, (b) developing positive relationships with students, or (c) even being proactive and outreaching to their respective student populations. Another consideration that these results suggest that perhaps the culture and student relationships within those areas of study may also be influencing timely degree completion. Nonetheless, this finding is also another great area to explore for future studies.

Table 8 Logistic Regression Model 3: All Transfer Student Academic and Other Relevant Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Transfer GPA</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>3.117</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>1.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Transfer Units</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>57.871</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1 GPA</td>
<td>.430</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>43.047</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1 Enrolled Units</td>
<td>.249</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>239.855</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took Summer Classes</td>
<td>.615</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>60.853</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took Winter Classes</td>
<td>1.122</td>
<td>.126</td>
<td>78.728</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed Major</td>
<td>-.576</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td>15.910</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admitted Major</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Engineering</td>
<td>-1.973</td>
<td>.833</td>
<td>5.602</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated Major</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Sign Language</td>
<td>3.009</td>
<td>1.192</td>
<td>6.378</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>20.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>2.450</td>
<td>1.158</td>
<td>4.478</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>11.591</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable used in this model was graduation in two years or not (1,0) (n=4,211)

Logistic Regression Model 4: First-Generation and Low Income Student

Academic and Other Relevant Data. As shown in Table 9, direct logistic regression
was performed to assess the impact of a number of factors, specifically academic and other relevant data factors, on the likelihood of first-generation and low income community college transfer students to complete their degree at Northern California University within two years. The model contained 9 independent variables (pre-transfer GPA, pre-transfer units, term 1 GPA, term 1 enrolled units, took summer classes, took winter classes, changed major, admitted major, and graduated major). The full model containing all predictors was statistically significant, $x^2 (9, N = 522) = 163.841, p < .05$, indicating that the model was able to distinguish respondents who graduated or did not graduate in two years from the university. The model as a whole explained between 27.1% (Cox and Snell R square) and 36.8% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in timely graduation status, and correctly classified 76.1% of cases. As shown in Table 9, only four variables made a statistically significant contribution to the model (pre-transfer unit, first-term GPA, first-term enrolled units, and taking winter classes). The strongest predictors of graduating within two years at the university for first-generation and low income transfer students was first-term enrolled units, recording an odds ratio of 1.260. This indicated that students who enrolled in more units at the university were one-and-a-quarter more times as likely to complete their degree within two years, controlling for all other factors in the model. The odds ratio of 1.991 for first-term GPA was almost 2, indicating that for first-generation and low income transfer students who had a higher first-term GPA were almost twice as likely to graduate within two years from the university, controlling for other factors in the model.
Moreover, the four statistically significant findings (pre-transfer unit, first-term GPA, first-term enrolled units, and taking winter classes) also seek to answer the second of three factor groups, academic and other relevant data factors, to Research Question One, “what factors are associated with two-year degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students.” The first finding for this student population was pre-transfer units, which suggests that the units that these students entered Northern California University with was associated with two-year degree completion. The researcher also suggested that the significance of the amount of units may have also been associated with assistance and support these students received at the community college; further eluding to the importance of pre-transfer interaction and communication that must be considered to ensure that students have the greatest opportunity to succeed. The second and third significant variables of involve their first term GPA and enrolled units.

The significance of these two independent variables suggests that the first semester at the university for first-generation and low income (FGLI) transfer students is a critical time. The researcher also considered that the importance of the first semester must also be communicated to educational administrators in the sense that although these students who had a successful first semester may have graduated in a timely manner anyway, that time and resources to ensuring that all first-generation and low income transfer students have a successful first-semester could yield positive results in terms of university graduation rates. The fourth significant variable was taking winter classes.
The researcher considered that motivated students who wanted to graduate within two years had to buckle down, find a source of financial resources, and take courses between the fall and spring semester(s) to graduate within a timely manner. What is particularly interesting about this finding is that at NCU, a three-unit winter course costs approximately $1,000 and students rarely receiving financial aid (Northern California University, 2016). However, this did not deter FGLI transfer students who possessed high resilience and determination to overcome this financial hurdle to get the classes they needed to finish their degree faster.

**Table 9 Logistic Regression Model 4: First-Generation and Low Income Student Academic and Other Relevant Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Transfer GPA</td>
<td>-.043</td>
<td>.217</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.842</td>
<td>.958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Transfer Units</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>6.023</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>1.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1 GPA</td>
<td>.689</td>
<td>.209</td>
<td>10.839</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1.991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1 Enrolled Units</td>
<td>.231</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>23.003</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took Summer Classes</td>
<td>.371</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>2.114</td>
<td>.146</td>
<td>1.450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took Winter Classes</td>
<td>.749</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td>6.008</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>2.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed Major</td>
<td>-.896</td>
<td>.831</td>
<td>1.163</td>
<td>.281</td>
<td>.408</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable used in this model was graduation in two years or not (1,0) (n=522)

**Quantitative Online Survey Data.** In addition to the student records, the second source of quantitative data was retrieved from an online survey hosted on Campus Labs, an online survey and assessment software. The Campus Labs website provided a link for the participants to complete the survey and was then subsequently distributed by a Northern California University administrator to the 8,473 transfer students who were admitted to the university during the Fall 2012, Spring 2013, and Fall 2013 semester. While the full online survey is included in the appendices of this study (see Appendix C),
the online survey quantitative data featured in this portion of the study was retrieved from 17 closed-ended questions on the survey. The online survey was completed by 384 participants out of the maximum 8,473 participants and yielded an overall response rate of 4.5%. The individual response rates per cohort were as follows: 174 out of 3,740 participants completed the online survey from the Fall 2012 cohort yielding a 4.65% response rate, 12 out of 234 participants completed the online survey from the Spring 2013 cohort yielding a 5.13% response rate, and 195 out of 4,499 participants completed the online survey from the Fall 2012 cohort yielding a 4.33% response rate. The first portion of this section will report on the participant demographics followed by a logistic regression of the data collected to answer the third and final component of Research Question One, helpful campus programs and services that were associated with two-year degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students.

**Demographic Profiles of Online Survey Participants.** The following tables illustrate the descriptive statistics of participants that completed an online survey for this study. Table 10 described the student status of online survey participants by each of the three cohorts that completed the survey. Table 10 also reports that a majority, 239 out of 384 participants (62.24%), of the participants who completed the online survey were students who graduated from the university which would lead to a higher likelihood of receiving responses from first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated within two years.
Table 10 Student Standing of Online Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Standing</th>
<th>Fall 2012 (n=174)</th>
<th>Spring 2013 (n=12)</th>
<th>Fall 2013 (n=195)</th>
<th>Grand Total (n=384)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently Enrolled</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrew/Discontinued</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred Away</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 describes the demographics that the online survey participants reported. The first set of demographics report that almost half of the online participants were first-generation students (45.57%), over half were low income students (57.29%), approximately two out of five were first-generation and low income (40.89%), almost three-quarters were employed while attending university (70.31%), and approximately three out of five identified as commuter students (60%). These demographics were relevant to the study as it confirmed fairly similar descriptive statistics with the research site, which also suggests that the quantitative and qualitative data is representative of the institution.

Table 11 Demographics of Online Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Fall 2012 (n=174)</th>
<th>Spring 2013 (n=12)</th>
<th>Fall 2013 (n=195)</th>
<th>Grand Total (n=384)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Income</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation AND Low Income</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuter Student</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12 communicates the gender identities of the online survey participants. As shown in Table 12, female participants account for a majority of the survey responses.
recording 249 out of 384 participants (64.84%) compared to male participants who accounted for 104 out of the 384 participants (27.08%). What is also interesting about this aspect of the online survey demographics is the researcher’s use of inclusive language by providing an option for participants to indicate that they are transgender or to decline to state their gender. While only 11 out 384 (2.86%) indicated they are transgender or declined to state, it could set the stage for future research to explore how gender identities influence progress to degree.

Table 12 Gender Identity of Online Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Fall 2012 (n=174)</th>
<th>Spring 2013 (n=12)</th>
<th>Fall 2013 (n=195)</th>
<th>Grand Total (n=384)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decline to State</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 illustrates the racial/ethnic backgrounds of the online survey participants. Within Table 13, the race/ethnic background of online participants is moderately consistent with that of the university used as the research site. Because the reported race/ethnicity descriptive statistics are moderately similar to the institution’s demographics, the researcher further inferred that the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the participants is fairly representative of the university’s student body demographics. Additionally, it is also important to consider that while the university does not have any one race/ethnicity as the majority of their student body population, the descriptive statistics reported in the online survey participants resulted that White/Caucasian students accounted for a slight majority of the overall participants.
(51.3%). Future research could also explore the impact and influence of race/ethnicity on student’s progress to degree and include aspects of social justice, power, and privilege.

Table 13 Race/Ethnicity of Online Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Fall 2012 (n=174)</th>
<th>Spring 2013 (n=12)</th>
<th>Fall 2013 (n=195)</th>
<th>Grand Total (n=384)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decline to State</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Logistic Regression Models of Quantitative Online Survey Data. Upon receiving the conclusion of the online survey, the researcher conducted four logistic regression analyses using SPSS. Specifically, the researcher prepared the quantitative data retrieved from the online survey and separated responses into two groups, all transfer students (n=384) and first-generation and low income transfer students (n=122). Further, to answer Research Question One, “what factors are associated with two year degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students,” the researcher used the independent variables from the online survey question that asks participants about the helpful campus programs and services that led to timely degree completion. A summary of the four logistic regression models is provided at the beginning of this section in Table 5, followed by individual results and researcher’s findings that each of the four logistic regression model produced.
In Table 14, **Model 5** involved a logistic regression using 384 online survey participants responses, with the dependent variable as graduation in two years or not (1,0). Model 5 also included 23 independent variables (academic advising, 24 hour study hall, student government, career center, positive relationships with faculty, positive relationships with staff, financial aid, fitness center, professor office hours, group projects, internships, joined student club, library services, on campus job, on campus events, undergraduate research, scholarships, services to students with disabilities, student club officer, health and counseling services center, tutoring, student union, and senior writing course) and reported that of the independent variables included in the regression, 24 hour study hall (p<.05) was statistically significant and was associated with graduation within two years. Individual results and the researcher’s interpretation of findings for Model 5 will be further discussed later in this chapter, see Table 15.

In Table 14, **Model 6** involved a logistic regression using 122 records, first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated, with the dependent variable as graduation in two years or not (1,0). Due to the smaller sample of responses collected, the original 23 independent variables from Model 5 had to be divided into three groups to meet the conditions of the sample size equation, n > 50 + 8m, where m represents the total amount of independent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Model 6 featured eight independent variables (academic advising, 24 hour study hall, student government, career center, positive relationships with faculty, positive relationships with staff, financial aid, and fitness center) and resulted in no statistical significance among any of
the independent variables. Individual results and the researcher’s interpretation of findings for Model 6 will be further discussed later in this chapter, see Table 16.

In Table 14, Model 7 involved a logistic regression using 122 records, first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated, with the dependent variable as graduation in two years or not (1,0). Due to the smaller sample of responses collected, the original 23 independent variables from Model 5 had to be divided into three groups to meet the conditions of the sample size equation, \( n > 50 + 8m \), where \( m \) represents the total amount of independent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Model 7 featured eight independent variables (professor office hours, group projects, internships, joined student club, library services, on campus job, on campus events, and undergraduate research) and reported only one independent variable with statistical significance, internships (\( p<.05 \)). Individual results and the researcher’s interpretation of findings for Model 7 will be further discussed later in this chapter, see Table 17.

In Table 14, Model 8 involved a logistic regression using 122 records, first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated, with the dependent variable as graduation in two years or not (1,0). Due to the smaller sample of responses collected, the original 23 independent variables from Model 5 had to be divided into three groups to meet the conditions of the sample size equation, \( n > 50 + 8m \), where \( m \) represents the total amount of independent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Model 8 featured seven independent variables (scholarships, services to students with disabilities, student club officer, health and counseling services center, tutoring, student union, and senior
writing course) and reported only one independent variable with statistical significance, senior writing course, p<.05. Individual results and the researcher’s interpretation of findings for Model 8 will be further discussed later in this chapter, see Table 18.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Total Population (n)</th>
<th>Independent Variables (IVs)</th>
<th>bold IVs achieved significant p values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MODEL 5</strong></td>
<td><strong>All Transfer Student Helpful Resources</strong> (See Table 15)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1) Academic Advising 2) <strong>24 Hour Study Hall (p&lt;.05)</strong> 3) Student Government 4) Career Center 5) Positive Relationships with Faculty 6) Positive Relationships with Staff 7) Financial Aid 8) Fitness Center 9) Professor Office Hours 10) Group Projects 11) Internships 12) Joined Student Club 13) Library Services 14) On Campus Job 15) On Campus Events 16) Undergraduate Research 17) Scholarships 18) Services to Students with Disabilities 19) Served as a Student Club Officer 20) Health and Counseling Services Center 21) Tutoring 22) Student Union 23) Senior Writing Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MODEL 6</strong></td>
<td><strong>First-Generation and Low Income Helpful Resources</strong> (1 of 3) (See Table 16)</td>
<td>1) Academic Advising 2) <strong>24 Hour Study Hall</strong> 3) Student Government 4) Career Center 5) Positive Relationships with Faculty 6) Positive Relationships with Staff 7) Financial Aid 8) Fitness Center</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MODEL 7</strong></td>
<td><strong>First-Generation and Low Income Helpful Resources</strong> (2 of 3) (See Table 17)</td>
<td>1) <strong>Professor Office Hours</strong> 2) <strong>Internships (p&lt;.05)</strong> 3) Joined Student Club 4) Library Services 5) On Campus Job 6) On Campus Events 7) Undergraduate Research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MODEL 8</strong></td>
<td><strong>First-Generation and Low Income Helpful Resources</strong> (3 of 3) (See Table 18)</td>
<td>1) Scholarships 2) <strong>Services to Students with Disabilities</strong> 3) Served as a Student Club Officer 4) Health and Counseling Services Center 5) Tutoring 6) Student Union 7) <strong>Senior Writing Course (p&lt;.05)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable used in all four models was graduation in two years or not (1,0)
Logistic Regression Model 5: All Transfer Student Helpful Resources. As shown in Table 15, direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of a number of factors, specifically helpful campus programs and services, on the likelihood of community college transfer students to complete their degree at Northern California University within two years. The model contained 23 independent variables (academic advising, 24 hour study hall, student government, career center, positive relationships with faculty, positive relationships with staff, financial aid, fitness center, professor office hours, group projects, internships, joined student club, library services, on campus job, on campus events, undergraduate research, scholarships, services to students with disabilities, student club officer, health and counseling services center, tutoring, student union, and senior writing course). The full model containing all predictors was NOT statistically significant, \( x^2 (23, N = 384) = 22.60, p > .05 \), indicating that the model was NOT able to distinguish respondents who graduated or did not graduate in two years from the university. The model as a whole explained between 5.7% (Cox and Snell R square) and 8.1% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in timely graduation status, and correctly classified 72.6% of cases. As shown in Table 15, only one variable made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model (24 hour study hall). The strongest predictor of graduating within two years at the university was indication that 24 hour study hall was a helpful service to timely graduation, recording an odds ratio of 1.79. This indicated that respondents who used the 24 hour study hall were almost twice
as likely to complete their degree within two years, controlling for all other factors in the model.

In Model 5, significance was not achieved in the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients output, an output that provides an overall view of how well the model performed (Pallant, 2013). However, Model 5 did pass the Hosmer-Lemeshow Goodness of Fit Test, which is the most reliable test reported in SPSS and indicates that this model is worthwhile (Pallant, 2013). Thus, the statistical significance of the independent variable 24 hour study hall is also worthwhile to consider. Essentially, the 24 hour study hall valued by the transfer student participants in the online survey suggests a helpful resource for a population that is traditionally known to maintain employment while pursuing their degree. The statistical significance of the 24 hour study hall could also suggest that the transfer students who were able to graduate within two years found the location convenient to conduct research and complete academic projects and assignments at this service. Future opportunity for research could be to solicit qualitative data involving the 24 hour study hall and its specific influences on students’ degree completion.
Table 15 Logistic Regression Model 5: All Transfer Student Helpful Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>-0.093</td>
<td>0.304</td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td>0.760</td>
<td>0.911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Hour Study Hall</td>
<td>0.584</td>
<td>0.279</td>
<td>4.374</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>1.794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Government</td>
<td>0.557</td>
<td>0.723</td>
<td>0.593</td>
<td>0.441</td>
<td>1.746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Center</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>0.472</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>0.822</td>
<td>1.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relationships W/ Faculty</td>
<td>0.218</td>
<td>0.326</td>
<td>0.447</td>
<td>0.504</td>
<td>1.244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relationships W/ Staff</td>
<td>-0.153</td>
<td>0.407</td>
<td>0.141</td>
<td>0.707</td>
<td>0.858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.262</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.585</td>
<td>1.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness Center</td>
<td>0.533</td>
<td>0.318</td>
<td>2.800</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>1.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Office Hours</td>
<td>-0.139</td>
<td>0.308</td>
<td>0.204</td>
<td>0.651</td>
<td>0.870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Projects</td>
<td>-0.126</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>0.776</td>
<td>0.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.389</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.884</td>
<td>1.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joined Student Club</td>
<td>-0.563</td>
<td>0.450</td>
<td>1.568</td>
<td>0.211</td>
<td>0.569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Services</td>
<td>-0.348</td>
<td>0.278</td>
<td>1.570</td>
<td>0.210</td>
<td>0.706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Campus Job</td>
<td>-0.577</td>
<td>0.572</td>
<td>1.016</td>
<td>0.314</td>
<td>0.562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Campus Events</td>
<td>-0.839</td>
<td>0.596</td>
<td>1.981</td>
<td>0.159</td>
<td>0.432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Research</td>
<td>-0.087</td>
<td>0.629</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>0.245</td>
<td>0.447</td>
<td>0.300</td>
<td>0.584</td>
<td>1.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services For Students With Disabilities</td>
<td>-0.742</td>
<td>0.710</td>
<td>1.090</td>
<td>0.297</td>
<td>0.476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served As A Student Club Officer</td>
<td>0.700</td>
<td>0.730</td>
<td>0.919</td>
<td>0.338</td>
<td>2.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health And Counseling Services Center</td>
<td>0.173</td>
<td>0.463</td>
<td>0.140</td>
<td>0.708</td>
<td>1.189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>-1.029</td>
<td>0.587</td>
<td>3.075</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>0.358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Union</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>0.356</td>
<td>0.140</td>
<td>0.708</td>
<td>1.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Writing Course</td>
<td>0.822</td>
<td>0.487</td>
<td>2.851</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>2.274</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable used in this model was graduation in two years or not (1,0) (n=384)

Logistic Regression Model 6: First-Generation and Low Income Helpful Resources

Resources (1 of 3). As shown in Table 16, direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of a number of factors, specifically helpful campus programs and services, on the likelihood of first-generation and low income community college transfer students to complete their degree within two years. Due to the limited number of survey
participants who identified as first-generation and low income, three separate models were run that gathered the variables into two groups of eight, Model 6 and Model 7, and one group of seven, Model 8.

The first model, Model 6, contained eight independent variables (academic advising, 24 hour study hall, student government, career center, positive relationships with faculty, positive relationships with staff, financial aid, and fitness center). The full model containing all predictors was NOT statistically significant, $x^2 (8, N = 122) = 4.578$, $p > .05$, indicating that the model was not able to distinguish respondents who graduated or did not graduate in two years from the university. The model as a whole explained between 3.7% (Cox and Snell R square) and 5.3% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in timely graduation status, and correctly classified 73% of cases. As shown in Table 16, no one variable made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model.

In Model 6, significance was not achieved in the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients output, an output that provides an overall view of how well the model performed (Pallant, 2013). However, Model 6 did pass the Hosmer-Lemeshow Goodness of Fit Test, which is the most reliable test reported in SPSS and indicates that this model is worthwhile (Pallant, 2013). Regretfully, no independent variables in Model 6 achieved statistical significance. The researcher presumed that the lack of statistical significance may be attributed to a limited sample size, 384 participants out of a
maximum of 8,473. Future opportunity for research could be to collect more student surveys to increase the sample size.

Table 16 Logistic Regression Model 6: First-Generation and Low Income Helpful Resources (1 of 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>-.301</td>
<td>.504</td>
<td>.357</td>
<td>.550</td>
<td>.740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Hour Study Hall</td>
<td>.517</td>
<td>.468</td>
<td>1.214</td>
<td>.270</td>
<td>1.677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Government</td>
<td>-1.306</td>
<td>1.181</td>
<td>1.224</td>
<td>.269</td>
<td>.271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Center</td>
<td>.184</td>
<td>.633</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.771</td>
<td>1.202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relationships W/ Faculty</td>
<td>-.050</td>
<td>.529</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.925</td>
<td>.951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relationships W/ Staff</td>
<td>.314</td>
<td>.629</td>
<td>.249</td>
<td>.618</td>
<td>1.369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>.462</td>
<td>.488</td>
<td>.897</td>
<td>.344</td>
<td>1.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness Center</td>
<td>-.175</td>
<td>.534</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.743</td>
<td>.839</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable used in this model was graduation in two years or not (1,0) (n=122)

Logistic Regression Model 7: First-Generation and Low Income Helpful Resources (2 of 3)

As show in Table 17, direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of a number of factors, specifically helpful campus programs and services, on the likelihood of first-generation and low income community college transfer students to complete their degree within two years. This model contained eight independent variables (professor office hours, group projects, internships, joined student club, library services, on campus job, on campus events, and undergraduate research). The full model containing all predictors was NOT statistically significant, $x^2 (8, N = 122) = 9.460, p > .05$, indicating that the model was NOT able to distinguish respondents who graduated or did not graduate in two years from the university. The model as a whole explained between 7.5% (Cox and Snell R square) and 10.8% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in timely graduation status, and correctly classified 74.6% of cases. As shown in Table 17, only one variable made a statistically significant contribution to the
model internships, p<.05. The model’s only predictor of graduating within two years at the university indicated that internships were associated with timely graduation, recording an odds ratio of 11.052. This indicated that respondents who valued internships were eleven times as likely to complete their degree within two years, controlling for all other factors in the model.

In Model 7, significance was not achieved in the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients output, an output that provides an overall view of how well the model performed (Pallant, 2013). However, Model 7 did pass the Hosmer-Lemeshow Goodness of Fit Test, which is the most reliable test reported in SPSS and indicates that this model is worthwhile (Pallant, 2013). Thus, the only independent variable to achieve statistical significance, internships, is worthwhile pursuing. The researcher presumed that the role internships play in influencing timely degree completion can be explained in a variety of different ways captured by qualitative research and analysis. However, educational leaders should consider the significance of internships as it relates to timely degree completion in the sense that perhaps it contributes to student’s progress through academic units, personal and career development, and/or assisting first-generation and low income students financial obligations (if the internship is paid). Nonetheless, future opportunity for research could be conducted to determine the true meanings of how internships influenced timely degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students. This statistically significant finding, internships, also answered the “helpful
resources” component of Research Question One, “what factors are associated with two-year degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students.”
Logistic Regression Model 8: First-Generation and Low Income Helpful Resources (3 of 3)

As shown in Table 18, direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of a number of factors, specifically helpful campus programs and services, on the likelihood of first-generation and low income community college transfer students to complete their degree within two years. This model contained seven independent variables (services to students with disabilities, serving as a student club officer, health and counseling services center, tutoring, student union, and senior writing course). The full model containing all predictors was statistically significant, $\chi^2 (7, N = 122) = 16.623, p < .05$, indicating that the model was able to distinguish respondents who graduated or did not graduate in two years from the university. The model as a whole explained between 12.7% (Cox and Snell R square) and 18.5% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in timely graduation status, and correctly classified 74.6% of cases. As shown in Table 18, only one variable made a statistically significant contribution to the model, senior writing course. The model’s only predictor of graduating within two years

Table 17 Logistic Regression Model 7: First-Generation and Low Income Helpful Resources (2 of 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor Office Hours</td>
<td>-.334</td>
<td>.558</td>
<td>.359</td>
<td>.549</td>
<td>.716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Projects</td>
<td>.225</td>
<td>.758</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>.767</td>
<td>1.252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships</td>
<td>2.403</td>
<td>1.040</td>
<td>5.335</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>11.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joining A Student Club</td>
<td>-1.264</td>
<td>1.035</td>
<td>1.494</td>
<td>.222</td>
<td>.282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Services</td>
<td>-.156</td>
<td>.514</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>.762</td>
<td>.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Campus Job</td>
<td>-1.358</td>
<td>.958</td>
<td>2.010</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>.257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Campus Events</td>
<td>.672</td>
<td>.804</td>
<td>.699</td>
<td>.403</td>
<td>1.958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Research</td>
<td>-.795</td>
<td>1.066</td>
<td>.556</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td>.452</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable used in this model was graduation in two years or not (1,0) (n=122)
at the university was indication that the senior writing intensive course was a helpful service to timely graduation, recording an odds ratio of 5.855. This explained that respondents who valued the senior writing intensive course as helpful to timely graduation were five times as likely to complete their degree within two years, controlling for all other factors in the model.

Model 8’s the only independent variable to achieve statistical significance, senior writing course, provided an array of interpretations. Firstly, the researcher presumed that the value of the senior writing course the role internships play in the scope of timely degree completion can be best understood using qualitative research and analysis. Another interpretation that the researcher provided is that perhaps the faculty and instructors in the senior writing course played a significant role in assisting the participants on their road to timely graduation. This finding could also suggest that perhaps the participants reached a higher level of maturity and development when they took the senior writing course, which may have helped prepare them to graduate in a more efficient manner. Whatever the case may be, educational leaders should consider the significance of the senior writing course as it positively influences first-generation and low income students’ and reduces time to degree. Nonetheless, future opportunity for research could be conducted to determine the true meanings of how internships influenced timely degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students. This statistically significant finding, internships, also answered the “helpful
resources” component of Research Question One, “what factors are associated with two-year degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students.”

Summary of Quantitative Findings

The eight logistic regression models used data from 4,211 student records and online surveys completed by 384 participants to answer Research Question One, “what factors are associated with two-year degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students?” As shown in Table 18, Research Question One was also divided factors into three areas: (a) student demographics, (b) academic and other relevant data, and (c) student use of university programs and services. While Model 2 did not report any statistically significant variables under student demographics, Model 4 reported that pre-transfer units (p<.05), term 1 GPA (p<.05), term 1 enrolled units (p<.01), and enrollment in winter courses (p<.05) were statistically significant academic and other relevant data factors that were associated with two-year degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students at the university. Model 7 reported that internships (p<.05), were statistically significant and Model 8 reported statistical significance with senior writing course (p<.05), both of which represented the helpful programs and services factors that were associated with two-year degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students at the university.
Table 18 Research Question One: Factors Associated with Two-Year Degree Completion for First-Generation and Low Income Transfer Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Demographics Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic and Other Data Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Transfer Units</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>6.023</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>1.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1 GPA</td>
<td>.689</td>
<td>.209</td>
<td>10.839</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1.991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1 Enrolled Units</td>
<td>.231</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>23.003</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took Winter Classes</td>
<td>.749</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td>6.008</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>2.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Use of University Programs and Services</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships</td>
<td>2.403</td>
<td>1.040</td>
<td>5.335</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>11.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Writing Course</td>
<td>1.767</td>
<td>.788</td>
<td>5.032</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>5.855</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable used in this model was graduation in two years or not (1,0) (n=122)

The following sections in this chapter will present the qualitative data collected and analyzed in this study to answer Research Question Two, “what unique successes and setbacks did first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated within two years experience in comparison to other transfer students?” and Research Question Three, “what recommendations do transfer students have to increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree?”

Report of Qualitative Data

**Qualitative Online Survey Data.** The qualitative data retrieved for this study was derived from two main sources, online surveys and individual interviews. This portion of the qualitative data report included the 384 online surveys completed by transfer students who were admitted to Northern California University during the Fall 2012, Spring 2013, and Fall 2013 cohorts. As shown in Figure 3, this study’s qualitative
methodology and analysis was illustrated. Once the deadline to complete the online survey had surpassed, the researcher securely downloaded all 384 completed surveys from the Campus Labs survey hosting website into an excel spreadsheet. At this point, the researcher separated the qualitative responses to the six open-ended questions from the survey and uploaded the responses into Dedoose, an online qualitative and mixed-methods software. Using Dedoose, the researcher engaged in Phase 1 of qualitative analysis by reviewing each of the six responses from the 384 survey participants. It was during Phase 1 when the researcher engaged in open coding and created individual codes to apply to the survey responses. Open coding was selected as the researcher’s initial approach because they were open to any possibilities as opposed to being limited to coding based on specific categories or types of codes (Merriam, 2014). After completing the open coding approach in Phase 1, the researcher began Phase 2 of the qualitative methodology and analysis and reviewed all codes and linked responses to sort codes into categories, also known as sub-themes. The process of reviewing open codes to determine categories or sub-themes is known as axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) and is illustrated in Phase 2 of Figure 3. After Phase 2, the researcher analyzed the sub-themes and began to sort the sub-themes into themes as shown in Phase 3 of Figure 3. Analyzing and sorting sub-themes into themes is known as selective coding, a process that also seeks to identify narrative patterns among the refined qualitative data (Merriam, 2014).
Qualitative Methodology and Analysis

Phase 1) Open Coding
Responses analyzed and codes were created and applied to responses

Phase 2) Axial Coding
Codes/responses were analyzed and grouped into sub-themes

Phase 3) Selective Coding
Sub-themes were analyzed and sorted into narrative patterns/themes

Figure 3 Qualitative Methodology and Analysis
Demographic Profiles of Online Survey Participants. In the following section, the demographic profiles of the online survey participants are introduced. Table 19 described the overall student status of the online survey participants. Table 19 also reported that a majority, 239 out of 384 participants (62.24%), of the participants who completed the survey were students who graduated. The high number of students who graduated suggests the responses involving their personal successes and setbacks would be helpful in determining recommendations to serve future students as a majority of these students successfully earned their degree.

Table 19 Student Standing of Online Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Status</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>62.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently Enrolled</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>27.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanently Withdrew</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanently Transferred Away</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>384</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20 illustrated the two-year degree completion status of the online survey participants. As described, approximately one-third of online survey participants (30.47%) were able to successfully complete their degree at Northern California University within two years. This number was very similar to the national two-year graduation rate of transfer students at 31% (American Council on Education, 2012) and was higher than Northern California University’s reported two-year graduation for transfer students at 18%.

Table 20 Two-Year Degree Completion Status of Online Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two-Year Degree Completion Status</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduated Within 2 Years</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>30.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Graduate Within 2 Years</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>69.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>384</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 21 describes the amount of first-generation students who completed the online survey, which was almost half of all participants (47.94%). In this study, first-generation students are defined as those who were the first in their family to attend and graduate college. This also included students who may have family members who attending college, but did not graduate. It is also important to note that online survey participants’ first-generation status was self-indicated by participants as opposed to using federal data.

Table 21 First-Generation Status of Online Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Generation Participants</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation Student</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>47.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non First-Generation Student</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>52.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>365</td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22 describes the amount of participants who identified as low income students, which was three out of every five participants. In this study, low income status was defined as those who qualified for the Federal Pell Grant. This also included students who qualified for but may not have received the grant due to missing paperwork or opting out. It is also important to note that online survey participants’ low income status was self-indicated by participants as opposed to using federal data.

Table 22 Low Income Status of Online Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Income Participants</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Income Students</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>60.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Low Income Students</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>39.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>365</td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23 reported the mother’s level of education for online survey participants and concluded that most participants had a mother who had some college experience
The second most common level of education for participants’ mothers was high school graduate (22.51%). Only about one-fifth of participants had a mother with a college degree or higher. An interesting area for future research could include the influence of mother’s level of education on students’ college degree attainability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s Level of Education</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Complete High School</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>22.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>37.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>15.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral/Advanced Graduate Degree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>351</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24 described the father’s level of education for online survey participants and reported that most participants had a father who had some college experience (35.24%). The next most common levels of education of participants’ fathers were high school graduate (20.18%) and bachelor’s degree (19.28%). Approximately one-quarter of participants had a father with bachelor’s degree or higher. This statistic was interesting in the sense that while most of the participants were female, most of the participants reported having a father with a bachelor’s degree or higher than a mother with a bachelor’s degree or higher.
Table 24 Father’s Level of Education of Online Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father’s Level of Education</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Complete High School</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>20.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>35.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>19.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral/Advanced Graduate Degree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>332</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25 conveys the most common majors of online survey participants. The top three majors of the online survey respondents accounted for over one-quarter of the total survey participants who reported their major. The top three majors of the online survey participants were business administration (13.42%), psychology (7.67%), and criminal justice (7.40%). Future research could include the influence of the major or academic study area on the timely progress to degree.

Table 25 Reported Majors of Online Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Majors</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Administration</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Studies</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Sciences</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Development</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Pathology And Audiology</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesiology</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>240</strong></td>
<td><strong>65.75%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 26 describes the helpful programs and services that the online survey participants reported. It is also important to note that participants are able to select multiple options at this part of the online survey and that not all programs and services serve all students (i.e. student athlete resource center, educational equity program, disability services, etc.). The top five most helpful university programs and services indicated by participants were financial aid (56.49%), library (45.78%), 24 hour study hall (40.58%), professor office hours (39.29%), and positive relationships with faculty (34.09%). While three of the five most helpful programs and services were physical locations or services, the remaining two involved faculty provision of service.
Table 26 Most Helpful Programs/Services of Online Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program/Service/Resource</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>56.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>45.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Hour Study Hall</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>40.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going To Professors' Office Hours</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>39.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Positive Relationships With Faculty</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>34.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>32.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness And Wellness Center</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>29.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Union</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>24.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joining A Student Club Or Organization</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>19.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Positive Relationships With Staff</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>15.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Assignments And Projects</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Center</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Health And Counseling</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Campus Events</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Level Writing Courses</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Campus Employment</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring Services</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating In Undergraduate Research</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Center</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Services</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Government</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving As A Student Club Officer</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major-Specific Tutoring</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Lab</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Equity Program</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capstone Courses And Projects (I.E. Senior Seminar)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centers For Diversity And Inclusion</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran's Services</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Center</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Campus Housing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying Abroad</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Student Mentorship</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Athlete Resources</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating In Transfer Learning Communities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>308</strong></td>
<td><strong>N/A</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of Qualitative Online Survey Data. Using Dedoose, the researcher engaged in Phase 1 of qualitative analysis by reviewing each of the six responses from the 384 survey participants. It was during Phase 1 when the researcher used open coding and created almost 200 individual codes to apply to the survey responses. Open coding was selected as the researcher’s initial approach because of the limitless possibilities as opposed to coding based on specific categories or types of codes (Merriam, 2014). It was also during this phase, that responses from first-generation and low income students who graduated within two years were analyzed and interpreted separately from all transfer students.

After the open coding approach was applied in Phase 1 to both sets of online survey responses, the researcher began Phase 2 and reviewed all codes and linked responses to sort codes into categories, also known as sub-themes. The process of reviewing open codes to determine categories or sub-themes is known as axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) and was illustrated in Figure 3.

After Phase 2, the researcher analyzed the sub-themes and sorted them into the following themes as shown of Figure 3. Analyzing and sorting sub-themes into themes is known as selective coding, a process that also seeks to identify narrative patterns among the refined qualitative data (Merriam, 2014). Upon the completion of Phase 3, the researcher identified five themes: (a) personal strategies and support, (b) personal setbacks, (c) setbacks from institution, (d) support from institution, and (e) helpful university programs and resources. Additionally, under each theme, the researcher
identified most salient sub-themes that were the most discussed in each of the respective categories. Table 27 illustrated the overall themes and sub-themes that were created from the online survey responses for both first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated within two years as well as all online survey participants.
Table 27 Overall Themes and Sub-Themes of Online Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses From</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FGLI Online Survey Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduating in 2 Years (n=33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Personal Strategies and Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and being organized was important</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received inspiration/motivation/support from others</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing the degree will lead to upward mobility/better career</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching long-term goals step-by-step</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in self</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing relations with peers</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Personal Setbacks</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing family commitments was a challenge</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuting</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Support From Institution</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing positive relationships with faculty and staff</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with college experience</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Setbacks From Institution</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for first-semester support</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University logistics: class availability</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University logistics: parking</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better communication between university and community college prior to transfer</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Helpful Programs/Services</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic advising</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student club experience</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N/A level indicates that the sub-theme may have been present in certain responses of that group, but did not achieve overwhelming responses to be considered a sub-theme.
The following results were sourced from the qualitative component of the online survey and are divided into two groups: first-generation and low income students who graduated within two years and all online survey participants. These results were purposefully presented in the following way because of this study’s nature to identify successes and setbacks of first-generation and low income transfer students completing their degree within two years and using the results overall to compare themes to (Fraker & Maynard, 1987). Further, the importance of comparing these groups in this study was to provide the most accurate representation of influences on first-generation and low income transfer students by also reviewing the experiences of those who may not have met this selection criteria. In other words, a majority of first-generation and low income students may state that the most influential support to helping them graduate in a timely manner was using the library, but if the students who were not first-generation and low income also stated that using the library was helpful for them completing the degree in a timely manner, then that resource may not be as unique to the first-generation and low income transfer student population.

**Theme: Personal Strategies and Support of FGLI Participants Graduating in Two Years.** The overall theme of personal strategies and support arose from the numerous personal successes and actions that these students experienced. Particularly, this theme encompassed all of the sub-themes and subsequent codes as these students reported fairly similar successes and strategies. Table 28 described the salient sub-themes discovered within the overall theme of personal strategies and support of first-generation
and low income (FGLI) students who completed their degree within two years. Out of the 384 online survey participants, there were only 33 FGLI survey participants who graduated within two years. The five salient sub-themes were represented in Table 28 using level of saliency among the responses and were reported as the following: (a) planning and being organized was important, (b) received inspiration/motivation from others, (d) believing the degree will lead to upward mobility/better career, and (e) received support/love/encouragement from others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 28 FGLI Online Survey Participants Graduated in Two Years - Theme: Personal Strategies and Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Theme</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Being Organized was Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received Inspiration/Motivation/Support from Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing the degree will lead to upward mobility/better career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=33 online survey participants)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sub-theme: planning and being organized was important. This sub-theme emerged from an overwhelmingly reported amount of FGLI participants who graduated within two years. Participants reported an array of planning and organizational skills ranging anywhere from using a personal or digital planner to using checklists and setting goals.

“Set reasonable short-term goals and work towards them. This helps to keep the long-term challenges mentally manageable.” –Online Survey Participant

“Having a calendar to plot out my semester has greatly helped as well, as a daily planner to give myself a ‘to do list’ for the day.” –Online Survey Participant
**Sub-theme: received inspiration/motivation from others.** Another commonly occurring sub-theme within online survey responses was drawing upon others, being inspired, and receiving love, support, and encouragement. Generally, the support, inspiration, and encouragement primarily came from family, loved ones, and close friends. Having others within one’s personal network of relationships as a source of inspiration and motivation is also known as social capital, a conceptual framework within this study.

“My grandfather was very vocal and supportive about meeting new people and having a great social experience at NCU as well as succeeding in academics. He emphasized that if I didn't take advantage of this particular bubble of time in my life I would never have the opportunity again.” –Online Survey Participant

“They (family and friends) refuse to believe that I can't do what I said I couldn't. They won’t accept the fact that I want to give up sometimes. Instead they would urge me to stand up and push forward because it will be all worth it in the end. They were right.” –Online Survey Participant

**Sub-theme: believing the degree will lead to upward mobility/better career.** It was very common for this group of online survey participants to report that believing the degree would lead to a better life for them. The college degree possessing a high value served to be a great source of motivation for these students. The researcher also noted that several participants also disclosed that this goal was not simply just for their future lifestyle and well-being but also for their families.

“I want more for my son then I had and those who failed to believe in me I wanted to prove wrong.” –Online Survey Participant
“I was inspired to come back to school because I couldn't earn enough to support my children. I am also motivated to prove to myself that I can get a bachelor's degree despite my challenges.” –Online Survey Participant

**Theme: Personal Setbacks of FGLI Participants Graduating in Two Years.**

The overall theme of personal setbacks arose from the numerous adverse experiences that these students had. Particularly, setbacks referred to the participants’ challenges they experienced that were more associated with their personal lives than the university. For example, a personal setback would be working full time as this is typically not regulated or maintained by the university. Additionally, personal setbacks were not as numerous among the qualitative data. Possible explanations for such occurrence could be participants’ choice not to disclose the setbacks or that the students did not experience as many setbacks in general. Table 29 described the salient sub-theme discovered within the overall theme of personal setbacks of first-generation and low income (FGLI) students who completed their degree within two years. The salient sub-theme was represented in Table 29 using level of saliency among the responses and was found as “balancing family commitments was a challenge.”

| Table 29 FGLI Online Survey Participants Graduated in Two Years - Theme: Personal Setbacks |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| **Sub-Theme**                        | **Level of Saliency Among Responses**         |
| Balancing family commitments was a   | High                                          |
| challenge                            |                                               |
| (n=33 online survey participants)    |                                               |

**Sub-theme: balancing family commitments was a challenge.** It was very common for this group of online survey participants to discuss the challenges they experienced related to their family commitments. As transfer students generally have
more obligations beyond academics to keep up with, such as family and employment (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Jacobs, 2004), so was it also found within this study’s responses.

“There being a father of two young children and having to watch them before classes each day as my wife was working in the mornings. Working late shifts after classes that forced me to study all night. Having to take many prerequisite courses just to get to major coursework and then repeating Physics just before switching majors.” – Online Survey Participant

“Having two kids and being married was my toughest challenge. I was no longer able to be part of PTA or help in their school. My second challenge was exhaustion, balancing parenthood, work and school.” – Online Survey Participant

**Theme: Support from Institution of FGLI Participants Graduating in Two Years.** The overall theme of support from institution arose from the numerous helps and successes that students experienced that were generally provided by the university. For example, developing positive relationships with faculty and staff is associated as a support from the institution in the sense that the university is responsible for the hiring and selection of their workforce and recruiting talented, approachable, and caring faculty and staff to help students is within their scope. Table 30 described the salient sub-themes discovered within the overall theme of support from institution of first-generation and low income (FGLI) students who completed their degree within two years. The salient sub-themes are represented in Table 30 using level of saliency among the responses and was found as “developing positive relationships with faculty and staff” and “satisfied with college experience.”
Table 30 FGLI Online Survey Participants Graduated in Two Years - Theme: Support from Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing positive relationships with faculty and staff</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with college experience</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=33 online survey participants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sub-theme: developing positive relationships with faculty/staff.** It was common for this group of online survey participants to discuss the level of positive influence that faculty and staff played on their journey to success. In many cases, the positive and effective relationships that were formed between the students and faculty/staff were a symbol of social capital, a conceptual framework in this study. While the specific effects of this positive relationship greatly varied from being provided a letter of recommendation to receiving additional support when needing it the most, this study further reinforces the critical role that effective faculty and staff play in the development of their students.

“My professor followed a similar education path as I did. It was great feeling like I could relate to him. Plus he was always available to talk and critique my work in detail.” –Online Survey Participant

“The faculty and staff at Northern California University have all been very supportive, helpful, and welcoming to me. I appreciate how accepting people are and willing to help and give advice.” –Online Survey Participant

“I had many wonderful professors who encouraged and pushed me along the way” –Online Survey Participant

**Sub-theme: satisfaction with college experience.** One of the interesting findings with the FGLI students who graduated within two years was their satisfaction with the
college experience at NCU. Despite the setbacks and challenges that this group experienced, it was common among them to report a positive level of satisfaction with their college experience. From a business standpoint, customer satisfaction, or in this case student satisfaction, is a primary goal that helps to achieve favorable profit and customer retention. What this finding suggests is that the level of satisfaction that students had can be associated with their timely degree completion. Future research in this sub-theme could include specific areas that they were satisfied with, as most participants had just kept this response fairly vague.

“I enjoyed my time at NCU. There were ups and downs along the way, but that comes with the nature of just about anything.” – Online Survey Participant

“I loved my experience at NCU because this was the time to focus on my major classes and not worry about getting into basic prerequisites that I could've gotten elsewhere.” – Online Survey Participant

“I think everything is good as is. I had a great experience at NCU.” – Online Survey Participant

**Theme: Setbacks from Institution of FGLI Participants Graduating in Two Years.** The overall theme of setbacks from institution arose from the various challenges that students experienced that were generally within the university’s control. For example, lack of available classes is associated as a setback from the institution as the university has a greater realm of control in the course offerings and listings than their students. Table 31 described the salient sub-themes discovered within the overall theme of support from institution of first-generation and low income (FGLI) students who completed their degree within two years. The salient sub-themes were represented in
Table 31 using level of saliency among the responses and were found to be “discussed a need for first-semester support” and “university logistics: class availability.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need for first-semester support</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University logistics: class availability</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=33 online survey participants)

**Sub-theme: need for first-semester support.** It was very common for this group of online survey participants to discuss the need for help and support during their first-semester at the university. As discussed in the literature review, “transfer shock” can occur during a transfer student’s first semester where they experience a significant dip in their GPA (Hills, 1965) and can even be common among students who had high GPAs at the community college (Berner, 2012; Hills, 1965). It was overwhelmingly reported by FGLIs for a need to have some type of support, program, or service that would better provide a smoother transition into the university. Common experiences shared by FGLIs included challenges related to the academic expectations, unfamiliarity with helpful resources or services, and even explicitly stating some type of first-semester transition program.

“At times, I perceived certain academic expectations a little challenging.” –Online Survey Participant

“I believe that transferring should not have been as difficult as it was. I was confused and didn't know where to go to get the answers I needed. Also, when I asked for help I was given multiple answers, which then led to more confusion.” –Online Survey Participant
“The campus needs to have better advertisement to the whole student population of resources/programs. It seems like certain groups are often the targeted audience rather than the whole student population” –Online Survey Participant

“NCU needs something along the lines of a transfer program for those individuals who would like it. A person available to show them how to navigate NCU’s website, how to enroll in classes, how to pay.” –Online Survey Participant

**Sub-theme: university logistics: class availability.** One of the unique findings of this study was the overall commentary from its participants about aspects of the university’s logistics such as class availability. No other research used in this study’s literature review brought attention to the management of university logistics and it could have been perceived that other universities did not have problems with logistics. It was very common for this group of online survey participants to discuss problems with university logistics such as parking, or in the case of FGLIs graduating in two years, the lack of class availability. It was overwhelmingly reported by FGLIs that the lack of class availability was a setback from the institution.

“The psychology program was impacted so it was unsure if I would be able to get into the program or get any of my classes.” –Online Survey Participant

“Getting classes and not having them scattered around at random times was the biggest challenge. The commute I had to take was a bit longer which meant I could not work nights, and so I had to change my work availability to the days that I was not in school.” –Online Survey Participant

“Many courses are only offered once per year which lengthens the time to earning a bachelor’s degree.” –Online Survey Participant
“My greatest challenge as a transfer student was getting the classes I needed for my major” – Online Survey Participant

I love NCU but in my opinion, they need to make it harder to get accepted. They need to raise the GPA requirement or do something else because there are just too many students for the university to handle. There is nowhere to park, it is way harder than it should be to get into classes, and they can't even pay teachers to take on more classes.” – Online Survey Participant

**Theme: Helpful Campus Resources/Services of FGLI Participants**

**Graduating in Two Years.** The overall theme of helpful campus resources/services arose from the specific resources and services that were highly common among the participants’ responses as well as in conjunction with the quantitative findings regarding helpful resources/services. Whereas the quantitative research of helpful campus resources/services were generally seeking to find which ones were significant, the qualitative research of the same topic sought to find out why or how certain ones were significant. Table 32 described the salient sub-theme discovered within the overall theme of helpful campus programs/services of first-generation and low income (FGLI) students who completed their degree within two years. The salient sub-themes were represented in Table 32 using level of saliency among the responses and was found to be academic advising.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme/Programs/Services</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic advising</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=33 online survey participants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sub-theme: academic advising. Academic advising was reported overwhelmingly among the FGLIs who graduated within two years. The responses that these participants provided led the findings to convey that it is perhaps the initiative that these students took to determine the most efficient route to degree completion as a probable factor in them mentioning advising as helpful. In some cases, students even reported that advising should be mandatory for all students each semester to ensure they are on the most efficient track to graduation.

“One challenge I faced as a transfer student was finding out what my resources were as a student. I talked to general education advisors and major advisors to find out what classes I needed to take.” – Online Survey Participant

“I printed out a copy of my degree requirements and consulted it constantly. I met with my counselor (advisor) when I was within two semesters of graduating to make sure I was on track and had planned out my course choices in a way that would allow me to graduate on time.” – Online Survey Participant

“Make it mandatory to meet with advisors every semester to track progress and set class schedules to assure that required classes are being fulfilled and completed. One extra semester was needed to attend two classes that I was not aware were needed to graduate.” – Online Survey Participant

Theme: Personal Strategies and Support of All Online Survey Participants.

The overall theme of personal strategies and support arose from the numerous personal successes and actions that these students experienced. Particularly, this theme encompassed all of the sub-themes and subsequent codes as these students reported fairly similar successes and strategies. Table 33 described the salient sub-themes discovered within the overall theme of personal strategies and support of all transfer students who
participated in the online survey. The five salient sub-themes were represented in Table 33 using level of saliency among the responses and were reported as the following: (a) planning and being organized was important, (b) received inspiration/motivation/support from others, (c) approaching long-term goals step-by-step, (d) belief in self, (e) developing relations with peers, and (f) resilience

Table 33 All Online Survey Participants - Theme: Personal Strategies and Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning and being organized was important</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received inspiration/motivation/support from others</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching long-term goals step-by-step</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in self</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing relations with peers</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=384 online survey participants)

Sub-theme: planning and being organized was important. Achieving a bachelor’s degree requires a significant level of time and energy from the student. Without the proper organization and planning skills in place, students can easily burn out, experience a lower level of performance, and in some cases, decided to discontinue their pursuit of a bachelor’s degree. Online survey participants discussed a more concrete approach to being organized such as setting short-term goals, using a planner, and incorporating enjoyable activities into their schedules.

“I've developed good study habits that helped me succeed and stay motivated through the semester. I make sure to manage my time so that I can get all my assignments and studying done in time. I also enjoy the majority of my course work.” –Online Survey Participant
“I always used a planner or some type of calendar to see when deadlines are approaching.” – Online Survey Participant

“I take things one day at a time and chip away at whatever problem I am facing. I keep a planner, so I know when important dates are coming, so I can plan my time better.” – Online Survey Participant

Sub-theme: received inspiration/motivation from others. Another commonly occurring sub-theme within online survey responses was drawing upon others, being inspired, and receiving love, support, and encouragement. Generally, this support came from family, loved ones, and close friends. Another way to describe this level of support and encouragement is social capital, a conceptual framework in this study. This particular success is presumed to have been effective due to the continuous stress that students endure as they progress towards their bachelor’s degree.

“My family and friends motivate me to keep going and to get through the hard times. The reminded me that I can do it and I can do it well.” – Online Survey Participant

“My mom did not finish college because she got pregnant with me. Her dream for me was that I would pursue higher education and finish were she started.” – Online Survey Participant

“My parents were my motivation and inspiration in pursuing my degree because my parents did not have the opportunity to finish college.” – Online Survey Participant

Sub-theme: approaching long-term goals step-by-step. Along the lines of being organized and approaching challenges, many participants reported that the way they generally approach long-term goals are step-by-step or breaking down large tasks. While this finding is interesting because so many people discussed it, future research could explore how this strategy was developed. Perhaps these participants may have an
acquired this specific strategy from a college success course at the previous institution or by trial and error.

“I like to look at challenges as a whole and then break it up into a timeline of due dates or a step by step process, making the situation more palatable and less daunting.” –Online Survey Participant

“I just try to go day by day instead of thinking about the end result. In my earlier years of college I would have given up or have stopped showing up to class. Before NCU I had a GPA that reflected those earlier decisions. Now I don't let anything beyond family come before my education. I work very hard at it and have raised my GPA to a 3.4.” –Online Survey Participant

“I approach my long-term challenges by making a series of benchmarks. If it's long-term, I feel it helpful to make little goals that I should reach so that I do not procrastinate. I try to space things out so I am not stressed and worried as the deadlines are approaching.” –Online Survey Participant

**Sub-theme: belief in self.** Belief in self was also another salient sub-theme among the responses as many participants credited themselves with being able to persevere through the many challenges that they experienced during their time as a student. Belief in self had much overlap with resilience, a conceptual framework of this study, but was also much different in the sense that it only captured one aspect of resilience. While some of the responses may be perceived as arrogance, most of the participant responses were generally interpreted as self-confidence by the researcher.

“I am my own greatest source of motivation. I also have a strong fear of failure and that fuels my motivation to get stuff done and to learn the material properly.” –Online Survey Participant

“I made sure I did all the work and decided mentally that I deserve it and nothing would stop me.” –Online Survey Participant
I was successful because I tried to inform myself as best I could, and I am still having trouble understanding what is available for me out there having my criminal background. Most important was my own determination not to give up. –Online Survey Participant

**Sub-theme: relations with peers.** Relationships with peers was an interesting finding among all transfer students. Many participants reported the value of having friendships that helped them progress successfully through college, but relations with peers also includes the sense of belonging at the university. In conjunction with Tinto’s retention theory (1975), the more that students felt that they belonged at the university, the more likely they are to make progress toward their degree and graduate. The same also rang true within the voices of the online survey participants.

“My success factor and personal strategies that led to me getting my degree? I would say that I am an insane maniac. Failure was never on my mind. I knew I was going to succeed as long as I put in the work. I had to make sure that I put in the time which I did.” –Online Survey Participant

“I was motivated by my competitive nature to compete against my classmates and by their willingness to study long hours.” –Online Survey Participant

“My first semester here, I found a job on campus which help me become familiar with the school and people. I was successful in overcoming challenges because I found a place for myself.” –Online Survey Participant

**Sub-theme: resilience.** Resilience is a conceptual framework in this study that also came up overall in transfer students who completed the online survey. Resilience referred to the successful adaptation to challenges, which college students are bound to face. In this particular sub-theme, resilience took a variety of different forms ranging from never giving up to resourcefulness and strong will.
“I used outside sources to help with the financial part in making sure I had books on time. I would just crash classes until I was told by the professor that I was enrolled or I had to find another class. I ended up taking the introduction to psychology class right before I was graduating.” –Online Survey Participant

“I’m a very diligent person. No matter what obstacles I face, I figure out a way to overcome them.” –Online Survey Participant

“I learned to adapt and take school more seriously. I did all my homework that was assigned, instead of putting it off for later and thinking I could pass without it. I had to retake the classes that I failed, and take other classes to raise my GPA. I re-applied to the business program and got accepted back in.” –Online Survey Participant

“I just don’t give up. I feel like a slightly smarter person may have given up by now instead of driving themselves into debt to get a piece of paper that a lot of people don’t care about anyway.” –Online Survey Participant

**Theme: Personal Setbacks of All Online Survey Participants.** The overall theme of personal setbacks was not as present among the survey responses. Generally, the setbacks that students reported were more likely caused by the university. For instance, the lack of available courses can be a setback for students, but is more on the responsibility of the university to assess their logistics and utilization practices as opposed to having it as the student’s responsibility. Additionally, personal setbacks were not as numerous among the qualitative data. Possible explanations for such occurrence could be participants’ choice not to disclose the setbacks or that the students did not experience as many personal setbacks in general. Table 34 described the salient sub-theme discovered among the transfer students who completed the online survey. The salient sub-theme was represented in Table 34 using level of saliency among the responses and was found as “commuting.”
Table 34 All Online Survey Participants - Theme: Personal Setbacks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commuting</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=384 online survey participants)

Sub-theme: commuting. While there are no statistics collected by the university to support the claim, NCU was known to many of its students as a commuter campus in which a majority of the students live at home with their parents and spend a considerable amount of time commuting to school. As seen throughout a majority of responses, it can be presumed that students who lived at home and commuted did so primarily for financial or family reasons. As transfer students tend to be low income students with limited disposable income and obligations to support their family, living near campus can easily become both a burden financially as well as on the family. Participants who reported commuting as a challenge also subsequently discussed parking as a major issue; however, parking is more along the lines of a setback from the institution’s management of logistics and resources. Further, commuting also caused a feeling of disconnect with the institution as reported by some participants.

“I got more used to the commute, although it still is a pain. I've had to deal with the costs of the school and I have also had help from my father. I realized that I was doing the major I wanted but also found a concentration that fit me better.” –Online Survey Participant

“I had trouble dealing with the commute the most. Before I was only 15 minutes away from my community college and now it was taking me up to an hour to get to NCU. The increased cost of tuition and parking passes were another challenge.” –Online Survey Participant
“Commuting was such a challenge because I commuted about 1 hr and 30 min one way, so in total I would drive about 3 hours each day. This was very tiring.” –Online Survey Participant

“One of the biggest challenges was travel. I live 45 minutes away from NCU and between the traffic and the parking, commuting was awful... When I got to campus, it seemed like everyone knew each other from freshman year and I felt a little bit of an outsider.” –Online Survey Participant

**Theme: Support from Institution of All Online Survey Participants.** The overall theme of support from institution arose from the helps and successes that students experienced that were generally provided by the university. For example, developing positive relationships with faculty and staff is associated as a support from the institution in the sense that the university is responsible for the hiring and selection of their workforce and recruiting talented, approachable, and caring faculty and staff to help students is within their scope. One interesting finding with this theme was that there were not as much support specifically administered by the institution, which could have been that students mostly relied on supporting themselves as opposed to the support services of the university. Table 35 described the salient sub-theme discovered within the overall theme of support from institution of all online survey participants. The salient sub-theme was represented in Table 35 using level of saliency among the responses and was found as “satisfied with college experience.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 35 All Online Survey Participants - Theme: Support from Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Theme</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Saliency Among Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with college experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=384 online survey participants)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sub-theme: satisfaction with college experience. One of the findings with the transfer student who completed the surveys was their level of satisfaction with the college experience at NCU. Despite the setbacks and challenges that this group experienced, it was common among them to report a positive level of satisfaction with their college experience. What this finding suggests is that the level of satisfaction that students had can be associated with their timely degree completion. Future research in this sub-theme could include specific areas that they were satisfied with, as most participants kept this response fairly vague.

“Going through my major I have experienced a lot of stress that has done terrible things to my health and psyche, but I am glad I went through it and learned all that I did. I also made some great friends! Overall, I am very proud to say that in both community college and at NCU that I have only one bad experience while dealing with professors or staff.” –Online Survey Participant

“I genuinely loved NCU, I wasn't there just to get a fancy job with a paycheck, and I think that helped me a lot. Being actually interested in your classes reduces a lot of stress when it comes to studying and passing exams.” –Online Survey Participant

Theme: Setbacks from Institution of All Online Survey Participants. The overall theme of setbacks from institution arose from the challenges that students experienced that were generally within the university’s control. For example, lack of available classes is associated as a setback from the institution as the university has a greater realm of control in the course offerings and listings than their students. Table 36 described the salient sub-themes discovered within the overall theme of support from institution of first-generation and low income (FGLI) students who completed their
degree within two years. The salient sub-themes were represented in Table 36 using level of saliency among the responses and were found to be “discussed a need for first-semester support” and “university logistics: class availability.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 36 All Online Survey Participants - Theme: Setbacks from Institution</th>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Theme: need for first-semester support.</td>
<td>Need for first-semester support</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University logistics: class availability</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University logistics: parking</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Better communication between university and</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>community college prior to transfer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(n=384 online survey participants)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through the hundreds of survey responses and numerous individual interviews, participants expressed a strong need for a program, office, or service that caters specifically to the needs of community college transfer students. This service bridges the gap between the outstanding support the university can provide and the challenges that students face by means of increasing social capital. Currently, NCU operates a first year experience program for their freshmen students, which amuses many transfer students and makes them question why they do not have such resources specifically targeted for them especially given the fact that they represent a majority of the student body population.

“Better details of explaining the requirements for graduation from day one so it will not feel like you are starting out blind.” –Online Survey Participant

“If there could be a program where they help transfer students ease into a four year university. I know that if I had a counselor that I could work close with, I would have applied for the master’s program.” –Online Survey Participant
“A mentor program would be great. Where the students are given a senior transfer student to talk to about classes to take and issues with school.” –Online Survey Participant

**Sub-theme: university logistics: class availability.** Interestingly, one of the more unique themes that arose from online survey participants was the need to open more classes, online courses, and evening sessions. The amount of frustrated students who experienced challenges with getting their classes was an overwhelming overall response by this study’s participants. Additionally in hand with availability, course sequencing restrictions were also a challenge for numerous participants as some were only offered once a year and/or required a pre-requisite course to be completed before enrolling in it.

“As a transfer student I was frustrated my first semester to learn that there were more students than could be accommodated in my major classes. I couldn't understand why the demand (number of students) was not being met with the supply (professors/classes). I was told during orientation that without getting into these particular classed I would not graduate on time but that there was no guarantee that I would be able to enroll. It almost felt like luck of the draw.” –Online Survey Participant

“Certain classes were only offered in one semester and had a prerequisite that was not offered at the junior college or other college. This lead to falling behind or just totally changing majors so I didn't have to stay longer and spend more money.” –Online Survey Participant

“NCU should offer more courses during the evening hours for student that HAVE to work. Not everyone is fortunate enough to attend school and not work. Four year colleges are typically tailored towards students that only attend school.” –Online Survey Participant

“I think having more classes available to students would increase graduation rates and reduce the amount of time people have to stay at NCU. For my major, I had to take CLASS 101 and CLASS 102 and the department won’t even let you sign up for CLASS 101 until your second to the last semester. This means that if you don’t pass it, or don’t pass
CLASS 102 (which you take your last semester) you have to stay a whole extra semester.” –Online Survey Participant

**Sub-theme: university logistics: parking.** Along the lines of university logistics, participants also commonly referred to the parking demand exceeding the supply of adequate spots. It was mentioned by various participants about having to commute to campus earlier to get a good spot. This could be problematic for many students as that would take away time from their work schedule as well as cause unneeded stress or anxiety if they were running late or stuck in traffic. Further research could include the specific effects that inadequate parking causes at a predominantly commuter campus.

“The parking is absolutely terrible. There are too many commuter students and not enough parking to accommodate them” –Online Survey Participant

“Spending hours finding a parking spot on campus is a waste of valuable study time. Provide more online classes. This way students don't have to spend so much time on the road or parking.” –Online Survey Participant

“As for parking, I would have to come an hour before class started to find parking on time or park way out in the overflow parking and walk to the other side of campus when it was raining.” –Online Survey Participant

**Sub-theme: better communication between university and community college prior to transfer.** Students generally reported a significant lack of communication between the Northern California University and the community college they were transferring from. While transferring to the university represents a milestone in one’s journey to the bachelor’s degree, the feelings of confusion and frustration overwhelmingly affected the students entering the university as transfer students.
“There needs to be better education for transfer students about how the school works before they come so that they don’t take useless classes.” – Online Survey Participant

“Emphasize the need to finish as many prerequisites at a community college first before transferring. Many transfers students that I have observed rush into transferring and then get overwhelmed by how many classes they still need to take at NCU that they could’ve taken at community college. It frustrates many students and leads to an unpleasant experience and possible dropout.” – Online Survey Participant

“Information sessions should be held for potential transfer students where they are encouraged to maximize their community college experience and the reality of class impaction laid out plainly. It seems counterintuitive to tell students to not transfer immediately, but in the long run it will lead to greater and faster graduation rates.” – Online Survey Participant

“Better communication with community college before transferring will help students save money and not have to wait on greatly impacted classes, thus alleviating one of the most common stresses of transfer students that I’ve seen. Yes, community college also has severe class impactions, but students save money and don't end up leaving their future university with a bad taste in their mouth.” – Online Survey Participant

**Theme: Helpful Campus Resources/Services of All Online Survey Participants.**

In the online survey and individual interviews, participants were asked which campus programs, resources, and services that they felt were helpful to their success as a student at Northern California University. Whereas the quantitative research of helpful campus resources/services were generally seeking to find which ones were significant, the qualitative research of the same topic sought to find out why or how certain ones were significant. Table 32 described the salient sub-themes discovered within the overall theme of helpful campus programs/services of first-generation and low income (FGLI) students who completed their degree within two years. The salient sub-
themes were represented in Table 32 using level of saliency among the responses and were found to be “academic advising” and “student club experience.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme/Programs/Services</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic advising</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student club experience</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=384 online survey participants)

**Sub-theme: academic advising.** Seeking academic advising each semester was particularly helpful for many online survey participants as it helped them gain a better understanding of where they stood on the road to graduation as well as help them plan the remainder of their coursework. Additionally, students were able to seek advice understanding and interpreting university policy as it pertained to their individual situation.

“I met with advisers at NCU and tried to readjust my path in order to meet the necessary requirements. I was able to get permission to take classes by meeting with advisers and having them input the classes from the junior college so that the system would let me add classes at NCU” – Online Survey Participant

“Academic advising helped the most. I utilized my major counselors and also begged to be seen by a General Education counselor to ensure I was going to graduate, which I did in the first year and the second.” – Online Survey Participant

“I went to academic advising each semester to help establish a good student-to-faculty relationship that may not otherwise form. This may also give other transfer students a better sense of direction in terms of his/her education plan, how to navigate the university system, and help build lasting relationships that persist beyond undergraduate studies.” – Online Survey Participant
Sub-theme: student club experience. The student involvement and student club component played a helpful role in the student’s journey to graduation for many reasons. Primarily, the club involvement served as a means to develop and cultivate a sense of belonging on campus in a group of like-minded peers who help support each other on their road to graduation. Additionally, students who also rose to officer positions in their clubs were able to develop and practice leadership, project management, and interpersonal skills that would help supplement their academic career and better prepare them for the workforce. These findings are consistent with literature that suggests that the more students are involved on campus, such as through student clubs, the more likely they are to be retained and graduate (Astin, 1984).

“I loved the Filipino Students Club. They made my college experience fun, exciting, and rewarding.” –Online Survey Participant

“The executive boards that I am holding a position in require me to be passing my classes. So in order to be a chair in my student club, I need good grades.” –Online Survey Participant

“Joining accounting student club and networking with professionals was great. Members of the organization are helpful as well because they understand what I’m going through because they're on the same boat.” –Online Survey Participant

Qualitative Interview Data. As previously indicated, the qualitative data retrieved for this study was derived from two main sources, online surveys and individual interviews. This portion of the qualitative data report included sixteen individual interviews with students who indicated their interest in participating in an interview at the end of the online survey. Of the 384 online survey participants, only sixteen were
successful and followed through in scheduling a time to meet with the researcher and share their experiences. In the following section, the demographics of the interview participants are described followed by narrative profiles of interview participants and then eventually the analysis of the individual interview data.

**Demographic Profiles of Interview Participants.** As illustrated in Table 38, the interview component included sixteen participants, nine females and seven males. It is also interesting to note that the overall breakdown of race/ethnicity of interview participants were similar to that of Northern California University, where no one race/ethnicity was the majority of the student body, or in this case, the participants. The ages of the participants at time they transferred ranged from 18 years old to 38 years old with most being in between 20-25 years old at the time they transferred. It is also noteworthy that all sixteen participants were low income and twelve of the sixteen were both first-generation and low income. Lastly, only five students were able to graduate within two years out of the sixteen, leading to a two-year degree completion rate among interview participants at 31.25%.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>First-Generation</th>
<th>Low Income</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Start Term</th>
<th>End Term</th>
<th>Total Semesters</th>
<th>Age Upon Transfer</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Mother's Level of Education</th>
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<td>Summer 2014</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>Spring 2014</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>Fall 2016</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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Narrative Profiles of Interview Participants. In addition to the similarities and differences illustrated in the demographic profiles table of interview participants, individual narrative profiles of participants were also included to portray the richness of each person’s journey to the bachelor’s degree. While all participants identified as low income, salient variations between them include: (a) first-generation status, (b) majors, (c) age upon transferring, (d) total semesters to graduation, (e) parents’ level of education, (f) first-semester transfer experiences, and (g) critical life experiences.

Xavier. Xavier was a 23 year old social work major at the time of transferring to Northern California University (NCU) during Fall 2013 and identifies as a White/Caucasian male. Prior to attending NCU, Xavier was a student at a community college in Arkansas and sought out NCU as a destination institution due to its prestigious bachelor’s in social work program. However, when Xavier arrived at NCU, he realized that the sequencing of courses would prolong his graduation from an expected two years to three years, which ultimately led him to changing his major to deaf-studies. During his undergraduate career, Xavier identified as a first-generation and low income student and spent only three semesters at NCU to complete his bachelor’s degree in deaf studies. In his interview, Xavier cited his challenges as the lack of class availability for his original major, having a long-distance relationship, and acquiring assistance with his pre-transfer questions and course equivalencies. The successes that supported him during his academic journey included planning and be organized, engaging in activities that promote health and wellness, and being persistent and resilient. One particular example of
Xavier’s persistence and resilience was his sustained focus on overcoming the negative encounters with the university’s bureaucratic policies that would have prevented him from graduating within three semesters. To navigate these challenges, Xavier remained positive and optimistic while also being respectful to all staff that served as the gatekeepers of the departments he needed to work with to overcome the bureaucratic obstacles. When asked about how he developed persistence and resilience, Xavier credited his experiences growing up having to adapt to significant life changes such as moving around constantly as well as successfully coping with his parents’ divorce. Currently, Xavier is in graduate school pursuing a master’s degree in social work with the intent of being able to work in a specialized school for children who are hearing impaired.

Ana. Ana was 38 years old at the time she transferred into NCU during the Fall 2012 term and also identifies as Hispanic/Latina Women. Originally, Ana was interested in studying as an art major but found her passion for child development as she progressed through her academics. Ana identified as first-generation and low income and raised two children, one of whom has special needs, while she was pursuing her bachelor’s degree. While Ana’s husband worked to support their family, her mother-in-law watched her children while she went to school. However, when her mother-in-law passed away, Ana recruited her biological mother to provide childcare support. Finding adequate and affordable childcare was a recurring theme among the interview and survey participants who had children. During her interview, Ana cited her setbacks being raising
her two elementary school-age children, financial challenges such as paying for her and her family’s basic needs, and also her age in the sense that she is not able to get by with low amounts of sleep as she once was able to in her younger years. Her sources of support that led to her successes included receiving love and encouragement from her husband, her children in which she wanted to also be a role model for, and her personal resilience. When asked about how she developed her resilience, she referenced the period of time when she became a mother citing that quitting was never an option for her and that in order for her children to be successful, she has to model that positive behavior of never giving up. While she graduated in four semesters, Ana is currently in graduate school working on a master’s degree in education.

Angela. Angela was a 23 year old criminal justice major when she transferred to NCU during the Fall 2013 semester and identifies as a White/Caucasian female. Angela was involved in student life at her community college and selected NCU as the destination campus because it was close to her family. Additionally, Angela also raised three children while pursuing her bachelor’s degree, which was also a primary reason for going to college near home so that she can have assistance with childcare while pursuing her degree. At NCU, Angela participated in a student leadership development program which she spoke highly about and recommended all transfer students to join and become part of to better familiarize themselves with the campus and its resources while also engaging in personal and professional development. In her interview, the setbacks that Angela experienced were related to time management, commuting, identifying parking,
and the de-centralized academic advising model at NCU, in which students must make appointments with multiple faculty/staff members who specialize in certain aspects of bachelor’s degree requirements. The successes that Angela experienced included being an effective planner and staying organized, having a desire to make her family proud, and being resilient. Angela credits her resilience to her childhood in which she developed her ability to be resourceful because her mother was incarcerated and left Angela to fend for herself. Currently, Angela works at the community college she transferred from in the campus’ assessment center where she also acts as an advocate for other students and assisting them on their academic journeys to the university.

**Nirvana.** Nirvana was a 20 year old criminal justice major at the time she transferred to NCU and identifies as a Hispanic/Latina woman. Nirvana participated in several leadership activities at her community college before transferring to NCU. Upon transferring, Nirvana experienced a discourse in which she was very familiar and well-known at her community college, but felt like a stranger in someone’s home at NCU. While Nirvana was first-generation and low income, her family did not provide as much encouragement and support in her desire to pursue a degree in criminal justice and eventually law school. In her interview, she mentioned that she was a person that people doubted and someone who would not amount to much because she was perceived as troublesome. It was not until her last year at the community college when Nirvana underwent a critical life experience and asked herself what she was doing with her life; after this needed self-reflection and evaluation, she identified her path on becoming a
lawyer to fight for social justice and help others who have been historically disadvantaged. The setbacks Nirvana experienced were more associated with her time at the community college, but also felt that parking and the availability of classes were her main challenges at NCU. The successes she experienced her becoming a self-advocate, finding her calling in life, fighting for social justice, and her eventual goal of becoming a lawyer. Currently, Nirvana is an academic support specialist at a community center and was focusing on completing admission requirements for law school.

**Travis.** Travis was a 28 year old anthropology major when he transferred to NCU and identifies as a first-generation and low income White/Caucasian male. Upon graduating high school, Travis wanted to go to college but felt that he was not ready at the time. Thus, Travis elected to join the United States Marine Corps and served a four-year term. After the military, he worked for an armored transport company transferring money between financial institutions. It was during this time where he came to a realization that he did not want to be locked down in this job making only $14 an hour for the rest of his life. It was also during this point where he engaged in critical self-reflection and made the decision to go to the community college. In community college, he was part of student body government and developed positive relationships with faculty. When he finally transferred to NCU, Travis did not experience many setbacks, but credits his biggest challenge as missing the campus tour at the student orientation. Travis noted that by missing the campus tour, he felt out of alignment and somewhat displaced as he did not feel confident in finding his way around the campus. His
successes as a student were mainly becoming student orientation advisor, serving as a student facilitator for a transfer student learning community, receiving support and encouragement from his significant other and his family, and being resilient. His resilience was acquired during the time he was in the military and proved to be very helpful in sustaining his motivation to complete his degree. Travis was also a father at the time he transferred and is currently working at NCU as a financial advisor while simultaneously finishing a master’s degree in anthropology.

**Jamie.** Jamie was 22 years old and majoring in Economics at the time she transferred to NCU and identifies as a multi-racial woman. Jamie is also a first-generation and low income student who experienced several commuting and housing challenges in her first few semesters at NCU. Additionally, Jamie disclosed that she has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), but did not feel that it was a major inhibitor in regards to her academics. An interesting fact that Jamie also shared was that one of her more effective study habits is to play music and have a moderate level of distraction in the background while she studied; this was something that she said was contradictory to what most ADHD students do not need when needing to concentrate and focus. Jamie also felt that despite having ADHD, she did not feel she needed any accommodations in the classroom to help her focus as she simply stated I needed to just work harder than everyone else to succeed. Her significant setbacks that she experienced were the horrible parking situation and class availability caused by the over-enrollment of students at NCU and having to overcome her disinterest in going to school. Her
strategies that led to her succeeding as a college student included her resilience in putting up with school, focusing on the big picture to ensure a successful life for her future children and family, and understanding the benefits that she will receive if she graduates with a bachelor’s degree. Currently, Jamie works as an administrative staff member at a recreation vehicle dealership and is searching for employment in the public service industry.

**Kelsey.** Kelsey was an 18 year old nursing student at the time she transferred to NCU and is an Asian/Pacific Islander woman. Kelsey was home schooled for most of her life and dually enrolled in the community college while completing her high school coursework. For most of her life, Kelsey did not feel associated with any religion up until recently when she made a decision to commit to the teachings and practices of Christianity. Kelsey credited her faith and religion as motivation and a heavy influence on her life and journey to excel and graduate. Additionally, Kelsey transferred in as a nursing major, but later changed her academic plan to biological sciences due to the high barriers of entry and competition for the upper division nursing program. Her setbacks were feeling that she did not belong to the campus community, maintaining motivation to finish school, and commuting approximately ten hours each week to and from campus. Kelsey’s successes included her faith/religion, making her parents proud, being a role model for her younger siblings, and obtaining a job as a peer tutor on campus.

**Dave.** Dave was a 29 year old business administration major when he transferred and identifies as a first-generation and low income Asian/Pacific Islander male. Before
beginning his career at the community college, Dave joined the Air Force and served a four-year term before heading back to the classroom. Additionally, Dave found a full time job in the international student programs office at his community college and chose to transfer specifically to NCU because most of the people in his network had positive messages about the campus. One critical life experience that he underwent occurred at the time of his father’s passing. Dave’s father had always been a major source of motivation in his life and Dave has credited his father as the one who instilled within him his positive work ethics. Dave honored his late father’s memory by always striving to work hard, not give up, and help as many people as he can. This life experience is what has shaped his personal resilience. During his interview, Dave reported that his setbacks were challenges receiving effective feedback from his instructors, a sense of disconnect with the campus community, time management, and having ineffective group members on major projects. His successes were attributed to striving to be a role model for his niece and nephew, his work ethic, and the support he received from his family and close friends. Currently, Dave works for the community college district that he graduated from helping high school students learn about the positive effects of higher education.

Ron. Ron was a 20 year old pursuing a degree in criminal justice at NCU and identifies as a low income White/Caucasian male. Ron elected to start his bachelor’s degree journey at the community college because most students from his high school did. He credits his enthusiastic criminal justice professor’s at the community college as the reason why he decided to pursue a degree within that field. When he finally transferred
to NCU during Spring 2013, Ron felt a disconnect with the campus and immediately started joining campus organizations to bridge that gap; however, he did not feel his college experience was going the best and felt he was not utilizing his full potential. During his interview, Ryan shared his critical life experience that occurred one day when he was walking around campus on a weekend. On that day, Ron had a mental breakdown and began spontaneously sobbing on a park bench wondering why his life was not going the way he wanted. It was also at that very moment that Ron reported something within him was awakened thus leading to the development of his resilience. From that moment on, Ron told himself that he was going to improve his life and make the most out of the experience. Similar to Angela, Ron participated in a student leadership development program and found on campus employment as a peer advisor which ultimately led to his change in career toward becoming a student affairs professional. His setbacks were the different teaching styles of the criminal justice faculty, a lack of belonging to the campus community, and feeling overlooked as a transfer student. Ron reported that his successes were finding mentors through on campus faculty and staff, joining student organizations, participating in a leadership development program, working on campus, and his personal drive for wanting to improve his life. Currently, Ron works at NCU in the engineering college as an administrative support professional where he gets to work with college students and faculty.

**Jadzia.** Jadzia was a 23 year-old geography student at the time she transferred to NCU and identifies as Hispanic/Latina woman. Jadzia was both first-generation and low
income and grew up living with her father and stepmother who she both felt did not truly care much for her wellbeing. Jadzia shared that as she was growing up, she did not have much to get by and remembers showing up empty-handed to potlucks and social gatherings with her friends. Since she graduated, Jadzia has been living on her own with her boyfriend and it is with his support and encouragement that has helped her the most progress through her challenges and remain optimistic and resilient. Three key motivational factors that led Jadzia to completing her degree were wanting to prove to her biological family that she made something of herself, her desire to increase her quality of life and social mobility, and having faith that there would be something greater after she graduated. At NCU, Jadzia became a learning assistant for one of her faculty mentors and credited the geography department faculty as a source of great support and going out of their way to ensure the success of their students. Her setbacks included her lack of adequate income, having no fallback plan to family if she had no financial resources, commuting and transportation, and expensive textbooks. Her successes were drawn from the support and encouragement from her significant other, her personal drive of wanting to succeed, her love for her academic program, and finding a group of supportive peers to get through the challenging curriculum. Currently, Jadzia works for a public service agency and is involved in urban planning.

**Viv.** Viv was 39 years old studying criminal justice when she transferred to NCU and identifies as a White/Caucasian female with 2 children. Viv entered the United States with her family from Russia when she was a teenager and did not initially plan to
go to college. Additionally, Viv was both first-generation and low income and upon graduating high school, Viv went straight into the real estate business working her way up and earning an adequate living. It was not until the 2007 recession when her company experienced the economic downturn that led to her not being able to receive any promotions because she possessed no college degree and then eventually being laid off. It was because of her economic situation that brought her to the community college and then eventually to NCU. At the university, Viv credits her positive relationships with faculty and staff and working hard to achieve a 4.0 GPA during her undergraduate career. She mentioned that it was due to her social capital and hard work that led her to being noticed by the college and provided scholarships to support her through her studies. Viv disclosed that she did not experience many significant challenges other than financial ones and finding reasonable childcare, but had various successes which included being a hard worker, asking questions and never giving up until she felt comfortable with the answer, going to professor’s office hours, and being resilient. One example of her resilience was when she delivered her second child a day before the semester started and then successfully walked back onto campus the next day to go to class. Currently, Viv is preparing for graduation and looks forward to being able to rejoin the workforce and watching her children grow up.

**Fred.** Fred was a 22 year-old computer science major when transferring to NCU and identifies as a White/Caucasian male from a low income background. Fred originally pursued a degree in computer science but upon transferring concluded that he did not
want to write computer programs and switched over to management information systems under the business administration major. Fred also regretted not becoming involved in student organizations during his time at NCU, but felt that working and supporting himself was more of an important commitment. Additionally, Fred was able to secure a job that provided a tuition reimbursement program so long as he maintained satisfactory progress toward his degree and worked with his supervisors to flex his work schedule. His primary setbacks were lack of class availability, managing a 40-hour workweek while going to school, challenges with course equivalencies and pre-requisites, and regret of not being able to get involved in a student organization. Fred’s successes were finding a job that supported him professionally and financially, living within a reasonable distance from campus, finding an effective study group and location, and engaging in activities that promote health and wellness. Currently, Fred is working for the company who support him through his undergraduate career and is taking a break before he returns to the classroom to pursue a master’s degree.

Jeremy. Jeremy was a 20 year old communications major when he transferred to NCU and identifies as a low income Asian/Pacific Islander male. Jeremy specifically chose to attend the community college before transferring to NCU because of his strong ties to his family. Upon entry to NCU, Jeremy noted that the student culture was very overwhelming and that there was a higher level of academic expectation and responsibility from the faculty at the university. He also had trouble finding adequate academic advising because his community college had a more centralized model where
he could get help in one location as opposed to the multiple locations and separation of
academic advising duties between faculty and professional staff. Jeremy also discussed
the stigma associated with a bachelor’s degree in communication in which people
believed that the degree lacked academic rigor, thus leading him to join the speech and
debate club and engage in research to prove to others that he earned a valuable education.
Jeremy’s setbacks included planning his commute and transportation route to and from
campus, the higher level of academic expectation and responsibility, and lack of
familiarity with campus resources. His successes were taking charge of his educational
experience, his personal drive in wanting to complete his degree, the support and
encouragement he received from his family, and joining a student organization.
Currently, Jeremy is searching for new employment and plans to volunteer at NCU’s
upcoming career fair.

Jessica. Jessica was a 21 year old biological sciences major when she transferred
to NCU and identifies as a low income Asian/Pacific Islander woman. Jessica originally
went to a four-year university upon graduating high school; however, due to personal
health reasons, Jessica had to return home and make frequent visits to the hospital.
Eventually, when her health began to stabilize, she enrolled in the community college and
participated in an educational equity program for science students which was led by NCU
faculty at her community college. When it came time to prepare for transferring, Jessica
narrowed her options down to two campuses, NCU and another college two hours away.
The decision to go to NCU came about when the campus offered her a favorable financial
aid package and the opportunity to do undergraduate research with a faculty member, both of which the other campus was not willing to provide. During her time at NCU, Jessica had to work three jobs to stay afloat of her tuition fees and living expenses, of which, she served as a peer advisor for fellow science students. When asked about her inspiration and sources of motivation, Jessica referenced the loss of two loved ones, one of whom was her best friend’s sister who was a twelve year old girl suffering from a chronic illness but never complaining about her pain or suffering to anyone. The other person who influenced her was her late fiancé who had an aneurism five weeks before the wedding. Jessica believed that if she was able to become a successful researcher that she may also be able to honor her lost loved ones and pave a pathway for future students who were in challenging situations. Overall, her setbacks were primarily financial and her successes were establishing positive relationships with faculty and staff who were also able to vouch for her when she needed to miss important exams to take care of her health challenges. Currently, Jessica is working on finishing her bachelor’s degree and still works with fellow science students to help them through their challenges they experienced.

**Greg.** Greg transferred to NCU at the age of 24 and identifies as a first-generation low income White/Caucasian male. Prior to NCU, Greg went to a community college in Arkansas where he began his electrical engineering requirements. The main reason Greg selected NCU was that he had a few friends who lived in the area and thought that moving here he would be able to secure a job closer to his ultimate
destination, San Francisco. As Greg transferred from out of the state, he was faced with additional tuition fees that led him to take a semester off to establish residency and then return to NCU after a short-term leave. One interesting period in Greg’s life was when he lost both of his parents and had to learn how to take care of himself. While his resilience was partly due to his upbringing in Arkansas where many people in his community grew up to be self-reliant, the memory of his parents is what pushed him through the future life challenges that he encountered. Greg’s setbacks were mainly finances, challenges with his department’s leadership, equivalencies with out of state coursework, and the bureaucracies of higher education. Greg’s successes that helped him toward his degree were mainly the memory of his parents, engaging in activities that promote health and wellness, developing his critical thinking and creativity skills, and wanting to be a role model for his niece and nephew. Currently, Greg is working toward finishing up his remaining requirements for his bachelor’s degree and is engaged to his significant other.

*Emma.* Emma was a 22 year old psychology major when she entered NCU and identifies as a Hispanic/Latina woman. Emma attended a community college close to home to maintain her strong relationship with her family and then eventually chose NCU because gave birth to her daughter and needed her family’s help with childcare. Emma also disclosed that she was diagnosed with ADHD, but has never viewed it as an inhibitor to her academic progress. While she was taking medication for her ADHD while being a dedicated student, her pregnancy required her to not take her medicine, which ultimately
led her to experience many challenges in the classroom; however, she remained resilient through her pregnancy and despite experiencing post-partum depression, she was able to return to her medication to help her progress through her academics. When further questioned about her resilience, Emma noted that it was due to her parents’ love, support, and encouragement that led her toward achieving her degree. She noted that her parents instilled a positive work ethic within her and her siblings and went as far as bringing them to their jobs washing cars at 2 o’clock in the morning at a local car dealership and cleaning houses to demonstrate to them that this is the manual labor that they will be doing if they do not earn a college degree. Overall, Emma’s setbacks were mainly her ADHD, commuting, ensuring she has adequate time to spend raising her daughter, time management, and managing her depression. Her successes that she experienced were the on campus childcare facility for her daughter, being perseverant and resilient, receiving positive messages about attending college, her supportive family, and mentorship. Currently, Emma is working toward completing her degree and is seeking out internships where she can serve foster youth.

**Analysis of Individual Interview Data.** During the semi-structured interview, participants were asked nine questions, as well as follow up questions as applicable, about their experiences at Northern California University (see Appendix F). Upon completion of the interview, the researcher manually transcribed each audio recording using transcription software and foot pedal. After the manuscript for an interview was created, it was then uploaded into Dedoose, an online research software used for
qualitative and mixed-method data and analysis. Using the qualitative methodology and analysis approach illustrated in Figure 3, the researcher engaged in the same three-phase approach (open coding, axial coding, and selective coding) to review the qualitative data collected during the interviews as well as identify key findings. The overall themes and sub-themes are then reported and illustrated in Table 39. These results show that the interview participants were divided into two groups, first-generation and low income students who graduated within two years (n=5) and all other interview participants (n=11). These results were purposefully presented in the following way because of this study’s nature to identify the unique successes and setbacks of first-generation and low income transfer students completing their degree within two years and used those who did not meet these qualifications as a comparative group (Fraker & Maynard, 1987). The importance of using comparative groups in this study was to provide the most accurate representation of influences on first-generation and low income transfer students by determining what truly may be unique for such population.
Table 39 Overall Themes and Sub-Themes on Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses From</th>
<th>FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in 2 Years (n=5)</th>
<th>All Other Interview Participants (n=11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Personal Strategies and Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and being organized was important</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in exercise/activities that promote health/wellness</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in self</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received inspiration/motivation from others</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for social justice</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Personal Setbacks</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges adjusting to university academics</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing degree at personal pace</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Support From Institution</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing positive relationships with faculty and staff</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having an on-campus job</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Setbacks From Institution</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for first-semester support</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University logistics: class availability</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University logistics: parking</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Helpful Programs/Services</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 hour study hall</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N/A level indicates that the sub-theme may have been present in certain responses of that group, but did not achieve overwhelming responses to be considered a sub-theme.

The following results were sourced from the qualitative interviews and are divided into two groups: first-generation and low income students who graduated within two years and all other interview participants. These results were purposefully presented in the following way because of this study’s nature to identify successes and setbacks of first-generation and low income transfer students completing their degree within two
years and using the results overall to compare themes to (Fraker & Maynard, 1987).

Further, the importance of comparing these groups in this study was to provide the most accurate representation of influences on first-generation and low income transfer students by also reviewing the experiences of those who may not have met this selection criteria. In other words, a majority of first-generation and low income students may state that the most influential support to helping them graduate in a timely manner was using the library, but if the students who were not first-generation and low income students graduating in two years also stated that using the fitness center was the most helpful for them completing the degree in a timely manner, then that resource may not be as unique to the first student population.

**Theme: Personal Strategies and Support of FGLI Interview Participants**

**Graduating within Two Years.** The personal strategies and support that participants shared during their interview indicated that the strongest sub-themes were: (a) planning and being organized, (b) believing the degree will lead to upward mobility, (c) engaging in self-reflection, (d) focusing on the end goal, (d) participating in campus programs and activities, belief in self, and receiving motivation and inspiration from others. Excerpts from the specific sub-themes will be portrayed in individual research question data reports in this chapter.
Table 40 FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years - Theme: Personal Strategies and Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Personal Strategies and Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and being organized was important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in exercise/activities that promote health/wellness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received inspiration/motivation from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for social justice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=5 interview participants)

**Sub-theme: planning and being organized was important.** This group of interview participants unanimously understood the importance of planning and being organized when it came to managing their academic, work, and personal lives. Interestingly enough, all five participants in this group had to maintain at least half-time employment to make it through college and three of the five had children to take care of; thus it is no surprise that not only organization skills were viewed as important, it was valued essentially for survival.

“One of my greatest strategies was being organized, getting a routine down and sticking to it.” – Xavier

“I had two planners, one for personal and work and one for school. They were physical planners as well, I did not like using my phone if it's in my phone and my phone dies, it is unreliable!” – Angela

“I have a partner and two children as well as a student teaching job to manage. There really was no room to waste time so I had to be organized in order to stay afloat.” -Ana

**Sub-theme: engaging in exercise/activities that promote health/wellness.** An interesting finding in this group of participants was the role exercise, health, and wellness played in their success. Most of these participants recognized the importance of regular
exercise and/or engage in activities that promote wellness whether it was actually exercising or meditation.

“
I liked having the fitness center, it provided a good break I could go over there when I had a big test that I was stressed out about or if a professor made me angry or if I just needed to get out of like the whole academic mindset” -Travis

“Staying healthy was important, if you got sick, everything falls apart--you don't go to work you, feel more stressed about affording college, you miss homework, you miss class, you get deducted…” -Xavier

“I really enjoyed how NCU had a relieve your stress workshop, I really found that to be very helpful in my life as a student and learned how to better deal with the stresses of being a college student and a mom.” - Angela

Sub-theme: belief in self. Believing in one’s abilities was another commonly reoccurring theme through the dialogue retrieved from the individual interviews of these participants. The belief in one’s own abilities also included aspects of personal drive, intrinsic motivation, and desire to succeed. Future research under this theme could include a more in-depth exploration as how these individuals developed their reported level of self-confidence and belief in their abilities.

“It was the personal drive that got me through the Marine Corps boot camp which got me into college. I told myself, this is what I'm going to do and this is what I gotta do to get there.” –Travis

“I really have to want it (graduating college in a timely manner), I don't usually start something unless I know I'm going to finish it. I have to have the drive so I think that's my approach.” –Angela

“I keep a picture of myself of when I was 2.5 or 3 years old and it's just motivation for me because that person deserves the best life and that's me.” -Nirvana
Sub-theme: received inspiration/motivation/support from others. Whether it was from family, friends, or even professors, receiving support, inspiration and motivation from others was helpful to these interview participants. This finding is another example of social capital, the network of relationships an individual has as well as a conceptual framework in this study.

“I had a lot of teachers who were really motivating too like they really pushed me and a lot of them were like don't stop at your bachelor's go up keep going your education because nobody can take that away from you that's something you'll always have that helped boost your morale and made you want to keep going.” – Angela

“My girlfriend was an occupational therapist and I saw some of the things she could do as a therapist, to help people with autism as well as the elderly and other disenfranchised groups. I wanted to do that too, help people, which gave me a huge boost of motivation” - Xavier

“My son always knew his mom goes to school and so does my daughter because she's not much older than him so I just wanna show them that you don't quit and that you always do your homework. I want to role model that for them because some day in the not very far future from now they will be going to college…” - Ana

Sub-theme: concern for social justice. Loosely defined, the sub-theme of social justice was identified within a majority of FGLI interview participants who completed their degree within two years. The concern for social justice among these participants was presented mainly as a personal goal to obtain a career that helps those from disadvantaged backgrounds or by the use of inclusive language. It was interesting to discover this unique sub-theme among the FGLI interview participants who completed their degree in two years as they expressed a desire to want to make a positive impact on the world. In one case, a participant mentioned that it was the children from the
disadvantaged background that served to motivate and inspire him to obtain a career where he can support them.

“I’d say NCU is exceptionally more diverse. One important value within the institution should be cultural competency or just having some training having a space for people at the college both student and staff to come together and just recognize how many different perspectives are coming to the college. If the faculty and staff reflect the diversity of the student population and really take the time to learn about the different cultures, students would feel more comfortable and be more successful.” – Xavier

“There's a deaf school where I had the chance to volunteer at and has a lot of talented children. Looking at the cultural elements of that group was a huge motivational factor for me to get my degree and find ways to help serve them better.” – Xavier

“I decided then that I wanted to pursue a career in law and even out the disparities in all of our systems but I figured one person can't change the whole system. However, I can just make a small scale difference and I chose the criminal justice system to be in the courts more specific to help alleviate the disparities there.” – Nirvana

“I think just umm something else very important is having your significant other your husband your wife, domestic partner be supportive of your academics.” – Ana

“My professors suggested I should become teacher and that sounded great. I gave it some thought and umm being that my son has special needs and being umm educated in the education filed has helped me tremendously to get him the support and the services to get him the help he needs in school and even if it is just for that, it's worth it.” -Ana

**Theme: Personal Setbacks of FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years.** The lack of personal setbacks that participants shared during the interview indicated that personal setbacks were relatively scarce. As indicated in Table 41, the only
The sub-theme present within most of this group of participants was experiencing challenges adjusting to university academics.

Table 41 FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years - Theme: Personal Setbacks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenges adjusting to university academics</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=5 interview participants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sub-theme: challenges adjusting to university academics.** The setbacks from institution theme was formed based on the responses from this study’s participants. Particularly, the setbacks from the institution included sub-themes that were within the university’s practices and processes. The most salient setbacks from the institution that this group of participants reported were that they all experienced challenges with the university, lack of class availability, and lack of familiarity with campus programs and resources.

“At my community college, besides having class participation there wasn't much more you needed to do. At NCU that is totally not the case umm there is so much more expected of you than at my community college so I have to be working on papers for at least 2-3 weeks to just gather information before I attempt to write anything and then I usually write about four drafts before taking it to writing center or asking a peer to review it. I feel the bar is set a lot higher with the amount of work and expectations at NCU.” – Angela

“It was extremely difficult for me at NCU with any class that had math. I constantly needed help and kept going to the math tutoring lab to get by.” – Nirvana

“I think that when you are transferring from a junior college to a university the course load is a little different, so you have not only more assignments to complete, but oftentimes there is no option for turning stuff in late… You're a lot more overwhelmed with the load of work that
you have and also not being able to turn in anything late so that was very different as far as the experience.” Ana

Theme: Support from Institution of FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years. Reluctantly, FGLI interview participants who graduated within two years did not report any substantial support from the institution. The closest support from the institution that these participants received was along the lines of financial aid; however, this was categorized as a helpful resource more than a support from institution. One possibility for why no salient sub-themes emerged from this category could be due in part to the self-sufficiency of the participants in the sense that perhaps they did not need any support from the institution to find their way to graduation. In certain aspects, this could also be considered resilience or academic resilience. Future research could explore student experiences more in-depth and seek to further determine any salient support from the institution that is associated with students who complete their degree in a timely manner.

Table 42 FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years - Theme: Support from Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=5 interview participants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme: Setbacks from Institution of FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years. The setbacks from institution theme was formed based on the responses from this group of participants. Particularly, the setbacks from the institution included sub-themes that were within the university’s practices and processes. As indicated by Table 43, the most salient setbacks from the institution that this group of
participants reported were ones they all experienced which were need for first-semester support” and “university logistics: class availability.”

Table 43 FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years - Theme: Setbacks from Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need for first-semester support</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University logistics: class availability</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=5 interview participants)

Sub-theme: need for first-semester support. Through the numerous individual interviews, participants expressed a strong need for a service that caters specifically to the needs of community college transfer students. This requested service would bridge the gap between the challenges students faced with the transition to the incredible amount of resources and support that the university is willing to provide. Particularly, this group of interview participants expressed a lack of familiarity with the services and resources available and wished there was a better way to deliver such important and helpful information to students.

“It took me pretty much at least that first semester to really figure out where my classes were and where I can go to do simple things like places to eat to get sit and study not having that chance having to figure it out on my own just mentally put me out of sorts.” –Travis

“I am all for helping first time and first generation college students and low income students! Besides wasting money on paper and doing more outreach, there needs to be somebody employed to answer calls about random questions that transfer students have when they get to NCU.” - Angela

“If NCU gave us a list of resources or said hey you know here are all the resources we offer and all the services we offer I would have greatly
benefitted and could also direct other students in that direction.” - Nirvana

**Sub-theme: university logistics: class availability.** Surprisingly, the lack of class availability concern also came up among the FGLI interview participants who graduated within two years. This was an interesting finding as those who had progressed in a timely manner to their degree had challenges getting the classes they needed. After re-evaluating the interview responses several times, the researcher also noted that while lack of available classes, or misalignment of university logistics, was evident among the responses, FGLI students who graduated in two years took it upon themselves to find a new approach to getting to the finish line. One participant even went as far as changing their academic major to ensure a timely graduation.

“I guess a big challenge, which is almost out of my hands, is class schedules. I wanted to plan in advance and know what will be offered each semester I was attending NCU so that if a class wasn’t going to be offered in one of the semesters I needed it to be, I can make alternate plans. Overall, it'd be great if you can see two years out so you can plan ahead.” – Travis

“I came out to NCU admitted as a social work major, but when I realized that it would take me three years to move through the program because not all classes were offered each semester, I quickly changed to deaf studies.” - Xavier

**Theme: Helpful Campus Resources/Services of FGLI Interview Participants**

**Graduating in Two Years.** Lastly, the helpful campus resources, programs, and services was the fifth overarching theme that emerged from this study’s participant responses. Particularly, this group of participants indicated that the most helpful service leading to their two-year graduation rate as financial aid, which is included in Table 44.
Table 44 FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years - Theme: Helpful Campus Resources/Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=5 interview participants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sub-theme: financial aid. As may be presumed, FGLI students who graduated within two years tend to express a need for financial aid as they are generally from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds (Soria et al., 2014). Financial aid can take the form of federal and state grants, student loans, scholarships, or work study programs; however, it was also common in this survey for participants to not explicitly state which types of financial aids were directly helpful. Yet, it can also be assumed that grants and scholarships were typically more favorable as students do not need to pay those forms of financial aid back upon graduation.

“I received full financial aid the whole time and that's been helpful and I was also able to get a couple of scholarships to help me get through rough patches such as a car breaking down on my way to class and my expensive textbooks.” – Ana

“I wouldn't have been able to go to school if it weren't for financial aid.” - Travis

“There definitely needs to be more financial aid workshops… Some people just don't want to deal with the hassle of applying for FAFSA or all that stuff but there are pamphlets! I think that NCU should have more financial aid awareness… I think it'd be beneficial for people, but I think some people are really prideful and feel ashamed to get financial aid. But I benefitted greatly from financial aid especially the grants and scholarships that I do not have to pay back.” - Angela

Theme: Personal Strategies and Support of All Other Interview Participants.

The personal strategies and support that participants shared during their interview
indicated that the strongest sub-themes were: (a) planning and being organized, (b) believing the degree will lead to upward mobility, (c) engaging in self-reflection, (d) focusing on the end goal, (d) participating in campus programs and activities, belief in self, and receiving motivation and inspiration from others. Excerpts from the specific sub-themes will be portrayed in individual research question data reports in this chapter.

Table 45 FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in Two Years - Theme: Personal Strategies and Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Personal Strategies and Support</th>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning and being organized was important</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belief in self</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Received inspiration/motivation from others</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=11 interview participants)

**Sub-theme: planning and being organized was important.** Similar to their counterparts, this group of interview participants greatly understood the importance of planning and being organized when it came to managing their academic, work, and personal lives. While planning and being organized did not come naturally for these interview participants, they valued the importance of having order in their life especially when it came to balancing school with work and their personal lives.

“I actually use a paper planner! It is wonderful and it keeps me on track. In the beginning of the semester, I actually write out all the assignments from my umm syllabus and I would transfer them into my planner… Every time I opened it up it gave me kind of an okay where am I at, what do I need to study first, prepare for and whatnot...” –Viv

“My approach to being organized is periodic check-ins. I do a lot checking in every month and staying on track so I use all the tech tools I can like my phone calendar, I also have an excel for financial stuff and setting goals because I wanted to graduate with a decent GPA.” –Greg
“I'm a very organized person so if like I had a goal that was like this I tried to make a checklist so that I'm on the right path and make sure I'm doing that and if I don't have some sort of organization or methodical way of going about something I can't get there. So whether it's setting deadlines for myself or trying to seek out the info I need whether it is there or not there, I try to do my part and I don't like waiting to the last minute.” –Jessica

Sub-theme: belief in self. Believing in one’s abilities was another commonly reoccurring theme through the dialogue retrieved from the individual interviews of these participants. The belief in one’s own abilities also included aspects of personal drive, intrinsic motivation, and desire to succeed. Future research under this theme could include a more in-depth exploration as how these individuals developed their reported level of self-confidence and belief in their abilities.

“My biggest motivation was believing in myself, nobody else was going to do it for me but me.” –Greg

“I have young children and in order for me to set a good example for them I had to believe in myself and be a role model... Giving up was never an option...” –Viv

“I want all my achievements to be known by my family especially my dad and step mom because they basically abandoned me and I really want to stick it to them that I’m better than them but that was one of my main sources of motivation and inspiration to really just get back at every body and stick it to them” -Jadzia

Sub-theme: resilience. As a conceptual framework in this study, resilience referred to the successful adaptation to new environments and challenges. As many of the interview participants shared in this category, life challenges were something that was usually expected that they experienced, learned from, and grew into the people they are
today. The researcher noted that the resilience factors among these interview participants were drawn from very rich experiences that they shared.

“People have told me that ‘school is not my thing’ and I’m sitting here like ‘school is nobody’s thing dude!’ Nobody likes it, nobody enjoys staying up at 3 am, and nobody likes getting kicked in the teeth for things! You just have to do it and it's more a matter of whether or not you're willing to endure.” – Jamie

“I think one of my successes is that I had been through a lot. I think people should a drive factor. I had two driving factors, the thirteen year old sister of my best friend and my fiancé, both of whom passed away. I also had a lot of the health stuff and went through a fight for my life, but I wanted to keep fighting and keep living.” – Jessica

“I'm not a quitter... I get what I want and I work for it and yeah I believe if you want something you're going to have to work for it because it will never magically appear... I want to be a psychologist so I’m going to have to do the work and not just sit there.” – Emma

**Sub-theme: received inspiration/motivation/support from others.** This group of interview participants reported an overwhelming level of support and inspiration from family members, particularly parents. This finding is another example of social capital, the network of relationships an individual has as well as a conceptual framework in this study.

“I would say my family they pushed me and my family's friends my mom was always like ‘I'm so proud’ you know I got tired of it but it definitely helped because someone was rooting for me and everyone I talked to was like just get it done you'll be happier after you do - Fred

“My dad was always the person I looked up to. Basically growing up he was like hey if you say you're going to do something you gotta own up to it and if that's what you say, then that's your word, you follow through in the same respect.” - Dave
“My parents worked so hard for us to go to school and um well their method was taking us to work with them so they can be like this is what you're going to be doing if you don't have your education because it's hard work. So my brothers would go with my dad to wash cars at 3 A.M. in cold or hot weather and I'd go with my mom to clean houses and it is hard work! That's what had pushed us and inspired us going to get an education and do well.” -Emma

**Theme: Personal Setbacks of All Other Interview.** Similarly with the FGLI interview participants, personal setbacks were relatively scarce. As indicated in Table 46, personal setbacks that this group of participants experienced were noted as completing the degree at personal pace.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 46 All Other Interview Participants - Theme: Personal Setbacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing degree at personal pace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=11 interview participants)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sub-theme: completing degree at personal pace.* This was reported by interview participants who felt that while they wished they had graduated within two years, they were more concerned with their personal welfare and/or had to take less courses per semester to work or take care of family.

“I would have ideally wanted to graduate in two years and I know everyone wants to hurry up and be done and move forward but umm I had umm a child in Fall 2014 so I only took two classes that semester and the semester before that because I didn't want to completely stress myself out” –Viv

“I got a job that provided tuition reimbursement, but I needed to commit 40 hours per week to them so I could only take about three classes each semester and only during the evenings. I mean, it was basically a
tradeoff that I willingly took and I ended up not having to take out loans and be burdened with that” –Fred

**Theme: Support from Institution of All Other Interview Participants.** As illustrated in Table 47, this group of interview participants’ responses resulted in two types of support from the institution, “developing positive relationships with faculty and staff” and “having an on-campus job.” As with the FGLI interview participants, future research could explore student experiences more in-depth and seek to further determine any salient support from the institution that is associated with students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing positive relationships with faculty and staff</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having an on-campus job</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=11 interview participants)

**Sub-theme: developing positive relationships with faculty and staff.** Developing rapport and having students establish positive relationships with faculty and staff play a significant role in the student’s ability to be successful through the lens of social capital. At the individual level, faculty and staff assist students by helping them feel that they are an important part of the campus as well as provide them inspiration to reach for their dreams. It was common for participants to mention specific faculty and staff members by name and how much of a positive impact they had on their lives.

“I had a great relationship with my advisor umm the semester before, the student affairs had reached out and had me be a panelist on the grades appeal committee. I also would have never know there was a reward to working hard and I was also presented opportunities to apply for scholarships and grants because they noticed me.” –Viv
“The faculty in my department really went out of their way to help us. They would even show up at 8 A.M. on Saturdays to open the lab for us to meet in to complete our group projects. I think it was totally illegal for them to do that, but they risked it anyways because they knew how much of an impact it had on their students be successful.” –Jadzia

“One professor questioned the legitimacy of my health problems to change a test, but my other professor and the department secretary were in my corner and fought for me.” -Jessica

**Sub-theme: having an on-campus job.** A unique finding among these interview participants was the benefit of having an on campus job. At face value, one would think that having a job generally contributes to student’s success financially as in the paycheck; however, these interview participants also mentioned the convenience of not having to commute to a job off site as well as how it provided professional development opportunities among them.

“I became a learning assistant for one of my professors who I liked a lot and then I got a lot of opportunities thrown my way because I was more involved and I made really good friends.” –Jadzia

“I would do two campus jobs; one was a call center at night time so I could focus at school in the day. My department was also good at getting us jobs and stuff and so I was a peer advisor for the transfer students and new students and also got to do research. It was great because I could make my own schedule and not worry about having to drive 30 minutes away to work.” -Jessica

“I had this great opportunity to become a peer mentor for freshman students and it taught me a lot about how to help other people. So much so that it altered my career trajectory from wanting to work in criminal justice to moving into higher education. I am in the process of applying for a master’s program in higher education.” -Ron

**Theme: Setbacks from Institution of All Other Interview Participants.** Within the setbacks from institution theme, this group of participants indicated that they had
experienced challenges that leaned more on the responsibility of the university. As Table 48 indicates, the most salient setbacks from the institution were: (a) a need for first-semester support, (b) university logistics: class availability, (c) university logistics: parking.

Table 48 All Other Interview Participants - Theme: Setbacks from Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need for first-semester support</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University logistics: class availability</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University logistics: parking</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=5 interview participants)

Sub-theme: need for first-semester support. Through these individual interviews, many participants expressed a strong need for a service that caters specifically to the needs of community college transfer students. Such service would better connect students to the helpful programs that the university offers. Additionally, this group of interview participants expressed a lack of familiarity with the services and resources available and wished there was a better way to deliver such important and helpful information to students.

“There should be a transfer student desk or like a transfer center or something that would answer their specific questions like hey does this class count for this or like where is so-and-so located.” - Jadzia

“There is a lot of student resources that students may not know about. I feel like NCU has a lot of potential for the programs it offers and the resources it has it just hasn't reached that potential because students don’t know about it.” - Kelsey

“It would be nice to have someone checking up on you and ask if everything is okay at least in the first semester, you know to make it
easier for them… I was so lost in my first semester and I didn’t even know where to go.” –Emma

Sub-theme: university logistics: class availability. The lack of class availability concern also came up among the other interview participants. The lack of class availability was also reported in other qualitative data aspects and could also be interpreted as a disconnect between supply and demand of logistics at the university. Challenges with class availability also included course sequencing which meant that in order to advance to a certain course a pre-requisite must have been previously fulfilled. This posed a great setback for certain students because certain courses that were involved in a course sequence may have only been offered once per year.

“One big problem is when people are trying to graduate in the time you're supposed but then certain courses were offered one semester but not the other so if you missed it you wouldn't get it and have to wait until literally next year before you can take it.” –Fred

“Class availability was a challenge even though I had priority registration as a veteran.” –Dave

“I remember when I finally got into my biology class, I just remember people saying I’ve been trying to get into this class for three or four years and I was like are you kidding me? I also remembered once crashing a course for four-five weeks and I was so determined to get into but eventually I was booted out even though I was doing the work and bought the stuff and everything.” -Jessica

Sub-theme: university logistics: parking. Similar to lack of class availability, interview participants had much concern about the lack of adequate parking and its adverse effects on their progress as a student. While some participants found the lack of
parking inconvenient, others were very vocal in expressing their great frustration with parking.

“Finding parking was such a hassle. Sometimes I just gave up and parked as far away as possible and spent about 30 minutes walking to my class.” - Fred

“Parking was horrendous! I am a firm believer that if you cannot facilitate parking for all the cars, then you should not give out that many parking permits! It just goes to show that NCU needs to cut back on how many folks you choose to enroll. If you can't facilitate the demand then you should not enroll that many people.” – Jamie

“I leave my house 2 hours before my first class just to make sure I get good parking. That's ridiculous!” – Jessica

**Theme: Helpful Campus Resources/Services of All Other Interview Participants.**

**Participants.** Lastly, the helpful campus resources, programs, and services was the fifth overarching theme that emerged from this study’s participant responses. Particularly, this group of participants indicated that the most helpful service leading to their two-year graduation rate as the 24 hour study hall, which is included in Table 49.

**Table 49 All Other Interview Participants - Theme: Helpful Campus Resources/Services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 hour study hall</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=11 interview participants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sub-theme: 24 hour study hall.** At NCU, there is a building that is open almost every day of the year for students to meet for group projects and/or individually study. This service was frequently noted as helpful due to the common remarks from participants about their limited time and availability to study and be productive as well as the convenience that this study hall provided to catering to their busy schedules.
“The final year in the last two semesters, I spent every weekend on campus in the study hall just doing homework, studying, and meeting with my groups. And yeah we really uh were crushing it the last year” – Fred

“Actually the place I found the most helpful was the 24 hour study hall as long as I could find an area I could get to and just focus that was cool.” – Dave

**Summary of Qualitative Findings**

As shown in Table 50, the overall qualitative themes and sub-themes derived from the online survey data and individual interviews are provided. Across the board among the personal strategies and support theme, participants consistently reported “planning and being organized was important” and “received inspiration/motivation/support from others” as very highly salient among responses. The only other theme that reported unanimous very high saliency was within the institutional setbacks, specifically “need for first-semester support” and “university logistics: class availability.”
Table 50 Overall Themes and Sub-Themes of Qualitative Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses From</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FGLI Online Survey Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduating in 2 Years (n=33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Personal Strategies and Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Planning and being organized was important</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Received inspiration/motivation/support from others</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Believing the degree will lead to upward mobility/better career</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Approaching long-term goals step-by-step</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Belief in self</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing relations with peers</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resilience</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engaging in exercise/activities that promote health/wellness</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Concern for social justice</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Personal Setbacks</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Balancing family commitments was a challenge</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commuting</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Challenges adjusting to university academics</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Completing degree at personal pace</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Support From Institution</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing positive relationships with faculty and staff</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Satisfaction with college experience</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Having an on-campus job</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Setbacks From Institution</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need for first-semester support</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• University logistics: class availability</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• University logistics: parking</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Better communication between university and community college prior to transfer</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Helpful Programs/Services</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Academic advising</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student club experience</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Financial aid</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 24 hour study hall</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N/A level indicates that the sub-theme may have been present in certain responses of that group, but did not achieve overwhelming responses to be considered a sub-theme.
This study’s qualitative findings from the online survey and individual interviews sought to respond to Research Question Two, “What unique successes and setbacks did first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated within two years experience in comparison to other transfer students?” Table 51 illustrates the unique successes and setbacks that first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated within two years collected from either/both of the online survey participants’ and interview participants’ responses. For further clarification, all themes and sub-themes shown in Table 51 were not found to be salient among the non-FGLI participants who graduated in two years. The unique successes for FGLI participants completing their degree within two years were: (a) believing the degree will lead to upward mobility/better career, (b) engaging in exercise/activities that promote health/wellness, (c) concern for social justice, and (d) the helpfulness of financial aid. The unique setbacks for FGLI participants that completed their degree within two years were: (a) balancing family commitments was a challenge and (b) challenges adjusting to university academics. These findings that answered Research Question Two will also be incorporated in Chapter 5’s recommendations for leadership.
### Table 51 Research Question Two: Unique Successes and Setbacks of FGLI Transfer Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Sub-Themes</th>
<th>FGLI Online Survey Participants Graduating in 2 Years (n=33)</th>
<th>FGLI Interview Participants Graduating in 2 Years (n=5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Personal Strategies and Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing the degree will lead to upward mobility/better career</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in exercise/activities that promote health/wellness</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for social justice</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Personal Setbacks</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing family commitments was a challenge</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges adjusting to university academics</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Support From Institution</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Setbacks From Institution</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Helpful Programs/Services</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N/A level indicates that the theme/sub-theme may have been present in certain responses of that group, but did not achieve overwhelming responses to be considered a sub-theme.

This study’s qualitative findings from the online survey and individual interviews sought to respond to Research Question Three, “What recommendations do transfer students have to increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree?” Table 52 illustrates the most salient themes across the online survey participants and individual interview participants. The most salient across all four sources of qualitative data were: (a) planning and being organized was important, (b) received inspiration/motivation/support from others, (c) need for first-semester support, and (d)
university logistics: class availability. Further, the following recommendations correspond to the four most salient responses retrieved from the qualitative data: (a) instilling the importance of planning and being organized among students, (b) developing students’ social capital by facilitating the inspiration/motivation/support they receive from others, (c) meeting the need to provide transfer students with support during their first-semester, and (d) reassessment of university logistics especially class availability.

The researcher used these highly salient themes and sub-themes to recommend implications for leadership practice in Chapter 5.

Table 52 Research Question Three: Recommendations to Increase Graduation Rates and Reduce Time to Degree Using Theme/Sub-Theme Saliency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Level of Saliency Among Responses From</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FGLI Online Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants Graduating in 2 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Online Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants Graduating in 2 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=384)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FGLI Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants Graduating in 2 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Other Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme: Personal Strategies and Support**
- Planning and being organized was important
- Received inspiration/motivation/support from others

**Theme: Personal Setbacks**
- N/A

**Theme: Support From Institution**
- N/A

**Theme: Setbacks From Institution**
- Need for first-semester support
- University logistics: class availability

**Theme: Helpful Programs/Services**
- N/A

N/A level indicates that the sub-theme may have been present in certain responses of that group, but did not achieve overwhelming responses to be considered a sub-theme.
Conclusion

This chapter described the results of a mixed-methods research study that included quantitative data from 4,211 student records and 384 online surveys as well as qualitative data from the same 384 online surveys and sixteen individual interviews. Logistic regression was used to analyze the quantitative data in this study and resulted in the creation of 8 logistic regression models to answer Research Question One. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were used to analyze the qualitative data in this study and resulted in the creation of five themes used to answer Research Question Two: (a) personal strategies and support, (b) personal setbacks, (c) support from institution, (d) setbacks from institution, and (e) helpful programs/services. To answer Research Question Three, the most salient themes across the four sources of qualitative data were collected and brought forth the following recommendations to increase transfer student graduation rates and reduce time to degree: (a) instilling the importance of planning and being organized among students, (b) developing students’ social capital by facilitating the inspiration/motivation/support they receive from others, (c) meeting the need to provide transfer students with support during their first-semester, and (d) reassessment of university logistics especially class availability. A summary and discussion of findings, leadership impactions and recommendations for action, and suggestions for future research will be provided in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5

FINDINGS, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION

This study took place at a large public four-year university, Northern California University, in the western region of the United States where the predominant demographics of the student population were community college transfer students, first-generation students, and low income students. First-generation students are defined as students being the first in their family to attend and graduate college, while low income students were identified as students who qualified to receive and/or received a Pell Grant during their undergraduate career. This study sought to explore the successes and setbacks that first-generation and low income community college transfer students graduating in two years experienced at the university.

The frameworks used to guide this study were social capital, resilience, and academic resilience. In partnership with a thoroughly crafted literature review, the conceptual frameworks served as a lens for this study. This research design used a concurrent triangulation approach in which certain aspects of the quantitative method and qualitative method were conducted and analyzed in isolation of each other and in no predetermined order. Chapter 5 is organized into three main components: (a) summary of findings and conclusions, (b) leadership impact and recommendations, and (c) future research and reflection of the researcher.
Summary and Discussion of Findings

Research Question One. What factors are associated with completion of a bachelor’s degree within two years of transferring to a 4-year university, for first-generation college students from low income backgrounds? Factors will include:

A) student demographics (ethnicity, parent(s)’/guardian(s)’ level of education, first-generation status, low income status, living on campus)

B) academic and other relevant data (pre-transfer GPA, pre-transfer units earned, major by admit, major by graduation, changed major status, first term enrolled units, first term GPA, hours spent working per week, hours spent commuting per week, enrolled in summer courses, enrolled in winter courses)

C) student use of university programs and services (academic advising, 24 hour study hall, student body government, capstone classes/senior projects, career center services, developing positive relationships with faculty, developing positive relationships with staff, financial aid, fitness & wellness center, going to professor office hours, internships, joining a student club, library services, tutoring, multi-cultural center, working on campus, on-campus events, undergraduate research, scholarships, serving as a student club officer, student counseling and health center)

Research Question One was answered using eight logistic regression models. The statistically significant factors that were associated with two-year degree completion among first-generation and low income transfer students were:
(a) pre-transfer units \((p<.05)\), the units that transfer students entered NCU with,
(b) term 1 GPA \((p<.05)\), the first term GPA,
(c) term 1 enrolled units \((p<.01)\), the amount of units enrolled in first term,
(d) enrollment in winter courses \((p<.05)\), taking NCU courses over winter break,
(e) internships \((p<.05)\), formal opportunities for professional development, and
(f) senior writing course \((p<.05)\), a writing course usually taken during final year.

Additionally, several of these statistically significant findings were consistent with literature involving factors associated with general degree completion, not timely degree completion. Specifically, full time enrollment and a strong college GPA were reported to be predictors for general degree completion, but were also found to be associated with timely degree completion in this study (Adelman, 1999, 2006; Cabrera et al., 2001; Chen & Carroll, 2005; Moore & Shulock, 2009). Further, Luo, Williams, and Vieweg (2007), also revealed relevant factors that related to this study’s findings including the significant influence that first term enrolled units and first term GPA have on transfer student retention (Lord et al., 2012). Zhai and Newcomb (2000) argued that among all factors, “a transfer student’s GPA is the best indicator of expected academic performance, while the student’s post-transfer GPA is the single most important measure associated with retention.”

Along the lines of the conceptual frameworks of the study, the statistically significant findings of Research Question One also suggest the importance of developing social capital, relevant to academia, almost immediately as the first semester played a
critical role in predicting two-year degree completion among first-generation and low income transfer students. With right level of social capital, FGLI transfer students could be better informed about taking enough units before transferring as well as achieving a strong GPA and enrolling in enough units their first term. Social capital could also assist FGLI students in identifying opportunities to obtain internships during their college career and develop professional skills to be even more successful in the workforce.

Along the lines of the conceptual frameworks of resilience and academic resilience, FGLI transfer students could identify opportunities to help fund their enrollment in winter courses as well as further understand the value of the senior writing courses. Particularly, winter courses may not be an easy sell for most students as the winter break presents a great opportunity for rest and relaxation; however, for those who are up for the challenge to adapt to this change, the reward of graduating in more timely manner may sway their opinions. In regards to the senior writing course, as this course would require a tremendous amount of writing, using academic resilience to reach out to professors and use tutoring resources (Waxman et al., 2003) or applying resilience strategies such as being optimistic (Benard, 1995; Duckworth et al., 2007) could enable FGLI students to be more successful and graduate in a timely manner.

**Research Question Two.** What unique setbacks and successes did first-generation and low income transfer students who graduated within two years experience in comparison to other transfer students?
Research Question Two was addressed using qualitative data retrieved from 384 online surveys and sixteen individual interviews. The unique successes for FGLI participants completing their degree within two years were: (a) believing the degree will lead to upward mobility/better career, (b) engaging in exercise/activities that promote health/wellness, (c) concern for social justice, and (d) the helpfulness of financial aid. The unique setbacks for FGLI participants that completed their degree within two years were: (a) balancing family commitments was a challenge and (b) challenges adjusting to university academics.

Along the lines of the literature reviewed in this study, believing that the degree will lead to greater social and economic mobility is an important reason for serving our disadvantaged student populations because if we are able to lift them up, our economic succeeds in the sense that they will be more educated and could essentially have more disposable income and spending power (Alter, 2012). With the exercise and wellness activities that students reported as a success, could also be relative to resilience and academic resilience as participants reported it enabled them to clear their mind, be healthy, and endure the rigors of academia as well as ones presented in life.

A pleasantly surprising finding that was a unique success for FGLI students was the concern for social justice. While it may be challenging to match a specific conceptual framework to it, the concern for social justice can be related to resilience and academic resilience in the sense that the participants who reported the concern for social justice mentioned that it was a driving force that enabled them to pursue a particular career field,
which they used as a form of motivation to lead them to success. The fourth unique success reported by FGLI transfers who completed in two years was the helpfulness of financial aid, particularly grants and scholarships. One interesting finding with this success is that the process of applying for federal aid could appear daunting, but with social capital and resilience, students are led to have conquered those anxieties by either asking for help from their network of relationships or being resilient and not giving up until their aid money is approved and received.

Balancing family commitments was a unique challenge of FGLI transfers in the sense that many of those who shared this setback had children to tend to. What was also coincidental was the fact that students who had children relied on their social capital to identify family and friends who could watch their children while they took care of their academic obligations. The last unique setback that FGLI transfers shared involved challenges adjusting to university academics. This setback goes in hand with academic resilience as students who shared their struggles adapting to the different levels of academic expectations that university life encompassed, they needed to also adjust their personal strategies and study habits. Such strategies included attending professor office hours, going to the tutoring center, and engaging in study groups among peers, all of which are relative to academic resilience with hints of social capital.

**Research Question Three.** What recommendations do transfer students have to increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree?
Research Question Three was addressed using qualitative data retrieved from 384 online surveys and sixteen individual interviews. The recommendations to increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree that were reported most salient across all four sources of qualitative data were: (a) stressing the importance of planning and being organized among students, (b) developing students’ social capital by facilitating the inspiration/motivation/support they receive from others, (c) meeting the need to provide transfer students with support during their first-semester, and (d) reassessment of university logistics especially class availability.

The first recommendation retrieved from the qualitative data involved stressing the importance of planning and being organized to students. This recommendation is very related to both resilience and academic resilience in the sense that both types of resilience involve adapting to a change in the environment (Benard, 1995; Duckworth et al., 2007; Sandoval-Hernandez & Cortes, 2012). Particularly, with this recommendation, the more successful adaptations that the students must undergo, the easier the adaptations will more likely become; however, students all need to start somewhere. While a sign stressing the importance of planning and being organized may not draw the target audience, and instead perhaps pairing this recommendation with other recommendations like a first-semester support program could prove to be effective. The second recommendation directly seeks to increase students’ social capital, particularly by facilitating the opportunities for them to be exposed to different types and levels of inspiration, motivation and support. As previously stated, students enter the university
with rich social capital, usually supportive parents and family (Laanan et al., 2010), but this type of social capital may not always align to what is needed to succeed at the university. Thus, one method for increasing students’ network of relationships relative to academia could be getting them involved in a student organization (Astin, 1984), develop positive relationships with faculty and staff, or even get them to meet and befriend other students to share the higher education journey with.

The third recommendation seeks to meet the need to provide support during the first semester for transfer students. As previously indicated in the quantitative portions of this study as well as aspects of the literature review, the first semester at the university is critical. Despite transfer students making up almost half of the nation’s undergraduate student population, universities rarely have programs that specifically seek to support transfer students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015; American Council on Education, 2012). Thus, this becomes the perfect opportunity to implement support programs for this student population during their first semester and beyond. Lastly, and probably one of the most unique and overwhelmingly reported themes in this study was the assessment of university logistics. Interestingly enough, research included in the literature review of this study rarely, if at all, discussed the role that university logistics played on timely degree completion or even on student’s general progress to the degree. It could be assumed that research involving transfer students were conducted at universities with highly effective management of logistics and resources; however, this study opened a new destination for future research to steer towards.
Leadership Impactions and Recommendations for Action

In addition to identifying the successes and setbacks that first-generation and low income community college transfer students experienced at the university, this study sought to demonstrate a need to ramify existing practices, programs, and services that influence the success of community college students and/or establish such practices, programs, and services with the intent to reduce their time to degree completion and increase graduation rates.

As one of the aims of this study was to inform practitioners regarding recommendations to reduce time to degree for first-generation and low income transfer students, the following includes recommendations based on the data collected and analyzed from this study. The following recommendations seek the attention of educational leaders and administrators at universities that enroll a significant amount of first-generation and low income transfer students. The recommendations are: (a) to provide better communication with students prior to transferring, (b) develop a program, office, or service that aims at facilitating a positive first-semester transfer student experience, (c) conduct a thorough assessment of university logistics and resources in relation to student enrollment and demand, and (d) facilitate a culture of inclusion and belonging across campus and beyond.

Better Communication With Students Prior To Transfer. As evidenced through the data, pre-transfer GPA and pre-transfer units earned were significant in predicting two-year graduation for community college transfer students. NCU’s overall
two-year graduation rate for transfer students hovers around 1/3 of the transfer students that they admitted and only about 20% for first-generation and low income students. These two previously existing statistic can be interpreted that by the time students arrive at NCU, it is too late. The pre-transfer GPA and pre-transfer units significant independent variables represent a tremendous opportunity for the university to enhance their efforts in pre-transfer programs and practices.

In numerous cases, students reported a great disconnect between the university and their previous community college. Many of the reoccurring concerns revolved around course equivalencies, dissatisfaction with transfer and admission counselors at community college and NCU, and not being familiar with major-specific coursework that could be completed at the community to effectively save time at the university.

“There was much confusion about how NCU’s degree programs and credits were organized and worked. Coming from my community college, I generally didn't know how the programs were when compared to community college certification and AA programs. I also had to figure out the system that NCU operated on in regards to counselors, administration, and classes; it was a different bureaucratic system at community college.” –Online Survey Participant

“I remember having a lot of difficulty getting all of my credits accepted. I also experienced significant frustration when I found out that I had to take a foreign language course in my last semester before graduation - my high school and community college advisors had assured me that two years of high school foreign language courses would address the NCU’s foreign language requirements.” –Online Survey Participant

“The hardest challenge was definitely the communication between schools in regards to which classes are usable for credit. I truly feel as if the counselors who were supposed to be helping me and many others decide on what classes to take for transfer effectively failed me. They were completely useless. Contradictory information was a constant
source of stress and frustration. Many classes that I had paid hundreds of dollars to take were useless, after I had been told they would transfer.” – Online Survey Participant

“I had credits from another college that were initially not accepted. I had to petition the college and meet with a counselor several times before some were accepted. I had to retake some courses that were not accepted as a transfer.” –Online Survey Participant

“I've had to fight tooth and nail to get some of the stuff I took previously at my community college to be approved so I wouldn’t have to retake it. They did give me an acceptable level of footwork I needed to do on my own, but at the same time I was not willing to let some of my previous courses I took be dismissed.” –Greg

“I think we're getting to them too late they are coming to NCU by the time we can already help them it is already too late and I don't know how but it will take so much effort but it will be so much worth it and we can fix those problems is that we got to hit them earlier before they come to NCU and I know they did this with me but my recent experience working I know this isn't being done for everyone” –Ron

“They should tell transfer students these are the classes you need to take but maybe they should prepare you for all the placement tests you need to take exams had I known if I had to take the math one, the English one, and the chemistry one I would have felt more prepared.” –Jessica

“I think we need to reach back further than at the community college. There should be better information for high school students who haven't entered college yet. Information that so they know what they're getting themselves into and what their expected of financially as well as how different college can be from high school.” –Jeremy

Additionally, providing effective communication prior to transferring is also an exchange of social capital and can hopefully influence retention and timely graduation for the student. Students who are able to engage in developmental activities with the university prior to transferring have the potential to increase their social capital by becoming more familiar with the new academic environment they will be entering.
Better communication prior to transfer can also increase student satisfaction as students will be more informed about their requirements to earn a bachelor’s degree and take as many lower division courses required for their degree at the community college instead of having to compete against the university’s continuing lower division students who already registered for the lower division classes.

**First-Semester Transfer Student Support.** Another salient finding among quantitative data and qualitative data was the role of the first-semester among transfer students. As the quantitative data in this study reported, the first term GPA and first term enrolled units were statistically significant factors associated with two-year degree completion among first-generation and low income transfer students. Through the qualitative data, participants expressed an overwhelming need for a first-semester transfer experience whether it is a class, an office, or a place they can go to for questions.

As discussed in this study’s literature review, “transfer shock” can occur during a transfer student’s first semester where they experience a significant dip in their GPA (Hills, 1965) and can even be common among students who had high GPAs at the community college (Berner, 2012; Hills, 1965). Additionally, a highly interactive one day and multifaceted student orientation was perceived by many participants in this study as overstimulating and overwhelming to process. Instead, these participants called for an extended period of time to allow for their adjustment. It was overwhelmingly reported by the participants in this study to have some type of support, program, or service that would better provide a smoother transition into the university in the first semester. Common
experiences shared by the participants included challenges related to the academic expectations, unfamiliarity with helpful resources or services, and even explicitly stating some type of first-semester transition program.

“At times, I perceived certain academic expectations a little challenging.” –Online Survey Participant

“I believe that transferring should not have been as difficult as it was. I was confused and didn’t know where to go to get the answers I needed. Also, when I asked for help I was given multiple answers, which then led to more confusion.” –Online Survey Participant

“The campus needs to have better advertisement to the whole student population of resources/programs. It seems like certain groups are often the targeted audience rather than the whole student population” –Online Survey Participant

“NCU needs something along the lines of a transfer program for those individuals who would like it. A person available to show them how to navigate NCU’s website, how to enroll in classes, how to pay.” –Online Survey Participant

“It took me pretty much at least that first semester to really figure out where my classes were and where I can go to do simple things like places to eat to get sit and study not having that chance having to figure it out on my own just mentally put me out of sorts.” –Travis

“I am all for helping first time and first generation college students and low income students! Besides wasting money on paper and doing more outreach, there needs to be somebody employed to answer calls about random questions that transfer students have when they get to NCU.” - Angela

“If NCU gave us a list of resources or said hey you know here are all the resources we offer and all the services we offer I would have greatly benefitted and could also direct other students in that direction.” - Nirvana

Further, with a first-semester transfer student program or office, an effort can be made to focus on social capital, resilience, and academic resilience among the student
learning outcomes and/or instructional curriculum, if applicable. One such example to increase social capital with the first-semester transfer experience would be to introduce the students to the campus programs and services in a more intentional approach as opposed to providing a laundry list of services at student orientation. To increase resilience, students in this program could be introduced to both the student counseling services as well as participate in activities and assignments that involve how to achieve long term goals and work through challenges. For academic resilience, students could also benefit from learning more about the specific academic success services such as tutoring or study groups and/or also learn how to approach faculty and staff to help better navigate the academic environment.

Assess University Logistics in Relation To Student Enrollment and Demand.

As evidenced by the overwhelming amount of participant responses regarding frustrations involving university logistics, universities must conduct a thorough assessment of its supply of logistics and resources and determine whether or not they effectively support student demand. An overwhelmingly reported theme from both qualitative data resources were the need for more availability of classes as well as evening and distance-learning courses to accommodate those who work during the day. Additionally, participants also expressed great concern regarding the over-crowding of Northern California University, particularly in the areas of student parking. Thus, a thorough assessment of enrollment practices should also be included in the university-wide inventory.
One of the most unique findings that this study contributed to the field of research was the consideration of university logistics in the role of student’s progress to degree. No other research used in this study’s literature review brought attention to the management of university logistics and it could have been perceived that other universities did not have problems with logistics. It was overwhelmingly common for participants to discuss challenges with university logistics such as parking or lack of available classes.

“The psychology program was impacted so it was unsure if I would be able to get into the program or get any of my classes.” –Online Survey Participant

“Getting classes and not having them scattered around at random times was the biggest challenge. The commute I had to take was a bit longer which meant I could not work nights, and so I had to change my work availability to the days that I was not in school.” –Online Survey Participant

“Many courses are only offered once per year which lengthens the time to earning a bachelor’s degree.” –Online Survey Participant

“My greatest challenge as a transfer student was getting the classes I needed for my major” –Online Survey Participant

I love NCU but in my opinion, they need to make it harder to get accepted. They need to raise the GPA requirement or do something else because there are just too many students for the university to handle. There is nowhere to park, it is way harder than it should be to get into classes, and they can't even pay teachers to take on more classes.” –Online Survey Participant

“One big problem is when people are trying to graduate in the time you're supposed but then certain courses were offered one semester but not the other so if you missed it you wouldn't get it and have to wait until literally next year before you can take it.” –Fred
“Class availability was a challenge even though I had priority registration as a veteran.” –Dave

“I remember when I finally got into my biology class, I just remember people saying I’ve been trying to get into this class for three or four years and I was like are you kidding me? I also remembered once crashing a course for four-five weeks and I was so determined to get into but eventually I was booted out even though I was doing the work and bought the stuff and everything.” -Jessica

Further, as noted by successful community college transfer students, a more collaborative and long-term approach to academic advising was also needed to help ensure students’ timely degree completion. This will require both faculty and staff to collaborate further and learn more from each other on how to empower students to take charge of their progress to graduation more effectively. Currently, NCU is exploring opportunities to incorporate electronic and digital software to assist the campus and its students with self-service academic advising, which allows academic department leaders to forecast needed courses in a more accurate approach based on actual student demand.

**Facilitate a Culture of Inclusion and Belonging.** One of the most unique themes expressed throughout the participant’s responses was the need to feel included and to belong. Certain examples of this recommendation ranged anywhere from “more school spirit” to “more networking with other students” and even “being noticed on campus.”

As Tinto’s Retention Theory (Tinto, 1975) and Durkheim’s Theory of Suicide explained, the more that a person is integrated into society or the institution, the less likely they are able to engage in actions that cause self-harm, such as suicide or dropping out of college. Thus, an effort to facilitate a culture around inclusion and creating a sense of belonging must be a priority not only for NCU, but for institutions across the nation.
Further, first-generation and low income transfer students interviewees who graduated in two years shared a concern for social justice and diversity, which was also considered a unique finding among this student population. The concern for social justice among these participants was presented mainly as a personal goal to obtain a career that helps others from disadvantaged backgrounds or even something as simple as the use of inclusive language.

“I’d say NCU is exceptionally more diverse. One important value within the institution should be cultural competency or just having some training having a space for people at the college both student and staff to come together and just recognize how many different perspectives are coming to the college. If the faculty and staff reflect the diversity of the student population and really take the time to learn about the different cultures, students would feel more comfortable and be more successful.” –Xavier

“There's a deaf school where I had the chance to volunteer at and has a lot of talented children. Looking at the cultural elements of that group was a huge motivational factor for me to get my degree and find ways to help serve them better.” –Xavier

“I decided then that I wanted to pursue a career in law and even out the disparities in all of our systems but I figured one person can't change the whole system. However, I can just make a small scale difference and I chose the criminal justice system to be in the courts more specific to help alleviate the disparities there.” –Nirvana

“I think just umm something else very important is having your significant other your husband your wife, domestic partner be supportive of your academics.” –Ana

“My professors suggested I should become teacher and that sounded great. I gave it some thought and umm being that my son has special needs and being umm educated in the education filed has helped me tremendously to get him the support and the services to get him the help he needs in school and even if it is just for that, it's worth it.” -Ana
With facilitating a culture of inclusion can also pave the way to further develop social capital among transfer students as they will feel more inclined to reach out for help when needed, develop positive relationships with faculty, staff, and other students, and even increase their own sense of belonging which can ultimately lead to increased graduation rates for the institution (Schlossberg, 1989). In summation, community college transfer students are the most diverse students that any campus will have; this diversity goes beyond racial and ethnic backgrounds and transcends into life experiences, work experience, age, and amount of household responsibilities such as raising children. Fortunately, NCU’s newly appointed campus president has a thorough understanding and passion for inclusion and has demonstrated his commitment to this cause by hosting programs and events to promote a shared mindset as well as communicating the importance of inclusion across the campus community and beyond.

**Future Research**

As with any research study, there will always be opportunity for additional research. One opportunity for future research would be to expand the amount of transfer student cohorts from three semesters to a span of over five to ten years and including other institutions that enroll similar demographics of students but in varying geographical locations. Generally, this is an increase in magnitude of the study to collect more records to project higher rates of significant data. The main challenges to this approach are simply, time and resources to conduct the study.
Another recommendation for future research would be to include faculty, staff, and administrators to gain their perspectives and narratives to contribute a more holistic set of knowledge and experiences in regards to first-generation and low income transfer students and their triumphs and challenges serving this student population. As with the previous recommendation, this method requires time and resources as well as buy-in from participants who may not initially see the value in such a cause.

A third opportunity for future research would be to include more demographics and information about participants such as household size, student’s SAT/ACT scores, high school academic data, experiences at the community college, an inquire into critical life and childhood experiences, or even the decision-making process on which university to transfer to. These marginal sets of data may initially appear as unnecessary and/or require excessive amounts of energy to collect, but as with the current set of quantitative and qualitative data, can be just as powerful and essential toward becoming one step closer to unveiling a master piece of student success.

A fourth approach for future research includes a more in-depth exploration. The researcher observed that their study and findings provided a great wealth of knowledge and breadth of experiences involving first-generation and low income transfer student success and setbacks; however, identifying a particular area of the study and exploring it more in-depth could prove to be extremely beneficial. For instance, one opportunity for future research could be to conduct an on-going observation of students where the researcher would be immersed into the environment they are researching. Such
observation that sought a more in-depth research approach was conducted similarly in a study involving learning communities and first-generation students (Watson, 2004).

**Conclusion**

The quantitative and qualitative research gathered data ran parallel to much of the existing research regarding first-generation students, low income students, and community college transfer students. Particularly, the findings of the overall research were generally analogous with existing literature such as pre-transfer GPA and units (Lord et al., 2012; Luo et al., 2007; Zhai & Newcomb, 2000) as well as developing and maintaining a significant level of social capital (positive relationships with faculty and staff and receiving motivation/inspiration from others) (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Tinto, 1975). Findings of research question one further reinforced the recommendation for a first-semester support program for transfer students, particularly focusing on increasing social capital, resilience, and academic resilience of first-generation and low income transfer students. Research Question Two used qualitative data retrieved from 384 online surveys and sixteen individual interviews and identified the unique successes for FGLI participants completing their degree within two years as: (a) believing the degree will lead to upward mobility/better career, (b) engaging in exercise/activities that promote health/wellness, (c) concern for social justice, and (d) the helpfulness of financial aid; whereas the unique setbacks for FGLI participants that completed their degree within two years were: (a) balancing family commitments was a challenge and (b) challenges adjusting to university academics. Lastly, Research Question Three identified
recommendations from transfer students regarding ways to increase transfer student graduation rates and reduce time to degree and were reported as: (a) stressing the importance of planning and being organized among students, (b) developing students’ social capital by facilitating the inspiration/motivation/support they receive from others, (c) meeting the need to provide transfer students with support during their first-semester, and (d) reassessment of university logistics especially class availability. Lastly, the overall recommendations to bolster success of first-generation and low income transfer students incorporated the quantitative and qualitative findings, literature review, and conceptual frameworks. Specifically, this study’s overall recommendations for bolstering timely degree completion for first-generation and low income transfer students were: (a) to provide better communication with students prior to transferring, (b) develop a program, office, or service that aims at facilitating a positive first-semester transfer student experience, (c) conduct a thorough assessment of university logistics and resources in relation to student enrollment and demand, and (d) facilitate a culture of inclusion and belonging across campus and beyond.

While much of this study reaffirmed and corroborated existing literature and research, the two most significant contributions to research and practice were the role that university logistics and resources plays in degree completion and time to degree for a university’s students. Particularly, no other literature included in this study demonstrated the influence that university logistics (specifically class availability and parking) has on student enrollment and degree completion. Secondly, this study contributed greatly to the
body of research as it is the first of its kind to explore the intersectionality for first-generation students, low income students, and community college transfer students in regards to timely degree completion. This study served to also provide educational leaders and administrators with the findings of qualitative and quantitative research regarding how to address the lack of support to first-generation and low income transfer students, which would also prove helpful to transfer students overall.

While this research involved a considerable amount of empirical data, what made this study particularly significant was the intentional incorporation of the student voice within the recommendations. Many times, educational leaders, researchers, and practitioners rely on existing theory and accumulated practice as the main source of knowledge involved in the decisions that affect student persistence and success. While it may not be the intentions of education leaders to leave out the student perspective, truly listening to the voice of the student can become a catalyst for discovering new opportunities and approaches that may not have easily been seen before.

Thus, as this study focused on providing research and recommendations to such educational leaders, a more overarching purpose of this study was to provide a voice for the oftentimes voiceless. Students are the lifeblood of education, and the success of first-generation and low income community college transfer students have gone ignored for far too long. However, the more research that includes the voices of the people that they are seeking to support, the higher the likelihood of one day being able to fully achieve an
equitable opportunity that their counterparts enjoy, the chance to rise above, succeed, and participate in the creation and facilitation of a better tomorrow for everyone to enjoy.
Chapter 6

APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Student Records Request to Northern California University
REQUEST FOR QUANTITATIVE ARCHIVED DATA

The Setbacks and Successes Influencing Bachelor’s Degree Completion for First-Generation and Low Income Community College Transfer Students

Dear Northern California University Administrator,

My name is Jason Sumihig, and I am a doctoral candidate at Sacramento State’s Doctorate in Educational Leadership program. I am writing to request your assistance with my research study about the challenges and successes that community college transfer students experienced during their time at Northern California University (NCU). The purpose of this research is to identify the challenges and successes that community college transfer students experienced with the overall goal of increasing transfer student graduation rates and reducing time to degree. The IRB approved number for this study is #15-16-045.

Specifically, I am writing to submit a request for data from all community college transfer students who began their enrollment at NCU during the Fall 2012, Spring 2013, and Fall 2013 semesters. The data request in the table below must not include any identifiers (names, email addresses, student identification numbers, contact information, etc):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Variable Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-transfer GPA</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>GPA before beginning coursework at NCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-transfer units earned</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Total units earned before beginning coursework at NCU (may exceed 70 unit maximum of transferable credit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major or area of study upon entry</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Student’s major upon entering NCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major or area of study upon graduation</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Student’s major upon graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA per semester</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>GPA per semester from first semester to final semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Units enrolled per semester</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>By semester, how many units did the student enroll in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Units earned per semester</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>By semester, how many units did the student earn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus employment</td>
<td>Dichotomous (Yes/No)</td>
<td>Whether or not the student worked on campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived on campus</td>
<td>Dichotomous (Yes/No)</td>
<td>Whether or not the student lived on campus in the residence halls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent highest level of education</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>The highest level of education achieved by one/both parents/guardians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-generation status</td>
<td>Dichotomous (Yes/No)</td>
<td>Whether or not student is first-generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pell grant eligibility</td>
<td>Dichotomous (Yes/No)</td>
<td>Whether or not student was eligible to receive a Pell Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer session enrollment</td>
<td>Categorical (No, Semester/Year)</td>
<td>If the student took summer session courses at NCU, what semester(s) and year(s)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter intercession enrollment</td>
<td>Categorical (No, Semester/Year)</td>
<td>If the student took winter intercession courses at NCU, what semester(s) and year(s)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total amount of withdrawals</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>To date, the current amount of withdrawal units that the student earned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered for courses during late registration</td>
<td>Categorical (No, Amount of semesters)</td>
<td>If the student registered primarily during late registration, what semester(s) and year(s)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s racial/ethnic background</td>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>Student’s racial/ethnic background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation status</td>
<td>Dichotomous (Yes/No)</td>
<td>Whether or not student completed degree objectives for graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total amount of semesters spent completing degree objective</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>How many total semesters student took to complete their degree objective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, I will also need assistance in distributing an online survey to the three cohorts of community college transfer students. Therefore, I will need trusted staff member to compile email addresses of all three student populations and distribute the survey using CampusLabs, a university-approved third party assessment platform.

Furthermore, every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality with the data you have provided to the best extent possible given the limitations of internet and technology. Measures to insure confidentiality include the storage of data using a password-protected computer, a secure locked filing cabinet that only the researcher has access to, and using a pseudonym in the final dissertation. All data collected for this study will be destroyed within one year after the completion of this study, no later than May 2017.

If you have any questions about this data request or research at any time, please call me at (760) XXX-XXXX, or my advisor, Dr. Lisa Romero at (916) 278-XXXX. If you have any further questions about this research project, please call the Office of Research Affairs, California State University, Sacramento, (916) 278-XXXX, or email irb@csus.edu.

Thank you for your assistance, I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jason Sunilhig, MBA
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership
Sacramento State College of Education
APPENDIX B

Email Invitation to Online Survey
Subject: CONGRATULATIONS! You have been invited to participate in a research study about community college transfer student experiences!

Hello there,

My name is Jason Sumilhig and I am a doctoral candidate at Sacramento State. As part of my doctoral dissertation research, I am studying the challenges and successes that transfer students experienced. I am writing to you because I need your help.

If you are willing, I would like to invite you to participate in an online survey which will inquire about your personal experiences as a community college transfer student at Northern California University (NCU). The online survey will include both open-ended and closed-ended questions and will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

Your participation will remain anonymous and unidentified for your protection and to the greatest technological extent possible. Full information about the study will appear when you click the link below. On the first page of the survey, you will have the opportunity to accept or decline participation in the study. You may also choose to discontinue your participation in the study at any time and without penalty.

Survey Link: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Would you please help me by taking the online survey by February 15, 2016?

After completing the survey, you will have the opportunity to enter a randomized drawing to receive one of ten $20 Target gift cards as well as express your interest in participating in a focus group for this study.

If you have any questions, you may contact me at the information I have provided below. Thank you for your support with this research project.

Jason Sumilhig, M.B.A.
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership
First Year Experience Coordinator
Sacramento State

Dissertation Chair: Lisa Romero, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, College of Education
Sacramento State
APPENDIX C

Online Survey Questions
Online Survey Questions

LEGEND

CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL FRAMES
SC = Social Capital / RT = Resilience Theory / AR = Academic Resilience

R1 = Research Question 1 / SD = Student Demographics / AD = Academic & Other Relevant Data / PS
Programs & Services (What factors are associated with completion of a bachelor's degree within two
years of transferring to a 4-year university, for first-generation college students from low income
backgrounds?)

R2 = Research Question 2 (What unique setbacks and successes did first-generation and low income status
transfer students who graduated within two years experience in comparison to other transfer students?)

R3 = Research Question 3 (What recommendations do first-generation and low income transfer students have
to increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree?)

PAGE 1 (ROUTE TO PAGE 2)

Online Survey

INFORMED CONSENT

The Setbacks and Successes Influencing Bachelor's Degree Completion for
First-Generation and Low Income Community College Transfer Students

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study about the challenges and successes that community college transfer students experienced
during their time at Northern California University. My name is Jason Sumilhig, and I am a doctoral student at Sacramento State's Doctorate
in Educational Leadership program.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. Even after you agree to participate, you may skip or decline to answer any question or
leave the study at any time. If you completely fill out this online survey and provide your email address, you will be automatically entered into a drawing to win one of ten $20 Target gift cards.

**What you will do in this study:**

The purpose of this research is to identify the challenges and successes that community college transfer students at Northern California University experienced with the overall goal of increasing transfer student graduation rates. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey that inquires about your experiences as a Northern California University community college transfer student. Your participation in the online survey will last approximately 15-20 minutes.

**Possible risks and benefits:**

There are very minimal psychological risks involved for participants which may include mild anxiety, stress, and/or embarrassment. You may decline to answer any question or leave the study at any time. While participants may not directly benefit from this study, the data collected and reported may benefit future community college transfer students.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study that can identify you will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission. Additionally, every effort will be made to ensure your confidentiality to the best extent possible given the limitations of internet and technology. Measures to insure your confidentiality include using a pseudonym for any featured response as well as using a pseudonym for the name of the institution in the final dissertation. All data collected for this study will be maintained in a safe, locked location that only the researcher has access to and will be destroyed within one year after the completion of this study.

**Questions:**

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call me at (707) XXX-XXXX, or my advisor, Dr. Lisa Romero at (916) 278-XXX. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research project please call the Office of Research Affairs, California State University, Sacramento, (916) 278-5674, or email irb@csus.edu.

By clicking "I agree" and proceeding to begin this online survey, you indicate that:
- You have read and understood the information provided above
- You willingly agree to participate
- You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue your participation at any time
- You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies

### PAGE 2 (ROUTE TO PAGE BASED ON RESPONSE TO QUESTION)

**Academic & Other Relevant Data**

1. Please select the option that best applies to you
   - I graduated from Northern California University with a bachelor’s degree (Proceed to Page 3A)
   - I am currently enrolled at Northern California University (Proceed to Page 3B)
   - I permanently withdrew or discontinued enrollment at NCU (Proceed to Page 3C)
   - I permanently transferred to another university or college (Proceed to Page 3D)

### PAGE 3A (ROUTE TO PAGE 4)

**Academic & Other Relevant Data**

2. How many total semesters did it take for you to graduate from Northern California University?
   - a) 1 semester
   - b) 2 semesters
   - c) 3 semesters
   - d) 4 semesters
   - e) 5 semesters
   - f) 6 semesters
   - g) 7 semesters
   - h) 8 semesters
   - i) 9+ semesters

### PAGE 3B (ROUTE TO PAGE 4)

**Academic & Other Relevant Data**

2. Including the Fall 2015 semester, how many total semesters were you enrolled at Northern California University?
   - a) 1 semester
   - b) 2 semesters
   - c) 3 semesters
2b. Excluding the Fall 2015 semester, how many total semesters do you have remaining before you earn your bachelor’s degree?
   a) 1 semester
   b) 2 semesters
   c) 3 semesters
   d) 4 semesters
   e) 5 semesters
   f) 6 semesters
   g) 7 semesters
   h) 8 semesters
   i) 9+ semesters

2. Including the Fall 2015 semester, how many total semesters were you enrolled at Northern California University?
   a) 1 semester
   b) 2 semesters
   c) 3 semesters
   d) 4 semesters
   e) 5 semesters
   f) 6 semesters
   g) 7 semesters
   h) 8 semesters
   i) 9+ semesters

2a. Open-Ended Question: What was/were your primary reason(s) for discontinuing enrollment from NCU?

PAGE 3C (ROUTE TO PAGE 4)
Academic & Other Relevant Data

PAGE 3D (ROUTE TO PAGE 4)
Academic & Other Relevant Data
2. Including the Fall 2015 semester, how many total semesters were you enrolled at Northern California University?  
   a) 1 semester  
   b) 2 semesters  
   c) 3 semesters  
   d) 4 semesters  
   e) 5 semesters  
   f) 6 semesters  
   g) 7 semesters  
   h) 8 semesters  
   i) 9+ semesters  

2a. Open-Ended Question: What was/were your primary reason(s) for transferring away from NCU?  

---

PAGE 4 (ROUTE TO PAGE 5)

### Academic & Other Relevant Data

3. Do you identify as a first-generation college student? (first in your family to attend & graduate college)  
   a) Yes  
   b) No  

4. Did you qualify for a Pell Grant while at NCU?  
   a) Yes  
   b) No  

5. On average, how many units did you take per semester?  
   a) Enter numeric value (whole numbers)  

6. Did you work a part-time or full-time job while attending NCU?  
   a) No  
   b) If Yes, how many hours per week on average?  

7. Did you live on campus in the residence halls?  
   a) No  
   b) If yes, how many semesters?  

8. Did you identify mostly as a commuter student?  
   a) No  
   b) If yes, how many hours on average did you spend commuting to and from NCU each week?
9. Which of the following best represents your racial/ethnic heritage? (Select One)
   a) Black/African American
   b) Asian/Pacific Islander
   c) Latino/Hispanic
   d) Native American/Alaskan Native
   e) White/Euro-American/Non-Hispanic
   f) Decline to State
   g) Other

10. What is your gender identity? (Select One)
    a) Female
    b) Male
    c) Transgender
    d) Decline to State
    e) Other

11. What is your Parent/Guardian 1’s highest level of education completed?
    a) Did not complete high school
    b) High school diploma/GED
    c) Some college
    d) Bachelor’s degree
    e) Master’s degree
    f) Doctoral/advanced graduate work
    g) Not sure

12. What is your Parent/Guardian 1’s relationship to you? (Select One)
    a) Father
    b) Mother
    c) Grandparent
    d) Uncle/Aunt
    e) Other

13. What is your Parent/Guardian 2’s highest level of education completed?
    a) Did not complete high school
    b) High school diploma/GED
    c) Some college
    d) Bachelor’s degree
    e) Master’s degree
    f) Doctoral/advanced graduate work
    g) I was raised in a single parent/guardian household
    h) Not sure
14. What is your Parent/Guardian 2’s relationship to you? (Select One)
   a) Father  
   b) Mother  
   c) Grandparent  
   d) Uncle/Aunt  
   e) Not Applicable  
   f) Other  

15. What was your major when you entered NCU? (Drop Down Menu)
   a) Anthropology  
   b) Art  
   c) Asian Studies  
   d) Biological Sciences  
   e) Business Administration  
   f) Career And Technical Studies  
   g) Chemistry  
   h) Child Development  
   i) Communication Studies  
   j) Computer Science  
   k) Criminal Justice  
   l) Economics  
   m) Education — American Sign Language/Deaf Studies  
   n) Engineering — Civil  
   o) Engineering — Computer  
   p) Engineering — Construction Management  
   q) Engineering — Electrical And Electronic  
   r) Engineering — Mechanical  
   s) English  
   t) Environmental Studies  
   u) Ethnic Studies  
   v) Family And Consumer Sciences  
   w) Film  
   x) French  
   y) Geography  
   z) Geology  
   aa) Gerontology  
   bb) Government  
   cc) Graphic Design  
   dd) Health Science
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<tr>
<th>16. What was your major when you graduated or departed from NCU? (Drop Down Menu)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Anthropology</td>
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<td>b) Art</td>
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<td>c) Asian Studies</td>
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<td>d) Biological Sciences</td>
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### Open Ended Questions

1) Generally, how do you approach and handle long-term challenges?  
*Seeks To:*  
- Collect information about participant’s grit and resilience

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2) In detail describe at least three challenges you experienced as a Northern California University (NCU) student. In what ways were you successful or unsuccessful in overcoming each of these challenges?  
*Seeks To:*  
- Collect information about the types of challenges they faced, their approaches, and their outcomes

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3) What were your personal strategies and success factors that led/lead you towards completing your bachelor’s degree?  
*Seeks To:*  
- Identify effective strategies that worked for the participants

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4) Who or what were your greatest sources of motivation and/or inspiration that led/lead you towards completing your bachelor’s degree? In what ways did each person or source motivate and/or inspire you?  
*Seeks To:*  
- Determine areas of great support that enabled participants to address challenges they experienced as students

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### NCU Programs, Resources, and Services

**Of the following programs/resources/services that you used at NCU, which were the most helpful to you completing your bachelor’s degree? (Select all that apply)**

- Academic Advising center  
- 24 hour study space  
- Student Body Government  
- Student Athlete Resource Center  
- Capstone Courses and Projects (i.e. Senior Seminar)  
- Career Center  
- Child care center

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h) Community service  
i) Developing positive relationships with faculty  
j) Developing positive relationships with professional staff  
k) Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)  
l) Faculty Student Mentor Program  
m) Financial Aid  
n) Fitness and Wellness Center  
o) Going to professors’ office hours  
p) Group Assignments and Projects  
q) Internships  
r) Joining a student club or organization  
s) Library  
t) major-specific tutoring  
u) Math Lab  
v) Multi-Cultural Center/Pride Center/Women's Resource Center  
w) On campus employment  
x) On Campus Events  
y) On campus housing  
z) Participating in Transfer Learning Communities  
za) Participating in Undergraduate Research  
zb) Scholarships  
zc) Services to Students with Disabilities  
zd) Serving as a student club officer  
ze) Health Center and Counseling Services  
f) Studying Abroad  
g) Tutoring services  
h) Student Union  
i) Veteran’s Success Center  
j) Writing Center  
k) Writing Intensive Courses  
l) Other: 

**PAGE 7 (ROUTE TO THANK YOU PAGE)**

**Final Questions**
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) What can be done to improve transfer student graduation rates and reduce time to degree?</td>
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<td>- Collect information to share with other transfer students, inform practice, and influence policy</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>2) Is there anything else about your college experiences that you would like to share at this time?</td>
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<td><strong>Seeks To:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Collect additional information to share with other transfer students, inform practice, and influence policy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>3) If you would like to be entered to win a $20 Target gift card, please provide your email address here. If not, leave blank. (route response to a separate sheet that is not tied to previous data)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4) If you identified as a first-generation and low income transfer student and are willing to participate in an interview for this study, please provide your email address here. If not, leave blank. (route response to a separate sheet that is not tied to previous data)</td>
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**THANK YOU!**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

If you are a gift card winner, you will be notified by the email you provided.

If you are selected for the interview, you will be contacted by email.
APPENDIX D

Email Invitation to Individual Interviews
**INTRODUCTORY EMAIL – INTERVIEW INVITATION EMAIL**

**Subject:** CONGRATULATIONS! You have been invited to participate in interviews about community college transfer student experiences at Northern California University!

Hello,

Recently, you took an online survey about your experiences as a transfer student at Northern California University and indicated that you would be interested in participating in an interview.

At this time, I would like to invite you to participate in one of the interviews. We will only need to meet one time and in-person. During the interview, you will be asked additional questions about your experiences as a transfer student at Northern California University which would take approximately 30-45 minutes.

If you can still help me with my study, please reply to this email with the following information:
1) Your first name and a fake first name you would like to use for this study (Example: Jason, Joe)
2) Your mobile phone number
3) Your gender
4) What semester and year you started at NCU (Example: Fall 2012)
5) What semester and year you graduated (or will graduate) at NCU (Example: Spring 2014) or if you transferred away/withdrew.
6) Location preference for in-person interview:
   a. At NCU campus
   b. At your home/residence (please provide city if not Northern California)
   c. A coffee shop or other public establishment (please provide city if not Northern California)
7) What days & times usually work best for a one-on-one interview? (Select all that apply)

If you have any questions, you may contact me at the information I have provided below. Thank you for your help and support with this research project!

Jason Sunilhig, M.B.A.
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership
First Year Experience Coordinator
Sacramento State
XXXXX@csus.edu
(916) 278-XXXX

Dissertation Chair: Lisa Romero, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, College of Education
Sacramento State
XXXXX@csus.edu
APPENDIX E

Informed Consent for Interviews and Demographics Survey
Interview
ADDITIONAL INFORMED CONSENT

The Setbacks and Successes Influencing Bachelor's Degree Completion for First-Generation and Low Income Community College Transfer Students

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research study about the challenges and successes that community college transfer students experienced during their time at Northern California University. My name is Jason Sumilhig, and I am a doctoral student at Sacramento State's Doctorate in Educational Leadership program.

What you will do in this study:
The purpose of this research is to identify the challenges and successes that community college transfer students at Northern California University experienced with the overall goal of increasing transfer student graduation rates. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview that inquires about your experiences as a Northern California University community college transfer student from a first-generation and low income background. Your participation in the Interview will last approximately 45 minutes.

Possible risks and benefits:
There are very minimal psychological risks involved for participants which may include anxiety, stress, and/or embarrassment. You may decline to answer any question or leave the study at any time. While participants may not directly benefit from this study, the data collected and reported may benefit future community college transfer students.

For your protection, a pseudonym will be used during the audio recording and the researcher's written notes. Additionally, the name of the institution will use a pseudonym in the final dissertation. All data collected for this study will be maintained in a safe, locked location that only the researcher has access to and will be destroyed within one year after the completion of this study.

Questions:
If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call me at (707) XXX-XXXX, or my advisor, Dr. Lisa Romero at (916) 278-XXXX. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research project please call the Office of Research Affairs, California State University, Sacramento, (916) 278-5674, or email irh@csus.edu.

Your signature below indicates that:
- You have read and understood the information provided above
- You willingly agree to participate
- You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue your participation at any time
- You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies

Signature __________________________ Date ___________
Interview
Participant Demographic Survey
Female/Male Transfer Students Completing in 2 years

1. Pseudonym:

2. Gender Identity:

3. On average, how many units did you take per semester?

4. Excluding the Spring 2016 semester, how many total semesters did it take for you to graduate from NCU?

5. Did you work while you attended classes? If yes, how many hours per week on average?

6. Did you live on campus? If yes, how many semesters?

7. Were you a commuter student? How many hours on average did you spend commuting to and from NCU each week?

8. Which of the following best represents your racial/ethnic heritage? (Select One)
   a) Black/African American
   b) Asian/Pacific Islander
   c) Latino/Hispanic
   d) Native American/Alaskan Native
   e) White/Euro-American/Non-Hispanic
   f) Decline to State
   Other

9. What is your Parent/Guardian 1’s highest level of education completed?
   a) Did not complete high school
   b) High school diploma/GED
   c) Some college
   d) Bachelor’s degree
   e) Master’s degree
   f) Doctoral/advanced graduate work
   Not sure

10. What is your Parent/Guardian 1’s relationship to you? (Select One)
    a) Father
    b) Mother
    c) Grandparent
11. What is your Parent/Guardian 2’s highest level of education completed?
   a) Did not complete high school
   b) High school diploma/GED
   c) Some college
   d) Bachelor’s degree
   e) Master’s degree
   f) Doctoral/advanced graduate work
   g) I was raised in a single parent/guardian household
   Not sure

12. What is your Parent/Guardian 2’s relationship to you? (Select One)
   a) Father
   b) Mother
   c) Grandparent
   d) Uncle/Aunt
   e) Not Applicable
   f) Other

13. What major did you enter NCU with? What major did/will you graduate with?

14. Of the following programs/resources/services that you used at NCU, which were the most helpful to you completing your bachelor’s degree? (Select all that apply)
   a) Academic Advising center
   b) 24 hour study space
   c) Student Body Government
   d) Student Athlete Resource Center
   e) Capstone Courses and Projects (i.e. Senior Seminar)
   f) Career Center
   g) Child care center
   h) Community service
   i) Developing positive relationships with faculty
   j) Developing positive relationships with professional staff
   k) Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)
   l) Faculty Student Mentor Program
   m) Financial Aid
   n) Fitness and Wellness Center
   o) Going to professors’ office hours
   p) Group Assignments and Projects
   q) Internships
   r) Joining a student club or organization
   s) Library
   t) major-specific tutoring
   u) Math Lab
   v) Multi-Cultural Center/Pride Center/Women's Resource Center
   w) On campus employment
v) On Campus Events
y) On campus housing
z) Participating in Transfer Learning Communities
aa) Participating in Undergraduate Research
bb) Scholarships
cc) Services to Students with Disabilities
dd) Serving as a student club officer
ee) Health and Counseling Services
ff) Studying Abroad
gg) Tutoring services
hh) University Union
ii) Veteran’s Success Center
jj) Writing Center
kk) Writing Intensive Courses
ll) Other:
Interview
Participant Demographic Survey
Female/Male Transfer Students Not Completing in 2 years

1. Pseudonym:

2. Gender Identity:

3. On average, how many units did you take per semester?

4. Excluding the Spring 2016 semester, how many total semesters did it take for you to graduate from NCU?

4a. Are you currently enrolled at NCU? If yes, how many more semesters will it take for you to graduate from NCU (include Spring 2016 semester)

5. Did you work while you attended classes? If yes, how many hours per week on average?

6. Did you live on campus? If yes, how many semesters?

7. Were you a commuter student? How many hours on average did you spend commuting to and from NCU each week?

8. Which of the following best represents your racial/ethnic heritage? (Select One)
   g) Black/African American
   h) Asian/Pacific Islander
   i) Latino/Hispanic
   j) Native American/Alaskan Native
   k) White/Euro-American/Non-Hispanic
   l) Decline to State
   Other

9. What is your Parent/Guardian 1’s highest level of education completed?
   g) Did not complete high school
   h) High school diploma/GED
   i) Some college
   j) Bachelor’s degree
   k) Master’s degree
   l) Doctoral/advanced graduate work
   Not sure
10. What is your Parent/Guardian 1’s relationship to you? (Select One)  
f) Father  
g) Mother  
h) Grandparent  
i) Uncle/Aunt  
j) Other  

11. What is your Parent/Guardian 2’s highest level of education completed?  
h) Did not complete high school  
i) High school diploma/GED  
j) Some college  
k) Bachelor’s degree  
l) Master’s degree  
m) Doctoral/advanced graduate work  
n) I was raised in a single parent/guardian household  
Not sure  

12. What is your Parent/Guardian 2’s relationship to you? (Select One)  
g) Father  
h) Mother  
i) Grandparent  
j) Uncle/Aunt  
k) Not Applicable  
l) Other  

13. What major did you enter NCU with? What major did/will you graduate with?  

14. Of the following programs/resources/services that you used at NCU, which were the most helpful to you completing your bachelor’s degree? (Select all that apply)  
a) Academic Advising center  
b) 24 hour study space  
c) Student Body Government  
d) Student Athlete Resource Center  
e) Capstone Courses and Projects (i.e. Senior Seminar)  
f) Career Center  
g) Child care center  
h) Community service  
i) Developing positive relationships with faculty  
j) Developing positive relationships with professional staff  
k) Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)  
l) Faculty Student Mentor Program  
m) Financial Aid  
n) Fitness and Wellness Center  
o) Going to professors’ office hours  
p) Group Assignments and Projects  
q) Internships  
r) Joining a student club or organization  
s) Library  
t) major-specific tutoring
u) Math Lab
v) Multi-Cultural Center/Pride Center/Women's Resource Center
w) On campus employment
x) On Campus Events
y) On campus housing
z) Participating in Transfer Learning Communities
aa) Participating in Undergraduate Research
bb) Scholarships
cc) Services to Students with Disabilities
dd) Serving as a student club officer
e) Health and Counseling Services
ff) Studying Abroad
gg) Tutoring services
hh) University Union
ii) Veteran’s Success Center
jj) Writing Center
kk) Writing Intensive Courses
ll) Other:
APPENDIX F

Interview Questions
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<th>Interview Questions – Oral Questions</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>RT</th>
<th>AR</th>
<th>R1</th>
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**LEGEND**

**CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL FRAMES**

| SC = Social Capital / RT = Resilience Theory / AR = Academic Resilience |

**R1** = Research Question 1 / **SD** = Student Demographics / **AD** = Academic & Other Relevant Data / **PS** Programs & Services (What factors are associated with completion of a bachelor’s degree within two years of transferring to a 4-year university, for first-generation college students from low income backgrounds?)

**R2** = Research Question 2 (What unique setbacks and successes did first-generation and low income status transfer students who graduated within two years experience in comparison to other transfer students?)

**R3** = Research Question 3 (What recommendations do first-generation and low income transfer students have to increase graduation rates and reduce time to degree?)

1. **Describe your approach to achieving long-term goals**
   a. In what ways are your approaches similar and different to achieving short-term goals

   **Serves To:**
   - Serve as a primer question for the interview
   - Collect information about how resilience is developed

   X | X
2. **Tell me about your college experience as a first-generation and low-income transfer student at Northern California University (NCU) during the time you attended.**
   a. How was being first-generation and low-income influence your college experience during this time?

*Seeks To:*
- Serve as a primer question for the Interview
- Ask participants to share their highlights and low points

3. **Why was graduating from NCU within two years important or unimportant to you?**
   a. Were you able to achieve graduation in two years or less? Why or why not?

*Seeks To:*
- Examine participant’s perspectives on time to degree
- Inquire about the participant’s motivations about graduating in a timely manner
4. What were your three main challenges as a NCU student and in what ways did each challenge influence you?
   a. How did you approach each challenge?
   b. In what ways were you successful or unsuccessful in each approach?

Seek To:
- Collect information about the types of challenges they faced, their approaches, and their outcomes

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5. What campus services and resources did you use during your time at NCU? (i.e. meeting with professors, seeing academic advising, meeting with counselors, peer tutoring, study groups, etc)
   a. Which ones had the most influence?
   b. Which ones had the least influence?

Seek To:
- Identify influential services and resources that successful and unsuccessful students used

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6. Aside from any applicable campus support or resources, what personal strategies led you towards completing your bachelor’s degree?
   a. How did you first discover and/or create each strategy?

Seek To:
- Identify effective and ineffective strategies that worked for the participants

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7. What and/or who were your main sources of motivation that led you towards earning your bachelor's degree?
   a. In what ways did each source influence you?

   **Seeks To:**
   - Determine areas of great support that enabled participants to address challenges they experienced as students

8. Based on your experiences, what should be done to support and assist other first-generation and low income transfer students?
   a. Do you have any advice to give other first-generation and low income transfer students?

   **Seeks To:**
   - Collect information to share with other transfer students, inform practice, and influence policy

9. Is there anything else about your college experiences that you would like to share at this time?

   **Seeks To:**
   - Provide participants an opportunity to convey any additional information that would be relevant to this study

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