EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF RUSSIAN-SPEAKING FIRST-GENERATION IMMIGRANT STUDENTS REGARDING THE TRANSFER PROCESS FROM THE LOS RIOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT TO CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

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A Thesis

by

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Date

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Abstract

EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF RUSSIAN-SPEAKING FIRST-GENERATION IMMIGRANT STUDENTS REGARDING THE TRANSFER PROCESS FROM THE LOS RIOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT TO CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

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Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students' experiences regarding the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to California State University, Sacramento, in order to identify important issues affecting this process. There were three main research questions addressed in the study:

- What are Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students' perceptions about the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?
- What are the economic, social, or academic factors that hinder or facilitate transfer of this group of students from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?
- What recommendations do Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students have regarding the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?
Methodology

The sample for this study consisted of nine Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students who transferred from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS and were admitted and enrolled in the university in fall 2007, spring 2008, and the fall 2008 semesters. This study was designed using the qualitative method of inquiry. To gather data, the researcher conducted nine personal interviews consisting of ten open-ended questions regarding Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students’ perceptions of the transfer process.

Conclusions and Recommendations

After analyzing the data, it became evident that the participants of this study experienced a number of barriers in their transfer processes from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS. Such barriers included lack of knowledge of the U.S. higher education system, inadequate and ineffective academic counseling, family and work responsibilities, limited English proficiency, lack of knowledge and understanding of the financial aid system, and unawareness of the existing support services and programs. Furthermore, there were several factors discovered that facilitated their transfers and made their adjustments to the new environment of a four-year institution less problematic. Some of these factors were the participants’ high level of academic preparation, their eligibility for government financial assistance such as tuition fee waivers and/or financial aid, and the articulation agreements between the Los Rios colleges and CSUS. Recommendations include the necessity of a specific ethnic category
for the Russian-speaking immigrant group of students on all application forms in the local higher education institutions, the need for improvement of CSUS outreach/recruitment programs and CSUS and Los Rios counseling services, the need to design and implement a transfer facilitating program targeting Russian-speaking immigrant students, and a suggestion to employ Russian-speaking academic counselors in CSUS and the Los Rios Community College District.

Committee Chair
JoLyn Britt/Ph.D.

Date 8/5/09
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

The United States is a country of immigrants. For hundreds of years, people have been coming here to find a better life. These immigrants arrive in this country and begin to work in order to adjust to the new life and provide for their families. However, at the present time, hard work is not enough to achieve success and prosperity in the U.S. It has become necessary to have at least some college education in order to be a part of the American workforce (Erisman & Looney, 2007). The demand for low-skilled labor has diminished, while the need for highly trained workers is growing very rapidly (Gray et al., 1996).

Over the last 15-20 years, the immigration of Russian-speaking populations to the United States, particularly to California, has increased due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russian immigration to the United States has a long history, beginning in the 18th century. There have been five major immigration waves from the former Soviet republics (Hardwick, 1993; Tsytsarev & Krichmar, 2000). The last (fifth) wave started in 1987, during the democratization period of the Soviet Union, continued throughout the collapse of that country, and is still taking place at the present time. This fifth wave of immigration brought a significant number of Russian-speaking immigrants into the Sacramento Area. According to the United States Census, there were approximately 75,000 Russian-speaking people residing in the Sacramento area in 2000 (U.S. Census,
In 2002, there were 3,230 new legal immigrants from Russia in California, which constituted 1.11% of all immigrants in this state, and 3,665 or 1.26% refugees from Ukraine. In Sacramento County, there were 442 Russian newcomers (4.9% of the whole county’s immigration population), which brought this group to the seventh place among all the immigrants in this area. Ukrainians ranked first – with 1,987 new immigrants in 2002 in Sacramento County comprising 22% of the county’s immigration population (Gage, n.d.). Today, over 200,000 Russian-speaking people live in the Sacramento, San Francisco, and Bay areas. Every thirtieth Californian speaks Russian (Mysterious Russian, 2007).

Like many other immigrant groups, newcomers from the former Soviet Union region, particularly Russians and Ukrainians, face many challenges related to their adjustment in the United States. One of these challenges is gaining access to and completing postsecondary education. The majority of Russian-speaking students attending American institutions of higher education belong to the last immigration wave. The immigrants of this fifth wave are described in the literature as people with a high level of education and high aspirations for their children (Tsytsarev & Krichmar, 2000). However, the vast majority of them do not speak, read or write English, when they arrive into this country. In addition, these immigrants experience many difficulties related to their cultural, social, and economic assimilation into the American society. They do not understand the ways people live and function in this country and, due to these
deficiencies, lack knowledge of many public services, including American post-secondary education (Keenan, 2003).

In the Sacramento Area, most of Russian-speaking immigrant students tend to start their post-secondary education in the local community colleges such as the Los Rios Community College District (J. Barr, personal communication, April 18, 2008). This community college district consists of four colleges: American River College (ARC), Sacramento City College (SCC), Consumes River College (CRC), and Folsom Lake College (FLC) (About Los Rios, n.d.). Most first-generation Russian-speaking immigrants enroll in the Los Rios Community College District, particularly in Sacramento City College and American River College, which can be explained by the higher Russian/Ukrainian population concentration in the areas surrounding these colleges. Due to their refugee status and low income, Russian-speaking immigrants are eligible for various financial assistance programs at the California community colleges; thus, community colleges very often become post-secondary education institutions of choice for this group of California residents (J. Barr, personal communication, April 18, 2008).

The California Community College system offers academic and vocational instruction at the lower-division level (freshman and sophomore) level. Community colleges may grant the Associate of Arts and the Associate of Science degrees. Some colleges also provide adult education programs—including basic skills education; citizenship instruction; vocational and recreational programs (Major Features, n.d.). The
Los Rios Community College District offers various Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees in more than 70 career fields and provides transfer education. Students of this college district have an opportunity to complete freshman and sophomore years and then they may become eligible to transfer to a four-year college or university (About Los Rios, n.d.).

California State University Sacramento (CSUS) is one of the largest and most ethnically diverse campuses within the California State University System. In enrolls about 28,000 students, and graduates 6,000 students every year (About Sacramento State, n.d.). For the last 6 years, colleges of the Los Rios Community College District have been the largest feeder schools for CSUS. In the fall 2007 semester, 33% of all undergraduate transfer students that enrolled in CSUS, transferred from the Los Rios Community College District. In the spring 2008 semester, 37% transfer students came from Los Rios, and in the fall 2008, 34% of all undergraduate transfer students that enrolled in CSUS were transferred from four colleges of Los Rios College District (Office of Institutional Research, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students’ experiences regarding the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to California State University, Sacramento, in order to
identify important issues affecting this process. There were three main research questions addressed in the study:

- What are Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students’ perceptions about the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?
- What are the economic, social, or academic factors that hinder or facilitate transfer of this group of students from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?
- What recommendations do Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students have regarding the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?

Despite the recent growth of Russian-speaking immigrants in the Greater Sacramento Area, which has been documented, there have been no studies conducted regarding their access to and achievements in higher education. None of the local post-secondary education institutions has a specific ethnic category for this group of immigrants, therefore, it is not possible to gather any type of statistical data for these students and discover possible difficulties in their educational pathway.

According to the ARC Transfer Center and Office of Institutional Research representatives, the Los Rios Community College District, particularly American River College, has the largest Russian-speaking student population of all community colleges in the area due to the higher concentration of Russian and Ukrainian refugees living in close
proximity to those colleges (C. Reisner, personal communication, April 18, 2008; J. Barr, personal communication, April 18, 2008).

In 2007, 90% of students enrolled in ESL programs in ARC were Russian and Ukrainian first-generation immigrants (J. Gamber, personal communication, April 18, 2008). These students pursue various careers and obtain associate degrees in art and science. However, the local research conducted by the Los Rios transfer centers (particularly American River College Transfer Center) showed that Russian-speaking immigrant students (primarily Russians and Ukrainians) tend to remain in the community colleges for a longer time, and not transfer into four-year institutions such as CSUS (C. Reisner, personal communication, April 25, 2008).

The researcher intends to examine the transfer patterns of Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS. The purpose is to identify possible reasons that prevent this immigrant group of students from transferring and receiving bachelor degrees, which would give these students the opportunity to advance their careers and earn higher income. In addition, the researcher will try to discover factors that may facilitate the transfer process for Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students.
Definition of Terms

Articulation Agreements: Formal agreements between two campuses, which define how courses taken in one post-secondary education institution can be used to satisfy a subject matter requirement at another institution (Articulation Agreements, n.d.).

California State University (CSU): A public system of four-year institutions that offers undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees up to the master's level, and selected doctoral degrees (Major Features, n.d.).

Community College: A postsecondary education institution that offers only academic and vocational instruction at the lower-division level (freshman and sophomore) level; it grants the associate of arts and the associate of science degrees. Some colleges also provide adult education programs—including basic skills education; citizenship instruction; vocational and recreational programs (Major Features, n.d.).

ESL Programs (English as a Second Language Programs): This term usually refers to the programs that provide the learning of English in an environment, where English is a native language. The ESL programs offer comprehensive learning of English: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004).

Refugee Status of Immigration: According to the Immigration and Nationality Act (1981), Refugee Status can be granted to anyone outside of his or her country of Nationality (or already inside of the United States) who is “unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion,
nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (Definition of Refugee, 2008).

Russian-Speaking First-Generation Immigrant Students: In this study, Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students will refer to the students, who were born on the territory of the former Soviet Union (predominantly Russia, Ukraine, and Byelorussia), immigrated to the United States at different ages, became naturalized citizens of this country (or hold permanent residency status), and attend an American higher education institution, particularly California State University, Sacramento.

Student Affairs: A division of college or university that consists of any advising, counseling, management, or administrative function and exists outside the classroom (Love, 2003).

Transfer Process: The process of students' transferring from the community colleges to four-year institutions.

Transfer Rates: There are many ways to estimate students transfer rates from community colleges to four-year institutions. In general, it is the number of students who enter the community college, subdivided according to certain criteria, divided into the number of students that consequently matriculate at a four-year institution (Cohen, 1993).

Transfer Students: Students that have transferred from community colleges to four-year institutions in order to receive a bachelor degree.
Significance of the Study

After reviewing relevant literature, it appears that there have been no studies conducted regarding the transfer process of Russian-Ukrainian first-generation immigrants in the United States. It can be explained by the fact that Russian-Ukrainian immigration started growing in the past 15-20 years thus scholars have not recognized the low transfer rates of this group to be a problem for American post-secondary education. Another possible reason for the lack of studies pertaining to immigration from the former Soviet Republics could be the absence of any special ethnic category for this population. When Russian/Ukrainian students are asked to identify their ethnicity (during application process), they usually select “White/Caucasian” or “White/Other” (J. Barr, personal communication, April 18, 2008). This makes it very difficult to prepare accurate statistical reports since these students automatically fall under the “White” category, which usually has the highest transfer rates in comparison to the other groups of students.

Many analysts consider the bachelor’s degree to be the key to economic opportunity (Bailey & Weininger, 2002). The United States plays a significant role in the global economy, and post-secondary education is very important for the American workforce in order to remain economically competitive (Erisman & Looney, 2007). By not transferring to degree granting institutions (undergraduate and graduate degrees), Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students deprive themselves of the opportunity for career advancement, higher income earnings in the future, and, thereby becoming a part of the American highly trained workforce.
Such relevant research would be beneficial for the Russian, Ukrainian and other first-generation immigrant students from the former Soviet republics since it would discover possible difficulties they encounter when transferring to four-year institutions such as CSUS as well as factors that may facilitate the transfer process for them. Consequently, the CSUS leadership would be able to identify specific targets and improve the university’s outreach and recruitment programs or develop new programs focusing on this group of students, which will increase university admission and enrollment rates. In addition, the Los Rios Community College District would be able to use the results of this research and develop various programs in order to address the existing issues.

Conclusion

The remainder of this study will include Chapter 2 - review of the literature – where this researcher will introduce five topics related to the research problem. Chapter 3 will describe methodology that was used for this study – it will include the setting, the population and sample, data collection process, instrumentation and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 will present the results of data gathering, and Chapter 5 will conclude this study with the summary, conclusions, and recommendations.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

After reviewing relevant literature, it appears that there have been no studies conducted regarding the transfer process of Russian-speaking first generation immigrants from community colleges to four-year institutions in the United States and, particularly, in California. However, several sources examine barriers encountered by first generation immigrants and other traditionally underrepresented immigrant students such as Hispanics/Latinos in gaining access to American post-secondary education, transferring to four-year institution from community colleges, and completing their bachelor degree. In addition, the researcher found several studies that examine the role of state policies and articulation agreements in the transfer process and specific articulation agreements that target traditionally underrepresented minority groups such as Hispanic and African-American students. Such policies and agreements could be applied to Russian-speaking first generation immigrant students.

This literature review will be organized according to following topics:

- A brief history of Russian-speaking immigration and the main characteristics of former Soviet Union immigrants;
Transfer experiences of first-generation immigrants in general and those of traditionally underrepresented immigrant student groups such as the Hispanic-Latino group;

- A brief overview of the transfer issues of the general American student population;

- The role of state policies and transfer agreements in the transfer process for American students and first-generation immigrants on the federal and state levels;

- A model Puente program that has been developed and successfully applied in California higher education institutions in order to facilitate transfer process for first-generation immigrant groups such as the Hispanic-Latino population.

Russian Speaking Immigration to the United States and Main Characteristics of This Group of Immigrants

In 1987, the President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, announced that all victims of religious persecution were given permission to leave the USSR and immigrate to the other countries (Hardwick, 1993). Members of those persecuted groups such as Jews, Baptists, and Pentecostals, arrived in the U.S. and Canada and were admitted to those countries as refugees. The main destination area for non-Jewish Russian speaking immigrants became not the usual cities of choice such as Los Angeles and San Francisco, but the Central Valley city of Sacramento and its surrounding areas.
In 1993, there were over eight thousand newcomers from the former Soviet Union region living in the capital of California (Hardwick, 1993).

Compared to all other immigrant groups that settled on the West Coast of the United States and Canada, Russian-speaking people blended relatively easily into American society. In general, their white skin color, their religious beliefs, ethnic background, and European heritage allowed them to blend quickly into the “melting pot.” However, in many ways, Russians have been different from other European immigrant groups (Hardwick, 1993).

There were several historical reasons that contributed to the fact that Russian-speaking refugees had a tendency to cluster in settlement nodes (Hardwick, 1993). Until Mikhail Gorbachev became President of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, the USSR was viewed by the majority of American people as the main enemy. Therefore, Russians and other former Soviet Union citizens had to struggle with this negative perception. Many Americans considered members of this group of immigrants to be hostile “Communists,” spies, and just enemies of American government (Hardwick, 1993). In addition, Russians had to struggle with another negative stereotype – they were considered to belong to a strange and unknown version of mainstream Christianity. Eastern Orthodox religion seemed too “pagan” to many fundamental Christians. All these factors contributed to Russian-speaking immigrants’ sense of being isolated from American mainstream life, made them cluster in their settlements, and slowed down their assimilation (Hardwick, 1993).
Russian-speaking immigration into the Greater Sacramento area continues to grow. The 2000 United States Census showed that there were approximately 75,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union residing in the Sacramento area (U.S. Census, 2001). Today, more than 200,000 Russian-speaking people live in the Sacramento, San Francisco, and Bay Areas (Mysterious Russian, 2007).

Similar to all the other immigrant groups in the United States, Russian-speaking immigrants face many difficulties in their adaptation and assimilation to the new life in the U.S. The change of a home country, as well as person’s birthplace, residence, education, where his or her relatives are buried – are some of the most difficult decisions an individual can make (Neimer, 2003). For some people, leaving everything they ever loved and cared for in the home country is a tragic event but the only way to continue their lives. For others, it is a long-awaited escape from an odious place and a chance to start a new and happy life. Nevertheless, regardless of the reasons for immigration, every newcomer must go through a very difficult period of adaptation to a new country, its values, mentality, and norms of behavior. Immigrant adaptation can be defined as an acceptance of the social values and norms of the new social setting. One of the most important measures of adaptation is whether the individual was able to find himself in the new country, start earning sufficient income in order to support himself and his family (Neimer, 2003). Despite the fact that many Russian-speaking immigrants have high educational background upon their arrival into the U.S. (especially older immigrants), almost all of them lack Western academic credentials and have very limited job skills that
could be applied in the U.S. (Hristov, 2004; Hubenthal, 2004). Therefore, these immigrants must obtain at least some type of post-secondary education in order to become a part of American workforce (Neimer, 2003; Hristov, 2004; Hubenthal, 2004).

The vast majority of Russian-speaking immigrants does not speak, read, or write English when they arrive to the United States (Keenan, 2003; Hubenthal, 2004). One of the other very serious challenges is that these newcomers do not understand many different aspects of life in the U.S. and lack knowledge of public services (Keenan, 2003). The Russian-speaking immigrant group is considered one of the oldest among other immigrant groups (more than 20% of the 500,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union are aged 65 and older), which makes it even more difficult for these individuals to learn English and adjust to the new ways of life (Hubenthal, 2004). Despite the fact that religious refugees are eligible to participate in many financial assistance programs, very often they take relatively long time to start taking advantage of their privileges such as free ESL classes at the local higher education institutions (Neimer, 2003; Hubenthal, 2004).

There is very limited research done regarding Russian-speaking immigrants in general and especially, regarding their educational pathways in the United States. The researcher had to explore other first-generation immigrant groups – the issues they experience in the process of completing their bachelor’s degree, particularly, the transfer process from community colleges to four-year institutions.
Transfer Experiences of First-Generation Immigrant Students and Transfer Issues of the Hispanic/Latino Group of Students

First-Generation Immigrants

Erisman and Looney (2007) describe issues experienced by first generation immigrants in gaining access to higher education and completing a college degree. Among those are stress of immigration, lack of information about higher education, financial need, academic preparation, work responsibilities, and limited English proficiency (Erisman & Looney, 2007).

The first challenge every immigrant faces when he or she comes to a foreign country is the experience of immigration itself (Erisman & Looney, 2007). “By any measure, immigration is one of the most stressful events a person can undergo” (Suarez-Orozco, 1999, p. 4). Immigration deprives people of many very important things in their lives such as family and friends relationships, community ties, jobs, familiar living situations and, very often, language. Immigrants lose their sense of competence and control. If the person immigrated in order to escape war or persecution, he or she may experience post-traumatic stress disorder (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Suarez-Orozco, 1999). One of the forms of stress specific to immigration is called acculturation stress. “This is the process whereby individuals learn and come to terms with the new cultural ‘rules of engagement’” (Suarez-Orozco, 1999, p. 5). When individuals grow up in their home country, they are used to certain circumstances so immigration puts them out of familiar and predictable contexts (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Suarez-Oroasco, 1999).
Therefore, enrolling in a four-year college – a very complex process, which requires knowledge and understanding of admission and financial aid systems – may seem unattainable for recent immigrants and the community college very often becomes a first choice for that group (Bailey & Weininger, 2002; Erisman & Looney, 2007).

Limited English proficiency of almost all incoming immigrants has a major impact on access to higher education system and transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions (Erisman & Looney, 2007; The High-Quality Learning, 2002; Alexander, et al., 2007). “Inadequate language skills are reported as the most outstanding problem shared by immigrants” (Gray, 1997, p. 46). Immigrants that come to this country being teenagers have just a few years to learn English before they graduate from high school and get into higher education. One of the reasons for these students to stay in community colleges for a long time and not transfer to four-year institutions is the variety and affordability of ESL programs offered in community colleges. Limited English proficiency appears to be one of the biggest problems for older immigrants, who are more than likely to speak a language other than English (The High-Quality Learning, 2002; Erisman & Looney, 2007).

Many immigrant students are non-traditional students – more than half of them are 24 and older, and almost a third of them have dependants (Erisman & Looney, 2007). Therefore, many of these students have to work to provide for their families. As a result, immigrant students prefer to attend community colleges, which offer many evening classes unlike four-year institutions (Erisman & Looney, 2007, Bailey & Weininger,
Research indicated that colleges with younger populations have higher transfer rates than those with older non-traditional students who are likely to have significant work and family responsibilities (Wassmer, Moore, & Schulock, 2004).

Immigrants who come to the United States as adults may lack adequate academic preparation for four-year institutions. Some of the students may be well prepared for college-level work when others may not have completed the equivalency of high school (Erisman & Looney, 2007, Bailey & Weininger, 2002; The High-Quality Learning, 2002). In addition, educational systems vary in terms of the methods of instruction and used materials thus many immigrant students may find themselves inadequately prepared for American college-level work even though they graduated from high school or attended college in their home country (Erisman & Looney, 2007).

The other barrier to higher education as well as the transfer process for first-generation immigrants described by several scholars is the lack of information about postsecondary education (Erisman & Looney, 2007, Bailey & Weininger, 2002; The High-Quality Learning, 2002). In order to transfer from the community college to degree granting institutions, students and their parents need to possess “college knowledge,” that is, understanding of the transfer process, admission requirements, and finance in American universities. Many of the students’ parents do not have college experience and they are not able to guide their kids through the transfer process (The High-Quality Learning, 2002; Alexander, et al., 2007).
Younger immigrants' college education very often depends on their parents’ ability to finance it. Low-income parents that are insecure in terms of their financial situation are less likely to take on loan debt (Gray, 1997). Studies show that immigrants take out loans less often than general American population of college students. Many immigrants hesitate to apply for financial aid because of lack of information about it (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Bailey & Weininger, 2002). In addition, very often immigrants need to provide not only for their immediate family but also for the remaining family in their home country, which makes their financial situation even more difficult compared to American low-income families (Erisman & Looney, 2007).

Traditionally Underrepresented Minority Students such as Hispanic-Latino Immigrant Students

There have been various studies conducted in regards to Hispanic/Latino first-generation immigrant students, who as well as Russian-speaking students are newcomers to this county and experience many similar difficulties in terms of adaptation and assimilation to a new way of life, gaining access to post-secondary education, and completing their bachelor’s degree (Hagedorn & Lester, 2006). The significant number of studies regarding this particular group of immigrant students can be explained by the fact that the Hispanic/Latino population in the U.S. is growing very rapidly. The 2000 U.S. Census showed that there were 37.9 million Hispanics in the United States, 40 % of whom are foreign-born (U.S. Census, 2001; Hagedorn & Lester, 2006). Therefore, these immigrants comprise the largest minority group among all others in the nation – much
more significant than the Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant group (Hagedorn & Lester, 2006).

Just like Russian-speaking immigrants and individuals from other first-generation immigrant groups, Hispanics are more likely to enroll into community colleges and attend them on a part-time basis (Fry, 2003; Hagedorn & Lester, 2006). All studies on the transfer process of Latino-Hispanic group of immigrant students stress the fact that the transfer rates of this group of students are always considerably lower than transfer rates of White/Caucasian non-immigrant students (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Hagedorn & Lester, 2006; Alexander, et al., 2007).

Several scholars examined the issues that Hispanic/Latino students face when they transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions, which can explain the low transfer rates of this group of students. The students and their parents do not have any knowledge of the U.S. higher education system – its structure, procedures, and admission requirements. A majority of parents do not have any college experience, therefore, they cannot direct their children through the process of entering the post-secondary education and completing their degree (The High-Quality Learning, 2002; Alexander, et al. 2007).

One of the most important barriers Hispanic-Latino students encounter is limited English proficiency. Most of these first-generation students enroll into ESL courses to improve their language skills, averaging five ELS course per academic year (Alexander, et al., 2007; The High-Quality Learning, 2002; Hagedorn & Lester, 2006). Most of these
students lack adequate high school preparation; many of them graduate from high school without taking college preparatory courses. Therefore, very often they have to take remedial courses at the community college (Fry, 2004, Alexander, et al., 2007).

Another very important barrier to transfer for Hispanic/Latino students is the fact that they lack financial resources and must work in order to support themselves and their families. Many of these students come from low-income, disadvantaged backgrounds and, consequently, must receive financial aid and work full or part time to provide for themselves and their families while they attend college (The High-Quality Learning, 2002; Alexander et al., 2007; Hagedorn & Lester, 2006). However, limits to financial aid make it incredibly difficult for students to qualify for financial assistance (Boswell, 2004). Because of that, they risk not transferring to the four-year institution and take very long time (several years) to complete their associate’s degree (Hagedorn & Lester, 2006; Alexander, et al., 2007). In addition, many of these students prioritize work and do not consider college a long-term commitment (The High-Quality Learning, 2002; Alexander, et al., 2007; Salinas & Llanes, 2003).

Working full or part time limits the number of classes these students can complete each semester. The impractical requirement to take twelve units to qualify for full financial aid increases the likelihood that these students will drop their courses and leave school altogether (The High-Quality Learning, 2002). Furthermore, in several states, financial aid has shifted from need-based to merit-based, which prevents many of these
students from qualifying for the financial assistance needed to pay for the skyrocketing costs of higher education (Boswell, 2004).

Many of Hispanic/Latino students enter community college with inadequate K-12 academic preparation and, therefore, enroll in remedial or basic skills courses to improve in areas such as math and English (The High-Quality Learning, 2002). Students must achieve comprehension in basic skills in order to successfully complete subsequent classes required to transfer. Academic preparation also signifies the most important indicator of student success (Handel, 2007). Student success characterized by GPA and the completion of the maximum number of transferable courses at a community college, suggests student persistence in attaining a baccalaureate degree (Rhine, Milligan & Nelson, 2000). Thus, both high school and community college academic achievement is a significant determinant of students’ ability to transfer and complete a baccalaureate degree (Handel, 2007; Rhine et al., 2000).

Community college students can apply for fee waivers or Cal Grants to help offset the costs associated with higher education; however, limitations further compound the problem. For example, students have found inadequate resources to assist them with living expenses. Furthermore, most Cal Grants are only available to recent high school graduates who meet the minimum financial and academic requirements. For older, non-traditional community college students, they must compete for a restricted number of Cal Grants available to them. Many traditionally underrepresented minority students delay college entry or attend part time, and, as a result, surpass the traditional college age of 18
to 24 years old. The limitation of Cal Grants for this group has a devastating effect on their successful transfer (Wassmer, Moore & Shulock, 2004).

Many underrepresented minority students including those of Hispanic/Latino immigrants start attending community colleges without initial goals to transfer to four-year institution. They enroll into credential programs or nonacademic continuing education and do not participate in any transfer programs (Alexander, et al., 2007).

Inadequate and ineffective academic counseling, moreover, signifies another barrier that impedes a successful transfer function. Often times, traditionally underrepresented minority students including Hispanics are first generation college students and, thus, cannot turn to their parents or other family members for knowledge and advice (Wassmer et al., 2004). In addition, these students most likely have come from high schools with low expectations of entering higher education, insufficient guidance counseling, and limited information about college access. These students need greater attention because without access to information and academic counseling, they will wander through the system and become increasingly discouraged in their efforts of transferring. The timeliness and accuracy of this information also has a great impact on their successful transfer. Delayed and inaccurate information contributes to students taking nontransferable courses, which adds to their aggravation and may actually cause some students to drop out (The High-Quality Learning, 2002). Likewise, these students experience difficulty accessing academic counseling as many of them work full or part time and attend classes in the evenings. They simply do not have the time during the day
to stay on campus, and many support services are not available in the evening (The High-Quality Learning, 2002).

Lastly, many institutional barriers hinder Hispanic/Latino students’ transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions such as very few faculty and administrative staff models, inconsistency of articulation policies and agreements, limited transfer programs or lack of knowledge that those transfer programs exist, prejudice on the part of faculty (The High-Quality Learning, 2002).

In their 2007 study, Alexander, et al., discovered several additional barriers that have been encountered by Hispanic/Latino students. One of them is lack of clarity and relevance of higher education. These immigrant students very often do not see the immediate value of education beyond community college. They have difficulty understanding how they can benefit from undergraduate education and they do not see the relevance of university curricular to their everyday life and struggles (Alexander, et al., 2007). In addition, Hispanic/Latino students strongly value their culture and background, which emphasize work and family, and can especially hinder transfer of female students. And the last obstacle that has been experienced by this group of students, according to Alexander, et al. (2007) is their undocumented immigration status.
in general for all groups of students. Cuseo (1998) pointed out that the institutional factors that lead to higher transfer rates include extensive support and advising services for students, better articulation with bachelor’s degree granting universities, more effective institutional research, higher faculty involvement in transfer issues, and more “academic” curriculum (Cuseo, 1998). Other researchers found that one of the most important factors associated with greater transfer success is the presence of “transfer culture” in the community college, meaning that the goal of students transferring to four-year institutions is given very high priority among faculty, staff, and administration. Many scholars that examined students’ characteristics related to transfer found that the community colleges with higher transfer rates tend to have a younger student population, better academic preparation, higher socio-economic status, and greater focus on academic programs (Wassmer, Moore, & Schulock, 2004).

The Role of State Policies and Transfer Agreements in the Transfer Process for American Students and First-Generation Immigrants

In 1960, The California Master Plan for Higher Education assigned specific goals for the California institutions for promoting higher education. Despite the fact that the transfer function between California community colleges and four-year institutions was designated to be a priority, the transfer process has not been as effective and efficient as it was meant to be. In 2002, the Legislature reviewed the Master Plan and came to the conclusion that course alignment and articulation between two-year colleges and four-
year institutions remained problematic (Promoting Access, 2006). The State of California included the importance of transfer students in its Master Plan and recognized higher education’s role in shaping future success of the State, stating that the transfer function between all the postsecondary education segments needed to be considered a central institutional priority by the Governor, Legislature, and all the governing boards of California’s higher education institutions. However, many believe it has yet to deliver on its promise as it pertains to transfer students (Promoting Access, 2006).

Transfer from a community college to a four-year institution deserves priority attention from state policymakers for several reasons. The success (or failure) of the community college-baccalaureate transfer function impacts many dimensions of higher education performance such as access, equity, affordability, quality, cost effectiveness, and degree productivity. The weakness of the transfer function from community colleges to four-year institutions can lead to the fact that students that enroll in a community college will be less likely to earn a bachelor’s degree, and those who eventually earn their degree, take much longer and need more credits to do so (Wellman, 2002).

To fight the low transfer rates, states developed policies to facilitate the transfer process (Wellman, 2002; Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006). In 2001, the Education Commission of the States surveyed all 50 states and identified seven categories of state policies that target transfer from two-year to four-year higher education institutions. The policies included legislation, cooperation agreements, transfer data reporting, incentives and rewards given to students for transfer, statewide articulation agreements, statewide
common core curricula, and common course numbering systems (Education Commission, 2001). Of 50 states, state law articulates the 2/4 transfer function in 30 states; 40 states created cooperative agreements, which include statewide frameworks or networks support voluntary cooperation between institutions; 33 states collect some type of data on transfer patterns; in 18 states, students are given rewards for transfer such as financial aid or guaranteed admission; 26 states developed articulation guides, which describe the requirements for course and institutional articulation between community colleges and four-year institutions; 23 states have statewide common core curricula, and 8 states developed common course numbering system (Education Commission, 2001).

Articulation agreements are the main instruments for facilitating the transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions (Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006). According to Wright, Briden, Inman, & Richardson (1996), “Articulation refers to the range of processes and relationships involved in the systematic movement of students between and among post-secondary institutions. The goal of articulation is to promote [the] problem-free transfer of courses from one institution to another” (p. 6). Articulation agreements are intended to negotiate the requirements for students’ movement from institution to institution and improve the transfer function. Before 1971, articulation agreements served just for negotiations between two-year and four-year colleges at the academic program or institutional level until Florida became the first state that legislatively mandated a statewide articulation policy, which was supposed to increase the state transfer rates between 2-year colleges and four-year institutions. The ultimate
goal was to outperform all the other states in terms of the transfer rates and after Florida, other states started developing similar articulation agreements hoping for the same result (Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006).

In 2006, community colleges declared that they participate in three types of articulation agreements with four-year higher education institutions (Report to the Governor, 2006). The first type is “core-to-core” articulation agreements, in which the baccalaureate degree granting institutions agree to accept the general education courses offered at the community colleges as fulfilling the general education “core” requirements.

The second type of agreements include “admissions” agreements, in which the four-year institution agrees to accept a student, who successfully completes an agreed-upon set of sixty units at the community college to a junior level. The third type constitutes the “program-specific agreements” between the academic schools and/or departments of a bachelor’s degree granting university and the community college. These agreements determine which courses a student should take during the associate program in order to receive transfer credit and obtain preparation for the baccalaureate program into which this student desires to transfer (Report to the Governor, 2006).

In addition to the major types of articulation agreements, every state has its own unique types of agreements. Universities and colleges of California offer various articulation agreements in addition to general education, admissions, and program specific agreements. They include course-to-course agreements, which determine if a specific course taken at one college will satisfy a requirement of another college; IGETC
or Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum, and major preparation agreements that specify the lower division course required for a specific major at a specific bachelor's degree granting institution (Transfer Center, 2007).

The Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC) began in 1992 and was created by CCC, UC, and CSU. This program specifies which courses meet each of the general education requirements and California State and University of California systems. Students attending community colleges can take these IGETC courses to fulfill lower division, general education requirements at all CSU and UC campuses. Although the IGETC is not mandatory to complete before transfer, it provided a clear way for students to check off the completion of the lower division general education courses that were guaranteed to transfer to the college of their choice. Many times completing the IGTC and passing the courses with a C grade or better increased student chances for acceptance (ETV15 Make it Easier, 2005; Promoting Access, 2006).

Another program addressing the issues with transfer process is ASSIST - Articulation System Stimulating Interinstitutional Transfer Project, which began in 1985. ASSIST is a computerized articulation and transfer planning database, and it is available for all California students and the general public. Using this system, students can identify how courses taken at one college or university can be used when transferred to another. ASSIST integrates the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGTC) and individual articulation agreements (ETV15 Make it Easier, 2005; Promoting Access, 2006).
Along with these, another program developed to facilitate the transfer process in California is called Intersegmental Major Preparation Articulated Curriculum (IMPAC), which began in 1999. It was a voluntary project intended to get faculty of all three systems to work together to develop a common understanding of the main preparation requirements around the whole state of California. Very often faculty members have different understandings of what skills and knowledge students must possess in their major in order to transfer effectively; thus, IMPAC attempts to get CSU and UC faculty to come up with consistent standards that can be used to create articulation agreements with other higher education systems (ETV15 Make it Easier, 2005; Promoting Access, 2006).

The reviewed research shows that along with other support services such as academic advising, career development, multicultural programming, and other functions associated with student affairs, articulation agreements play a key role in the effectiveness of the transfer process (Koenigbauer, 2006; Suarez, 2003; Wellman, 2002; Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006). According to Suarez (2003), members of underrepresented student groups, such as African-American and Hispanic, are the most negatively affected when the transfer function fails. There are many sources describing how various support services can increase transfer of underrepresented students but, unfortunately, there is a lack of contemporary literature dedicated to the impact of articulation agreements on the transfer process of students of color or other minority groups such as Russian-speaking first generation immigrants. Despite the fact that
articulation agreements primarily target economically and academically underprivileged students such as African-Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, and other immigrants, the literature has very few sources that examined impact of articulation agreements on the transfer rates of those groups (Koenigbauer, 2006).

In 2001, the Office of Institutional Development of City College of San Francisco compiled a document discussing a national articulation agreement between City College of San Francisco, Historically Black Colleges, and Universities (HBCUs), and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), which was developed in the fall 1999 in order to increase minority degree attainment. This articulation agreement enabled the American Council on Education, NAFEO, AACC, the Council of the Great City Schools and the Negro College Fund to make it easier for community college students nationwide to transfer from community colleges to HBCUs and HSIs. In addition, this document proposed the establishment of a National Articulation network to ease and promote transfer to African-American students and Hispanic students. This network would be a national course-to-course articulation agreement that would allow a student to transfer from anywhere in the country to HBCUs or HSIs (Office of Institutional Development, 2001). HBCUs and HSIs reported success in attracting students to their campuses with programs that include articulation agreements (Office of Institutional Development, 2001).
Puente Program

A number of programs have been created in an effort to address transfer issues and one of them appeared to be very successful. McGrath and Galaviz created the Puente Program in 1981 and first implemented it in Chabot College in the Bay area (The Puente Program, 2001). At first, this program focused on Latino/Hispanic immigrant students who intended to transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions and earn a bachelor degree. Later, the Puente Program focused on underrepresented students that have a goal to transfer. Today, this program is open for all other groups of students (Willett, 2002). The Puente Program is sponsored by the University of California system and participating community colleges. It is a one-year cohort program that includes mentoring, English accelerated instruction, and intensive academic counseling. Instructors and counselors receive special training from the University of California. Willett (2002) conducted a study in order to compare the rates of success, retention, and persistence of Puente students to other students in English courses (English 250A and 1A) at Gavilan Community College. The results of that study showed that Puente students were significantly more successful at English courses than other students; they were retained at much higher rates in English 250 and persisted to English 1A at considerably higher rates than non-Puente students, and performance improvement was more pronounced in English 250 course (Practical Writing), than in the subsequent course – English 1A (Willett, 2002). Since the Puente Program was developed, thirty-eight California community colleges have participated. This program has won national
awards and has proven its success by increasing transfer rates up to 48% for participating students (compared to 7% of non-Puente students) (Student Services, 2007; The Puente Program, 2001).

Rationale for the Study

The Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant population is growing rapidly in the Sacramento area. Local community colleges such as those in the Los Rios Community College District actively enroll Russian-speaking students, many of whom intend to transfer to four-year universities, particularly, to CSUS in order to obtain their bachelor’s degrees. Nevertheless, this group of immigrant students has not been given any attention in terms of their possible issues in higher education, particularly, during their transfer from community college to four-year institutions. This research will examine the transfer process of Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students, discover possible issues they experience during their transfer, and identify factors that facilitate the transfer process for this student group. As a result, the researcher is hoping to provide valuable and important information and offer practical recommendations to Student Affairs professionals of CSUS and the Los Rios Community College District. The goal is to improve their outreach and recruitment services and develop transfer programs to increase the number of Russian-speaking first-generation students transferring from the colleges of the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS. Furthermore, this research will attempt to demonstrate the importance of the specific
ethnic category for this immigrant group of students in the application process to the Los Rios Community College District and CSUS. Thus, the statistical data could be gathered in order to identify any difficulties these students might experience in their post-secondary education pathways.

Summary

After reviewing relevant literature, the researcher was unable to locate studies regarding the transfer process of Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students from community colleges to four-year institutions. Several scholars dedicated their research to the immigration from the former Soviet Union region and described the main characteristics of Russian-speaking immigrants, their patterns of assimilation in the U.S., and the difficulties they experience trying to adjust to the new ways of life in the foreign country, but none of the scholars examined the education pathways of this immigrant group.

Due to the lack of literature regarding transfer process of Russian-speaking immigrants, the researcher had to look at the relevant research dedicated to the transfer process of the other immigrant groups of students. There have been various sources found regarding transfer issues of first-generation immigrant students, particularly, Hispanic/Latino students. In addition, the literature review described the role of state policies and articulation agreements in the transfer process from community colleges to four-year institutions, and a successful model program that was developed for
improvement of the Hispanic/Latino students’ transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions (Puente Program).

The immigration from the former Soviet Union region to the U.S. increased after the President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, gave all the victims of religious persecution permission to leave the USSR and immigrate to other countries (Hardwick, 1993). The main destination area for non-Jewish Russian-speaking immigrants became the Central Valley city of Sacramento and its surrounding areas. These immigrants blended relatively easily into the American society due to their white skin color, religious beliefs, ethnic background, and European heritage, however, the former Soviets have been different in many ways from other European immigrant groups, and experiences various difficulties in adjusting to the new life (Hardwick, 1993). In general, Russian-speaking immigrants have high educational background but almost all of them lack Western academic credentials and have limited job skills. A majority of these immigrants have limited English proficiency upon their arrival to the U.S. and do not understand many different aspects of life in this country (Keenan, 2003, Hubenthal, 2004). All these factors could affect the educational pathways of this group of immigrants tremendously and hinder every step toward completing their bachelor's degree.

After reviewing the literature that described issues in the transfer process for the first-generation immigrants in general and Hispanic-Latino immigrant students, it appears that these students encounter various barriers in their transfer from community colleges to the four-year institutions. Among those are lack of knowledge of the U.S. higher
education system, limited English proficiency, lack of financial resources and need to work full time to support their themselves and their families, and inadequate academic preparation (Alexander et al., 2007; Hagedorn & Lester, 2006; The High-Quality Learning, 2002; Boswell, 2004). In addition, there are various institutional factors that hinder the transfer process of first-generation immigrant students such as inadequate and ineffective academic counseling, very few faculty and administrative staff models, limited transfer programs or lack of knowledge that those programs exist, and prejudice on the part of faculty (Wassmer et al., 2004; The High-Quality Learning, 2002; Alexander et al., 2007). Furthermore, Alexander et al. (2007) discovered three additional barriers that have been encountered by Hispanic/Latino immigrant students: lack of clarity and relevance of higher education, gender and traditional culture, and undocumented immigration status (Alexander et al., 2007).

The United States, including California, developed various policies and procedures in order to facilitate the transfer process from community colleges to four-year institutions (Wellman, 2002; Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006; Anderson, Alfonso, & Sun, 2006). Among those are articulation agreements that appear to be the main instruments for facilitating transfer (Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006). Universities and colleges of California offer various articulation agreements and state programs that were developed to increase the number of transferring students. However, despite the fact that traditionally underrepresented minority groups of students including immigrant students are the first to be affected when the transfer function fails, the research regarding the
impact of articulation agreements on the transfer rates of all these group is very limited (Suarez, 2003; Koenigbauer, 2006).

Lastly, the researcher looked at the Puente program which has been the most successful for increasing Hispanic/Latino students’ transfer rates and could be a model program for facilitating (if needed) Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students’ transfer process. This program has been applied in thirty-eight California colleges and proven its success by increasing transfer rates up to 48% compared to 7% of non-Puente students (Willet, 2002; Student Services, 2002; The Puente Program, 2001).

In conclusion, the contemporary academic literature presents no studies on Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students’ possible issues in American post-secondary education, particularly in the transfer process from community colleges to four-year institutions, which shows the need for further research in this area.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students' experiences regarding the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to California State University, Sacramento, in order to identify important issues affecting this process. There were three main research questions addressed in the study:

- What are Russian-speaking first generation immigrant students’ perceptions about the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?
- What are the economic, social, or academic factors that hinder or facilitate transfer of this group of students from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?
- What recommendations do Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students have regarding the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?

In order to answer these research questions, the researcher used qualitative design based on individual interviews using a structured open-ended questionnaire (Appendix A).
This chapter will include information regarding the setting of this study, the population and sample, the data collection process, as well as instrumentation and limitations of the research.

Setting

The setting of this study was California State University Sacramento (CSUS) located in the City of Sacramento. CSUS is among the largest and most ethnically and culturally diverse campuses in the California State University system. It enrolls a multicultural student body of 28,000, graduates about 6,000 students each year, and offers sixty undergraduate and 40 graduate degrees (About Sacramento State, n.d.).

According to the University Office of Institutional Research, in the fall 2008 CSUS enrolled 7% of African American students, 1% American Indian, 18% Asian Pacific, 14% Latino/Hispanic, 42% White/Caucasian, 2% International, and 17% of students who marked their ethnicity as “Other” (The Fall 2008 Sac State, 2009).

Population and Sample

The student sample for this study consisted of nine Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students who transferred from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS and were admitted and enrolled in the university in fall 2007, spring 2008, and fall 2008 semesters. Five female and four male students participated in the study. The youngest student was 21, and the oldest was 42 years old. All participants
represented the fifth wave of Russian-speaking immigration and arrived in this country after the collapse of the Soviet Union between 1991 and 2002. Two participants attended Sacramento City College before they transferred, five students transferred from American River College, one participant attended both American River and Sacramento City colleges, and one participant took classes in Cosumnes River and Sacramento City colleges before transferring to CSUS. None of the participants attended Folsom Lake College.

The Los Rios Community College District is a two-year public college district, which includes Sacramento City, Cosumnes River, American River, and Folsom Lake Colleges; major centers in the areas surrounding city of Sacramento, and special services for business and industry. The Los Rios colleges offer transfer education, AA and AS degrees, and certificates in more than 70 career fields (About Los Rios, n.d.). For the last 6 years, colleges of Los Rios district appear to be the largest feeder schools for CSUS in terms of transfer students. In the fall 2007 semester, 33% of all undergraduate transfer students that enrolled in CSUS, transferred from the Los Rios Community College District. In the spring 2008 semester 37% transfer students came from Los Rios, and in the fall 2008 34% of all undergraduate transfer students that enrolled in CSUS transferred from four colleges of the Los Rios Community College District (Office of Institutional Research, 2009).

Of the student population that transferred from Los Rios colleges to CSUS, the ethnic breakdown in the fall 2007 semester was the following: 43% White, 17% Other,
15% Asian, 12.5% Latino/Hispanic, 6% African-American, 2.6 % Filipino, 2% Pacific Islander, 0.9% Foreign Nationality, and 0.7% American Indian students (Office of Institutional Research, 2009). In the spring 2008 semester, the students transferring from the four colleges of Los Rios to CSUS represented the following ethnic groups: 43.2% White, 17% Asian, 14.7% Other, 11.7% Latino/Hispanic, 5.5% African-American, 4.4 % Filipino, 1.3% Pacific Islander, 1.1% Foreign Nationality, and 0.8% American Indian students. The students that transferred from Los Rios College District to CSUS in the fall 2008 semester had an ethnic breakdown of 46% White, 15.5% Asian, 13.4% Other, 11.8% Latino/Hispanic, 5.6% African-American, 3.4 % Filipino, 1.7% Pacific Islander, 0.6% Foreign Nationality, and 1.5% American Indian (Office of Institutional Research, 2009).

According to the representatives of the American River College Transfer Center, Russian-speaking first generation immigrant students usually select “White/Caucasian” or “White/Other” ethnic categories (J. Barr, personal communication, April 18, 2008).

Data Collection

This study was designed using the qualitative method of inquiry. To gather data, the researcher conducted nine one-on-one interviews with Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students that transferred from the Los Rios colleges to CSUS. In order to obtain the interviewees’ contact information and consequently invite them to participate in this study, the researcher followed the procedures, which were approved by
the Human Subjects Approval Committee through the CSUS Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (EDLP). The researcher requested a list of all students that transferred from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS in the fall 2007, spring 2008, and fall 2008 semesters from the CSUS Registrar. Due to the fact that there is no specific ethnic category on the CSUS application for Russian-speaking immigrant students, the researcher had to read the provided list of all transfer students’ names and e-mail addresses and visually identify individuals with Russian and Ukrainian first and last names. There were 100 Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian names found in the list and an e-mail letter asking for their participation was sent to each of them with the consent letter attached. The consent letter was also approved by the EDLP Human Subjects Approval Committee – it explained the purpose of the study, requested students’ participation, guaranteed the full anonymity of participants, and stressed the fact that their participation was voluntary. The consent letter can be found in Appendix B.

Fifteen students replied to the invitation stating that they were willing to participate in the study. However, only nine of them were chosen for the interviews since the remaining students either did not qualify (they were born in the U.S., therefore, they were second-generation immigrants), or were not able to adjust their schedule and make themselves available for the interview. Once the students were chosen and they agreed to the terms and conditions of the interview, a day and time was set up for the one-hour confidential interview. Each student was allowed to read, sign, and date the consent letter before the interview began.
The interview consisted of ten questions, the first five of them related to the participants' length of time in the United States, what their English language proficiency level was upon their arrival in this country, what type of English language training they received, what level of education they possessed when they immigrated, and what community colleges they attended within the Los Rios Community College District prior to transferring to CSUS. The other five questions covered participants' perceptions regarding the transfer process from the Los Rios colleges to CSUS, their opinion on whether there were any economic, social, or academic factors that affected their transfers, and their recommendations regarding the transfer process of Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students. The interview questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

With the participants' authorization, each interview was tape-recorded for the purpose of transcription. The results of this data collection will be presented and discussed in Chapter 4. After the data collection was finished, all nine interviews were transcribed, the transcriptions were thoroughly read several times, and the transcriptions were coded in order to identify common themes. The results of coding and data analysis will be also discussed in Chapter 4.

Instrumentation

Prior to initiating the data gathering, the researcher submitted the Human Subjects Approval Review Form along with the consent letter and interview questionnaire to the Human Subjects Approval Committee of the CSUS EDLP. The approval form included
information regarding the purpose of the study, the way participants were going to be recruited, design of the study, processes of data collection, and the methods used to protect participants' rights to privacy and safety. After the Committee approved the protocol for the Protection of Human Rights as a "no risk" research, the consent letter, and interview questionnaire, the researcher proceeded with the participants' recruitment and data collection.

The University Registrar released a list of students that transferred from Los Rios colleges to CSUS and were admitted and enrolled in the fall 2007, spring 2008, and fall 2008 semesters. The researcher identified Russian/Ukrainian students' names and sent them an electronic letter with the consent form attached requesting their participation in the study. Nine interviews with Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students were conducted, where the participants were offered ten interview questions focusing on their perceptions of transferring from the Los Rios colleges to CSUS, and their recommendations regarding the transfer process.

Limitations

This study has several limitations to consider. The first limitation of this research is the fact that there have been no studies conducted regarding the transfer process of Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students thus no assumptions could be made about possible issues encountered during transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to California State University Sacramento by this particular group of
immigrant students. The researcher used the literature from studies involving the transfer process of other immigrant groups of students and in addition, sources that described issues related to the transfer process of the general American student population. Therefore, this study has a very limited base of research.

In addition, this study is limited by the absence of the specific ethnic category for Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students on application forms in the Los Rios Community College District as well as in California State University, Sacramento, which makes it impossible to provide the exact numbers of Russian-speaking immigrant students that attend those institutions and that transfer from the community colleges to CSUS.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that the participants – Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students - could be at different levels of their English proficiency thus the results could be subject to other interpretations. This leads to the next limitation – the interviews were conducted in either Russian or English language depending on the participants’ preferences and their level of comfort in those languages. In addition, the researcher had to transcribe all the interviews herself due to the fact that several interviews were conducted in Russian, others were either in English or in mixed Russian/English language.

Finally, this study is based on the interviews of nine Russian-speaking first generation immigrant students, which represents a relatively small sample of the studied population. Furthermore, all participants attended Sacramento City, American River or
Cosumnes River Colleges, none of the interviewees were ever enrolled in Folsom Lake College of the Los Rios Community College District. Therefore, the results of the data gathering cannot be generalized to the entire Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students' population that transfers from all four community colleges of the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS.
Chapter 4
DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students' experiences regarding the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to California State University, Sacramento, in order to identify important issues affecting this process. There were three main research questions addressed in the study:

- What are Russian-speaking first generation immigrant students’ perceptions about the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?
- What are the economic, social, or academic factors that hinder or facilitate transfer of this group of students from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?
- What recommendations do Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students have regarding the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?

In order to answer these research questions, the researcher used a qualitative method of inquiry and conducted nine personal interviews with Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students that transferred from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS. This chapter will begin with the demographics and background of the
participants and then it will present the common themes that emerged from the interviews.

Demographics and Background of Participants

Among nine interviewed participants, there were three Russian immigrant students, five Ukrainian immigrant students, and one immigrant student of Byelorussian origin. The age of the participants ranged from 21 to 42 years old.
Table 1

Participant Distribution by Age, Country of Origin, Years Spent in the U.S., and Level of Schooling upon Arrival in the U.S.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Years in the U.S.</th>
<th>Level of Schooling upon Arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1st grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Degree from vocational school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>MA degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2nd grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>HS + 1 year of vocational school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Byelorussia</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A majority of the participants arrived in the United States during their childhood; one participant arrived as a teen-ager, three participants emigrated when they were already 20 years of age and older.

Table 2

Participants Distribution by Level of English Proficiency, Type of English Training upon Arrival, and Community Colleges Attended prior to Transfer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>English Proficiency upon Arrival</th>
<th>Type of English Training upon Arrival in the U.S.</th>
<th>Community College Attended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1 year of ESL</td>
<td>ARC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1.5 of ESL in HS+2 years in JC</td>
<td>ARC and SacCity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>ARC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3 years ESL in JC</td>
<td>ARC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>ARC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>MA in English</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>ARC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>SCC and Cosumnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1 year of ESL in JC</td>
<td>SCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>SCC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among all nine participants, only one had a high level of English proficiency and a master's degree at the time of moving to the U.S. One participant had a degree from a vocational school, and one participant was a high school graduate upon arrival in the
United States. The level of schooling of the remaining participants ranged from preschool through sophomore year of high school. Typically, participants who emigrated at the early ages did not receive any English training upon their arrival. Instead, they went directly to public schools and learned English by interacting with other children and the teachers. Sometimes they could take advantage of Russian interpreters that occasionally came to schools for several hours a week. The older participants that started their education in the U.S. at the high school or college level usually had to enroll in the ESL programs and attend ESL classes for several years in order to learn English.

All participants attended colleges of the Los Rios Community College District before transferring to CSUS: Five students were enrolled in American River College, two students attended Sacramento City College, one participant took classes at Sacramento City and Cosumnes Colleges, and one student was enrolled in American River and Sacramento City Colleges before transferring to CSUS.

Presentation of the Data

The data gathered during interviews will be presented in the following order: participants’ perceptions regarding transfer process from the Los Rios Colleges to CSUS; economic, social, and academic factors that affected their transfer, and participants’ recommendations regarding transfer process of Russian-speaking first-generation immigrants.
Participants' Perceptions Regarding Transfer Process

Several common themes emerged during the interviews when the participants were asked to speak about their perceptions of the transfer process from the Los Rios colleges to CSUS. Among them were accessibility of consistent and timely information on transfer requirements and the financial aid process, the quality of support services, and the role of the participants' families and Russian-speaking immigrant communities in their decision to transfer and receive a bachelor's degree.

Accessibility of Information on Transfer Requirements and the Financial Aid Process.

All nine participants stated that their transfers from the Los Rios Colleges to CSUS were not difficult in general but could have been much easier if they had received all the necessary information regarding transfer requirements, the CSUS application process, and financial aid system in a timely manner. In addition, eight of nine participants indicated that they experienced difficulties in obtaining such information. They did not have any knowledge of where to find it, whom to ask for help, and had to rely mostly on their friends and/or family members who went through the same process of transfer from community colleges to CSUS. Eight of nine participants stated that the information they were receiving from Los Rios and CSUS counselors was inconsistent and often contradictory.

The transfer was pretty easy for me but I had to go to so many different places to get all the necessary information – ARC and SacCity counselors, SacState
counselors, look at the Los Rios and SacState websites, follow so many deadlines, that at some point, it got really overwhelming and I decided to ask my friend, who went to ARC and then transferred to SacState. He told me exactly what to do and I followed his directions and managed to submit all the paperwork on time.

(Participant 2)

Six out of nine participants stated that they had to rely on either family members or friends in order to understand transfer requirements and the financial aid system at CSUS. Two participants declared that the most helpful in terms of information regarding the transfer process was the University College Fair that was held at the Los Rios Community College District. One participant pointed out that CSUS transfer students' orientation was very useful, but he would have not attended if his counselor had not told him that it was mandatory. However, it is necessary to mention that the orientation for transfer students is not mandatory, and thus the participant’s attendance was due to the counselor's mistake. When asked why he would have not gone to this orientation, the participant admitted that it was a financial burden for him to pay the cost of the transfer orientation.

None of the interviewed students had a chance to meet with the admission counselors from CSUS, who work at the Los Rios colleges once a week. When asked about the reason for this, eight participants stated that they did not know about this opportunity, while one participant said that he knew about the CSUS counselor meeting in ARC on Wednesdays but could never set up a meeting with him due to participant’s
class and work schedule. In addition, none of the interviewees visited Los Rios Transfer Centers and none of them knew if there were any transfer programs they could participate in.

I didn't now I was supposed to go to the Transfer Center. I thought counselors were supposed to answer all my questions.... I didn't know I had to go to the counselors and to the Transfer Center...what's the point? Maybe I should've though because counselors did not seem to know anything about transfer.

(Participant 3)

Quality of Support Services.

All nine participants stressed the fact that they considered community college counselors to be the main source of information regarding transfer. All participants met with ARC, SCC or Cosumnes counselors at some point when they decided to transfer to CSUS. In addition, all nine participants had appointments with either CSUS admission counselors or counselors at the CSUS departments to which they were transferring. Six participants had very negative perceptions about Los Rios counselors:

...The hardest part was that when I was going to different counselors at ARC, they would give totally different information and get me completely confused...like they would tell me to take a class and I actually didn't need that class so I ended up wasting my time and money. So I had to do my own research too, like I would check all the papers so I don't take extra classes and don't pay for them (my dad pays for my classes). I'd say counselors are helpful but you have to
find the right one. I tried and then I found one and now I always go only to him.

(Participant 5)

All these participants indicated that the counselors did not provide them with consistent and correct information regarding transfer requirements. Six interviewed students stated that they took at least one wrong class that they did not need in order to transfer due to the counselor’s mistake.

When speaking about CSUS admission counselors, six participants stated that they were dissatisfied with their services; four participants said very positive things about CSUS admission counselors. All the participants, who met with the counselors at the department they were transferring to, had very high opinions of the quality of help they received.

Four participants pointed out that they were disappointed with the CSUS counseling services due to the fact that they were not able to receive all the necessary information regarding transfer requirements in one department, thus, they had to go to many different offices in order to gather all the information.

Role of the Participants’ Families and Russian-Speaking Immigrant Communities in their Decision to Transfer and Receive a Bachelor’s Degree.

Six participants went to community college with the goal to transfer to a four-year institution. The remainder of the participants decided to transfer later while taking classes at the Los Rios colleges. Eight out of nine participants insisted that their families played a
key role in their decision to transfer from community colleges to the four-year institution in order to receive a bachelor's degree.

My parents always wanted me to get into higher education, both of them have some college education and both of them went to ARC – that’s why I actually went to ARC. They always wanted me to get a bachelor's degree – that's why I transferred. (Participant 3)

My aunt was the most influential. She went to ARC for her nursing degree and then she came to SacState to take classes so she kept telling me – come here, the program is good and you will get your bachelor’s. She told me what classes to take and was telling me how she went through all this too. (Participant 5)

Six participants had taken an active part in the Russian-speaking community church life. Due to the fact that the church community plays a significant role in the participants’ lives, the researcher asked if it somehow influenced the decisions in their education pathways, particularly, transfer to CSUS and completing their bachelor’s degree. Each participant out of these six stated that he/she was one of very few Russian-speaking immigrants that transferred from community colleges to four-year institutions. According to them, the vast majority of the former Soviet Union immigrants receive associate degrees in community colleges, particularly the Los Rios colleges, and never transfer to four-year institutions, or do not even attend community colleges.

All these people from church – they feel like they can get through life just doing construction and cars, they don't really need a degree, they don't see a value of it.
They want some fast money; they don't understand why they need all that “book smart” stuff. This is how most guys think, as for girls – they just want to get married and have babies, they sometimes have a job on the side but it is not a priority for them. (Participant 9)

Five of the nine participants pointed out that there is a stereotype among Russian-speaking immigrant community that it is much more difficult to study at the four-year institution than at the community college.

Yeah, people from church think that it is a lot harder to study at the university than in the community college, the classes are much more serious and the tests are very difficult. Also, a lot of our people do not know about financial aid and they think that it is way too expensive to go to SacState or other four-year schools. (Participant 4)

Other Themes.

Several other themes emerged when the participants were speaking of their general perceptions regarding the transfer process. Among them were the role of English proficiency level in the transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions and importance of consistent and correct international transcript evaluation.

Three participants that immigrated to the U.S. when they were in their 20s and older, stated that their English proficiency level played a significant role in their education pathway, particularly, the transfer process. Not only did it take much longer for them to learn enough English to be able to begin taking classes in the community college
but it also made it more difficult to understand the transfer requirements and financial aid process. One participant said that when she was being advised by one of the CSUS admission counselors, she could not understand many words he was saying, which left her confused and discouraged her from asking CSUS counselors for help in the future.

One participant brought up another issue she faced during transfer – her international transcript evaluation. She was ordered by the ARC counselor to get her transcript evaluated by a foreign transcript evaluation agency.

At the agency, a woman told me one thing, she counted some of my classes and the counselor told me to take certain classes at ARC. But when I brought my transcript to SacState (they don't take transcripts evaluated by the agency, they evaluate them themselves), they counted different classes so it turned out that I took wrong classes at ARC and in order to transfer, had to stay for another semester and take those classes. (Participant 4)

Another participant, who received a master's degree in Russia before she immigrated, decided not to disclose this information to the officials of ARC since she was advised that she would not receive a fee waver at the community college due to the fact that she already has postsecondary education. Therefore, she needed to take all the general education courses again, which she could have avoided had she had her international transcript submitted and evaluated by the ARC Department of Admissions.
Economic, Social, and Academic Factors that Affected Participants’ Transfer from Los Rios to CSUS

**Economic Factors.**

Speaking of possible economic factors that affected the participants’ transfer process, the following common themes emerged during the interviews: significance of the tuition fee waiver and financial aid system in the transfer process, and role of participants’ family and work responsibilities in the transfer from Los Rios to CSUS.

**Fee Waiver and Financial Aid.**

Due to the fact that the participants had refugee status of immigration upon their arrival to the U.S., eight of them were eligible for a fee waiver and certain scholarships in the community colleges they attended thus they did not pay any tuition fees nor textbook costs. One participant did not qualify for a fee waiver and the family paid all her educational expenses. Therefore, eight out of nine students did not pay for their education at the community colleges. Seven out of nine participants qualified for financial aid when they were admitted to CSUS. All the participants that received any type of government assistance in their education pathway, expressed their gratitude for that and stated that they would have not been able to attend community colleges and then transfer to CSUS had they not qualified for the fee waivers and/or financial aid. However, four out of eight participants that were qualified for the fee waiver at Los Rios colleges indicated that they were hesitant to transfer to CSUS due to the lack of information about financial aid and feared that they would have to pay for their education in the four-year institution.
I was worried about financial aid here at SacState because I was getting fee waver at ARC and I didn’t know how financial aid worked here at all and if I would qualify, and the only help regarding this issue I got from my friend who also attended here. (Participant 3)

*Family and Work Responsibilities.*

Five participants indicated that their obligation to work in order to support themselves and their families hindered their transfer and definitely postponed it. The need to care for their children, families, and work left very little time for the education. These participants stressed the fact that it would not have taken them this long to transfer and complete their degree if they did not have to work and take care of their families.

I had to start working as soon as I came here – I cleaned people’s houses, did all kinds of work, I have three children now so, of course, it was hard to take all the necessary classes to transfer...That’s why it took so long for me. (Participant 2)

*Social Factors*

There were two common themes that emerged during the interviews when participants were asked to identify any social factors that might have affected their transfer from Los Rios to CSUS: the family influence and the negative example of the Russian-speaking immigrant community, which does not consider postsecondary education a priority and does not see a value of having a bachelor’s degree.
Family Influence.

As it was mentioned before, eight of nine participants stated that they decided to pursue higher education and receive their bachelor’s degree due to the influence of their family members.

...My parents were always about college so that’s why I am doing it. My dad has a master’s degree and my mom has an associate degree from ARC. And they want all their five kids to go to college and graduate. And I am the oldest one so they want me to go through all this – community college, transfer, and then SacState to show them an example” (Participant 5)

In addition, all nine participants stated that they transferred to CSUS and not to any other four-year institution due to the fact that all their families are situated in the Sacramento area, and they preferred to stay in the close proximity to their family members.

Russian-Speaking Immigrant Community.

All six participants said that they actively participate in the Russian-speaking community church life. These students indicated that in general, the individuals of this immigrant group are not interested in pursuing postsecondary education and receiving undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Most of the people who go to my church don’t go to college. I see very few Russians from my church here at SacState. Majority of them just get jobs and
keep saying that it is not worth going to college when you can make money right now. (Participant 5)

These six participants stated that if it were not for their parents’ influence, they would have not transferred to CSUS as the majority of their community members either receive associate degrees or do not go to college at all.

I really don’t understand people who grow up here and don’t go to college, they finish high school or they don’t even finish high school and they just work on construction. Because if you think about it – all these “physical jobs” – you only will work there for a limited amount of time, maybe 10 years. And then, you will get hurt and then it will be a lot more difficult to go back to college. So that thought played a huge role in my decision to go into higher education and transfer to SacState. Because I see it all the time in our community, I mean – Russians and Ukrainians. (Participant 3)

Academic Factors

Three common themes emerged during the interviews when the participants were speaking of possible academic factors that might have affected their transfer from the Los Rios colleges to CSUS: participants’ level of academic preparation, the role of academic counseling in the participants’ transfer process, and the role of articulation agreements between the Los Rios Community College District and CSUS in the transfer process.
Level of Academic Preparation.

All nine participants indicated that they felt they were adequately prepared for transferring from the Los Rios colleges to CSUS. None experienced serious difficulties in terms of adjusting to the CSUS course system and methods of instruction. The participants admitted that the CSUS approach is somewhat different from the Los Rios colleges but it did not affect their transfer in any way.

I don’t feel that it is harder in SacState than at SacCity but I felt the difference when I came here. Teachers require much more participation, ask a lot of questions. In the community college, students were quiet, didn’t want to contribute anything. And by the end of the semester, a lot of people usually dropped. Over here, people don’t wanna drop out, they have a goal, they wanna do something, people are a lot more determined. (Participant 9)

Role of Academic Counseling.

Six of nine participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the community college counselors. They stated that the information the counselors provided was inaccurate, inconsistent and often led them to take wrong courses, which were not required for transferring to CSUS.

When I was talking to the counselors at the community college, they would give me information like what courses to take but I would go back and read everything myself. I would go to all the websites, read all the worksheets, and sometimes I
was noticing that whatever counselors told me wasn’t really correct, I actually had to take a different class from what they told me! (Participant 9)

In addition, six participants indicated that they did not receive adequate help from CSUS counselors and were rather confused and frustrated after the appointments with them.

I came to see the admission counselor here at SacState, and he was speaking very fast and looked like he just wanted to get rid of me and I tried to ask him to repeat what he was saying even though my English was already good at that time – I took like a million of units in ARC! So I felt like he was irritated with me and I ended up leaving and not knowing what I had to do at all! Other counselors...they might have given me wrong information but at least they treated me like a normal person, not like I was a retard or something… (Participant 4)

Four of nine participants had very positive experiences with CSUS counselors and stated that their help definitely facilitated their transfer and made it much easier for them.

Articulation Agreements.

When asked about the role of articulation agreements in the transfer, all nine participants stated that they found it very convenient that they could take certain courses for their major in the community college and then transfer them to CSUS. However, seven of nine participants indicated that it was difficult for them to understand this system and the information provided by the counselors was often incorrect and misleading. Five participants stressed the fact that they could have taken wrong courses if
it were not for their friends or family members who referred them to the ASSIST website to identify what courses they needed to take for their major in order to be able to transfer those courses to CSUS.

Other themes.

There were several other themes mentioned by some participants. Among them were the importance of an adequate English proficiency level for transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions and lack of knowledge of transfer programs and other services that could potentially facilitate their transfer process. One participant stated that she considers the CSUS Summer Bridge program, which she attended, the most helpful in terms of facilitating her transfer and adjusting to the new environment at CSUS. In addition, she mentioned the EOP program at American River College, which was also very useful for her transfer.

Recommendations

At the end of the interviews, the researcher asked the participants to give recommendations regarding the transfer process of Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students. There were several common recommendations that emerged during the interviews.

- The Los Rios counselors should be more knowledgeable in terms of transfer requirements and articulation agreements between Los Rios and CSUS and provide the students with all the necessary information in a consistent and timely manner.
• There should be better communication between Los Rios and CSUS counselors so the information regarding transfer that they give to the students is consistent throughout both institutions.

• Eight of nine participants stressed the need of timely, clear, and consistent information on the CSUS financial aid system. A majority of these interviewees stated that the lack of information regarding CSUS financial aid definitely made them hesitate to transfer to the four-year school due to the fact that they were eligible for a fee waiver at the Los Rios Colleges and had no information on how they would cover the cost of education at CSUS.

• There is a need for a Russian-speaking, preferably, immigrant counselor that would be able to not only give all the information regarding transfer requirements, but also explain the difference between the former Soviet and American systems of higher education. All nine participants stated that they would choose a Russian-speaking immigrant counselor over any other counselor due to the fact that they feel that they could relate better to a person with the same background. Three participants that arrived in the U.S. at older ages indicated that it would have been very helpful if a Russian counselor had started working with them at the beginning of their education pathways and explained the higher education system, financial aid system, and the transfer requirements.

• The advertisement of transfer facilitating programs, workshops, university fairs, presentations, and other support services on Los Rios and CSUS campuses should
be more aggressive. Seven of nine interviewed students indicated that they never heard of any programs that they could be a part of in order to obtain all the necessary information and prepare themselves for transfer.

- All nine participants stated that the Russian-speaking representatives of the Los Rios and CSUS outreach and recruitment teams need to work not only with the Russian-speaking students but also with the entire immigrant community in order to bring the values of postsecondary education and importance of having a bachelor's degree in the U.S.

At the very end of the interviews, the researcher asked all the participants what ethnic category they usually choose when they go through the application process at the postsecondary education institutions in the U.S. Eight of nine participants indicated that they always mark “White/Caucasian” category and only one participant stated that she usually selects “White/Other” category.

Interpretation of the Data

After completing personal interviews with nine Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students that transferred from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS, it became evident that this group of students experienced certain barriers in their transfer process. In addition, it was apparent that several factors facilitated their transfer or could have facilitated it if these students had received all the necessary information regarding existing transfer programs and other support services.
One of the most common issues all the participants faced during their transfer was the lack of information regarding transfer requirements, the CSUS application process, and the financial aid system. These students had difficulties obtaining this information and did not receive adequate help from the Los Rios and/or CSUS support services. In addition, a majority of the participants indicated that throughout all the years they attended community colleges, they were not aware of any transfer programs, workshops, presentations, and other services that potentially could help them obtain all the information regarding transfer from Los Rios to CSUS.

Another apparent barrier was inadequate, ineffective, and often discouraging academic counseling. All the participants considered academic counselors to be the main source of information regarding all the aspects of transfer and a majority of these students were dissatisfied with the services provided by the Los Rios and CSUS counselors. The information given by the counselors was inconsistent, confusing, and sometimes misleading. In addition, it was evident that there is a major miscommunication between Los Rios and CSUS academic counselors regarding transfer requirements. The participants indicated that in many cases they received different and very often contradictory information from both sources.

The next barrier to transfer that the Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students encountered was family and work responsibilities. All the participants who needed to work full or part-time in order to support themselves and their families
indicated that it hindered their transfer from Los Rios to CSUS. It limited the number of classes they could complete each semester and therefore, postponed their transfer.

Despite the fact that all the participants successfully transferred from community colleges to CSUS, all of them stressed the fact that in general, the Russian-speaking immigrant community does not value higher education and has a major difficulty understanding the advantages of having a bachelor's degree. All the interviewed students confirmed that they began their education at Los Rios and then transferred to CSUS only due to their family influence regardless their community views and values. This could be another potential barrier to transfer for Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students, who take an active part in their community life and whose immediate families do not have any college experience or high aspirations for their children in terms of education.

Furthermore, the participants who arrived in the U.S. at the age of 20 or older indicated another barrier to transfer they encountered - limited English proficiency. All these students needed to complete ESL courses, which took up to three years for one of these participants, in order to be able to enroll into General Education courses at the Los Rios Colleges and meet all the requirements for transferring to CSUS.

Among the positive factors that facilitated participants' transfer was eligibility of a majority of these students for the community college fee waivers and/or CSUS financial aid. Eight of nine interviewed students stressed the fact that they would not have been able to begin their education at the community college and transfer to CSUS if they had
not received financial assistance, which helped them pay for the classes and very often
textbooks. Another factor that positively affected the participants' transfer process is high
quality of instruction at the Los Rios Colleges, which assured students' adequate level of
academic preparation and made their adjustment period in CSUS unproblematic.
According to all nine participants, the existence of articulation agreements between all
four Los Rios Colleges and CSUS also positively affected their transfer process due to
the fact that they could take certain classes for their majors in the community colleges
and then transfer them to CSUS. However, seven of nine participants stated that they did
not completely understand the process since they were having difficulties obtaining the
correct information from the community college and CSUS counselors.

Lastly, those few participants that managed to take advantage of the university
fairs, CSUS transfer orientation, CSUS Summer Bridge program, and Los Rios
Educational Opportunity Programs, stated that those services and events were very useful
and aided them in obtaining the necessary information and therefore, facilitated their
transfer from the Los Rios colleges to CSUS.

The fact that all the participants identify themselves as “White/Caucasian” or
“White/Other” shows that it is not possible for the Los Rios and CSUS transfer centers
and offices of institutional research to prepare accurate statistical reports for Russian-
speaking immigrant students and therefore, determine if they experience any difficulties
in their education pathways. At the present time, these students automatically fall under
the “White” ethnic category, which is considered the most successful in terms of transfer
and completing their education. It is evident that Russian-speaking immigrant students deserve special attention in order to support their efforts to transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions and receive their undergraduate degrees.
Chapter 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students’ experiences regarding the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to California State University, Sacramento, in order to identify any important issues affecting this process. There were three main research questions addressed in the study:

- What are Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students’ perceptions about the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?
- What are the economic, social, or academic factors that hinder or facilitate transfer of this group of students from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?
- What recommendations do Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students have regarding the transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS?

Due to the lack of research pertaining to the transfer process of Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students, the researcher presented the literature regarding the history of Russian-speaking immigration, the main characteristics of the former Soviet Union immigrants, their patterns of assimilation in the U.S., and the difficulties they
experience trying to adjust to the new ways of life in a foreign country. Furthermore, the literature review included the following key areas:

- Transfer experiences of first-generation immigrants in general and those of the traditionally underrepresented immigrant student groups such as the Hispanic-Latino group;
- A brief overview of the transfer issues of the general American student population;
- The role of state policies and transfer agreements in the transfer process for American students and first generation immigrants on the federal and state levels;
- A model program that has been developed and successfully applied in California higher education institutions in order to facilitate transfer process for first-generation immigrant groups such as the Hispanic-Latino population.

This study was designed using the qualitative method of inquiry. In order to address the research questions and gather all the necessary data, the researcher conducted personal interviews with nine Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students that transferred from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS. A qualitative design used in this study that included ten open-ended interview questions allowed the researcher an opportunity to obtain valuable in-depth information regarding participants’ perceptions of their transfer experience.
Conclusions

After analyzing the data, it became apparent that the participants of this study experienced a number of barriers in their transfer process from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS. Furthermore, there have been several factors discovered that facilitated their transfer and made their adjustment to the new environment of a four-year institution less problematic.

The research regarding Russian-speaking immigrants in general has been very limited and there is no contemporary academic literature that would examine these immigrants’ experiences in the transfer process from community colleges to four-year institutions. However, the studies that were conducted in regards to the transfer issues and barriers of first-generation immigrants and traditionally underrepresented students such as Hispanics/Latinos contained a significant amount of information that appeared is applicable to Russian-speaking students’ transfer experiences as well.

All participants represented fifth wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union region to the U.S. These immigrants are described in the literature as people with a high level of education and high aspirations for their children (Tsytsarev & Krichmar, 2000). However, a vast majority of them have very limited English proficiency, lack Western academic credentials, and do not have job skills that could be applied in the U.S. (Keenan, 2003, Hubenthal, 2004). Eight of nine interviewed students did not speak English upon their arrival, and none of the participants possessed any skills or knowledge
that could be used in the U.S.; therefore, in order to receive their bachelor’s degrees, all of the participants had to enter local community colleges first and then transfer to CSUS.

All participants experienced certain difficulties during their transfer from Los Rios to CSUS. As the literature demonstrates, all these barriers appear to be common for first-generation immigrants, including the Hispanic/Latino student population. Among these barriers are lack of knowledge of the U.S. higher education system, limited English proficiency, family and work responsibilities, inadequate and ineffective academic counseling, lack of knowledge and understanding of the financial aid system, and unawareness of the existing support services and programs available to them (Erisman & Looney, 2007; The High-Quality Learning, 2002; Alexander, et al., 2007; Salinas & Llanes, 2003).

The participants of this study faced several similar issues to those reported in the literature regarding transfer barriers of first-generation immigrants and Hispanic/Latino students. One of the most common was the lack of information regarding transfer requirements, the CSUS application process, financial aid systems, and transfer support services and programs. Another significant barrier, which all the participants encountered during their transfer was inadequate, ineffective, and often discouraging academic counseling. According to several participants, the most significant economic factor that hindered transfer was family and work responsibilities. Such responsibilities left very little time for education and postponed the transfer.
Other barriers encountered by the participants of this study were limited English proficiency (for immigrants that arrived at the age of 20 and older) and inconsistent international transcript evaluation, which could hinder transfer of the students who received undergraduate or graduate degrees in their home countries before immigrating to the U.S.

One of the most significant findings of this study was the fact that the Russian-speaking immigrant community in general does not see the immediate value of education beyond the community college experience. Many immigrants of this group do not understand how they can benefit from a postsecondary education, and they do not see how such an education can help their everyday lives and struggles. A majority of participants indicated that they were among very few Russia-speaking immigrants who transferred to a four-year institution in order to complete their undergraduate degree. All these students stressed the fact that they made the decision to transfer due to their families' influence and they would not have transferred had they not been encouraged by their family members who had prior college experiences. This issue has been reported in the literature regarding transfer barriers of other underrepresented minority groups including the Hispanic/Latino population.

The literature reports that academic preparation signifies the most important indicator of student success, and both high school and community college academic achievement is an important determinant of students’ ability to transfer and complete a baccalaureate degree (Handel, 2007; Rhine et al., 2000). Unlike many other first-
generation immigrants and traditionally underrepresented minority students, all participants of this study had a high enough level of academic preparation for transfer and did not consider it a barrier to successful transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions. In addition, none of the participants indicated the cost of education to be an obstacle to their transfer, since the majority of them qualified for tuition fee wavers and/or financial aid. Furthermore, according to all of the participants, articulation agreements between Los Rios and CSUS were very useful for their transfer. The only obstacle the participants faced in regards to articulation agreements was the fact that they had difficulty in obtaining correct and consistent information on the required courses.

Lastly, one of the main goals of this study was to demonstrate that the absence of a specific ethnic category in enrollment applications of Sacramento area colleges and universities for Russian-speaking immigrant students. This poses the significant barrier to gathering statistical data for this student population. Therefore, conducting any type of research regarding Russian-speaking immigrants’ experiences in American post-secondary education poses a critical challenge. While conducting this study, the researcher was unable to present the transfer rates for this group of students due to the fact that Russian-speaking immigrant students always choose the “White/Caucasian” or “White/Other” ethnic category during the application process. This automatically designates them as a part of the “White” student group, which has been the most successful in terms of their achievements in higher education. After conducting personal interviews with nine Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students and analyzing
the data, it became apparent that the participants encountered several barriers in their transfer from the Los Rios Community College District to CSUS, which demonstrates the need for a specific ethnic category for this group of students, in order to create statistical reports, and conduct further studies regarding this unique immigrant population.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the researcher presents the following recommendations:

1. **Add a specific ethnic category for Russian-speaking immigrant students on the Los Rios and CSUS applications.**

   At the present time, the CSUS application contains the following ethnic categories: White (European, Middle Easterner, North African, Other/White), Asian, Latino/Hispanic, Black or African/American, Filipino, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, Foreign Nationality, and Other (CSU Application, 2009). The Los Rios Colleges applications include the following ethnic categories to students: American Indian/Alaskan, Black/African American, Cambodian, Central American, Chinese, Filipino, Guamanian, Hawaiian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Samoan, South American, Vietnamese, White, Other Asian, Other Hispanic, Other Non-White, and Other Pacific Islander (Applicant Information, n.d.). It is apparent that CSUS and the Los Rios Community College District offer a wide range of ethnic categories for students to choose from. However, the Los
Rios application does not even include the White/Other category. Therefore, Russian-speaking immigrants are left with only one choice – White. In 2007, 90% of the students enrolled in the ESL classes in American River College were Russians and Ukrainians (J. Gamber, personal communication, April 25, 2008). It seems necessary to add a specific ethnic category for the immigrants from the former Soviet Union region since the Los Rios Colleges, particularly, American River College, enroll such a significant number of these immigrant students.

2. Improve CSUS outreach and recruitment programs as well as the advertisement of the existing support services.

CSUS offers many different types of support services and events for students intending to transfer. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement in terms of reaching students, particularly Russian-speaking immigrant students by providing them with all of the necessary information regarding transfer. CSUS counselors are responsible for classroom presentations upon request of the community college staff; however, many counselors rarely receive those requests and, therefore, do not get a chance to ensure students’ awareness of the transfer requirements and available services (C. Rubio, personal communication, June 27, 2008). Presentations to students about the transfer path must be timely and numerous to ensure that students retain the information. In addition, although the CSUS counselors advise the Los Rios students once a week, many participants of this study indicated that they either did not know about it or could not arrange a meeting with the counselors due to busy class and work schedule. The CSUS
outreach and recruitment teams should increase their efforts to make students aware of the opportunities available to help prepare themselves for transfers.

CSUS offers a transfer student orientation, but only one participant attended it, stressing the fact that it was the most helpful event in terms of receiving all the necessary information regarding transfer requirements. The CSUS outreach professionals need to aggressively advertise the need to attend such orientation and, possibly, make it mandatory.

In addition, CSUS offers the EOP and Summer Bridge programs, which are also very helpful to new students, especially to those of the traditionally underrepresented minority groups. Russian-speaking first-generation immigrants could take advantage of those programs if they received timely information about them. Therefore, such programs should be aggressively advertised.

As this study showed, Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students need guidance in understanding financial aid options and the role that grades have in maintaining receipt of aid. This is an area where university outreach staff can expand their roles in advising students at the community college about financial aid availability, emphasizing that pursuing a degree through transfer is a viable and affordable option for many. These findings of this study demonstrated that students are often discouraged when made aware of the cost of a university education. This contributes to the low transfer of Russian-speaking immigrant students from community colleges to four-year institutions.
3. Improve the Los Rios and CSUS counseling services and provide regular training and professional development workshops for Los Rios and CSUS counselors.

The quality of academic counseling must be improved and the counselors in Los Rios and CSUS need to provide students with consistent, timely, and correct information regarding transfer requirements and articulation agreements between community colleges and CSUS. The CSUS and Los Rios counseling services must strengthen their partnership, communicating closely with regard to articulation agreements between segments so that can student receive consistent information regarding course requirements for every particular major.

In addition, counselors from all segments must be deliberate in providing information not only about transfer requirements, but also about financial aid. They must make this a consistent part of their counsel to Russian-speaking immigrant students, along with academic advising and transfer planning.

4. Design a program that would assist the Russian-speaking immigrant group of students to complete community college courses and transfer to four-year institutions.

Considering the fact that Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students experience certain barriers in the transfer process, the Los Rios Colleges could address those issued by designing a program that would specifically target this group of immigrant students. The Puente Program could be used as a model program since it has proven its success over the years by increasing transfer rates of Hispanic/Latino students in 38 California colleges (Student Services, 2002; The Puente Program, 2001).
The Puente Program provides initial extensive training to community college faculty and counselors who have been selected to implement this program on campuses. These specially trained professionals provide students with accelerated writing course; counseling that provides students with sustained, extensive career and academic guidance throughout their enrollment at the community college; and mentoring by members of the professional community who are trained to share with students career advice regarding their personal experiences of incorporating culture and family with academic success (Community College, n.d.). The analogous program could be applied to the Russian-speaking first-generation students since they experience transfer barriers similar to those of the other immigrant and traditionally underrepresented groups of students such as Hispanics/Latinos.

5. **Employ Russian-speaking academic counselors at CSUS and the Los Rios Community College District.**

As all nine participants indicated, there is a need for a Russian-speaking, preferably, immigrant counselor who could begin working with Russian-speaking immigrant students while they are still attending ESL courses in order to start their preparation for transfer. The participants that arrived in the U.S. during later years stated that it was difficult for them to understand the American post-secondary education system, specifically its segments, admission, transfer, and graduation requirements. A Russian-speaking counselor would be helpful not only to older immigrants with low English skills but also to the younger students who, according to six participants of this
study, could better relate to the counselor with the same immigrant background. A Russian-speaking counselor could also advise immigrant students on financial aid system, which is generally very confusing for many newcomers from the former Soviet Union, where education and many other public services were free of charge.

Suggestions for Future Research

As mentioned several times throughout this study, the contemporary academic literature does not contain any research in regards to the Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students’ experiences in American post-secondary education and particularly, their transfer process from community colleges to four-year institutions. Due to the very specific needs of this unique population, there are many service and programs that need to be improved in order to affectively assist these students in their pursuit of higher education. Therefore, the researcher suggests the following recommendations for further research:

- Continue researching all aspects of Russian-speaking first-generation immigrant students’ transfer process from community colleges to four year-institutions.

- Conduct studies in regards to the factors affecting access to higher education for this group of students.

- Conduct studies regarding the factors that affect retention and graduation rates of these immigrant students.
- Conduct research in order to find out what programs are the most effective in helping students with the language barrier.

- Conduct research in order to determine the best ways to hire and train Russian-speaking counselors.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Interview Questionnaire

1. How long have you been in the United States?

2. What do you feel your English language proficiency level was when you arrived to the U.S.?

3. What type of English language training did you get after you arrived to the U.S.?

4. What was your level of education upon your arrival to the U.S.?
   - No schooling
   - Elementary
   - Middle school level
   - High school diploma
   - Non-University (technical, vocational, nursing)
   - BA an accredited Russian higher education institution
   - Masters or Doctorate degree

5. What community college did you attend and for how long?

6. What are your perceptions regarding the transfer process?

7. What are the economic factors that affected your transfer to CSUS?

8. What are the social factors that affected your transfer to CSUS?

9. What are the academic factors that affected your transfer to CSUS?

10. What recommendation(s) do you have regarding the transfer process from community colleges to 4-year institutions for Russian/Ukrainian immigrant students?
Dear Student,

I am requesting your assistance in a research project I am conducting as part of my Masters Thesis. I am an Educational Leadership and Policy Studies graduate student at Sacramento State. My study will investigate factors related to transfer process of first-generation Russian and Ukrainian immigrant students from community colleges within Northern California to Sacramento State University.

You will be asked to participate in the interview and answer questions regarding your experiences in transfer process from the community colleges you attended to Sacramento State. The interview may require up to an hour of your time.

If some of the items in the interview seem too personal to you and you are not comfortable answering them, you do not have to answer those questions.

To preserve the confidentiality of that information, you will be asked not to share information that would personally identify you, such as your full name, address, telephone number, etc. Your responses to the interview questions will be anonymous. Your first name will not be used in this research but you will be assigned a number, which will identify you throughout the study. The transcript of the interview will be stored in a secured location and destroyed as soon as the study is completed.

There will be no harm or risk to you in this study. You will not receive any compensation for participating in this research.

If you have any questions regarding this research, you may contact Nadejda (Nadya) A. Sporova at (517) 980-2778 or by e-mail at nsporova@csus.edu.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agreed to participate in the research.

______________________________  __________________________
Signature of Participant            Date
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