

EXPLORING REVERSE TRANSFER: A STUDY OF WHY
SOME STUDENTS TRANSFER TO A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Abstract

This study explores the reasons why a group of students reverse transfer from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college. This study utilizes one two-year community college as the sample institution to discover more about a sample of the reverse transfer student population. The overarching theoretical framework includes the push and pull factor influenced by student demographics, environmental experiences, student departure decisions, and desired student outcomes.

The study seeks to uncover characteristic patterns of why some students reverse transfer through four research questions:

1. What is the educational background of these students who reverse transferred?
2. What are the educational goals of these students who reverse transfer?
3. Why did these students reverse transfer from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college?
4. How do these students feel about their decision to reverse transfer?

The four research questions and the 15 student participants who participated in qualitative, semi-structured interviews at the sample institution illustrate that these reverse transfer students have varied educational backgrounds, educational goals, and reasons for the reverse transfer. Additionally, the study reveals that the reverse transfer pattern is complex and often overlaps with other transfer terms, specifically the transfer swirl. The study questions the usefulness of the term “reverse.” While the 15 students experienced pushes from the four-year institutions leading to their student departure, pulls from the two-year community college led to a

decisive student choice to reverse transfer. Ultimately, the decision to reverse transfer was a positive experience and viewed as a form of academic advancement. This interview study enhances future research by highlighting a sample of the reverse transfer student population and displaying why these students decided to reverse transfer. The new information and alignment with current research has implications for graduation rates and practices and policies at the institutional, state, and national levels.

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Dedication

This doctoral dissertation and degree are dedicated to my little girl, Sophia Rose Buchwitz.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The traditional educational pipeline channeling students directly from high school to baccalaureate attainment is a “mechanistic image” and is often a false reality (Townsend & Dever, 1999, p. 5). Transfer students in American colleges and universities constitute a continually present and growing student cohort. According to the National Center for Education Statistics’ May 2015 report, 17.5 million students enrolled at American colleges and universities in the fall of 2013. Approximately 35 percent (6,125,000) of undergraduate students transferred at some point during their academic careers to a different college or university (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2014a; NCES, 2014b; NCES, 2014c). In referencing the above 35 percent, approximately 20 percent of the 6,125,000 students followed a vertical transfer path from two-year community colleges to four-year colleges and universities, but approximately 15 percent engaged in what is called reverse transfer (Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin, Chen, Zerquera & Torres, 2012). Reverse transfer students started in a four-year college or university and then transferred to a two-year community college (Catanzaro, 1999; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Chen, Zerquera, Ziskin, & Torres, 2012; LeBard, 1999; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Winter & Harris, 1999).

In the last few decades, researchers have focused attention on college student mobility as it relates to degree completion. In addition to the traditional vertical transfer pattern, scholars have identified other types of student mobility. Terms such as transfer swirl, vertical transfer, horizontal transfer, parallel transfer, reverse transfer, dropping down, stopping out, double-reverse transfer, lateral transfer, double-dipping, upward transfer, dual enrollment, summer swirl, transfer out, and downward transfer refer to the multiple mobility patterns a student can take with regards to earning a postsecondary degree. Many of these students enroll at two or more

colleges and universities during their academic career (Catanzaro, 1999; McCormick, 2003; NCES, 2011; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). Most of the research on transfer students in the United States focuses on the traditional vertical transfer. A vertical transfer describes a student who after high school attends a two-year community college and then transfers to a four-year college or university with the educational goal of earning a bachelor's degree (Hagedorn, 2006; Ishitani, 2010; Nutting, 2011; Sylvia, Song & Waters, 2010; Wang, 2009).

The phenomenon of reverse transfer has not been studied as thoroughly. Reverse transfer refers to students who enroll at a two-year community college after previously studying at a four-year college or university (Catanzaro, 1999; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Chen et al., 2012; LeBard, 1999; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Winter & Harris, 1999). This mobility pattern is considered reverse because traditionally a transfer student participates in a vertical transfer progression moving from a two-year community college to a four-year college or university intending to acquire a baccalaureate degree (LeBard, 1999; Townsend & Dever, 1999). This interview study further questioned a group of reverse transfer students to better understand why they decided to reverse transfer.

Specifically, this study explored the various push and pull factors that explain why a group of students reverse transferred to one two-year community college. While defined in greater detail later in this chapter, in its simplest form, this theoretical framework acknowledges that push factors repel people while pull factors attract people (Tinto, 1982; Titus, 2006; Wright, 1973). Thus, as it applies to this study, students have pushes from the four-year college or university and pulls from the two-year community college. The study includes factors from the Input-Environment-Outcomes (I-E-O) theory when exploring why students reverse transfer (Astin, 1991). These factors, such as student demographics (I) and environmental experiences

(E), can be considered push factors when they cause students to leave a four-year college or university or pull factors when they cause students to reverse transfer into a two-year community college. This exploratory study sought to better understand how pushes and pulls affect a sample of 15 students who decided to reverse transfer to a specific two-year community college.

Purpose of the Study

The study explored student demographics, environmental experiences, and student goals, seeking to uncover patterns of why some students reverse transfer. Ultimately, the goal of the study was to provide direction as to how a two-year community college could support this population of students. Additionally, as will be reviewed in Chapter 2, reverse transfer research is limited; this study contributed to literature by exploring the experiences of a sample of reverse transfer students.

According to research, since the 1960s, the reverse transfer student population has hovered between 10 and 16 percent of the transfer student cohort (Kalogrides & Grodsky, 2011; Townsend & Dever, 1999). More recently, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center released a report titled *Reverse Transfer: A National View of Student Mobility from Four-Year to Two-Year Institutions* displaying the prevalence of reverse transfer nationwide, subsequent enrollment outcomes following reverse transfer, student pathways and completion, and six-year outcomes (Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Chen et al., 2012). The nationwide cohort is defined as 1,244,349 students whose first enrollment in the fall of 2005 was at a four-year institution. Of those students, 178,846 students (14.4 percent) reverse transferred over a span of six years, transferring from a four-year college or university to a two-year institution (Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Chen et al., 2012). The report, while extensive regarding mobility patterns and six-year

outcomes, excludes any discussion of the individual students' demographic backgrounds, reasons for the transfer based on their experiences and educational goals, and analyses of when during their academic career the transfer occurred.

In the state of Kansas, the site of this interview study, 19 two-year community colleges enrolled 214,631 students in the fall of 2012 (Kansas Higher Education Enrollment Report [KHEER], 2014). The Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) is the governing body of the state's six universities and the statewide coordinating board for the state's 32 public higher education institutions, which includes the 19 two-year community colleges. While no specific figures about the number of reverse transfer students at Kansas two-year community colleges exists, it is reasonable to assume that if approximately 15 percent of America's college students reverse transfer, approximately 32,194 students reverse transfer in Kansas annually.

The study was carried out at Johnson County Community College (JCCC), a two-year, public community college located in Overland Park, Kansas, and governed by KBOR. The study explored four research questions:

1. What is the educational background of these students who reverse transferred?
2. What are the educational goals of these students who reverse transfer?
3. Why did these students reverse transfer from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college?
4. How do these students feel about their decision to reverse transfer?

To understand reverse transfer behavior at one two-year community college, this study focused on 15 students who were currently enrolled at JCCC during the spring semester of 2015.

All of the interview participants attended a four-year college or university prior to enrolling at and attending JCCC.

The Context: Johnson County Community College

Located in Overland Park, Kansas, JCCC was established in 1969 in response to the rapidly growing Kansas City metropolitan area (JCCC, 2015). In the fall of 2014, JCCC enrolled 19,429 students and employed 917 faculty (318 full-time and 599 part-time) and 1,460 staff (608 full-time and 852 part-time). The campus sits on 245 acres and is comprised of 21 buildings. Undergraduate students can enroll in more than 130 degree and certificate options (JCCC, 2014a). JCCC is the largest two-year community college in the state of Kansas and has the third largest enrollment of postsecondary students in the state, lagging only behind the University of Kansas and Kansas State University in student headcount (JCCC, 2014b).

In the fall of 2013, 2,075 students comprised the transfer population at JCCC (P. Rossol-Allison, personal communication, January 16, 2014). According to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning and Research at JCCC, the 2,075 transfer students' previous institutions are distributed in the following ways: 1,636 students' previous institutions are unknown, 300 students are reverse transfers from a four-year public university, and 139 are lateral transfers from another two-year community college (P. Rossol-Allison, personal communication, January 16, 2014). JCCC does not know the 1,636 transfer students' previous institutions for several reasons: the timing of when JCCC's research office compiles and runs data, missing transcript information submitted by the student, a lack of understanding from students about how their transfer status is defined, and a lack of understanding from students regarding their educational goals while enrolled at JCCC.

Currently, according to Patrick Rossol-Allison, Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning and Research at JCCC, little is known about who represents this reverse transfer student population beyond official transcript records. Much of the institution's research has been focused solely on the vertical transfer student population, similar to what is found in research literature (P. Rossol-Allison, personal communication, January 16, 2014).

A research study exploring the school's reverse transfer population is a priority for two primary reasons. First, in 2009, President Barak Obama set a goal that the nation should have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by the year 2020. In 1990, the U.S. was ranked first in the world with the highest number of citizens who had earned a college degree. Today, the U.S. has fallen to twelfth in the world. In response to this goal, the U.S. Department of Education determined that the number of college graduates nationwide would need to increase by 50 percent. The increase of college graduates includes both two-year community college students earning associate degrees and four-year college and university students earning bachelor degrees. As of 2009 the state of Kansas reported 150,109 college graduates. By 2020, to achieve the President's goal, the state of Kansas should increase college graduates between the range of 220,000 to 226,000 (The White House, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). As the third largest institution in the state of Kansas, JCCC can make a significant impact in increasing the rate of completed college degrees, especially if it has a better understanding of its students' experiences and academic goals. Second, in response to President Obama's initiative, KBOR has directed the colleges in Kansas to increase higher education enrollment and degree attainment.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework, connecting research questions, contextual information, literature review, and methodology, served as a map to give coherence to the study's research questions. This interview study was exploratory in nature, using research and prior theories as a cumulative guide in order to better understand why some students reverse transfer from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college.

The theory of pushing and pulling, the push and pull factor, represents the overarching theoretical framework. In research, push and pull is often discussed in terms of and stems from migration (Altbach, 1991; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Tinto, 1982; Titus, 2006; Wright, 1973). Migration, whether international migration or migration from rural to urban communities, in its most simple form focuses on pushing people out and/or pulling people in (Passaris, 1989; Petersen, 1958; Tinto, 1982; Wright, 1973). Push factors repel people while pull factors attract people.

Wright (1973) studied Harvard University undergraduate students and the "push-pull process" to understand why students leave higher education (p. 240). Student integration with the institution is a central pull factor, while individuals with high stress feel pushed from higher education (Wright, 1973). In another study, Titus (2006) sought to understand student persistence at a four-year college. This study found that student characteristics, college experiences, institutional characteristics, and environmental pulls affected the decision to stay or leave. The environmental pulls were described as financial needs, work responsibilities, family responsibilities, and transfer opportunities (Titus, 2006).

Altbach also considered the push and pull concept within higher education by stating that push and pull factors are important “in determining flows of students” (1991, p. 309). This student flow is written in the context of international and study abroad students regarding their relationship with both their sending and host countries. Altbach considered the student’s decision-making process in determining to study abroad and leave the sending institution and country. Better opportunities, cost, family, and the value of the degree are listed as reasons students decide to study abroad (Altbach, 1991). These same reasons can be applied to a student’s decision to transfer.

The Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) theory (Astin, 1991) and the student departure theory (Tinto, 1993) allow for further exploration into the potential reasons for the student’s reverse transfer decision. The I-E-O theory discusses the relevance of student inputs, environmental experiences, and student outcomes. Inputs refer to student demographics and any previous experiences. Environment encompasses the institutional environment experienced by the student. Outcomes feature the knowledge, values, beliefs, and attitudes of a student after graduating from college (Astin, 1991). The student departure theory highlights the dimensions and consequences of a student leaving a college or university. Central to Tinto’s student departure theory is the concept of integration, interaction, and the stages of transition (Tinto, 1993).

As it relates to this study, a student’s personal demographics, personal motivations, personal goals, institutional fit, interaction with the environment, and institutional integration can play a role in pushing a student to transfer out of a four-year college or university and in pulling a student into a two-year community college. In the educational context, this model allows for the assessment of “interactive effects of external educational opportunities (pull) upon the

dropout/transfer decisions of persons currently experiencing higher education in specific institutional settings (push)” (Tinto, 1982, p. 691). Ultimately, in order for students to decide to reverse transfer, these students may be experiencing a push from a four-year college or university and a pull into a two-year community college. This study explored how these factors were related to the actual decisions of a group of 15 students who reverse transferred.

Much of the research does not view this two-sided, push and pull relationship as it affects a student’s mobility decisions. With the four research questions in mind, if students are pushed from a four-year college or university, why are students pulled into the two-year community college? What additional factors are at play with this decisive transfer movement? Thus, by looking at the reverse transfer process through an accumulation of several lenses, additional knowledge can be gained regarding this sample of reverse transfer students.

Significance of the Study

Public institutions of higher education in Kansas, as directed by President Obama and KBOR, seek to increase degree attainment and develop clear transfer and articulation agreements (The White House, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In September 2010, KBOR approved and implemented a 10-year strategic agenda for the public higher education system in the state of Kansas. This strategic agenda, titled *Foresight 2020*, sets long-term goals that Kansas public institutions are to meet by 2020.

The first of the three strategic goals is to “increase higher education attainment among Kansans” (KBOR, 2014a). Specifically, a goal is to “[i]ncrease, to 60 percent, the number of Kansas adults who have a certificate, credential, associate’s degree, or bachelor’s degree by 2020” and “[a]chieve a ten percentage point increase in retention and graduation rates” (KBOR,

2014a). One way JCCC plans to meet KBOR's graduation goals is through reverse transfer. By helping students reverse their transfer credits from a four-year college or university, degree attainment in the state will inevitably increase as additional students earn their associate degree or certificate.

As previously noted, much of the transfer student research exclusively studies vertical transfer students (Hagedorn, 2006; Ishitani, 2010; Nutting, 2011; Sylvia et al., 2010; Wang, 2009). While there have been studies regarding reverse transfer students in more recent years, much of that literature focuses on defining the student's mobility and dividing the population into categories based on the student's educational background (Catanzaro, 1999; Kajstura & Keim, 1992; LeBard, 1999; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Townsend, 2001; Winter & Harris, 1999). This interview study approach contributes to research by further understanding a sample of the reverse transfer student population in terms of exploring why the reverse transfer occurs, and by considering student demographics, environmental experiences, and desired student outcomes.

Conclusion

This study examined 15 students who reverse transferred. Chapter 2 expands upon the literature review, the historical context of two-year community colleges, types of transfer, vertical transfer, reverse transfer, and the selected theoretical frameworks. The qualitative methodology guiding the source of data collection is detailed in Chapter 3. Study findings in response to the four predetermined research questions are highlighted in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 brings this study to a close, summarizing the study, discussing the findings, noting the study limitations, and introducing recommendations for practice and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review begins with the historical context of two-year community colleges. Next, this study defines three types of transfer—vertical transfer, transfer swirl, and reverse transfer. To inform the limited research on reverse transfer, this study highlights the extensive research conducted on vertical transfer. Lastly, the literature review describes the theoretical frameworks that guide the selected methodology and explores the four research questions.

Historical Context

While four-year colleges and universities have existed for centuries, two-year community colleges are comparatively new in the higher education system. In 1901, a four-year university administrator and a high school administrator determined a need for providing a transitional school for students between high school and baccalaureate-granting institutions. This transitional school would act as the first two years of a bachelor's degree. The school was soon labeled a “junior” college, which over time evolved into today's two-year community college (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Joliet Junior College in Joliet, Illinois, is considered America's first community college (Joliet Junior College, 2015). Today, there are 1,123 two-year community colleges in the United States whose enrollment in for-credit programs totals 7.4 million students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015).

Junior college was the original term used due to the fact that the two-year school was considered the “lower-division branches” of four-year colleges and universities (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 4). The term community college became common in the 1950s when the two-year school received more public support. “[P]eople's college, democracy's college, contradictory college, opportunity college, and anti-university” are labels and nicknames for

two-year community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 4). Since the foundation of two-year community colleges, the mission has evolved including serving as transitional schools, degree-granting institutions, and schools geared at educating the community (Nutting, 2011; Sylvia et al., 2010; Townsend, 2001; Zamani, 2001).

A relationship between two-year community colleges and four-year colleges and universities has existed since the establishment of junior colleges. The formalized relationship became evident in the 1930s when state legislation began to reference academic transfer. Along with academic transfer came articulation agreements—the transfer of earned academic credits between institutions (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Academic transfer fulfilled several institutional purposes: “a popularizing role, a democratizing pursuit, and a function of conducting lower-division courses for the universities” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 21). The “popularizing role” served as advertisement for higher education. “Democratizing” occurred when a student’s first access point into higher education, following secondary education, began at the two-year community college. When two-year community colleges offered lower-division courses, this afforded four-year colleges and universities the opportunity to have selective admission. Originally, the two-year community college was viewed as a feeder institution, which lent itself to vertical transfer. Today, the interplay between two-year community colleges and four-year colleges and universities is more varied.

Types of Transfer

At one time, students who transferred to earn a higher education degree may have been considered “nontraditional students.” Now, these multifaceted trajectory patterns indicate an “American undergraduate” (Goldrick-Rab, 2006, p. 61). In order to earn a college degree, students commonly approach postsecondary education in a way that fits their specific needs

(Adelman, 2006; Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Kim et al., 2012; Renn & Reason, 2013). The title of a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* summarizes today's student mobility: "Despite Hurdles, Students Keep Switching Colleges" (Mangan, 2015, July 7).

There are multiple terms to describe transfer patterns: transfer swirl, vertical transfer, horizontal transfer, parallel transfer, reverse transfer, dropping down, stopping out, double-reverse transfer, lateral transfer, double-dipping, upward transfer, summer swirl, transfer out, and downward transfer (Adelman, 2006; Bahr, 2009; Bahr, 2012; Catanzaro, 1999; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Duggan & Pickering, 2008; Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Flaga, 2006; Hagedorn, 2006; Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Chen et al., 2012; Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin et al., 2012; Ishitani, 2010; Jacobs, 2003; Kajstura & Keim, 1992; Kalogrides & Grodsky, 2011; Kim et al., 2012; Laanan, 2004; Laanan, Starobin & Eggleston, 2011; Lang, 2009; LeBard, 1999; Nutting, 2011; Sylvia et al., 2010; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Townsend, 2001; Wang, 2009; Winter & Harris, 1999). With approximately 35 percent of postsecondary education students transferring, American college campuses evince all forms of mobility patterns (Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin, et al., 2012). Additionally, while the terms appear singular, the definitions may overlap depending on the individual student's transfer pattern.

A vertical transfer or upward transfer recognizes students who transfer from a two-year community college to a four-year college or university. This path from high school, to a two-year community college, to a four-year college or university also can be referred to as traditional or unidirectional (Bahr, 2012). The vertical transfer pattern is the most common (57 percent of all transfer students), according to national statistics, and the most researched transfer pattern (Bahr, 2009; Bahr, 2012; Duggan & Pickering, 2008; Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Flaga, 2006;

Hagedorn, 2006; Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin et al., 2012; Ishitani, 2010; Jacobs, 2003; Kalogrides & Grodsky, 2011; Kozeracki, 2009; Laanan, 2004; Laanan et al., 2011; Lang, 2009; Nutting, 2011; Surette, 2000; Sylvia et al., 2010; Townsend, 2001; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006a; Townsend & Wilson, 2006b; Wang, 2009). Horizontal transfer, parallel transfer, and lateral transfer all refer to the movement from one four-year college or university to another four-year college or university or from one two-year community college to another two-year community college (Adelman, 2006; Bahr, 2009; Kearney et al., 1995).

Transfer swirl refers to students who participate in multiple mobility patterns between institutions, regardless of the school's classification. There is no distinct pattern when considering transfer swirl (Bahr, 2012; Borden, 2004; McCormick, 2003; Rab, 2004; Renn & Reason, 2013). Several terms identify students who transfer from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college: reverse transfer, dropping down, double-reverse transfer, and downward transfer (Catanzaro, 1999; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Chen et al., 2012; Kajstura & Keim, 1992; Kim et al., 2012; Renn & Reason, 2013; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Winter & Harris, 1999). This interview study focuses on reverse transfer students and are expanded upon later in this chapter.

Additionally, the scope and pattern of student departure can be considered when describing transfer trends (Tinto, 1993). Tinto highlights these trends: institutional departure, system departure, immediate transfer, delayed transfer, stop outs, and institutional stop outs. These terms show the "scope and variability among different segments" of the higher education student population (Tinto, 1993, p. 8). Tinto asks the following: Is the transfer student departing from a single institution or from higher education as a whole? Is the student immediately transferring from one college to another, or is the student delaying the transfer enrollment after

departing from one institution? Tinto highlights the importance of these questions when defining and further understanding transfer students in his book *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* (1993).

A new report by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2015), titled *Transfer and Mobility: A National View of Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2008 Cohort*, displays students' enrollment patterns between two-year community colleges and four-year colleges and universities, public and private institutions, and the transfers and mobility patterns across state lines from 2008 to 2014 (Shapiro, Dundar, Wakhungu, Yuan & Harrell, 2015). The report states that “diverse pathways” students take in their postsecondary education pursuit are “well acknowledged” in research (Shapiro et al., 2015, p. 5).

Shapiro et al. (2015) report the following findings with regards to today's mobile student population. In the fall of 2008, 3.6 million students entered higher education for the first time. Between 2008 and 2014, 37.2 percent of these students transferred to a different institution; 2.4 million transfer movements occurred during this time span (Shapiro et al., 2015). Student mobility often includes movement between states. It is not uncommon for students to cross state lines when transferring institutions, regardless of institutional classification. In addition to transferring between institutions, students also display changes in their enrollment statuses. Most transfer students, 53.7 percent, have a mix of full- and part-time enrollment patterns. Part-time students have the lowest transfer rate. For students who begin their higher education pursuit at four-year colleges and universities, reverse transfer is the most common movement as compared to the option of laterally transferring to another four-year college or university. Fifty-one percent of students transferring from a four-year college or university reverse transferred to a two-year community college. Summer swirlers are becoming more common; these students

enroll at four-year colleges or universities during the fall and spring semester and then enroll in two-year community colleges during the summer semester. This particular transfer pattern has a higher bachelor's degree completion rate (77.5 percent) than other types of transfer patterns (Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Chen et al., 2012; Shapiro et al., 2015).

The majority of research in higher education focuses on one possible pipeline in terms of mobility options—the vertical transfer. Thus, this study first reviews the literature on vertical transfer to inform the limited reverse transfer research. Transfer swirl is defined next to fully understand a transfer pattern that may encompass a reverse transfer student.

Vertical Transfer

Research featuring vertical transfer is extensive. To reiterate, a vertical transfer occurs when a student transfers from a two-year community college to a four-year college or university (Duggan & Pickering, 2008; Hagedorn, 2006; Ishitani, 2010; Laanan et al., 2011; Nutting, 2011; Sylvia et al., 2010; Townsend, 2008; Wang, 2009).

Dating back to 1901, transfer education was the central mission for two-year community colleges (Townsend, 2001). Transfer was originally defined as two-year community colleges aiding in a student's transition to the four-year college or university. A vertical transfer can encompass six patterns: (1) transferring to a four-year college or university without an associate degree, (2) transferring with a degree or non-liberal arts courses that do not transfer, (3) transferring with dual credit courses awarded by two-year community colleges to high school students, (4) transferring two-year community college courses earned during the summer semester, (5) transferring two-year community college courses taken concurrently with four-year college or university courses, (6) transferring in a swirling pattern (Townsend, 2001).

Between 1901 and the 1920s, due to the simplicity of college transfer, two-year community college transfer students performed as well as native four-year college and university students (Kintzer, 1996; Nutting, 2011; Rifkin, 1996; Sylvia et al., 2010). In the 1930s, the transfer process evolved and arguably became more complicated due to bureaucratic hurdles (Ishitani, 2010; Kozeracki, 2002; Laanan et al., 2011; Nutting, 2011; Surette, 2000; Sylvia et al., 2010; Wang, 2009). Several of these bureaucratic hurdles, with regards to transfer student issues, include the following: attempts to transfer too many credits, lack of articulation agreements, lack of sufficient preparation from the two-year community college faculty and staff, the need to establish a universal measure of successful transfer programs, technological challenges, and unspecified educational outcomes (Kozeracki, 2002; Sylvia et al., 2010; Wang, 2009).

Researchers report challenges, opportunities, and conflicting persistence and graduation rates of vertical transfer students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin, Chiang, Chen, Harrell, & Torres, 2013; Townsend, 2001; Wang, 2009). Townsend asks, “[D]oes attending the community college make attaining the baccalaureate quicker, less expensive, and academically easier?” (2001, p. 35). In response to time-to-degree, Townsend discusses the variety of factors that affect the attainment of a bachelor’s degree for a vertical transfer student. First, if the student took dual-credit courses in high school, then the credits earned through the two-year community college could shorten the time that it takes to complete a bachelor’s degree. Second, time-to-degree is dependent on whether or not the student had defined academic goals upon entering the two-year community college. Did the student plan to vertically transfer? Students’ goals to transfer credits earned at the two-year community college is supported by articulation agreements. If the student planned to vertically transfer, then based on her research,

Townsend claims it is possible for the transfer student to complete at the same rate as a student who initially matriculated at the four-year college or university (Townsend, 2001).

Townsend claims that some two-year community colleges adequately prepare vertical transfer students while other two-year community colleges may not (Townsend, 2001).

Pascarella and Terenzini conclude that “students seeking a bachelor’s degree who begin their college careers in a two-year public institution continue to be at a disadvantage in reaching their education goals compared with similar students entering a four-year college or university” (2005, p. 381). These two studies demonstrate the conflicting research regarding two-year community colleges preparation of vertical transfer students for four-year college or university education.

Wang (2009) studied factors that predict baccalaureate attainment of vertical transfer students. The study sample consisted of 786 students who enrolled in two-year community colleges during 1992 and 1993 and eventually transferred to a four-year college or university. With regards to persistence at the four-year college or university, Wang found that the two-year community college GPA is strongly associated with continuous enrollment at the four-year college or university (Wang, 2009). Baccalaureate attainment is dependent on student demographics, high school experiences, and college experiences (Wang, 2009). Female students, students with high socioeconomic status, high quality academic curriculum in high school, college involvement, and student goals to earn a bachelor’s degree are associated with the higher likelihood of earning a bachelor’s degree (Wang, 2009).

A report by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, titled *Baccalaureate Attainment: A National View of the Postsecondary Outcomes of Students Who Transfer from Two-Year and Four-Year Institutions*, examines bachelor’s degree completion within six years

after vertical transfer (Shapiro et al., 2013). Shapiro et al. (2013) report that 62 percent of students who vertically transferred from a two-year community college to a four-year college or university earned a bachelor's degree within six years after the transfer. Another eight percent of the vertical transfer students, totaling 70 percent, were making progress toward baccalaureate attainment (Shapiro et al., 2013). The above studies show varying factors that impact vertical transfer students' success at four-year colleges and universities. The varying factors include two-year community college academic preparation, two-year community college GPA, student demographics, high school experiences, two-year community college experiences, and academic goals as defined by the student. Researchers define success primarily as baccalaureate attainment, especially time-to-degree once the vertical transfer student enrolls at the four-year college or university.

Researchers report best practices to improve the transfer process for vertical transfer students. Best practices include the following: offer more information regarding the transfer process, clarify four-year college or university requirements, increase the difficulty of work at the two-year community college—more research papers and more essay examinations, offer greater involvement from the faculty, implement articulation agreements, move beyond the concept of transfer shock, uncover factors affecting the transfer decision, consider factors that influence academic and social adjustments, and assure that counselors at the two-year community college are aware of the information and services needed by prospective transfer students (Bahr, 2012; Kozeracki, 2002; Laanan et al., 2011, p. 191; Nutting, 2011; Sylvia et al., 2010; Zamani, 2001). The vertical transfer best practices can inform potential reverse transfer best practices.

Today vertical transfers have become so common that this transfer is considered a “simple transfer pattern” (Clemetsen, Furbeck, & Moore, 2015, p. 130). However, the common occurrence of the vertical transfer pattern does not exclude difficulty experienced by students. A form of vertical transfer difficulty is called transfer shock (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Hills, 1965; Keeley & House, 1993). In research, transfer shock focuses on vertical transfer students. However, the overall concept of transfer shock can inform issues and challenges that may be experienced by reverse transfer students.

Transfer shock. In 1965, Hills coined the phrase “transfer shock,” primarily defined as a predictable drop in grade point average, typically 0.30 to 0.50 points, experienced by two-year community college transfer students during the first semester at their four-year college or university (Hills, 1965). Initially transfer shock referred to students’ academics. Students’ two-year community college grade point average would be compared to their four-year college or university grade point average to determine the degree to which transfer shock occurred (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Hills, 1965; Keeley & House, 1993). Over the years, researchers have realized that a student’s GPA is not the only important variable; the transition is much more than academic measurements. Now, transfer shock describes an overall lack of success that transfer students encounter in their initial experiences after transferring, enrolling, and attending the four-year college or university (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Cejda et al., 1998a; Cejda et al., 1998b; Johnson, 2005; Lannan, 2007; Townsend, 2001; White, 2007). There is a “complex adjustment process” that comes with a transfer from a two-year community college to a four-year college or university (Laanan, 2007, p. 37).

For the purpose of investigating transfer shock, researchers have looked to compare transfer students to native students. Native students are defined as individuals who began their

postsecondary education career as freshmen at four-year colleges or universities and hope to graduate from the same four-year college or university (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Johnson, 2005; Townsend, 2001; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; White, 2007). Native students act as the comparison group to transfer students in determining the presence and level of transfer shock experienced. Academic measurements and performance are the most commonly used factors in comparing the two groups (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Johnson, 2005; Townsend, 2001; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; White, 2007).

When looking at transfer students and the occurrence of transfer shock, pre-college predictors are a point of investigation. Researchers include a wide range of variables among these predictors: gender, age, earning of an associate degree, race, residence status, class level, high school GPA, ACT/SAT score, and location of two-year community college attended (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Cameron, 2005; Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Keeley & House, 1993; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003; White, 2007). The impact of pre-college predictors on transfer shock are discussed next. Though this research focuses on vertical transfer students, the findings can inform research regarding reverse transfer students and the possibility of transfer shock. Additionally, the pre-college predictors presented in vertical transfer research can be applied to the I (input) in the I-E-O theory—a theoretical framework for this study (Astin, 1991). Gender, age, and educational background are examples of inputs and pre-college predictors that can inform transfer student research—vertical and reverse.

Researchers from five different studies discover three contradictory outcomes regarding the effect of gender on transfer shock. First, Cameron (2005) finds that women experience transfer shock to a greater degree. Second, Keeley and House (1993) and Wawrzynski and Sedlacek's (2003) determine that women experience transfer shock to a lesser degree. Third,

Carlan and Byxbe (2000) and White (2007) state that there was no difference in performance, social or academic, between men and women; gender had no impact on transfer shock.

Next, age (another input example) seems to be the greatest determining factor on transfer shock according to Keeley and House (1993). Age is divided into three categories for evaluation: students 25 years and older, students aged 21-24, and students under the age of 21. Students 25 and older experience the least amount of transfer shock. Transfers under the age of 21 experience transfer shock but recover faster than students aged 21-24. Students under age 21 may recover faster because they “are moving through their academic careers ‘on time’” as opposed to students aged 21-24 who are generally two to three years behind in their academic careers (Keeley & House, 1993, p. 7). However, as with gender, Carlan and Byxbe (2000) and White (2007) state that there is no difference in performance, social or academic, based upon a student’s age.

The final pre-college predictor and input example in determining the presence of transfer shock is whether or not the transfer student earned an associate degree at the prior two-year community college. Keeley and House (1993) conclude that transferring after earning an associate degree positively affects the student’s academic performance. When students earn an associate degree, their GPAs do not drop as much in their first semester as students who had not earned an associate degree (Keeley & House, 1993). However, Carlan and Byxbe (2000) and White (2007) do not report a substantial difference between these students. There is a slight decrease in GPA by transfer students who earn an associate degree, but no significant academic performance is influenced when other variables are held constant (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000). Based on these sets of results, pre-college predictors do not appear to be the most useful variables when determining the possible occurrence of transfer shock.

Students who vertically transfer from two-year community colleges to four-year colleges and universities experience transfer shock (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Cejda et al., 1998a; Cejda et al., 1998b; Davies & Casey, 1999; Handel, 2007; Hills, 1965; Keeley & House, 1993; Laanan, 2007; Townsend, 2001; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; White, 2007). However, researchers also show that students who have a positive attitude and make an effort to engage in the transitional process experience less transfer shock than those with negative perceptions (Davies & Casey, 1999). The quality of effort that students put into the transfer process can have an effect on student outcomes. Furthermore, academic counselors, workshops, faculty-student interaction, individual learning and experiences, and student effort can all reduce transfer shock (Handel, 2007; Laanan, 2007). Students who delve into their new institution can positively move beyond the complex adjustment process (Laanan, 2007). Though this research is geared at vertical transfer students, the above strategies can inform how to understand and support reverse transfer students.

Transfer student support. In more recent years, the higher education system has initiated efforts in terms of supporting vertical transfer. Much of the support comes in the form of state policies and institutional agents including structures, staff, programs, and practices (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). These policies include the following: common course numbering, guaranteed transfer of an associate degree, articulation agreements, and 2+2 programs (Anderson, 2015; Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Articulation refers to the movement of students' academic credits. 2+2 programs guarantee the admission of a vertical transfer student, who has earned an associate degree, to a four-year college or university. The goal of these policies is assuring that courses taken at the two-year community college are accepted at the four-year college or university and can be applied to a bachelor's degree. This type of state and

institutional support may be offered to reverse transfer students, though is not explicitly discussed in research.

Articulation agreements, institutional collaborations, institutional alliances, and institutional strategic partnerships are all facets that aid in facilitating seamless articulation (Arnold, 2001; Kintzer, 1996; Rifkin, 1996). Articulation agreements evince legally binding agreements, state system transfer policies, and voluntary arrangements between two-year community colleges and four-year colleges and universities (Zamani, 2001). Institutional collaborations entail a mutual commitment to accountability, the sharing of institutional resources, alliance, and strategic partnership (Bragg & Russman, 2007; Hoffman-Johnson, 2007).

Similar to the transfer shock research, transfer student support research too focuses on vertical transfer students. While this research is not specifically describing reverse transfer students, a vertical transfer involves the same institutions as a reverse transfer—two-year community colleges and four-year colleges and universities. Transfer articulation agreements can apply in the reverse pattern. Next, transfer swirl is defined to understand a transfer pattern that encompasses vertical and reverse transfer students.

Transfer Swirl

Transfer swirl can be viewed as the interplay between vertical transfer and reverse transfer. In 1990, the term swirling was coined to characterize a student's back-and-forth journey in his or her postsecondary attendance patterns (de los Santos & Wright, 1990). Transfer swirl highlights students who weave through multiple higher education institutions and create a swirling journey by interacting with three or more colleges (Bahr, 2012; Borden, 2004;

McCormick, 2003; Rab, 2004; Renn & Reason, 2013). The transfer swirl definition encompasses three or more colleges, as compared to a two-college transfer captured by a vertical transfer, horizontal transfer, or reverse transfer.

Thus, a transfer swirling student likely attends a minimum of three institutions of higher education prior to completing a baccalaureate degree or moves between institutions two or more times (Brown, 2011; de los Santos & Wright, 1990; Renn & Reason, 2013). Swirling embodies the visual image of a student moving between many institutions, regardless of the institutional classification. Borden (2004) notes that a transfer swirl does not only begin at a two-year community college; swirling students can begin their higher education at a four-year college or university (Kearney, Townsend, & Kearney, 1995; McCormick, 1997; McCormick, 2003; Renn & Reason, 2013).

Kearney et al. (1995) suggest four types of swirling: (1) from a two-year community college to a four-year college or university and then to another four-year institution, (2) from a two-year community college to another two-year community college and then on to a four-year institution, (3) from a four-year institution to a four-year institution and on to yet another four-year institution, (4) from a four-year institution to a two-year community college and then to another two-year community college.

McCormick (2003) describes that almost 50 percent of new college students in 1989-1990 who started at a four-year institution enrolled at two or more colleges within five years. Of those 50 percent, 15 percent enrolled in at least three institutions. Thus, McCormick asks, “Why do students attend multiple institutions?” To respond and differentiate the types of student swirl, McCormick (2003) hypothesizes eight different attendance patterns a student can experience

among multiple institutions. The eight hypothesized attendance patterns include the following: trial enrollment, special program enrollment, supplemental enrollment, rebounding enrollment, concurrent enrollment, consolidated enrollment, serial transfer, and independent enrollment (McCormick, 2003).

Trial enrollment highlights students who enroll in a few courses to try an institution (McCormick, 2003). Special program enrollment offers students the opportunity to enroll in unique courses at a college they are not currently attending. Summer enrollment at another institution is considered supplemental enrollment; the student is supplementing his or her course load. Enrolling at one college in the fall semester and another college in the spring semester is coined rebounding enrollment. Concurrent enrollment at two different institutions is also called double-dipping. Enrolling in a collection of classes at a variety of colleges and universities, with the intention of creating a degree, is consolidated enrollment. A serial transfer highlights a student who participates in one or more transfers in pursuit of his or her higher education attainment. Last, independent enrollment refers to students who take courses unrelated to their degree program at another college (Borden, 2004; McCormick, 2003; Renn & Reason, 2013).

This multi-institution enrollment has a variety of higher education and federal and state policy implications. Institutional finances, student assessment, collaborative academic advising, student financial aid, departmental curriculum planning, institutional curriculum planning, institutional accountability, shared admission counseling, transfer agreements, articulation agreements, credit transfer policies, retention, and graduation are all facets affected by students who transfer swirl (McCormick, 2003; Renn & Reason, 2013). A swirling student does not solely affect the individual student and his or her pursuit of a higher education experience and

degree. Every institution that enrolls a swirling student can be impacted and can impact that student.

Student attendance patterns are increasingly complex. Transfer swirl is important to include in this study's literature review; while the study is focused on the reverse transfer student population, ultimately it is possible that a student participant could have a more varied educational background. Additionally, a transfer swirl can encompass a reverse transfer.

Research question two seeks to answer the following: What is the educational background of these students who reverse transfer? Acknowledging this form of transfer will shed light on interview discussions and assist in understanding and defining the full educational journey.

Reverse Transfer

Reverse transfer literature is much more limited in scale and scope. While there have been studies in recent years regarding reverse transfer students, as discussed in Chapter 1, much of that literature focuses on defining the student's mobility pattern and dividing the population into categories based on educational intentions (Catanzaro, 1999; Kajstura & Keim, 1992; LeBard, 1999; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Townsend, 2001; Winter & Harris, 1999). However, in contrast to research on vertical transfers, research on reverse transfer students is limited regarding factors such as support, persistence, completion, the transfer process, and transfer shock.

Traditionally a student participates in a vertical transfer progression transferring from a two-year community college to a four-year college or university hoping to acquire a baccalaureate degree. Reverse transfer is coined reverse because its direction and goals are

considered the opposite of vertical transfer movement (LeBard, 1999; Renn & Reason, 2013; Townsend & Dever, 1999).

In the 1970s, there was “no single factor” that led to a student reverse transferring (Kajstura & Keim, 1992). Kajstura and Keim (1992) summarize past research that highlights the major reasons for reverse transfer: financial cost, lack of individualized attention, academic difficulty, proximity to home, lack of definite academic goals, educational costs, personal reasons, change in academic goals, academic problems, career change, inability to decide on academic and career goals, inconvenient class times, challenging instructors, lack of job training opportunities, academic inabilities, and advice from family and friends. These highlights, as they relate to this study, are examples of a student’s potential pushes or pulls.

Goldrick-Rab (2006) state that 15.5 percent of students who begin their higher education at a four-year college or university reverse transferred to a two-year community college. Adelman (2006), however, finds that 10 percent of the study’s sample students participated in a reverse transfer. More recently, in the United States as many as 14.4 percent of postsecondary education students participate in the reverse transfer process having previously attended a four-year institution and then attending a two-year institution (Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Chen et al., 2012). Thus, for the past 10 years, the reverse transfer population has averaged 10 to 15 percent.

The reverse transfer population raises concerns for several reasons. First, many of the students who reverse transfer struggled academically at their previous four-year college or university (Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Renn & Reason, 2013). Second, regarding student outcomes, 41 percent of students who reverse transferred eventually returned to a four-year college or university. Yet, of that 41 percent, only 22 percent earned a baccalaureate degree within eight

years (Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Renn & Reason, 2013). When compared to the previously stated statistic that 62 percent of vertical transfer students graduate with a bachelor's degree within six years after the transfer, the conclusion can be made that vertical transfer students yield higher rates of baccalaureate attainment than reverse transfer students (Shapiro et al., 2013). Third, of those who do complete a baccalaureate degree, the journey takes longer than eight years (Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Renn & Reason, 2013). Thus, the concerns addressed by researchers regarding the negative consequences of a reverse transfer on academic achievement and completion are substantiated. Additionally, a common trend found among the reverse transfer population relates to the students' backgrounds. Reverse transfer students tend to have less-educated parents and come from lower socioeconomic status than vertical transfer students or students who do not participate in a transfer movement (Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Renn & Reason, 2013).

Due to their unique characteristics and reasons for engaging in a reverse transfer, reverse transfer students are often divided into categories within literature, nationwide surveys, institutional data, and focus groups (Anderson, 2015; Catanzaro, 1999; Kajstura & Keim, 1992; LeBard, 1999; Shapiro, et al., 2015; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Townsend, 2001; Winter & Harris, 1999). The reverse transfer categories are based on their reasons for reverse transferring from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college. Reverse transfer students can be categorized into one of four subgroups: (1) undergraduate reverse transfers, (2) temporary reverse transfers, (3) post-baccalaureate reverse transfers, and (4) reverse transfer credits (Anderson, 2015; Catanzaro, 1999; Kajstura & Keim, 1992; LeBard, 1999; Shapiro, et al., 2015; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Townsend, 2001; Winter & Harris, 1999).

Undergraduate reverse transfers include students who begin their postsecondary education at a four-year institution and then transfer to a two-year community college (Townsend & Dever, 1999). These students often are referred to as noncompleters due to their lack of completing a bachelor's degree before enrolling at a community college (Catanzaro, 1999; Kajstura & Keim, 1992; Winter & Harris, 1999). However, this student group can be categorized beyond mere incompleteness; undergraduate reverse transfer students can have a variety of educational goals and reasons for the reverse transfer movement: to fulfill a special need, to attain a two-year associate's degree, to earn a technical degree or certificate (Catanzaro, 1999; Winter & Harris, 1999). Associate degrees or certificates in nursing, engineering technology, graphic arts, dental hygiene, automotive technology, cosmetology, fashion merchandising, construction management, hotel and lodging management, and more may be earned in two or fewer years and afford students well-paying jobs sooner than if they were to stay enrolled at a four-year college or university. Higher wages and job security can be reasons for an undergraduate reverse transfer.

Temporary reverse transfers attend the two-year college for a short amount of time, typically during the summer semester (Catanzaro, 1999; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Townsend, 2001). These students, who represent the largest group of reverse transfers, typically intend to return earned credits to their four-year university. Transient student is another term found in literature to describe this student cohort. Comparative cost, proximity, accessibility, easier coursework, and convenience can be reasons for this temporary reverse transfer movement (Catanzaro, 1999; Townsend, 2001). Additionally, typical temporary reverse transfer students are often traditional-aged students.

Post-baccalaureate reverse transfers are students who already have at least a bachelor's degree before enrolling at a two-year college (Catanzaro, 1999; Kajstura & Keim, 1992; LeBard, 1999; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Townsend, 2001; Winter & Harris, 1999). These students are often seeking personal enrichment or have a specific personal objective (Townsend & Dever, 1999). This enrollment pattern typically happens a year or more after having earned the bachelor's degree. Community colleges implement new course development, specific marketing, nontraditional course sites, convenient times, condensed required credits, and internet and video delivery to appeal to the post-baccalaureate reverse transfer students (Catanzaro, 1999).

Today, a fourth category of reverse transfer students is emerging. This category, only recently cited in research, originated in news stories and by the current actions of higher education administrators. According to Dr. Andy Tompkins, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Kansas Board of Regents, KBOR is beginning to incorporate a new definition of reverse transfer: students who begin at a two-year community college and transfer vertically to a four-year college or university, but then acquire a two-year degree or certificate based on combined credit hours from both the two- and the four-year institutions (A. Tompkins, personal communication, February 14, 2014). This emerging reverse transfer category, reverse transfer credits, can now be found in the literature (Anderson, 2015; Shapiro, et al., 2015). The definition of reverse transfer now also includes "the process by which students combine credits from both two-year and four-year institutions toward an associate's degree from the two-year institution" (Shapiro, et al., 2015, p. 5).

This definition demonstrates that all reverse transfer students may not physically return to the two-year community college. Instead, this category highlights policy agreements that award

students degrees or certificates for work completed at a two-year community college while still enrolled at the four-year college or university—reverse transfer credits rather than reverse transfer movement. On January 17, 2014, the University of Kansas (KU), a four-year public university, and Metropolitan Community College (MCC), a two-year community college in Missouri, signed a reverse transfer agreement: “This agreement allows students who transfer from MCC to KU the opportunity to transfer credits back to MCC in order to satisfy degree requirements for an associate’s degree” (Schmiedeler, 2014). While this definition does not align with the definition found in literature, KBOR’s and MCC’s definition offers an expanded approach to the transfer student population in terms of the students’ educational goals in order to also meet institutional and state outcome measures. The present study does not include students who engage in this form of reverse transfer. Rather, this definition further informs the broad research on reverse transfer.

In the past 20 years, over 31 million students have left higher education with some college credits yet no degree (Anderson, 2015). The concept of reverse transfer credits supports awarding credits to students who earned the college credits, yet without the transfer of credits, the college credits would be lost—credit when credit is due. This can aid in degree completion and avoid students losing credits in their decision to move between or out of institutions. States and organizations are utilizing policy to support increasing educational attainment of postsecondary education students. Today, seven states have created legislation featuring this form of reverse transfer: Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Oregon, and Texas (Anderson, 2015). Credit When It’s Due (CWID) is an initiative that encourages two-year community college and four-year college and university partnerships to award associate degrees to vertical transfer students when the student completes degree requirements while pursuing a

bachelor's degree (Lumina Foundation, 2012; Taylor & Bragg, 2015). CWID is viewed as “experimentation on transfer and articulation across a sizeable number of states” (Taylor & Bragg, 2015, p. 11). Due to the novelty of this effort, outcome statistics and reports are not yet readily available.

While reverse transfer students are and can be categorized into four groups, this interview study focuses solely on undergraduate reverse transfer students—students who begin their postsecondary education at a four-year college or university and then transfer to a two-year community college. The other three reverse transfer student categories will not be explored within this interview study, because the remaining groups highlight students who either return to the four-year college or university (temporary reverse transfers), already have a bachelor's degree (post-baccalaureate reverse transfer students), or do not physically participate in the mobility pattern of enrolling at a two-year community college after attending a four-year college or university (reverse transfer credits). Though research regarding reverse transfer is expanding, ultimately higher education is still missing an opportunity to learn more about who represents reverse transfer students, what their educational backgrounds are, and why these students decide to reverse transfer based on educational goals. Literature on vertical transfer and transfer swirl can inform reverse transfer research. Specifically, the following research can be applied to reverse transfer research: transfer patterns, persistence, best practices, transfer shock, and transfer student support.

Theoretical Framework

Utilizing a single organizing principle, theoretical frameworks outline a proposed map, grounded in prior theory and research, of the approach to a particular study. Connecting research

questions, contextual information, literature review, and methodology, this theoretical framework guides this explorative study offering increased knowledge. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, the theory of pushing and pulling represents the overarching theoretical framework (Tinto, 1982; Titus, 2006; Wright, 1973). Push and pull can be further enhanced, defined, and applied through the influence of the following theories in order to better address potential explanations for students reverse transferring: the Input-Environment-Outcomes (I-E-O) theory (Astin, 1991) and the student departure theory (Tinto, 1993). At its broadest level, this theoretical framework utilizes the I-E-O theory and the student departure theory to frame student experiences as pushes and pulls that lead to a departure from a four-year college or university to enrollment at a two-year community college. A student's personal demographics, personal motivations, personal goals, institutional fit, interaction with the environment, institutional integration, and desired student outcomes are all considered factors of pushing and pulling.

Overarching theoretical understanding: Push and pull factor. The theory of pushing and pulling denotes the overarching theoretical understanding (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Tinto, 1982; Wright, 1973). In research, push and pull is often discussed in terms of international migration or migration from rural to urban settings. In its most simple form, migration describes pushing people out and/or pulling people in (Passaris, 1989; Petersen, 1958; Tinto, 1982). Push factors repel people while pull factors attract people.

Two different studies utilize the push and pull factor when examining student movement between higher education institutions (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Wright, 1973). In a study from 1973, the "push-pull process" is directed at understanding why students leave higher education (Wright, 1973, p. 240). Another study describes the student's decision to seek overseas education through a "push-pull model" (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 82).

The 1973 study sought to address why students voluntarily left school temporarily or permanently. Wright found that integration is a central pull factor while individuals with high stress feel pushed from higher education. Additionally, the action of withdrawing from college depends upon the “balance between” the push and the pull (Wright, 1973, p. 240). Students who have high stress and low integration have a high probability of leaving while students with low stress and high integration tend to stay. This point is particularly important to this study as it highlights the fact that a student’s decision to reverse transfer may be affected by negative and positive pushes and pulls.

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) examined the factors that motivate international students’ decisions to seek overseas education and the factors that influence the student destination choice. The global pattern of international student movement is explained through pushes and pulls that encourage students to study overseas. The push factors apply to the student’s home country. The pull factors apply to the host country. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) found that the push factors were economic and social forces while the pull factors were more varied. The pull factors included the following: knowledge and awareness of the host, recommendations from friends and relatives, cost, the environment, and geographic proximity. Both this study and Wright’s (1973) study reflect the two-sided relationship that affects a student’s mobility decisions. Students experience a push from the four-year college or university and a pull from the two-year community college. The decision to reverse transfer is affected by pushes and pulls.

Titus (2006) used student-level and institutional-level data to understand student persistence at four-year colleges and universities utilizing environmental pulls. While this study does not describe any pushes, the pulls complement the pulls found in the Wright (1973) and

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) studies. The study draws from the 1996-1998 Beginning Postsecondary Students, a longitudinal database researched by the National Center for Education Statistics. The final sample was comprised of 4,951 students attending 367 four-year institutions. The study outlines variables that affect a student's decision to stay or leave. Student characteristics, college experiences, institutional characteristics, and environmental pulls are identified as key variables that affect a student's decision. To continue, the environmental pulls are described as financial needs, work responsibilities, family responsibilities, and transfer opportunities (Titus, 2006).

As it relates to this study, student demographics, environmental experiences, and desired student outcomes can all be considered factors of pushing and pulling. In 1982, Tinto sought to develop a model of "student interinstitutional movement" that would assess the "interactive effects" of a student's engagement between institutions in order to persist, transfer, or leave higher education (Tinto, 1982, p. 690). This model is the premise of his student departure model, outlined later in this chapter. "In the educational context such models may allow us to assess the interactive effects of external educational opportunities (pull) upon the dropout/transfer decisions of persons currently experiencing higher education in specific institutional settings (push)" (Tinto, 1982, p. 691). While the Wright (1973) and Titus (2006) studies above touch on push and pull in terms of staying or leaving higher education institutions, push and pull can be further explored through the following theories that provide potential explanations about students who reverse transfer: the Input-Environment-Outcomes (I-E-O) theory (Astin, 1991) and the student departure theory (Tinto, 1993).

I-E-O theory. Astin (1991) developed a research design that categorizes three variables that contribute to the field of educational assessment. Astin finds that educational assessment is

incomplete if the data excludes student inputs, student outcomes, and the educational environment. This model is commonly referred to as the Input-Environment-Outcomes (I-E-O) Theory (Astin, 1991; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Pascarella et al., 2006; Titus, 2006). In Astin's model, inputs are related to and affect both outputs and the environment. Astin considers the environment to be the most critical and most commonly ignored facet due to the fact that educators can directly control aspects of the environment. Two of the three variables of this theory, input (I) and environment (E), provide examples for this study regarding the variety of variables that impact student decisions.

The I (inputs) refer to the “personal qualities” that a student brings into the academic pursuit. Student inputs are varied: fixed student attributes—age, race or ethnicity, religion, gender, birth order, family size, socioeconomic status, and marital status; cognitive functioning—high school grade point average and standardized admission tests; aspirations and expectations—degree aspirations, intended career choice, major field of study, and life goals; values and attitudes—a student's thoughts on social, educational, and political issues; behavioral patterns—involvement or lack of involvement inside and outside of school; educational background characteristics—type of secondary school, year of high school graduation, and previous courses taken (Astin, 1991). Inputs, for this study, shed light on who the students are and when the transfer occurs during their academic careers. This model offers the present, qualitative study justification for looking at the reverse transfer student's personal and educational backgrounds.

The E (environment) encompasses the identification and quantification of external circumstances and events (Astin, 1991). In its simplest description, environment encompasses everything that students experience during the pursuit of their postsecondary education that may

be considered out of their control. The environment includes academic programs, faculty, staff, teaching practices, campus facilities, the social and institutional climate, courses taken, the school's location (urban or rural), student services (registrar, counseling, parking, and financial aid), class size, and more. Astin additionally offers, "within institution environmental experiences," a college may consider the following when assessing or evaluating their environment: classroom characteristics, peer group characteristics, administrator/faculty characteristics, student services utilization, courses taken, time devoted to cocurricular programs, student living environment, and amount of financial aid received (Astin, 1991). As it relates to this study, environment looks at the whole picture with regards to a student's academic experience and provides insight into why some students decide to reverse transfer. This interview study explores the participant's experiences at their previous four-year college or university and their current experiences at JCCC. Experiential pushes and pulls are revealed in the interviews.

The O (outcomes) in the I-E-O Theory is not directly related to this study because the reverse transfer student outcomes after college graduation are not explored. The intended student goals are explored in this study, but the results of the educational goals are not studied. However, to complete the description of the I-E-O Theory, outcomes refer to the student characteristics, attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs that exist after a student has graduated from college (Astin, 1991). "Criterion variables, output variables, aims, goals, or objectives" can also be considered outcomes (Astin, 1991, p. 38). There are two types of outcomes: cognitive and affective. Cognitive outcomes include subject-matter knowledge, academic ability, critical thinking ability, basic learning skills, special aptitudes, academic achievement, degree attainment, vocational achievement, and award recognition. Affective outcomes include values,

interests, self-concept, attitudes, beliefs, student satisfaction, leadership, citizenship, interpersonal relations, and hobbies.

I-E-O and the push and pull factor can be integrated, through this study's overarching theoretical framework, when considering what causes a student to be pushed from a four-year college or university. The pushes may include personal demographics (for example, age), environmental experiences (for example, lack of integration with the four-year university), and student desired outcomes (for example, career or major change) (Catanzaro, 1999).

Student departure theory. Due to the fact that “more students leave their college or university prior to degree completion than stay,” Tinto developed a model highlighting the dimensions and consequences of student departure (Tinto, 1993, p. 1). Tinto's student departure model is commonly adopted and analyzed in terms of understanding student retention and persistence (Cabrera & Castaneda, 1993; Guiffrida, 2006; Tinto, 1993). Central to Tinto's model is the concept of integration, interaction, and the stages of transition (Tinto, 1993). Tinto claims that social and academic integration are essential to student retention (Beil et al., 2000; Jackson et al., 2003; Reason, 2009; Rendon, Jaloma, & Nora, 2003; Tinto, 1993). Academic integration highlights a student's finding and utilization of academic resources allowing a student to stay assimilated in the college setting. Social integration indicates a student's comfort level, found through peers and cocurriculars, external to the classroom. The social system represents the daily life and the personal needs of a student. Overall, the theory recognizes the importance of whether or not a student fits into an institution.

Integration is absent when a student experiences incongruence and/or isolation in his or her higher education environment. Incongruence represents a lack of institutional fit, while

isolation refers to the absence of insufficient interactions (Tinto, 1993). Incongruence can occur socially and/or academically. Abilities, skills, interests, and demands in the academic and social system can result in incongruence in a student's college setting. Tinto compares the college campus to "human communities," in that communities influence their community membership. A student's decision to stay in or drop out of college may depend on "membership" to the community, which Tinto defines as how a person interacts with and responds to the world based on his or her individual characteristics (Tinto, 1993; Bean & Eaton, 2000). This meaning stems from an "interactionalist system" (Tinto, 1993; Rendon et al., 2003). Community is relevant as a model because "it highlights the ways in which the social and intellectual communities that make up a college come to influence the willingness of students to stay at that college" (Tinto, 2003, p. 104).

Furthermore, Tinto offers five core concepts in terms of understanding student departure: (1) pre-entry attributes, (2) goals and commitments, (3) institutional experiences, (4) integration, and (5) outcomes. Highlighting a student's negative encounters allows administrators to determine why students leave; alternatively, positive encounters can serve as a reason for students to invest in their college experience (Tinto, 2003). Additionally, the core concepts can be broken apart through the lens of the institution and the lens of the individual student. Pre-entry attributes, goals, and commitments are on the individual level, while institutional experiences and integration are on the institutional level. Outcomes are the combination of both the individual and institution interactions resulting in the student departure (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's theory recognizes that both the individual and the institution can affect a student's decision to transfer.

To reiterate, this qualitative study seeks to explore why students decide to reverse transfer. The push and pull factor, I-E-O theory, and student departure theory guide the questions to consider in this exploratory study. While independently the three theories contribute to the study in terms of exploring reverse transfer students, collectively the theories strengthen the study by evincing why the reverse transfer occurs and substantiating the decisive transfer pattern for 15 students. The push and pull factor define the interplay between a student's time at a four-year college or university and his or her transition to a two-year community college. The I (input) and E (environment) within the I-E-O theory highlight the individual characteristics and experiences of the student accompanied with the push and pull movement. The student departure theory acknowledges that in order for a student to reverse transfer, he or she had to depart from the previous four-year college or university. In addition, this theory focuses on what incongruences might have pushed the student to transfer. The action, student, and decision collectively frame and strengthen the guided exploration of why some students transfer to a two-year community college.

Conclusion

The literature offers this interview study a broad view of the topic. Reviewing three mobility patterns (vertical transfer, transfer swirl, and reverser transfer) benefits the study by highlighting prominent transfer movements. Literature regarding the vertical transfer student population is extensive and informs the limited reverse transfer research. The theoretical frameworks, the push and pull factor, as further applied through the exploration of two additional theories (I-E-O and student departure) inform the study and structure the thematic findings within Chapter 4. Applying what is known regarding transfer students and exploring the

research questions utilizing the theoretical framework will enhance the current body of research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Method and Research Design

Literature research and statistical data offered a broad understanding about the topic of reverse transfer students. As noted in Chapter 1, going more in depth by talking to individual students in order to understand what experiences and goals led to the reverse transfer enhanced the knowledge base surrounding a group of reverse transfer students. A qualitative interview study featuring person-to-person interviews with students from JCCC was utilized in order to explore four research questions:

1. What is the educational background of these students who reverse transfer?
2. What are the educational goals of these students who reverse transfer?
3. Why did these students reverse transfer from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college?
4. How do these students feel about their decision to reverse transfer?

JCCC was selected as the interview site for several reasons: First, I had convenient access to the two-year community college in terms of physical proximity and collegial relationships with key institutional administrators and faculty. Many of these collegial relationships were established due to the fact that my father is a senior faculty member at JCCC in the English department; he has taught at the two-year community college since 1979. His longevity at the institution was a benefit to me and the study in terms of accessing students, faculty, and administrators. Second, JCCC is the largest two-year community college in the state of Kansas (JCCC, 2014b). The large enrollment allowed for convenient access to a sizeable

population of students—the potential interview participants. Lastly, JCCC has peer institutions allowing for this study to inform a transfer pattern that may exist at other institutions.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative interview studies (Merriam, 2009). The nature of a qualitative study, including this exploratory qualitative study, identifies researcher and participant interaction. Thus, I sought to ensure trustworthiness with this study. An information statement (Appendix B) was distributed to all participants at the start of each interview. The information statement included the purpose of the study and the role of the students' participation. Additionally, trustworthiness was achieved by ensuring participant confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms. This approach strives to reveal honesty and openness from the participants regarding their personal and academic experiences at their previous four-year college or university and at JCCC.

Regarding the positionality of the sole researcher, I offer a unique and informed perspective on the overall topic as well as a genuine interest. First, as previously mentioned, I am the daughter of a two-year community college professor. In fact, both of my parents are college professors; while my mother's career was primarily at a proprietary, for-profit institution, she too taught at JCCC. Thus, my entire life has been intertwined with higher education. In addition to personal time spent at the two-year community college, I began my higher education career at JCCC. The career began by taking one college course during summer session between my junior and senior year of high school. The summer enrollment theme continued throughout my entire baccalaureate attainment. In the end, I earned over 30 credit hours at JCCC as part of my baccalaureate degree, awarded from the University of Kansas. Therefore, based on

definitions in Chapter 2, I was a temporary reverse transfer, summer swirler, and vertical transfer (Catanzaro, 1999; Shapiro et al., 2015; Townsend, 2001).

My passion for transfer students was manifested during my Master's degree education. Originally my research in graduate school focused on vertical transfer students. Over time, my research evolved to focus on reverse transfer students when I discovered missed opportunities in literature. Consequently, I have academically focused on the transfer student topic for nearly 10 years. In closing the loop, I am also a professional higher education administrator at the University of Kansas with eight years of administrative experience. Thus, the role of the researcher for this interview study was intentional, productive, and academically and professionally rewarding.

Participant Selection

Using a qualitative method, 15 currently enrolled students from JCCC were interviewed to better understand their transfer student experience. The reverse transfer student participants met the following criteria in order to be eligible: (1) students who were currently enrolled at JCCC in six or more credit hours for the spring 2015 semester; (2) students who were previously enrolled at JCCC in six or more credit hours for the fall 2014 semester (meaning the student must have been enrolled at JCCC for two consecutive semesters); and (3) students who previously attended a four-year college or university within the past four academic years, prior to their current enrollment at JCCC. The six credit hours allowed for full-time and part-time students to participate. Additionally, the fall 2014 and spring 2015 enrollment rule intentionally sought students who were not temporary reverse transfer students who were only enrolled at JCCC for one semester, or solely during the summer semester. Last, the requirement of having

been enrolled at a higher education institution in the past four years sought students who were not returning students or career-changers who had been away from postsecondary education for over five years, but who were intentional reverse transfer students continuing their higher educational pursuit.

Pending student responses, the goal was to recruit 15 to 20 students to create the sample population. The number of students was selected for three primary reasons: First, as previously noted, with one researcher the study had limited resources available to interview participants. Second, sources suggested selecting the sample size based on what would offer reasonable coverage until a point of saturation (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Third, this sample population range allowed me to determine, after several interviews were conducted, if additional interviews should be administered to strengthen the data collection. I sought diversity within the interviewed students to be representative of the population of students who attend JCCC. Ideally, there would be gender, hometown, race, age, academic major, educational goal, and socioeconomic status diversity among the participants affording depth and breadth for the data collection. Chapter 4 displays the 15 student participants.

A pilot student participated in a semi-structured, recorded interview on the JCCC campus in June 2014. The pilot student was found through my father's English course during the 2014 summer semester. The student voluntarily shared with the class that she previously attended a four-year university. While the methodology of the study was still being developed, the pilot interview was rich in information and informed the interview protocol discussed later in this chapter. The pilot student's responses are threaded through Chapter 4.

I utilized a convenience sample for participant selection. A convenience sample selected participants based on time, money, location, and availability (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, the recruitment of study participants took place in two phases. Phase one describes the initial recruitment plan that took place in January at the start of the spring 2015 semester. Phase two describes the second recruitment push, developed in February, in an effort to recruit more participants. The overall recruitment did not vary from the initial approved protocol. Instead, the phase two recruitment expanded upon and repeated much of the phase one recruitment strategy. Additionally, phase two instilled continued participant diversity by being more far-reaching throughout the campus.

Recruitment phase one. Three primary sources supported phase one of the student participant recruitment: (1) a promotional flyer, (2) the JCCC Writing Center, and (3) JCCC English department chair and faculty. I determined that a one-page promotional flyer would be an easy and succinct way to communicate the study and recruitment to multiple sources. A flyer can be printed, forwarded, and posted. The flyer read as follows: “A University of Kansas School of Education doctoral student is seeking students who meet the following criteria. (1) Students who are currently enrolled at JCCC in six or more credit hours for the spring 2015 semester. (2) Students who were previously enrolled at JCCC in six or more credit hours for the fall 2014 semester. (3) Students who previously attended a four-year college, within the past four academic years, prior to their current enrollment at JCCC. If you fit this definition, you are perfect! The doctoral student would request a one to two hour interview to be held at JCCC in order to better understand you and your educational goals. Please email Stefani at buchwitz@ku.edu to opt-in to this interview opportunity!”

The Writing Center Director, Kathryn Byrne, assisted in the promotion of this study. This was achieved through two approaches: (1) the promotional flyer was posted in the Writing Center announcing the study and its desire to seek interested participants; and (2) a request was posted on “Pipeline,” an email announcement to students via the Writing Center. The Writing Center was selected as a site to recruit participants because it is accessed by 10,000 to 12,000 students each semester (K. Byrne, personal communication, May 16, 2014).

Next, Dr. Keith Geekie, Professor and Chair of the English department, assisted in connecting me with English department faculty in order to access students in their respective classes during the spring 2015 semester. English classes are a requirement of nearly every degree at JCCC; thus, these classes serve a unique function as an entry-point for access to students attending JCCC. English courses represent a cross-section of the JCCC student population, enrolling students of all demographics and academic majors. Geekie forwarded my email request for study participants with the promotional flyer as an attachment to faculty members of the department who, in turn, disseminated the request to their students in a variety of ways. The English department faculty made verbal announcements in their face-to-face classes, distributed printed copies of the promotional flyer, posted the flyer on their office doors, shared the announcement online with their online classes, and one faculty member attached the promotional flyer to the back of each student’s homework assignment. When faculty communicated the study to their students, the faculty asked students who were interested in participating to directly email me, the researcher. By guiding the interested students to directly email the researcher, the students were able to maintain confidentiality with the study.

In addition to the English department faculty, Geekie also included faculty from English as a Second Language and Journalism who relayed the study recruitment message in similar

ways to the English department faculty. There are 111 faculty members in English, English as a Second Language, and Journalism. The 111 faculty members teach 277 courses, including course by arrangement. JCCC courses enroll approximately 20 students; 277 courses multiplied by 20 students totals access to 5,540 students (K. Geekie, personal communication, May 16, 2014).

Within one week of the initial recruitment phase, 13 students contacted me via email to opt-in to the interview opportunity. Of the 13 students, 10 were eligible for the study and three were not. The three ineligible students did not meet the required criteria. Throughout the entire recruitment process, once the voluntary students opted-in, I responded to the students' emails, confirmed their eligibility, and if eligible, scheduled person-to-person interviews to be held on the JCCC campus.

Of the initial 10 students, six JCCC students were interviewed in February 2015 and two students were interviewed in March 2015. Two students who fit the required criteria chose not to participate by not responding to further email communication. Thus, at the end of recruitment phase one, the 13 students who opted-in to the study resulted in eight one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

Recruitment phase two. After a successful phase one recruitment, I determined that a second recruitment push at the sample institution was necessary to solicit additional student participants. For phase two of the student participant recruitment, the convenience sample was recruited through three primary sources: (1) promotional flyers posted on campus bulletin boards; (2) the JCCC Athletic Director; and (3) JCCC academic deans in Business and Leadership, Industrial Technology, and Math and Science. In general, academic administrators

and classrooms remained the primary form of promotion as a tool for accessing potential student participants.

The JCCC campus has numerous bulletin boards to post promotional flyers. With the opportunity to create a second wave of promotion, I revised the promotional flyer to offer a new look and condensed content to vary the visual message. Additionally, having already conducted eight interviews, I was able to determine that a one-hour interview, as opposed to a one to two-hour interview, provided appropriate time for the student participant to fully respond to each question in great detail. This flyer read: “Are you a transfer student? Did you previously attend a 4-year college? Were you enrolled at JCCC fall 2014? Are you enrolled at JCCC now? Yes? You are perfect! A University of Kansas School of Education doctoral student would request a one hour interview, at JCCC, in order to better understand you and your educational goals. Please email Stefani Gerson Buchwitz at buchwitz@ku.edu to opt-in to this interview opportunity.” I posted flyers throughout the campus, including the Student Center, the cafeteria, all academic buildings, and in high-traffic hallways. The flyers were posted for approximately one week. Next, I contacted the JCCC Athletic Director, Carl Heinrich, to assist in promotion of the study. After Mr. Heinrich received approval from the National Junior College Athletic Association, he disseminated the recruitment email with promotional flyer attachment to 28 JCCC coaches.

Similar to the recruitment facilitated by the Chair of the English department, who assisted in connecting me with English department faculty in order to access students in their respective classes during the spring 2015 semester, I sent emails to the deans of Business and Leadership, Industrial Technology, and Math and Science. The deans were invited to share the study and revised promotional flyer. No expectation was placed on the deans of these three schools;

however, the deans responded favorably and assisted in promoting the study in the following ways: by printing the flyer and placing copies in each faculty member's mailbox within their department, by forwarding the email message to their faculty who then shared the message with their classes, and by printing the flyer to post on their office doors. Since I am neither employed by JCCC, on the JCCC campus regularly, nor a student at JCCC, the administrative support for the study aided in inviting students to participate in the study.

Within two weeks of the second recruitment phase, 16 students directly emailed me to opt-in to the study. Five students were not eligible as they did not fit the required criteria—one had not previously attended a four-year college or university, and four students had already graduated from four-year colleges or universities and earned bachelor's degrees. This led to 11 eligible students. Of the 11 eligible students, seven students were interviewed in March 2015, one student did not show at the agreed upon date and time, and three stopped communication prior to scheduling an interview. Thus, in the second recruitment phase, 16 student respondents resulted in seven one-on-one semi-structured interviews. A total of 15 students were interviewed for this study.

I stopped additional recruitment efforts after 29 JCCC students opted-in to the study, with eight not eligible, five stopping conversation prior to scheduling an interview, one missing the scheduled interview, and interviewing 15 students. After drafting themes found in response to the four research questions, I determined that a point of saturation had been reached and data was becoming repetitive.

Description of Participants

For this study, the 15 participants were current JCCC students. All of the participants had previously attended a four-year college or university within the past four academic years, were enrolled in six or more credit hours during the spring 2015 semester, and were enrolled in six or more credit hours during the fall 2014 semester. The participants' educational backgrounds and reasons for their reverse transfer varied immensely, offering informative findings for the four research questions. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants and are used in Chapter 4.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was developed from the literature on the push and pull theory (Altbach, 1991; Tinto, 1982; Wright, 1973), Input-Environment-Outcomes (I-E-O) theory (Astin, 1991), and the student departure theory (Tinto, 1993). The interview questions sought to uncover reverse transfer student patterns exploring why a student transfers to a two-year community college. The questions were tested in June 2014 on the pilot participant who had reverse transferred to JCCC. After receiving feedback from my doctoral dissertation committee and analyzing the pilot interview, the interview protocol underwent minor revisions. However, as the researcher, I gained important practice in facilitating this specific interview protocol. For example, I added three probing questions and decided to not take written notes during all future interviews to allow for better conversation with the participant. Ultimately, I decided to keep the pilot student in the final sample population due to the effectiveness of the pilot interview. Her responses to the interview questions added rich information to the study. The 12 questions below comprise the interview protocol.

Probing was utilized as a tool to further encourage thorough and meaningful participant responses during the person-to-person interviews (Merriam, 2009). Three additional probes were used throughout to foster further discussion: “How did that make you feel?” “What happened next?” “Tell me more.” Incorporating what was learned through the literature review and applied through the theoretical frameworks guided the act of probing between me and the student participant in order to uncover themes and better understand the student’s experiences and goals.

1. Tell me about yourself. (*Probes: name, age, hometown, academic major, parents’ educational background, etc.*)
2. Tell me about your decision to go to college. (*Probes: predisposition, search, choice*)
3. Tell me about your educational background. (*Probes: progression from high school to college, previous college(s) attended, major(s), etc.*)
4. Tell me about your educational goals. (*Probes: intended degree, enrollment status, upon entering college, upon entering JCCC, etc.*)
5. Tell me about your experience at your previous four-year college or university. (*Probes: student experience, academic experience, institutional fit*)
6. Why did you transfer from the four-year college to JCCC (a two-year community college)? (*Probes: social and academic integration, connectivity to the four-year college or university*)
7. When you transferred, tell me about that process. (*Probes: timing, key reasons, pushes from the four-year institution, logistics, credit hours*)

8. Looking back, is there anything that the four-year college could have done differently to influence your decision to transfer? (*Probes: If so, what? If not, why not?*)
9. What attracted you to JCCC? (*Or what pulled you into a two-year community college?*)
10. Tell me more about how JCCC (a two-year community college) contributes to your educational goals? (*Probes: and the educational goal connection to future profession, specific offered major, intended degree(s)*)
11. How do you feel about the choice you made to transfer to JCCC?
12. To wrap up, is there anything else you would like to add or clarify regarding your transfer student experience?

Data Collection

This interview study solely used person-to-person interviews. Finding out what is “in and on someone else’s mind” was the goal in order to best explore the four research questions (Patton, 2002, p. 341). The interviews for this study were semi-structured; while interview questions were outlined, the order and probes varied based on the individual interviews.

All of the interviews were held in a faculty member’s office on the JCCC campus. The office was in a public, yet private, location. The office is located in the JCCC Library across the hall from the JCCC Writing Center. The public location allowed for ease of access, yet the private faculty office allowed for confidential involvement and interviews without public distraction. Interviews of participants lasted from 15 minutes to one hour and 15 minutes. I chose to not take any notes during the actual interview to assure full attention and create

opportunities to respond with planned probes. By fully listening and engaging in the semi-structured interview, I could ask follow-up questions when appropriate. A digital recorder captured the entire spoken interview.

As a way to quickly collect meaningful demographic information, a demographic survey was created and distributed to the student participants at the start of each interview. I communicated that he or she was allowed to skip any question that he or she did not feel comfortable answering. Appendix C: Demographic Survey, shows a copy of the distributed survey. The survey sought to collect the following information: name, gender, age, ethnicity (or race), marital status, residential status (based on tuition payment), employment status, and parents' educational levels. Demographic information is standard data to collect in an interview study (Merriam, 2009).

After the interview concluded, I summarized key themes found during the interview in response to the four research questions, keeping in mind the overarching theoretical framework, the push and pull factor. These notes guided the results addressed in Chapter 4. At the completion of the interviews, I independently transcribed all interviews and assigned pseudonyms to both the student and their former four-year college or university. Recognizing the value of knowing the student's former four-year college or university in terms of location, size, and institutional category, the college or university pseudonym was selected intentionally to be descriptive. For example, I labeled one "Urban Research University" and another one "Small Public University." These names provide important information, but also protect the student and his/her identity.

The transcription process took two months. Guided by the four research questions, I created a color coding system throughout the transcription process to assist in exploring and confirming themes found. Student quotes that responded to research question one (educational background) were highlighted in blue on the transcript. Student quotes that responded to research question two (educational goals) were highlighted in pink. Student quotes that responded to research question three (why reverse transfer) were highlighted in yellow. Last, student quotes that responded to research question four (feeling about the reverse transfer decision) were highlighted in green. All transcripts were read and analyzed multiple times during the data analysis process.

Data Analysis: Validity and Reliability

The data collected, based on literature and researcher conducted person-to-person interviews, must be “sufficiently authentic” and “make sense” as depicted through detailed findings (Merriam, 2009, p. 210). Validity and reliability are particularly important in a qualitative study where the concepts and findings are a reflection of the participants’ interpretations of their worlds and the researcher’s understanding of the participants’ verbal descriptions and responses. Several strategies address the concern of valid and reliable qualitative research studies.

Internal validity questions how the research findings match reality. The pilot student served as a test for the interview protocol and enhanced the validity of the study. Recognizing that human beings are the source of data for a qualitative study and assuring that I directly engage with the study participants aids in validating the study findings. Reliability and consistency refer to the extent to which the designed study can be replicated and yield the same

results. Peer examination, a suggested strategy to create reliability, occurs when the researcher asks colleagues to comment on the findings (Merriam, 2009). The involvement of a doctoral advisor and a doctoral dissertation committee comprised of university faculty address the strategy of peer examination.

Additionally, the study was submitted to the University of Kansas Human Subject Committee – Lawrence (HSC-L) for consideration and ultimately approval. The approval process required a 10-page application including subject information, recruitment plan, project information, risks and benefits, data collection and security, and information regarding the informed consent. Prior to applying for approval, I completed a required human subjects tutorial and training modules. The HSC-L application was submitted in December 2014 and I received University of Kansas study approval in January 2015 (Appendix D: University of Kansas Approval of Protocol).

Lastly, recognizing that the study and recruitment of students was to take place on the JCCC campus, a second layer of study approval was required through JCCC. The HSC-L application and supporting documentation was submitted to the JCCC Research Participant Protection Program. In late January 2015, the JCCC Research Participant Protection Program approved recruitment from the JCCC student body and to use JCCC facilities to conduct interviews with JCCC students (Appendix E: Johnson County Community College Study Approval).

Limitations of the Study

While this qualitative interview study seeks to make an important contribution to the reverse transfer research, the study has limitations. First, due to limited resources (participants,

financial, and time), the study includes one two-year community college at one moment in time. The study is not longitudinal, representing multiple academic years or students over the span of their academic career. Second, I interviewed 15 students. While a greater sample size could offer further gained knowledge, it is suggested that in a qualitative study, a point of saturation can occur during interviews where no new content or themes emerge (Merriam, 2009). The 15 study participants did offer an exploration of a group of reverse transfer students. Additional study limitations are detailed in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

Method and research design, participant selection, incorporation of the theoretical frameworks, interview protocol, role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, and limitations guided the exploratory study of some reverse transfer students utilizing four research questions. Chapter 4 features the 15 participants and their responses to better understand why some postsecondary education students decided to reverse transfer.

Chapter 4: Findings

Fifteen students, who transferred from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college, are explored through interviews. The considerations of student demographics, environmental experiences, student departure, and student goals are reflected in the findings through the lens of pushes and pulls (Astin, 1991; Tinto, 1982; Tinto, 1993; Titus, 2006; Wright, 1973). The findings are presented in the following order: educational background of students who reverse transferred (research question one); educational goals of students who reverse transferred (research question two); why students reverse transferred (research question three); feelings about the reverse transfer decision (research question four).

Quotes and revealed themes from the student participants are threaded throughout the chapter. All quotes are verbatim from the transcriptions and are connected to a student's pseudonym, ensuring promised confidentiality. Additionally, as previously discussed, all former four-year colleges and universities have also been assigned a pseudonym. Based on results from the distributed demographic survey (Appendix C), the student's demographic data are in Table 1.

Name	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Residential Status	Employment Status
Katie	F	22	White	Single	In state	Employed part time
Blake	M	19	White	Single	In state	Employed part time
Jameson	M	22	White	Single	In state	Employed part time
Nolan	M	24	White	Single	In state	Not employed
Harper	F	20	White	Single	Out of state	Employed part time
Justin	M	20	White	Single	In state	Not employed
Samuel	M	24	White	Single	In state	Not employed
Tracy	F	22	White	Single	In state	Not employed

Exploring Reverse Transfer

Shane	M	21	White	Single	Out of state	Employed part time
Avery	F	19	White/Hispanic	Married	In state	Employed part time
Cameron	M	21	White	Single	In state	Employed part time
Ross	M	20	White	Single	In state	Not employed
Anthony	M	20	Hispanic/Latino	Single	In state	Employed part time
Mallory	F	23	White	Single	In state	Employed full time
Gina	F	26	White	Single	In state	Employed full time

To summarize the demographic data, nine of the students are male and six are female.

The students range in age from 19 years old to 26 years old. The average age of the 15 participants is 21. Thirteen students identify themselves as white, one female student identifies herself as white/Hispanic, and one male student identifies himself as Hispanic/Latino. Fourteen of 15 describe themselves as single. The majority of the students are considered in-state students based on his or her JCCC tuition payment. Last, eight students are employed part time.

The 15 study participants also report their parents' education levels as part of the distributed demographic survey (Appendix C). I initially included this question on the demographic survey so as to create a full understanding of each student's personal, familial background. The question contributes a descriptive fact. The parents' educational background reveals that many of the reverse transfer students are first generation college students. Only three of the 15 participants' parents have both graduated from four-year colleges or universities. Nine of the 15 students have one parent with only a high school degree, while four of the 15 students have both parents with only high school degrees. In addition, three of the 15 participants' parents earned associate degrees. To substantiate this descriptive information, Table 2 displays the student and his or her parents' education levels. Note that the gender of the

parent is not included; the data displayed simply enumerates the parents as parent one and parent two.

Name	Education Level – Parent One	Education Level – Parent Two
Katie	High school graduate	Bachelor's degree
Blake	High school graduate	High school graduate
Jameson	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree
Nolan	High school graduate	High school graduate
Harper	High school graduate	High school graduate
Justin	High school graduate	Master's degree
Samuel	Associate degree	Associate degree
Tracy	High school graduate	Master's degree
Shane	Bachelor's degree	Doctorate degree
Avery	High school graduate	High school graduate
Cameron	Master's degree	Doctorate degree
Ross	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree
Anthony	Associate degree	Associate degree
Mallory	High school graduate	Master's degree
Gina	High school graduate	Bachelor's degree

Participant Narratives

As an individual reverse transfer student, each of the 15 participants offers his or her own background, story, reasoning, goals, and feelings. In order to best visualize the 15 students, a narrative of the first impression and their interview are detailed below.

Blake, a student athlete who plays soccer at JCCC and previously played soccer at Private Presbyterian College (PPC), arrives for his 9:00 a.m. interview, on the dot. He is dressed for an upcoming soccer practice wearing soccer shorts, a comfortable T-shirt, and tennis shoes. His focus throughout the interview circles around his passion for soccer and hometown life in the Kansas City metropolitan area. As one of the youngest student participants at 19 years old, he appears youthful and wide-eyed. However, Blake is clearly a driven, intentional, and passionate person as seen in his answers to questions and goals for the future.

Mallory, who has attended four colleges or universities, arrives at her interview straight from her full-time job at a local pediatrics office where she is the patient service representative. Following her interview, she is taking an exam on campus. Mallory's days are scheduled to the minute in order for her to achieve high educational and career goals. Of all of the interview participants, she appears the most stressed and disheveled. As discussed later in this chapter, finances, a learning disability, and lack of supportive parents are her primary stressors.

Samuel's is an evening interview, and as such, the JCCC halls are quiet. The first sign of Samuel is the click-clack of a walker on the hallway carpet. At 24 years old, Samuel slowly creeps into the office, hunched over, scooting his feet in harmony with his walker. Samuel earned an associate degree from JCCC, studied at Midwestern Research University (MRU), and now is a reverse transfer student at JCCC. As revealed in the interview, and discussed later in this chapter, Samuel has health issues that ultimately affect his previous and current educational status. While he has experienced personal hurdles, he has laudable academic and career goals that undoubtedly can be achieved due to personal drive and a supportive family unit.

Tracy, a Urban Research University (URU) reverse transfer student, arrives for her 6:00 p.m. interview from the dental hygiene clinic, wearing student scrubs. Dental hygiene is the central theme of her entire interview. In fact, Tracy is so dedicated to dental hygiene as her future career goal and her sole purpose for being in school that her story and interview are simple and brief at 23 minutes total.

Shane, a former Land-Grant Public II (LGP-II) baseball player who now plays baseball at JCCC, schedules his interview following a team dinner. He arrives in a baseball practice outfit, including a deliberately placed baseball hat slightly tilted towards the back of his head. Shane's interview is one of the longest at 78 minutes as he discusses his goals, passion for baseball, positive connection to his family, and faith at great length.

Anthony is polished, and while small in stature, offers a firm handshake upon arrival. He is eloquent in his speech and dedicated to his goal of becoming a dentist. As a local from the Kansas City area, he reverse transferred to JCCC from the Public Research University (PRU) after a poor experience during his first semester of college at PRU. He is succinct throughout the entire interview, and as a result partakes in the shortest interview of the group at 14 minutes.

Nolan, covered in tattoos and broad in his physical size, appears as a combination of nervous and confident. After graduating from high school in Kansas City, he moved to the college town of PRU. After one month, he unenrolled because "it was overwhelming." One month into his college career was the start of his four-year hiatus from higher education. Now a reverse transfer student at JCCC, he discusses his dedication to his studies.

Justin's mother is the owner of a gas station, and his father is the former financial director for a nearby city in Kansas. His parents are 20 years apart in age and have been divorced since

he was young. His interview covers all aspects of his life - from youth, to present time, to future goals. He is a former high school athlete, a Public Research University dropout due to depression, and now discusses his recovery and interest in pursuing the highest level of education, a Ph.D. Justin credits his reverse transfer to JCCC for his turnaround.

Jameson is a reverse transfer student to JCCC from PRU. He is ultimately committed to joining the Peace Corps upon the conclusion of his higher education studies. After deciding to attend the University of Oregon out of high school, “last minute I found this organization, WWOOF, World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, and I, um, took my savings and my care and I went and camped in the desert in New Mexico for a couple of months.” This quote summarizes his interview and personality well.

Gina is the most challenging to schedule an interview time with due to the fact that she has a young son, she works full time, and she is an online student. We meet after rescheduling the interview several times. She is the oldest of the participant pool at 26 years old. Gina, a swirling student, discusses her eagerness to vertically transfer to Land-Grant Public-I (LGP-I), the school that she most recently reverse transferred from.

Avery is dressed in a floral outfit for her 8:00 a.m. interview. At 19 years old, she is a recent Midwestern transplant still adjusting to life in Kansas with her new Navy husband of six months. She excitedly talks about her love and elopement story that has affected her higher education pursuit and path leading not only to Kansas, leaving California and the Public Research System University (PRSU) behind, but also inviting her to explore new Kansas colleges.

Cameron is the only participant to arrive in a business casual outfit; though not dressed up for the interview, he arrives from his part-time banking position in Topeka, Kansas. Cameron is a commuter student who stacks his classes on two days a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, to avoid the constant drive and to allow for time to work. He previously attended LGP-I and is proud to pursue a career in hospitality management.

Ross is clean-cut wearing a button down shirt and khaki pants. Because he is originally from the college town of LGP-I, Ross is personally and academically part of his background. However, ultimately the college town campus was not a fit for his higher education. He says “we” throughout much of the interview referencing himself and his parents as a collective unit. In fact, his parents actually met at JCCC, so the family ties to the two-year community college and his higher education pursuit run deep.

Harper is 20 years old and the mother of a two-month-old son. She reverse transferred to JCCC from Small Public University (SPU) after taking a one-year break between institutions because she “just wanted to decide what [she] really wanted to go to school for.” She is a young mom now interested in becoming an elementary school teacher.

Katie, the pilot study student, shares her varied educational background covering almost the entire state of Kansas and nearly a dozen academic majors. Katie has studied at many schools, but she most recently attended LGP-I. She appears dedicated to future success and discusses her extensive academic background as learning opportunities rather than mistakes. The most time has passed since her interview, and as such, she recently reached out to me to share exciting news; Katie began the Masters of Occupational Therapy program at the University

of Kansas Medical Center in summer 2015. Her goals are no longer future possibilities; they are her current reality.

All 15 reverse transfer students are explored further in the sections below. Their experiences, reflected through verbatim quotes, respond to the four research questions illustrating themes regarding educational background, educational goals, reasons for reverse transfer, and feelings about the reverse transfer decision.

Findings from Research Questions

Educational background of reverse transfer students. Research question one asks the following: What is the educational background of these students who reverse transferred? The intention behind this question is to better understand when in the student's academic career the reverse transfer movement occurs. Additionally, the research question aims to understand the student's academic history, including school(s) previously attended, major(s), and timeline. Is there a theme in considering when in the student's academic career the transfer from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college takes place?

Within the interview protocol, several questions were posed in response to this specific research question: (1) Tell me about your decision to go to college. (2) Tell me about your educational background. (3) Tell me about your experience at your previous, four-year college. (4) When you transferred, tell me about that process.

The following categories emerge as themes pertinent to addressing research question one: entry into the higher education setting from high school, college attendance history, number of semesters at the four-year college or university before departure, and the academic year when the reverse transfer occurs. In attempting to better understand the student's transition from high

school, the student's stories reveal that the majority, 11 of 15, went straight from high school, without an academic break, into a four-year college or university. To continue, the student participants fall into one of two categories regarding their academic history: First, 11 of the 15 students are true undergraduate reverse transfers having only attended one four-year college or university prior to transferring to one two-year community college. Second, four of the 15 students have swirling academic histories having attended three or more institutions, including the current two-year community college. The length of time, identified by the number of semesters at the four-year college or university, ranges from one semester to four semesters, before departing the four-year college or university and reverse transferring. Last, while there is a relatively even distribution of the academic year in which the student reverse transfers, the highest number of participants, six of 15, reverse transferred during their junior year of college, based on credit hours.

Transition from high school to higher education. In discussing the students' educational backgrounds, a probe during the interview circles around their initial decision to go to college stemming back to their high school career. Interestingly enough, 11 of 15 student participants focused their search only on four-year colleges or universities and chose to begin their college career at a four-year college or university immediately after graduating from high school. Two participants, Katie and Samuel, started at a two-year community college. Two other participants, Gina and Jameson, took a short academic break between high school and higher education. For many, including Blake, Nolan, Harper, Justin, Tracy, Shane, Avery, Cameron, Ross, Anthony, and Mallory, they transitioned directly from high school to a four-year institution.

Nolan shares how his college career begins: “you graduate from Sumner Academy. Your junior and senior year, you are pretty much taking all college classes so they preach four-year degree. Anything else is below them.” Even though his college career begins straight from high school to a four-year institution, he is not pleased with the decision:

I hated school. I was the kid my senior year, that if I didn't have class, I didn't go. Um, teachers either loved me or hated me. They set me outside every day because I was disruptive, and, I was. I was an absolutely terrible student and I hated being there. I was there because I had to be there. That's what's so great about now. I'm here because I want to be here. It's completely different. But, um, I hated going to college. My parents never went to college, and um, uh, I hated everybody there. No one liked me and I didn't like no one, and if you don't go ask for help, they don't give you help. My parents never went to college, so I never knew any of the process stuff. I didn't know about FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid], which I wouldn't have needed anyway because my parents are well off, but I didn't know about scholarships. I didn't know about the enrollment process. I didn't know about any of it. It was all new because none of my parents, nobody in my family had ever gone to college, and I didn't have trust in my teachers or counselors because I didn't like them anyway. So, why would I go to them to help me out with these classes, so, I was just kinda thrown out into the middle of nowhere, and whenever you talk about anything else, like community college, they want nothin' of it. It was beneath ya.

Justin, who starts college at PRU, also expresses how attending a four-year university after high school is simply what is prescribed:

Well, before my senior year, I just kinda, [PRU]. That's what I was gonna do. That's what my sisters did. Mainly because my dad influenced me: “You're going to college. You're doing this. You're doing that.” So, I was kinda like, ok, I wasn't like a rebellious, no I'm not doing that, I don't care. He's a smart guy, he knows what's best. So, I was like ok, I'll go to [PRU].

Like Justin, Tracy is following in her family's path. She explains, “Um, I applied to K-State because my sister goes there. I applied to Washburn [University] because my brother goes there. And then I decided that I wanted to be a dental hygienist and I looked into dental hygiene schools and pretty much narrowed it down to [URU] and Johnson County.” However,

ultimately, she selects URU because they “had dorms, and I guess that’s why I wanted to go there.”

Cameron, explains his college choice and entry into the college setting:

I think the biggest influence was the stereotype of where I was at. I went to a 6A high school that was, it was Washburn Rural High School. Uh, it was very well-to-do. People who graduated high school then went to college. That was just the idea. My sister had done the exact same thing before me. She went to KU. I went to [LGP-I]. Um, I think there was a stigma there, but at the same time, my parents had told me for years that it’s always just a piece of paper. Ya know, you can always get that piece of paper and you can always move up. So it was the norm.

When asked if it was the norm to attend a four-year college or university first, Cameron states:

I think right out of high school, yes. I think the option to go to a community college is looked down upon if not totally ignored. Um, mostly because the opportunities or experiences there. So, KU, K-State, Emporia [State University], those are all kinda, or, I guess Wichita [State University]. Those are all top-tier within Kansas. So, it was always the right to go there, and then Washburn [University], even though it is a four-year, it was still kinda looked at as a community college because it’s just the local college. My dad went to K-State. My mom went to Mizzou [University of Missouri], and then my sister went to KU. Um, I don’t think it was anything like I just decided to go where my dad went. I think it was more on all my uppers of my family had been to college so I should go to college as well.

Other students feel the pressure and expectations from society and/or their parents to acquire a baccalaureate degree. Harper shares her decision to go to college:

I went straight from high school to college. I think my big motivator was that my parents didn’t go to college and my sister didn’t go to college. So, I’d be like the first one to go and hopefully get a degree. Um, I only had it chose between [SPU] and [LGP-I]. Um, I think that was probably my biggest thing was seeing how our economy is and I know that if you don’t have a degree then it’s hard to be successful in one’s eyes, I guess.

When asked if he always knew he wanted to go to college, Ross explains, “Um, eh yeah. There was actually, I think there was more of a pressure towards needing to go to college from everybody like all my family and my friends. Like everybody is going to college and it’s kinda weird to go off track, I guess.” Anthony has similar sentiments:

I definitely acknowledge that social expectations were probably the biggest influence. Just because the environment I was in in high school involved with AP classes and high demanding extracurricular activities, it was expected that you would go to college. Otherwise, it would seem like, ya know, a squandering of potential. So, it was entirely up to social expectations. At the point, I did not have much drive to go to college. I was simply following in the footsteps of the norm.

After focusing on the start of the participant’s higher education careers, the next section uncovers their college attendance history.

College attendance history. To provide additional information regarding the study participants, Table 3 displays the student participants’ previous four-year institutions. Additionally, an asterisk next to the student participant’s name identifies a swirling student who attended additional colleges or attended colleges in a swirling path.

Name	Four-Year Institution
Katie*	Land-Grant Public-I (LGP-I)
Blake	Private Presbyterian College (PRC)
Jameson	Public Research University (PRU)
Nolan	Public Research University (PRU)
Harper	Small Public University (SPU)
Justin	Public Research University (PRU)
Samuel*	Midwestern Research University (MRU)

Tracy	Urban Research University (URU)
Shane	Land-Grant Public-II (LGP-II)
Avery	Public Research System University (PRSU)
Cameron	Land-Grant Public I (LGP-I)
Ross	Land-Grant Public I (LGP-I)
Anthony	Public Research University (PRU)
Mallory*	Public Research University (PRU)
Gina*	Land-Grant Public I (LGP-I)

As previously noted, the study participants represent two categories of transfer in terms of their educational background. The first category defined by literature, is an undergraduate reverse transfer student featuring students who begin their postsecondary education at a four-year institution and then transfer to a two-year community college, perhaps to attain a two-year degree or certificate. Blake, Jameson, Nolan, Harper, Justin, Tracy, Shane, Avery, Cameron, Ross, and Anthony, 11 of the 15 students, are undergraduate reverse transfer students.

The second category of students is defined, according to literature, as swirling transfer students who weave through multiple higher education institutions and create a swirling journey by interacting with two or more colleges. Katie, Samuel, Gina, and Mallory, four of the 15 students, demonstrate a swirling academic history having attended three or more colleges or universities, including the current two-year community college.

When asked what schools Katie has attended, she says:

Ok. Garden City Community College, um, JUCO [JCCC], after that was K-State, then that summer I took one class from Hutch[inson] Community College, um, back to K-State, then Fort Hays [State University], and then Johnson County [Community College], and back to Fort Hays.

In total, Katie has attended five colleges in her pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. While Samuel has only attended two colleges, one two-year community college (JCCC) and one four-year university (Midwestern Research University), his enrollment pattern has swirled.

I graduated high school in 2009. Then I took classes right away here [JCCC] in summer 2009. Like I went the summer and fall of '09 and spring and summer of '10 then transferred spring '10 to [MRU]. Then in fall of '10 I was down in [MRU]. I took a class that I failed here and had to transfer it back to graduate. So, my graduation with an associate's, in I think liberal arts in I think 2010 or spring 2011. I was at [MRU] for probably two years. I was probably within a couple semesters of graduating from [MRU].

Gina, also a swirling student, explains her educational background:

I went to Colorado State in 2006 for a short course on Equine Science and Reproduction Management, went to an internship in New Mexico, moved to Arizona for a new job, and then stayed there until 2008. In August 2008, I enrolled at [LGP-I]. I was there from 2008 to 2012. My major is now nutrition and health once I get accepted into the [LGP-I] program, but it was previously marketing. I didn't transfer many credits from [LGP-I] to JCCC, maybe 34?

Gina has attended three colleges thus far, in two different states.

Mallory, who “finished high school in Missouri” after having previously lived in California, has attended four colleges or universities thus far, three four-year institutions and one two-year community college. She explains:

I did a semester at UCM, the University of Central Missouri, but yeah, I didn't like it 'cause I was driving 30 minutes to go to school. So, I was like, if you're [Mallory's parents] not gonna pay for it, I get more scholarships if I study abroad. So, I decided to study abroad instead. I did my fall semester at UCM. Then I traveled for a while in Europe, and then, I went to China and I was at the Beijing University of Technology for about three semesters, but their semesters are a little strange. It starts in September, and I think I ended up in September; so, it was basically a year.

After spending a year in China, Mallory's parents moved from Missouri to Overland Park, Kansas. “They told me to pick a university.” Having previously lived in California before her time in Missouri, “I thought about maybe going back to California, but because we had lived in

Missouri, the tuition would be out of state.” Thus, after returning from China, “I did actually apply to JUCO [JCCC] to take a few classes, and I think I took one or two kinda like during the summertime.” Next, Mallory attended PRU “for two and a half years.” Then, most recently, Mallory’s advisor encouraged her to “take a break for a little while and then go back.” Due to a variety of reasons, discussed later in Chapter 4, Mallory agrees and reverse transfers to JCCC.

Number of semesters at four-year college or university. The number of semesters at the four-year college or university displays the amount of academic time spent at the student’s former four-year campus. The interviews reveal that four students reverse transferred after one semester at a four-year college or university; three student reverse transferred after one year (two semesters); one student transferred in the midst of his second academic year at the four-year institution, three semesters in; and three students reverse transferred after four semesters at their former college or university. This information denotes the exact amount of time the true undergraduate reverse transfer spends at the four-year college or university before reverse transferring to the two-year community college. Note that this content does not include the four swirling students due to their varying and complicated academic histories; thus, only 11 of 15 student participants are highlighted in this section.

Names	Semester Count
Blake, Nolan, Justin, Anthony [4]	One semester
Harper, Avery, Cameron [3]	Two semesters (One year)
Jameson [1]	Three semesters (One and a half years)
Tracy, Shane, Ross [3]	Four semesters (Two years)

Academic year. Last, the fourth educational background facet highlights the reverse transfer academic year, counted in credit hours. This information is differentiated from the above quantity of time based on semesters spent at the four-year college or university, because credit hours are earned by many of the student participants during high school as advanced placement (AP) credits. The academic year, further defined below, does not directly correlate with how long the student was at the four-year college or university. The academic year highlights the credits reverse transferred.

While there is a relatively even distribution of the academic year in which the student reverse transferred, the highest number of participants, six of 15, reverse transferred during their junior year of college. Table 5 displays when during the student's academic career the reverse transfer movement occurs. For consistency and accuracy, the academic year is reflected by the student's earned credit hours that transfer into the two-year community college. On average, to earn a baccalaureate degree, a student is required to complete 120 credit hours. If 120 credit hours is divided into four academic years, a student's academic year could be defined by 30 credit hours. Thus, freshman year is represented by less than 30 credit hours. Sophomore year includes 31-60 credit hours. Junior year denotes 61-90 credit hours. Lastly, senior year represents more than 91 credit hours. Note that the earned credit hours with which the student participant reverse transfers is solely identified by the student's memory. Their official academic transcripts were not checked for confirmation or accuracy.

Names	Academic Year
Blake, Nolan, Justin, Cameron, Anthony [5]	Freshman (< 30 credit hours)
Jameson, Harper, Ross, Gina [4]	Sophomore (31-60 credit hours)

Katie, Samuel, Tracy, Shane, Avery, Mallory [6]	Junior (61-90 credit hours)
[0]	Senior (> 91 credit hours)

The highest number of student participants, six of 15, reverse transferred as juniors. The lowest number of transfer credits is zero for both Nolan and Justin. The highest number of credits transferred is by Tracy at 80 credit hours.

Nolan explains how he reverse transferred with zero credit hours from the University of Kansas:

The reason I unenrolled in all of them [classes] was because I wanted to show that I never went to college. I didn't want it on my record, and that was my main thing was because I could have stayed enrolled in my chemistry and my math and I could have passed them with no problem without even going to class, but I knew if later in my life I wanted to go back to college and I didn't want that bad look on my record. It wasn't right there at that time for me so that's why I unenrolled in everything.

Justin similarly discusses how he did not want his attendance at the Public Research University to appear on his transcript.

I didn't want any of my classes to transfer. I wanted to forget that I ever went to [PRU]. I didn't want anything to do with that. I didn't transfer any of the classes. On my transcript, [PRU] doesn't exist. I just kinda enrolled in Johnson County. All I brought were my high school classes and classes I took while in high school that counted for college credit through St. Mary's. I just kinda acted like that was my first semester. I didn't want there to be a transfer process. I just kinda enrolled here and just forgot about [PRU].

Tracy, however, reverse transferred from the Urban Research University with the highest number of credit hours, 80. She discusses her transfer process:

All the classes transferred but some transferred as something different than I thought it would, but a class that didn't transfer from high school to [URU] transferred here, I'm thinking I transferred in with 80 hours. I don't remember.

Additionally, though not a highly discussed topic, five of the students note that changes in their academic majors also occur in their educational history. Katie states, “um, I have changed my major a lot.” She continues, “there was music, um, sign language, el. ed., music ed., radiology, radiology technology, I guess, and then general studies.”

Samuel explains his academic major background:

I originally wanted to go into astronomy, but then when I found out what I had to take for it, I decided not to go into it. Then I started to go into accounting and then when I started getting into the high level courses I decided that’s not what I wanted to do. Now I’m computer science and IT.

Ross discusses his academic major progression:

I’m getting an associate’s of science with an emphasis in information systems technology. Um, previously I went to [Land-Grant Public-I] for the professional pilot program, and then I enrolled in the college of business and that’s. Now I am here.

Jameson shares that his current major is “liberal arts until I transfer to a four-year school where I can finish.” He hopes to earn a degree in “English.” However, while at the PRU, he “went in studying computer science, um, and went back and forth between computer science and computer engineering.”

Interestingly enough, 10 of the 15 participants do not discuss wavering academic majors. For example, Nolan, who took a four-year break between attending the PRU directly out of high school and enrolling at JCCC upon his return to higher education, has wanted a “[PPRU] engineering” bachelor’s degree the entire time. Similarly, Tracy has only majored in “dental hygiene.” In fact, out of high school, Tracy only looked at colleges with a strong dental hygiene program. Her only wavering has focused on which dental hygiene degree to get. “Originally, I was going to get a bachelor’s degree in dental hygiene, but at, well here, they only offer associate’s degree. So, I’ll probably get that, graduate, and be done.”

Summary. In response to research question one, regarding reverse transfer students' educational backgrounds, four key themes emerge: First, 11 of 15 students went straight from high school, without an academic break, into a four-year college university. Second, the majority of the study participants, 11 of 15, are true undergraduate reverse transfer students having only attended one four-year college or university prior to transferring to JCCC. Third, the amount of time spent at the four-year college or university before reverse transferring ranges from one to four semesters. Fourth, the majority of the student participants, six of 15, reverse transferred during their junior year of college. The educational goals of the students are outlined next.

Educational goals of reverse transfer students. Research question two asks the following: What are the educational goals of these students who reverse transfer? A two-year community college and a four-year institution are fundamentally different in one primary way – a two-year community college grants associate degrees, and a four-year institution grants baccalaureate degrees. Additionally, while not a key topic of the study, this research question provides insight into the student's professional goals, post higher education. Recognizing that a job post schooling is inevitable, acknowledging career goals in conversation allows for a greater understanding of the student's overall educational goals.

Within the interview protocol, several questions were written in response to this specific research question: (1) Tell me about your decision to go to college. (2) Tell me about your educational goals. (3) Why did you transfer from the four-year college to JCCC (a two-year community college)? (4) Tell me more about how JCCC (a two-year community college) contributes to your educational goals.

The four categories that emerge as the educational goals pertinent to addressing research question two are: earning an associate degree, earning an associate degree and a baccalaureate degree, vertically transferring to a four-year college or university to earn a bachelor’s degree, and vertically transferring to a four-year institution to earn a baccalaureate degree with the intention of continuing on to graduate school. The study participants represent an even distribution of educational goals. Three students intend to earn an associate degree; the community college would be the end goal of their higher education. Four students plan to earn an associate degree and then proceed to earn a bachelor’s degree at a four-year college or university. Three students plan to not earn an associate degree, complete required prerequisites at the two-year community college, and vertically transfer to a four-year institution to earn a baccalaureate degree. Lastly, five students’ goals are to not earn an associate degree, vertically transfer to a four-year college or university, earn a bachelor’s degree, and then attend graduate or professional school.

Name	Educational Goal
Tracy, Harper, Cameron [3]	Earn an associate degree
Jameson, Nolan, Samuel, Ross [4]	Earn an associate degree and earn a baccalaureate degree
Gina, Blake, Avery [3]	Vertically transfer to earn a bachelor’s degree
Katie, Shane, Justin, Anthony, Mallory [5]	Vertically transfer to earn a baccalaureate degree, continue to graduate school

Earn an associate degree. The first educational goal highlights three of the study participants: Tracy, Harper, and Cameron. These three reverse transfer students intend to earn an associate degree. For Tracy, Harper, and Cameron, the two-year community college will be the end of their higher education. Cameron hopes to earn an associate degree in “hospitality and

hotel management.” According to Cameron, of the three offered hospitality and hotel management programs (“food and beverage, chef’s apprentice, and there’s hotel”), “I’m shooting for the hotel.” He shares why he does not intend to continue higher education beyond the associate degree and earn a bachelor’s degree:

My major is so specific to hospitality that I can get it all from that building over there [the JCCC Hospitality and Culinary Academy], and I don’t really, necessarily need to go to a four-year. I recently found out that [LGP-I] has an excellent hospitality program. Uh, which is kinda a kick in the pants, but whatever. But, uh, this is in Kansas City, and [the college town] has three or four hotels at most, whereas, I mean this school, 11 million dollars spent was created just to produce people and they have a culinary team that’s won the last 20 years in a row. They, people constantly scout from the Sheraton, Downtown Marriott, to the Hilton, everything, and Kansas City is ultimately a bigger network than [the college town].

Cameron concludes by stating, “I should be getting that degree in the next year and a half, or so.”

Tracy intends to earn an associate degree in dental hygiene. Tracy states, “so, I’ll probably get that, graduate, and be done, because I don’t think I can handle much more schooling. I’m like, I’ve been going to school since I was in kindergarten so I’d like a nice break.” Tracy transferred to JCCC from Urban Research University.

Harper plans to earn an associate degree in elementary education: “I want to finish up, uh, my associate’s and get my licensing and teaching.” While Harper is earning an associate degree, it will be awarded by Small Public University as opposed to JCCC. She further explains how she is earning an associate degree:

Well, I’m doing the [SPU] program through JCCC, so probably two more years here, but I’m technically going to be an [SPU] student, if that makes sense. My degree will be from [SPU] but all of my classes will be at JCCC. It’s an associate’s, but it’s under [SPU’s] wing. I believe the teachers come here and teach the classes.

To continue, Harper discusses how her major fits with her educational goals:

My current major is elementary education, but I'm wanting to do middle school. It's just they don't have a major for middle. It's either elementary or secondary, and secondary, I want to do middle school math or middle school or high school math, but to be a math teacher you have to take the same classes to be an engineer, so I was like why would I be a math teacher if I'm taking the same classes to be an engineer, so I, um, went down to elementary education just 'cause there's more grades and more job opportunities to do elementary and middle versus high school.

Harper's time at JCCC is proving beneficial in terms of meeting her educational goals:

Well, I'm going in teaching so a lot of the classes I'm in right now are teaching about teaching. Like how to teach. Like, I'm only a few weeks into it and I've learned so much that teachers give you awesome ideas. They tell you, they give you advice that I feel like I'm actually going to use and go towards my future into teaching. So, that's something I never really experienced until this semester, which is awesome.

For Cameron, Tracy, and Harper, their educational goals and their professional career goals can be achieved by attending JCCC and earning an associate degree. Hospitality and hotel management, dental hygiene, and elementary school teaching, according to the student participants, are fields that do not need a bachelor's degree for professional placement. In their experience, the associate degree is appropriate and sufficient education.

Earn an associate degree and a baccalaureate degree. Jameson, Nolan, Samuel, and Ross plan to earn their associate degrees at JCCC and then proceed to a four-year college or university to earn a bachelor's degree. This category represents the second educational goal of the student participants. Jameson states: "I'm hoping to finish my associate's degree and then my bachelor's degree four semesters after, so I guess spring of 2017 should be when I finish that." Jameson plans to earn a bachelor's degree in English from [URU].

I'm almost done, um, I've, I have talked to the counselor about where I'm going to transfer next. Um, and I've kind of started the process on that, um, but not much. Um, but I definitely did learn a lot about transferring from [PRU] to here and that will help me transfer from here [JCCC] to [URU].

To continue, Jameson discusses how earning education beyond a bachelor's degree is not likely part of his educational goals:

Um, and then in terms of school afterwards, I don't know. I know that the Peace Corps offers a lot of, um, benefits to return volunteers including, uh, partially paying for a master's degree in a variety of subject areas or even fully paying for it, but I don't know, um, if that's what I'm going to do yet. Um, I really don't like school very much. I'm not a school person. Um, I ya know, I do it because I have to and I do other things because I want to, and so, um, if something changes with that or if I come to find that I have a good opportunity at a school, I know a professor or something, I will continue, but right now it doesn't look likely that I'll continue beyond a bachelor's degree. Education is just a rung on that ladder.

Ross discusses his educational goals to earn a bachelor's degree:

I'm getting an associate's of science with an emphasis in information systems technology, and the program I'm in, it transfers straight to KU Edwards, so that also, I was gonna do that program, I'm going to do that program, too, so. I should be able to go there after like next spring. It'll be a bachelor of science in information technology management, or something like that.

Nolan shares his educational goals:

So, my life goal right now is school. I'm in 22 hours. I'm gonna graduate either in, I just got an internship with Black and Veatch for the summer. So, I'm not gonna be able to go full time but just 12 in the summer, but, I'll graduate either in December of 2015 or May 2016 and I'll graduate with my general studies and my drafting design technology degree, and then I have all of the requirements and enroll and to get accepted in the [PRU] engineering and I'm gonna go for architectural engineering.

To continue, when asked if his plan was to always get a bachelor's degree, Nolan responds by saying, "Oh, for sure. I mean an associate's, you might as well not even go to school if you just want to stop at an associate's. It's just a waste of money."

For Samuel, getting an associate degree was not the plan; however, he explains: "I think by the time I do all of my prereqs here I will be able to get an associate's within two or three classes so by then I'll probably just finish my associate's." After Samuel earns his associate degree from JCCC, he plans to proceed to the University of Kansas Edwards Campus, in

Overland Park, Kansas, to earn “the bachelor of science and IT over at KU.” Upon graduation, Samuel would “like to do something like Geek Squads. I kinda also want to open my own computer repair because there’s nothing like it in my hometown.”

Jameson, Nolan, Samuel, and Ross will benefit from their reverse transfer decision by earning two degrees: an associate degree from JCCC and a bachelor’s degree from a four-year college or university. Samuel and Ross hope to earn their bachelor’s degrees from the KU Edwards Campus. Nolan will proceed to the KU Lawrence, Kansas campus. Jameson plans to attend [URU] in Kansas City following his time at JCCC.

Vertically transfer to earn a bachelor’s degree. For the third educational goal, Gina, Blake, and Avery plan to not earn an associate degree, complete required prerequisites at the two-year community college, and vertically transfer to a four-year institution to earn a baccalaureate degree. Gina explains her educational goals:

I hope to earn a degree from Kansas State in nutrition and health. I will use this to do sports nutrition and open my own business of working with kids around the Johnson County area, teaching them how to be properly fueling their ever-growing and ever-changing bodies.

Gina further explains that attending JCCC is “to explore my career for the zillionth time and wanted a place to get prereqs done before attending a four-year college again.”

Similar to Gina, Blake intends to earn his prerequisites at JCCC. Blake, who is studying business, states:

I just wanted to, um, get as many as the classes I could get done before going to another four year school. Get all of my prerequisites done and out of the way, and I wanted to have a 3.5 GPA and play soccer.

When asked if he wants to earn an associate degree, his response is, “no way.” In fact, he further states:

I don't want to sign up for any classes that wouldn't transfer, um, I'm really careful about that especially after finding out that one class that I took this summer isn't going to transfer.

After vertically transferring, Blake envisions being at the four-year university for “two years.” Specifically, as a student athlete who plays soccer at JCCC, Blake's next institution will further be guided by his soccer opportunities. When asked what schools Blake is considering, he explains the following:

I like Rockhurst [University, a Jesuit university] and I like MidAmerica Nazarene [University, a Christian liberal arts college], but I've heard that some of the, you have to, like some of the things you have to do for the church during the week that has caused a lot of the guys to transfer out. So, I've been kind of careful about deciding if I want to go there or not. Kinda want to learn more about that school and, um, a lot of that stuff will start getting more serious next year. Trying to figure out which schools I want to go to, but I really would like to stay in the Kansas City area, but if the right opportunity comes and it's not a school out in the country I probably will look into it.

Avery, who reverse transferred from Public Research System University (PRSU) campus to JCCC, discusses her current major as “right now, nursing.” In fact, she comments that “I was also in a medical program at my high school.” While at PRSU,

I had put nursing [as my major] because originally I always felt like I wanted to do nursing, but I don't know, I didn't exactly get into the nursing program yet because I think they only accept like 30 people out of the whole thing, and so they [PRSU] accepted me as undeclared to maybe like see progress, or something.

Avery moved to Kansas to be with her husband who is in the Navy and from Kansas.

Additionally, Avery explains: “I'm moving to do my career, as well, like nursing.” When asked about transferring out of PRSU, she shares her thoughts regarding her next schooling steps:

I was thinking about a community [college] or four-year [college or university]. I was looking at KU, first of all, and I was like, wait, I have to take these prereqs though before I can ever get in. So, I was like, the only way to do that I can get in is maybe go to a community college, or something.

Avery comments that she “wants to get a baccalaureate.” Her husband’s major and bachelor’s attainment is also a part of her educational goals. She wants to vertically transfer to a four-year college or university “that has both of our degrees, nursing and petroleum engineering. There is only like 20 schools in the country that have it.” Due to current residency in Kansas and a mutual interest in Texas, they are “thinking about KU, Texas Tech [University], or Texas A&M [University]. So, that’s why those are our mainly narrowed down options.”

For Gina, Blake, and Avery, the reverse transfer movement serves as a “stepping stone” back to a four-year college or university to eventually earn a baccalaureate degree. The two-year community college is a part of the educational pursuit, not the end of their educational goals. Additionally, as seen in their quotes, having the ability to earn prerequisites at the two-year community college is a valuable part of their academic career.

Vertically transfer to earn a baccalaureate degree, continue to graduate school. Last, Katie, Shane, Justin, Anthony, and Mallory’s goals are to not earn an associate degree, vertically transfer to a four-year college or university, earn a bachelor’s degree, and then attend graduate or professional school. Katie explains:

So, my goal is to hopefully get a bachelor’s in general studies. Um, and then get into KU Med school in the occupational therapy program and end with a master’s in occupational therapy.

Katie further shares that “I took a lot of prereqs for the program here.”

Katie explains that her bachelor’s degree will be from Fort Hays State University through an online program. As Katie is the pilot student for this study, the eligibility requirements to

participate in the study were not yet defined. However, Katie did attend JCCC full time for one academic year, summer 2013 through summer 2014.

So, I'm actually, last semester was my last semester at Johnson County [Community College] and I got my associate's in, I don't even know, science and liberal arts or something. Basically they were like you have all of the classes, you just have to apply for graduation. So I was like, ok, I'll do that.

After earning her bachelor's degree, Katie plans to get her master's degree in occupational therapy.

In the fall, I went back full-time, here [JCCC], and that's, I had a hospital stay that past summer and I worked with an OT [occupational therapist], and I was like, "this is what I want to do." I just had this huge epiphany and so I knew that I needed to get these classes for the prereq program at OT school. So, I did as many as I could here, at Johnson County, because it's cheap, and then that semester I was all full time here, and then the next semester, which would have been this past semester, I took two classes through Johnson County and two classes through Fort Hays online, and that's where I'll be finishing out my bachelor's degree.

Shane, as previously mentioned, is a reverse transfer student from the Land-Grant Public-II (LGP-II) to JCCC and considers himself most notably a student athlete in baseball. His reason for reverse transferring was simply guided by baseball. Knowing that he would only be at JCCC for one year, he also knew that he would not be earning an associate degree. In fact, he admits that "I'm not gonna say that I, like, super furthered my education with this year at Johnson County [Community College]" due to the fact that he is "far enough ahead" academically.

So, I was at State for two years, came here, I'm only gonna be here for a year, and then I'll have two more years of eligibility at Louisiana Tech [University] because I redshirted my freshman year playing baseball at State. This is my second semester at Johnson County Community College.

Shane's educational goals are "double-majoring, and I was at State, in psychology and communications." He intends to earn his baccalaureate degree at Louisiana Tech University.

Specifically, he states the following:

I became pretty interested in sports psychology my junior year of high school, and just playing football and baseball in high school, I enjoyed the different, like, material that I came across.

After earning a bachelor's degree at Louisiana Tech University, Shane's goal is to return to the Land-Grant Public-II for their "sports psych master's program. I definitely do want to get a master's." Or, Shane is interested in going to medical school and specializing in "anesthesiology, I'm really considering that path as well."

Justin talks about the evolution of his educational goals:

Uh, it was more when I first enrolled here, uh, I really just wanted to get my associate's and be done, but as I kept going, I started doing, getting better grades. I started doing better and just kinda grew, I just kinda grew as a person. Kinda figured out that I really do want to get a bachelor's, and I want to go back to a four-year school, and kinda get, get what I'm going for.

Justin is majoring in "criminal justice" and intends to earn a bachelor's degree from "Wichita State [University], Washburn [University]" or "UMKC."

Bachelor's, that was just my basic thought, that's just kinda what was driven into my mind all through my life. So, it's what my family, well my dad's side of the family did. However, master's-wise it'll kinda depend on what I did and how I did it and if I wanted to keep going with my education, but just an associate's was never talked about, not that it's anything bad. It's just how my dad was and not going to college at all, no that, that was a no. For him, that, that was a no. I mean he always gave me the whole speech: "Hey, you're going to college, duh, duh, duh. You'll be this, you'll be that."

While Justin is set on earning a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, he has not confirmed his decision to attend graduate school, though he says doing so is likely.

Well, I've been discussing with one of my professors, one of my criminal justice professors, uh, and his wife, who's also a psychology professor here, about, uh,

career goals as far as what to do with, say a master's degree in criminal justice or psychology, as opposed to saying just getting a bachelor's in criminal justice, 'cause they feel as if I'd do really good in a psychology aspect like forensic psychology aspect of it. Just kinda how I've expressed, 'cause I've had him for two separate classes for about a year straight, so he kinda knows how I think, how I operate, and then his wife got to know me, so they really feel like the psychology aspect of criminal justice would be best for me. So, they're kinda helping me kinda structure what I may do in the future and what I would do in the future. So, I'm thinking right now, uh, cop, but the psychology aspect is kinda growing on me, and I may do something with that and kinda get a master's in psychology with an emphasis in all that, just all that kinda field. I could be a cop for a couple years and then get school, a master's, while I'm a cop.

Mallory states that her educational goals are to get “two bachelor's, physics and biochemistry and two minors, linguistics and astrobiology.” When asked if she intends to get an associate degree, she responds with “No. No. I don't even know what I could get with all the random, sporadic classes. I don't even know what I would have to do to get an associate's degree.” Earning an associate degree from JCCC is not a part of her educational plans.

However, after earning two bachelor's degrees, Mallory plans to continue to graduate school.

I always knew that I wanted to apply for medical school, which is what I want to do, but I want to apply for a medical school where I can study medicine; but I also want to be able to get a doctorate in physics or in astrophysics, and only a few medical schools let you do both. So, I kinda have just very few to pick from. So, that would be an MD/PhD, not in related fields at all, but kinda what I'm interested in mostly the medical stuff because I could get a job and physics-wise, most of the physics students, they're either super intelligent, which I'm not, or their parents pay for everything because in the end it ends up being a degree that's like a hundred thousand dollars, and unless mom and dad are paying for it's not very easy to do. So, the medical stuff will kinda help me with that, um, but what I'm interested in is NASA, so I'm trying to get my piloting license here in Kansas because that's a little easier to get it here, and, um, that's kinda where I'm going in like a couple of years. So, I'd apply for medical school next summer after I go back to [PRU] and kinda start finishing off stuff.

Similar to Mallory, Anthony has lofty educational goals. Anthony shares his thoughts:

So, then I made the decision to return to Johnson County Community College to work on dentistry prerequisites. So, now I am here taking chemistry, anatomy, calculus, the works. Associate's degree is not, uh, really a goal. A goal is to finish my prerequisites and then transfer to a four-year university to acquire a bachelor's degree and then apply to a dental school.

Anthony further explains:

I don't plan on transferring my credits just because I don't plan on graduating from Johnson County Community College. So, my credits are still at [PRU] and they're separate, essentially. I will at some point transfer them to the four-year university from which I want to graduate.

While Katie, Shane, Justin, Anthony, and Mallory are currently defined as reverse transfer students due to their movements from four-year colleges and universities to JCCC, by intending to transfer to another four-year college or university, these five participants will acquire the student title of a transfer swirl (Kearney et al., 1995). In fact, within the transfer swirl categories, according to research, Katie, Shane, Justin, Anthony, and Mallory can also be considered serial transfers. A serial transfer highlights a student who participates in one or more transfers in pursuit of his or her higher education attainment (Kearney et al., 1995).

Summary. In response to research question two, the 15 students reveal their four educational goal categories: earn an associate degree, earn an associate degree and earn a baccalaureate degree, vertically transfer to a four-year college or university to earn a bachelor's degree, and vertically transfer to a four-year institution to earn a baccalaureate degree with the intention of continuing on to graduate school. The 15 students are pulled into the two-year community college to accomplish a short-term or long-term goal with regards to their educational pursuit.

Why students reverse transfer. Research question three asks the following: Why did these students reverse transfer from a four-year college or university to a two-year college? This question highlights the overall goal of the study, to explore and better understand a group of reverse transfer students. The question offers a broad standpoint, looking at the individual student as a part of the larger reverse transfer student population. Recognizing the variety of

educational paths a student can choose in his or her academic pursuit, this research question highlights the reverse transfer as the student's chosen academic path.

Within the interview protocol, several questions were written in response to this specific research question: (1) Tell me about your decision to go to college. (2) Why did you transfer from the four-year college to JCCC (a two-year community college)? (3) Looking back, is there anything that the four-year college could have done differently to influence your decision to transfer? (4) Tell me about your experience at your previous, four-year college. (5) What attracted you to JCCC? (6) Tell me more about how JCCC (a two-year community college) contributes to your educational goals?

For each student, this section shows that there is not one sole reason for their reverse transfer; all 15 students display multiple reasons, pushes and pulls, affecting their decision to leave a four-year college or university and reverse transfer to a two-year community college. The following five categories emerge as thematic findings pertinent to addressing research question three: institutional fit, academics, finances, family ties to community college location, and personal circumstances. The findings are organized by the overarching theoretical framework, the push and pull factor. As discussed in the theoretical framework, pushes encourage students to leave a four-year institution while pulls draw students into the two-year community college. The reality is that students may be pushed from a college or university, but the push does not mean that the student will be pulled into the community college; additional factors are at play with this decisive transfer.

Institutional fit. Institutional fit at the four-year college or university, as a reason to reverse transfer, appears during the interviews in four different ways: (1) location of the four-

year college or university, (2) institution and class size, (3) difficulty making friends, and (4) an overall poor experience. All four of these reasons can be considered pushes as the reverse transfer students discuss these as negative experiences regarding the four-year college or university they previously attended.

Location of the four-year college or university (a push). The location of the four-year college or university, as a reason why a student reverse transfers, is discussed by six of the 15 participants. Katie, Blake, Jameson, Harper, Tracy, and Ross all share why the geographical location of their former four-year college or university was a negative experience.

Blake shares why the rural location of his four-year college pushes him to transfer out:

Um, I went, initially signed at [Presbyterian Private College] in Nebraska and I was a red shirt for the first year. So, I kinda figured out that I didn't like living out in the country so much. I didn't realize how much I liked being in the city, like in Kansas City. So, came back here. Um, it really was just about living out in the middle of nowhere that it was just, like, so strange for me. I didn't realize that, ya know, every day after school, like, we would go to the Plaza, or to downtown, or on the weekend there's all kinds of movie theaters and stuff, and stuff to do, and then in [PPC] all they had was just one theater with not very much showings, and then there was no restaurants which killed me because I love cooking and didn't have a kitchen, and there's just a culture shock for me pretty much. So, I needed to be back in the city and I kinda figured that out about myself. Living out there for half the year.

Blake summarizes by sharing "I really liked everything about that school, but it's just a bad location."

Ross, who spent time on both the college town campus and rural campus of LPG-I, explains how the rural campus was not a fit by simply stating, "I didn't like [the rural campus] 'cause it was a small town." Katie shares similar sentiments as Blake and Ross: "I hated [the college town]. Like I would always visit my sister in Kansas City and I just missed it. Like I felt like I didn't belong in [the college town], and I don't know, I just felt like I had a really hard

time feeling like I was in place.” Harper expresses comparable thoughts regarding [the SPU location]. “I was like ok, maybe I’ll stay at SPU, but then I really thought about it and I was like, ‘I hate this place.’” Harper continues, “[the SPU location], it was a very small town; you couldn’t do a lot of things.”

For Jameson, he explains his lack of integration and experience with the college town, where the PRU is located. “[the location of PRU] was, like the city was alright. I never really lived in the cool places in [the location of PRU], so I never really experienced the full of that city. Um, and as a result, I didn’t really like it that much.”

Tracy, after speaking positively about her time at the Urban Research University, ultimately notes, in response to being asked, “Overall, you enjoyed [URU]?” “Yes, although it was kinda scary because it was in the ghetto-y part of town. I mean, close to it, and I hated driving around there.” Additionally, Tracy, who is “from a small town called Winchester, Kansas” states, “I’m not a big fan of [the location of URU].”

The obvious fact is that a college or university cannot and will not move its physical location; however, it is the student’s prerogative to leave that location. Thus, the location of a four-year college or university is a reason why a student reverse transfers.

Institution and class size (a push). While not all four-year colleges and universities are large in size, the majority of the four-year colleges and universities that these student participants attended have a large student enrollment, 20,000 students or more. The large physical size and classroom size of the four-year college or university are deterrents for seven of the 15 reverse transfer students.

Jameson, who attended the PRU, explains:

Um, I was getting a little fed up with the, um, scale of the university; made it difficult for me to accomplish, um, anything, um, to get help with, um, ya know, um, finding my tax form that I had to get from this university, getting my questions answered about scholarships, career opportunities, internships, um, getting my records in the bursars office. I had a lot of difficulty with the university size.

Nolan, also a PRU reverse transfer, shares his perspective regarding institutional size:

Going in, like I said, I had nobody to talk to, I have nobody's input. I chose my classes from eight to nine and nine to 10 and boom, boom, boom, boom, and it's almost impossible to do because of the walking if you're on one side of thing and walking to the other side. I was going from English all the way to [a campus building] [two buildings on opposite sides of the campus] and then I'd be down somewhere else, and plus, you don't know where you're going new and um, so I'm late to all of my classes, and I lived at the bottom of that hill so you had to hike up to top of the hill; terrible living situation.

Nolan continues by discussing class size as a negative experience:

They throw the freshmen to the wolves when it comes to classes. I mean, when you're in a high school and you're going from 15 to 25 people in a class and you get thrown into a class of 1,200 people, and you can't even see the instructor because you're up on the third deck.

Justin echoes Jameson and Nolan regarding the size of the school: "the overwhelmed-ness, I was overwhelmed with the size of the school." Additionally, he specifies that "having to be around 28,000 people" is part of what overwhelms him. He continues, "I wasn't expecting, like I knew they [classes] would be big, but I didn't know how big. They're pretty big."

Tracy, who attended the Urban Research University, shares, "um, yeah definitely I didn't like the class sizes and my instructors never knew me, like never knew who I was. I feel like sometimes they didn't really care." Similarly, when asked to share her academic experience at PRSU, Avery explains, "there's probably 400 people in them [the classes]. So, you're fighting for your spot." While discussing a different university than the one Avery attended, Mallory makes nearly an identical statement regarding class size at the PRU: "um, they have a lot of

classes that have like 400 people, and mostly the people that teach it are graduate students which most of the time they don't have time for you."

Ross faults the large size of classes at Land-Grant Public-I as his reason for doing poorly academically. "Um, I was distracted. I just, I wasn't going to class, for one. Um, because those are a lot bigger classes, so you're not pressured to go to class. Like no one really cares. No one's watching you." Later in the interview, Ross reiterates, "[LGP-I], the classes, 400 people versus 30. So, you don't really learn. You don't feel pressure to go to class." The large class sizes and expansive university are a push and reasons students reverse transfer.

Difficulty making friends (a push). Negative institutional fit is next connected through difficulty making friends, a missed connection to peers, and a lack of integration, an experience that five of the 15 reverse transfer students share as a reason for leaving their previous four-year college or university.

Katie, who lived off campus, yet was involved in the marching band at LGP-I and worked at a local daycare, shares her experience:

Um, I had a really hard time making friends, um, a lot of people from my hometown went there so I knew a lot of people, but everyone was in a sorority or a fraternity and I am not a sorority girl. It just wasn't something I was interested in, but if you definitely aren't in one you feel left out and I, um, so I made friends that weren't [in a sorority], but they were also friends from back home. So, I thought that was really hard.

Jameson, a PRU reverse transfer student who lived off campus like Katie also brings up Greek life. He says,

Um, well I do regret not having lived in the dorms. Um, I didn't really meet a lot of people and especially my personality, I'm outgoing, and so I had a very difficult time [with the people] I met in my computer science and engineering

classes. I had a hard time fitting in with them generally, and so, um, I didn't make a ton of friends. I [joined] just a couple of organization groups, the association of computer machinery, competitive programming club, all that kind of business, and I never really found my niche. Um, I'm not, I'm not really big on belonging to organizations larger than myself because I don't really like it when other people's actions can speak for me as a member of that organization. So, I never joined a fraternity or any kind of other social group like that. So, I do regret that because I feel like that really contributed to my, um, my lack of success there.

Harper shares similar sentiments as Jameson and Katie when asked about her experience at Small Public University regarding a connection to peers:

I cheered, so that helped. I feel like you get to meet people that way, but I felt like the town was, um, if you didn't do sports or you weren't Greek life, um, you were nobody kind of thing, and I just didn't like that. Even though I was involved, I didn't feel like I knew anybody that wasn't involved with things. I don't know, I like to know a lot of people and I know that there were a lot of people that were involved and I know that there were also people that weren't. I felt like since I cheered it kind of held me back from knowing other people and experiencing different things because I couldn't do the Greek life or I couldn't get to know the track players because they just, I don't know, I just didn't like the environment, overall.

Justin discusses his experience "as far as friends-wise."

I made three, two guys and a girl, mainly because I was forced. Like the girl wouldn't give up. She kinda noticed that I was like reserved and kept annoying me and annoying me. I'm still really good friends with her and the two guys. I didn't make many friends, but I didn't try.

Additionally, he notes that "I didn't go to one basketball game. I didn't go to one football game." Overall, he shares a lack of integration with the institution and his peers primarily because "where I was, at the time, it wasn't a good fit, but I don't think anywhere would have been a good fit."

Cameron simply notes, "I was really, really nervous when I went to LGP-I, just not outgoing at all. Didn't have any of that, so when I had to meet new situations, I just kinda

avoided them instead.” For these reverse transfers, a lack of connection to peers aids in their push out of the four-year institution.

Poor overall experience at the four-year college or university (a push). Last, five of the 15 reverse transfer students share their poor overall experience at the four-year college or university as a reason to leave and feel pushed out. To begin, Cameron shares, “I just didn’t really enjoy it [LGP-I] nearly as much.”

Similarly, Anthony, who attended the Public Research University, discusses his experience at the four-year university:

I just wasn’t liking [PRU], just the whole ethos of the university is not to my liking. I just felt like the ethos of the school was very much focused on the indoctrination of students into the [PRU], uh, just [PRU] fandom. I felt like there was a lot of emphasis to be a [PRU] fan. Even during orientation, there was like, you’re going to find a spot in [PRU] and you’re gonna love it here, and I just felt like it was very fabricated. I feel like if one wants to have a, ya know, positive relationship with their university it should be allowed to grow organically. Like I was getting T-shirts thrown at me. Like uh, here’s a [PRU] shirt. Here’s a [PRU] shirt. I just didn’t really care for it.

For Anthony, a negative overall experience at PRU was his primary reason for reverse transfer.

Jameson relates to Anthony in his lack of desire to be a fan of PRU:

I don’t know, people, like so I, I was raised, my dad’s a [LGP-II] fan, [LGP-II] sports. Um, and so that’s how I was raised, and I came to [PRU] because I had friends here, because I had friends there, and it was so intense; like I don’t like basketball very much and I’m a huge football fan. I love men’s soccer. I love women’s soccer. I watched a couple of the women’s soccer games and they’re a good team, but, like, there is no men’s soccer team. The football team wasn’t very good. I just never got a lot of allegiance to the university, and so being here [JCCC], um, I feel like everyone’s kinda on the same page as like this is not the end all be all. This is, this is, we’re all here [JCCC] to do what we need to do and then move on. It’s a stepping stone and I feel like for a lot of the people that I knew, um, [PRU] was the peak of their life, and I don’t, that just wasn’t me.

Comparably, when discussing her experience at Small Public University, Harper states, “I hated it. Yeah, it was awful. Um, I went there ’cause I was like, oh, it’s a small town. Columbia, Tennessee [Harper’s hometown], is a small town and I wanted to go back to that kind of environment, and it was not what I was hoping for.” Additionally, she says, “um, I think I regret going there altogether. I think I would have been happier going other routes.”

Nolan’s overall negative experience included his living situation: “At [PRU], moved in, went in, and it was the worst dorm ever, for sure. I couldn’t believe I was living there. It was absolutely terrible.”

In summary, a lack of institutional fit, defined by a dislike of the location of the four-year college or university, difficulty adjusting to the physical and classroom size at the four-year college or university, trouble making friends, and an overall poor institutional experience clarifies why 11 of 15 student participants reverse transferred to a two-year community college.

Academics. Academics is another common theme found during the student interviews. This category is represented in three subcategories: (1) academic difficulty at the four-year college or university, (2) a specific academic program offered at a two-year community college, and (3) acquisition of baccalaureate prerequisites.

Academic difficulty at four-year college or university (a push). Academic difficulty at his or her four-year university is one of the reasons four students reverse transferred: Jameson, Cameron, Ross, and Mallory. Below are their academic difficulty stories.

Jameson ultimately reverse transferred from Public Research University to JCCC due to the fact that he was “put on academic probation” and “dismissed from the college of engineering.” He states that he:

Went in studying computer science, um, and went back and forth between computer science and computer engineering which were pretty much the same first level courses. Uh, didn't have a lot of success, um, I did alright in some of my classes and I did poorly in others.

Jameson continues:

Um, so um, my second semester I got put on academic probation, the spring of 2013. Um, and then I was able to keep my grades above the line, um, in the fall, then the following spring I was unable to do so, and then after the second year I was dismissed from the college of engineering. Um, I could have stayed at [PRU] to change my major which is kinda what I was looking towards doing anyway, um, but, um, I had a job, um, at the brewery as a host at the time, um, so I came home and I worked, um. I only took five credit hours last semester trying to get my other things more on track so I could get back with school. Um, and I was working full time, um, and then, uh, after that I enrolled full time for this semester.

Jameson delves further:

In terms of, um, the quality of my courses, they, um, like I said, I repeated a couple of courses and they were vastly different every time I took them. Um, granted, they were survey courses so they were ya know entry level, basically, engineering courses. But I took a computer programming course through the first time and I got a D and you needed a C to advance. It was very, very difficult and I worked very, very, very hard, um, and then, um, the second time through, we didn't have any homework, the tests were much easier, they were computer based instead of pen and paper which was much easier. It will catch a lot more of your mistakes that way. Um and so I passed that class with a A without even trying. Um, and so I got a little, that was the second semester and I got a little miffed at the whole, um, like education as a whole, um, just its lack of consistency. Um, I felt like a lot of things were largely based on chance. Um, and um, I had that experience in all of the classes that I repeated were vastly different whether they were easier or harder the second time.

After Cameron's freshman year at Land-Grant Public-I, he received a letter, "pretty early on, like two or three weeks after school had ended," stating his dismissal from the university. Originally, he was "put on academic probation after my freshman year, fall semester." In one breath, he says," and then I was put on academic probation 'cause I would mostly just go to class and then go home and sleep or drink or go home with friends and stuff like that." Cameron continues his story:

And then second semester I was all like yeah, I'm gonna get it back up. We're gonna do just fine, and I didn't. I failed out of [LGP-I], and I, I knew I would. Well, it was getting towards the end of the semester and I just didn't know any of the things that were coming up on the test. Like, I consider myself a rather intelligent person but when you don't go to a math class every single day it's like putting your training wheels back on your bike. Um, so, yeah, and I think the thing that really, really hit was when I was back home and, ya know, I kinda had to tell my parents that I didn't do well, at all, and I guess it wasn't really kicked out, it was more or less I dropped. I guess I never saw it as a forceful thing but it was more or less a letter that said "hey, we'd love to have you back, just not right now sort of thing." So, it was kinda like go somewhere else so you can get your grades up and then come back, but if that's being kicked out, then by all means, I was kicked out.

Interestingly enough, Cameron explains:

I had already enrolled in the fall semester, but I more or less knew I wasn't coming back and had already talking with my counselor that I probably wasn't going to return. So, I wasn't necessarily sad, it really wasn't working for me at [LGP-I]. I just didn't enjoy it nearly as much. I had told my parents, I was like, "I'm, I failed out of [LGP-I]. I'm sorry that I wasted your money, but I, I totally just failed out of school." They were kinda like, ok, and then about a week later I got the letter, and I was like, ok, this just confirms it.

When asked what about his time at Land-Grant Public-I was not working, he shares the following:

Uh, let's see here. The teaching is good. Like the teachers are cool. I had one or two teachers that I loved to death. They were just amazing. They had traveled all over the world. They could teach in different attitudes, but there were some that were just out for themselves. So, when it came to teaching, it was just for them and you were kinda just a participant. You weren't really being taught, you were being told. Um, and then, I don't know, the opportunities to not go to class are a lot higher.

While Ross was not formally dismissed from Land-Grant Public-I, he admits that he did "poorly" three times during his interview. First, he says, "I ended up doing poorly in my classes, failing some classes, three out of my four classes. Um, and then the next semester I was like crap." Second, he shares, "Then I ended up doing poorly again and I was, I really decided then that I can't, I can't be in this scenario, this environment. So I was like I gotta change

something.” Third, when asked to discuss more about his decision to reverse transfer, he describes, “so, ya know, I failed, or I did poorly again and that was really like the catalyst for the whole reaction.” As discussed earlier in this chapter, Ross faults the large class size for the primary reason he did “poorly.”

For Mallory, her academic difficulty stems from a self-prescribed learning disability. At length, she explains her struggles:

Um, and then one of other things is I have testing problems. I don't do the bubble testing very well. They told me I'd have to actually go and get a diagnosis which costs three thousand dollars for them to give me any sort of anything for, like, disability, or whatever. So, that's another thing I have to get before I go back, um, because I talked to the testing centers and they would do nothing until you have a diagnosis, which most kids do it when they're, like, 10, and I'm doing it now when I'm 20, and it's a little difficult. So, that just kinda stunk, but physics teachers, because they dealt a lot of with autistic kids, I guess, because they're interested in that, they were very nice. Like give me a room to myself and I would do the testing and I would get great grades. Other classes, not so much, and I would do very bad, and that kinda where there was a big discrepancy, which I'm kinda fighting with [PRU] to make W [withdrawn] some of the Fs that I had because sometimes it just wasn't fair, from my point of view. So, I want them to put W so that it doesn't affect my GPA 'cause I have As and then I have a couple Fs and it just doesn't really make any sense.

Mallory credits her “disability testing stuff” and finances as her primary reasons for reverse transferring.

As seen in Jameson's, Cameron's, Ross', and Mallory's stories, academic difficulty at the four-year university is revealed in a variety of ways ultimately affecting their ability to stay enrolled at the baccalaureate granting institution.

Acquisition of baccalaureate prerequisites; a stepping stone (a pull). Seven participants, Katie, Blake, Samuel, Avery, Anthony, Gina, and Mallory, many of whom intend to earn a bachelor's degree, each discuss how reverse transferring affords an opportunity to earn

prerequisites at a two-year community college, and perhaps create a stepping stone progression to a four-year institution.

Blake shares, “I just wanted to, um, get as many as the classes I could get done before going to another four year school. Get all of my prerequisites done and out of the way, and I wanted to have a 3.5 GPA and play soccer.” Gina describes comparable reasoning: “I wanted to explore my career for the zillionth time and wanted a place to get prereqs done before attending a four-year college again.” Similarly, Katie discusses her pull toward JCCC:

I took a lot of prereqs for the program here. So, like human anatomy was one, human physiology was one, medical terminology was one, tech writing was one. So, a lot of the prereqs that I still needed, they were offered here, and there were not prereqs that I would need for like another program. So, yeah, I ended up doing that here.

Samuel, who wants to earn an associate degree and earn a baccalaureate degree, explains his approach to earning prerequisites and proceeding to a four-year university. “But, like to do it, I couldn’t go jump right into a university since I didn’t have my prereqs for it. So, I came back here [JCCC] because I know the campus and it’s cheaper than to go anywhere else, but I’m kind of just taking my prereqs here.”

Avery echoes, “so, we’re [Avery and her husband] gonna be here for about a year just to take the prereqs, and he’s also taking prereqs too. So, we’re getting some of the things out of the way.” Anthony continues with similar notions, “so, then I made the decision to return to Johnson County Community College to work on dentistry prerequisites. So, now I am here taking chemistry, anatomy, calculus, the works.”

Last, while Mallory does not specifically say she is taking prerequisites at JCCC, when asked if she considers herself a transfer student, she says the following:

Not really. Just 'cause I know I'm gonna go back. Um, but so far I've liked the teachers and I like the students, and I've met a couple of students that started here and I think it's such a good, it's such a good choice just 'cause the hours are really cheap, the classes are basically the same, and then they can have like a part-time job where they can save up for two or three years and then go to [PRU].

For Mallory, she is exhibiting how attending the two-year community college can serve as a stepping stone back to a four-year university. Several student participants also refer to JCCC as a stepping stone guiding their path back to a bachelor's degree. Nolan claims a community college is merely "a stepping stone to a four-year degree."

Katie states, "I felt like ok, this is a stepping stone, it's not my stopping point, and I think that's the realization that like made it [reverse transferring] ok." Last, Jameson describes the community college as "a stepping stone" as students are "here to do what we need to do and then move on."

Specific academic program offered at the two-year community college (a pull). For Blake, Samuel, Tracy, and Ross, JCCC offered a specific academic program that pulled them into the two-year community college and supported their continued academic progression.

When asked why Blake did not choose to transfer from Private Presbyterian College to another four-year college, he explains the following:

Ok, um, well a big part of it was I wanted to try out the culinary school here at Johnson County. They just had built it and it was really nice, and it looked like something fun to do. So, that was one of the reasons I just, I just wanted to try it out 'cause I like cooking, and, um, it like, it was fun. I still like to take some of the classes every once in a while, but, um, I get a lot more out of the business courses. They're a lot more challenging than the culinary school, so, um, that was part of the reason.

Samuel, who transferred from Midwestern Research University to JCCC after originally attending JCCC out of high school, simply says, "they have a degree that I go into." Tracy, who

intends to earn an associate degree, choose JCCC due to their dental hygiene program. Similar to Tracy, Cameron will earn an associate degree in hospitality, which he can do through a specific program offered at JCCC. “My major is so specific to hospitality that I can get it all from that building over there [the JCCC hospitality and Culinary Academy] and I don’t really, necessarily need to go to a four-year.”

In summary, academic difficulty, an available academic program, and a desire to earn prerequisites provide answers to research question three, why students reverse transfer.

Finances. The high financial cost of attending a four-year college or university is viewed as a deterrent by 11 student participants. In fact, many of the students refer to the four-year college or university as “expensive,” a push, and the two-year community college as “cheap,” a pull, resulting in a positive reason to reverse transfer and enroll at JCCC. Put simply, reverse transferring is cost effective in the higher education pursuit for reverse transfer students.

Katie shares the following:

Well, I transferred from LGP-I to Fort Hays, but back to Johnson County [Community College] because I didn’t know what I wanted to do and classes are cheaper here, and so I thought if I’m gonna waste classes, not like waste them, but if I’m gonna be paying for classes that don’t go towards whatever bachelor’s I get, I might as well pay for them cheaper. It [LGP-I] was expensive. Like I remember, I went to school here for free because I played clarinet and I got a scholarship, and then I also had an academic scholarship, so it was cheap. However, I also lived off campus which isn’t cheap in Kansas City, and, um, but I remember getting my financial aid, I remember it not being enough to cover [LGP-I], and I was like, “what am I gonna do?” That ended up being a huge factor.

Avery agrees that it is “much cheaper for me, for me since we [Avery and her husband] want to be saving money, and what not, it’s just much cheaper for me to get my prereqs done here.” Additionally, after living in California she states:

I know it's much cheaper over here [Kansas] for school and live. So, I was like wow, over there [California] it was extremely expensive. So, I'm just taking prereqs, and they all have them here and for a good price, especially if you live in Johnson County, it's even cheaper. It's \$88 a credit hour, and if you're from somewhere else in Kansas it's about \$100. So, since we moved here, it's even cheaper so it's even better.

She summarizes, "I mean you will be in debt much less."

When asked "is there anything that [URU] could have done to keep you," Tracy states, "I feel like if they would have been cheaper it would have made more a difference." Samuel states a similar comment, "if I went to a university, it's gonna cost more to take all of my prereqs, and I really didn't want to go to any of the universities because I didn't want to pay to go there."

Anthony agrees with Samuel; "my goal is to finish the majority of my prerequisites here [JCCC] because of cost and location." When asked what attracted Anthony to JCCC, he simply states, "cost." Justin has the same answer as Anthony to the same question: "it's cheaper."

When Harper decides to transfer out of Small Public University, she considers Kansas State University; however, cost was a deterrent from this lateral transfer option.

And then I applied to K-State 'cause I was going to transfer there, but financially I was like, K-State is a little expensive, and then I was gonna go, I was going to go to K-State, but I was like no, it's too expensive.

Now, "I'm financially looking at an adult way view of life, would be JCCC and then going to a four-year. Just, so expensive." Ultimately, Harper enrolls at JCCC because "it was a lot cheaper."

Jameson reiterates the common comments regarding cost: "it was expensive for me, ya know, and I wish that I would have only stayed for one year. Two semesters instead of four semesters." When asked, "what were the main reason to transfer from [LGP-I] to JCCC," Ross says, "cost, number one reason."

For Mallory, as previously noted, finance is her primary struggle with her higher education pursuit and the common thread through her interview. She begins her story about financial struggle when asked to share her decision to go to college.

Um, so my parents told me to go to school. They wanted something simpler than physics and I decided to change my major when I kinda realized that I was gonna be paying for it. Even though they're supportive of it, they're basically just paying for rent, and, um, I needed tuition money, and in the United States, if you're under 24 you're still considered dependent unless you legally get emancipation from your parents. So my parents make enough money to pay for me to go to school and they don't, so the U.S. doesn't give me any loans and stuff. I'm not eligible for any of that [FAFSA] stuff.

Mallory continues her story regarding her financial difficulties by stating, "I would take about one semester off every other semester just because I would end up having to pay out-of-pocket whatever was leftover."

Mallory expresses continued concerns directly in response to the question "is there anything that PRU could have done differently to help you?"

Um, I guess the financial aid office, working with a payment plan for students that have to work, because mostly they're like "talk to your parents," and I'm like most of us don't live with our parents anymore or they're not financially responsible for us. Even now, even though I'm by myself they still send stuff to my parents, and I'm just like like they're not even aware that I'm going to school, or anything. They're just kinda there. But, until you're 24, and I think they might have raised the age again, they always ask you to co-sign your parents, and if you want to ask for a loan, you have to ask your parents. If you want to sign for FAFSA you have to ask for your parent's tax return stuff; so, it's just, I don't know, it's geared toward people that their parents are gonna pay for everything. Which is mostly the students I met, which for them it was very weird. They were like, "why are you working all the time?" It's like, well, stuff is expensive. But I think that's one of those things, the financial office.

As a result, Mallory is now taking classes at JCCC "just 'cause they're much cheaper." Simply, "um, I can afford to take classes" at JCCC; this is the only means for Mallory's continued enrollment in college. The above section demonstrates the impact finances, specifically an

“expensive” four-year college or university and a “cheap” two-year community college has on students; this makes reverse transferring a cost effective option in order to remain a college student and acquire less financial debt.

Family ties to community college location. Ten of the student participants cite the desirable community college location as a positive pull drawing them into JCCC. Specifically, for these 10 students, family ties to the community college location aided in their decision to reverse transfer. Note that family living near or around the community college does not mean that Overland Park, Kansas, is their hometown. For Mallory, Gina, Anthony, Ross, Samuel, Harper, Justin, Jameson, Blake, and Katie, JCCC’s physical location is a pull to reverse transfer. This pull can be viewed as a contrast to the push experienced by several students, resulting from the negative location of their previously attended four-year colleges or universities. This theme is revealed when asked “what attracted you to JCCC?”

Mallory responds saying, “well, when I first came, I was in Overland Park [Kansas] with my parents, and they live like five minutes south of here [JCCC]. So, um, they told me that there was a community college there and you can take some classes.” Similarly, Gina “wanted to move home to Kansas City, and this was the best option for colleges.” Gina continues, “JCCC is conveniently located and central to the area, and was the best choice.”

After struggling academically at Land-Grant Public-I, Ross states the following:

I was really disappointed in myself, and, um, so I was just talking with my parents and they suggest things like this. You could go to a community college, ya know. I needed to stay in Kansas. I pretty much wanted to come to Kansas City because I love it here. It’s, well, it’s really cheap here compared to any other four-year school. Um, also, I would be living with my brother so I wouldn’t be paying rent anywhere.

Being able to live with his brother made the reverse transfer a positive option. Justin shares a similar story regarding a sibling draw to Overland Park, Kansas.

Uh, I didn't know where to start. I didn't know where I would go. I didn't know how I'd get there. It just, I just knew Johnson County was here, and I have a sister that lives out here so I knew I could just kinda live with her, and just kinda be alone but not be alone, and work on myself instead of having to be around 28,000 people, and have people kinda keep trying to bring me out, bring me out when I didn't want to. Here I knew I'd just be able to focus on what I needed to do without any distractions, I guess. Because even when I lived with my sister she was kinda gone, because she's a doctor so she was at work or asleep. I didn't want to be around all of the people. I didn't want to. I just felt like that would be way too much.

Ultimately, Justin "had somewhere to live"; this pulls him into JCCC. Katie echoes the opportunity to live with a sibling: "So, then I moved up to Kansas City to move in with my sister who had just recently gotten a divorce. Like I would always visit my sister in Kansas City, and I just missed it."

Anthony's hometown of Overland Park, Kansas, pulled him to JCCC. When asked if he considered other schools when leaving the Public Research University, he responds, "it was Johnson County Community College due to its location. It didn't cross my mind to transfer to a four-year before completing prerequisites."

Comparable to Anthony, Harper, who reverse transferred from Small Public University and took one academic year off, states, "JCCC was closer to home so I wouldn't have to move." Being a mom of a two-month-old, not having to move is important. Additionally, "'cause I still have my job that I had then, and so that was a big thing."

Jameson shares his story including hometown and a job that pulls him into JCCC from PRU: "Well, um, I didn't want to pay rent at my apartment, um, for one. Um, and so I moved back home which is on the Kansas side like way out south. Um, and I work close to there, and

so I didn't want to, um, go to school, uh, I didn't want to commute that far, ya know." Blake, after reverse transferring from Private Presbyterian College to JCCC, also moved home to Kansas City, Kansas, to live with his parents.

For Samuel, his health issues, detailed in the next section within this chapter, force him to move home in order to get help from his mom and have easy access to his Kansas City doctors.

With my health getting bad, well, I could have stayed there and went to doctors but I was three hours from pretty much everyone that I was family with. So, moving back home, it was, I live with my mom, my dad lives 15 minutes away, all my other family is right around there so it's, I mean I have to come up to Kansas City to go to the doctors.

Samuel selects JCCC for his reverse transfer "because, one, I'm familiar with this area, not just the campus but the area, and plus, my doctors are up at KU [Medical Center], so I'm close to them."

For 10 of the 15 reverse transfer students, the physical setting of the selected two-year community college was an important pull. Being able to live at home for free, move in with a sibling, or be near a job or doctor aids in the reverse transfer decision.

Personal circumstances. The final theme that emerges during the student interviews surrounds personal, unpredicted circumstances. For some, the circumstances happen to the student. For others, the circumstances occur due to the student's choice. The personal circumstances include a health issue, an incident with a male student, depression, falling in love and eloping, becoming pregnant, and a lack of athletic playing time. While these themes are varied, they highlight the reality of individual lives, a need for individual responses, and the opportunity for education to mold and support students' changing lives.

As previewed above, Samuel unfortunately experiences the need to reverse transfer due to health issues. Samuel explains his story:

I was probably within a couple semesters of graduating from [MRU], but when I came back home for Christmas they knew something was up, but I was trying to do stuff on my own, and I came home for Christmas and I fell, and they just noticed how much worse I had gotten when I was home. Well, me not really liking the field that I was going into anymore. With that my mom was like, “If you want to come home or if you want to stop and come home that’s fine,” and it, it wasn’t me just not wanting to continue accounting and dropout, I wasn’t really interested, and plus it was more health reasons. Plus, down there it was me, my brother, plus his fiancé and her family. So, like my family is all here so it’s a lot easier for me to be able to go to the doctor and have people go with me if I’m here than down there.

Samuel continues discussing his health issues:

So it was more a health decision and move back home and find out what was going wrong, because it was probably nine, 10 months to find out what was actually wrong. Because I pretty, went to see my doctor who I got referred to from someone else, and I just kept getting referred until they finally took a blood test and did DNA stuff on it and found out what it was, but now that I’m up here I have, like, I have to go see a neurologist once a year, and I think every two or three years I have to go see a cardiologist, and it, I mean it’s a lot easier being up here ’cause I don’t know medical stuff so, and my aunt’s a nurse. I mean I have some nurses in the family. My mom works in a hospital so she kinda understands that stuff. So, I pretty much, if I have a doctor’s appointment, one of them goes with me, that way they understand it more than I do, and it’s easier being up here that we go 45 minutes to an hour to a doctor instead of them coming three hours and we going to the doctor.

When asked if this is a new health problem, Samuel responds:

Well, I mean, it’s a genetic one. I’ve had it all the time and looking back, I kinda had symptoms in high school, but they weren’t as bad as what they are now so we didn’t really know then or when I was here the first time, but it’s probably when I went down there they kinda noticed something was off first few times that I was home, and when I came home and fell, they knew something was up then. Then it was given to me that I could stop going there and come home and go to the doctors.

Though dealing with an unexpected and not ideal situation, Samuel remains positive throughout the interview and does not waiver on his educational goals.

For Justin, he credits depression as the primary reason he reverse transferred. At the start of the interview, he skirts around the topic. Much of his depression, which he coins later in the interview, originates from “shoulder issues” and his lack of ability to play a sport, “a release for emotions as far as weight lifting.” Circling around the topic of depression, he simply states, “that’s [weight lifting] what I use to kinda release for different types of feelings.” Justin begins his story:

Um, my senior year I had shoulder surgery, no, the summer after my senior year I had shoulder surgery to repair a tear. Um, that had a big impact as to my mindset going into [PRU]. It kinda brought me down a lot. It kept me from doing a lot of things that I wanted to do.

Justin continues delving into his feelings affecting his academics by stating, “because like I said, that shoulder issue, it just, my entire everything, like I failed. I wouldn’t say depressed, but I was kinda uneasy.” When asked about involvement at PRU, he shares the following:

Originally, ROTC and then when they said basically I couldn’t do any of the physical activity, I just kinda shied away from that. Um, when that happened, I kinda shied away from a lot of things like going out, I just kinda stopped doing that. I became like a recluse in my own dorm. I was just kinda doing my own thing. People would try to get me to come out, but I was just like, “no, I’m good.”

At the end of his first semester at PRU, “I was cleared to lift, like to workout for my shoulder, literally that, I ate, lifted, and I slept. I worked out, I ate, I went to sleep. That’s it. I didn’t do anything with anybody. That’s all I did ’cause that was just kinda the mindset. Like, I didn’t want to talk to anybody.” Looking back to the summer after high school, “so, getting shoulder surgery kinda brought me down a lot. So, going into [PRU], I was really depressed, I guess.” Ultimately, Justin was not in “the right mindset” to be at PRU. Justin wanted to take an academic break after leaving PRU, but his father influenced him to consider a community college.

In conclusion, when asked if PRU could have done anything to keep Justin, he explains, “No. It wasn’t about [PRU]. It was more about myself. It was more about what I was going through internally and not about nothing externally. It was basically me, nothing [PRU] could have done.”

Harper has an equally emotional personal circumstance. Much of her push from Small Public University revolves around a negative incident with a male student, a star football player. Though open about her story, Harper never specifies what she means by “incident.” I decide during the interview not to probe further than necessary.

I just didn’t like the environment, overall. Um, that and I had an incident there with a guy and the school, and like I notified the school about it, but since he was a football player they didn’t do anything about it because they didn’t want the reputation to be damaged, and so that was probably my biggest reason of leaving because I didn’t want to be a part of a school, um, that does that to their students, cares more about the football team than their students. Um, and I almost didn’t do the [SPU] program through here because I didn’t want to be affiliated with them, but I weighed the pros and cons. It was just a series of events.

She continues to discuss her anger with the four-year university regarding their lack of response and assistance to her experience.

First of all, well, care more for their female students, first of all. Care less about their football team that isn’t even that good. Um, try to get non-Greek or non-athletic students involved. Um, whenever I told the counselor that I was gonna transfer to K-State, she just kinda gave off the vibe that ok, I don’t want anything to do with you anymore. Which, I thought, oh, wow. When I talked to her that just influenced my decision to leave even more because it was around the same time of that whole incident with that guy. I tried to get the administration to do something, and they would say that they would, but they wouldn’t, and so after I kinda realized that they’re not gonna do anything, ’cause they don’t want the publicity of it so I was like alright, see ya, I don’t want money going towards a school that doesn’t care about their students. If they’re not gonna do something for me, when I’m voicing my opinion, what are they gonna do for another woman that’s not voicing her opinion. I’m not the star football player. I’m just a student, but I’m their student, too, and what I say should matter, but, it didn’t. I’m just a number to you guys and that really upset me. If none of that ever happened, I think things would be a lot different. I think I would still probably be there. I

would find joy somewhere in that dark place. Because if you look at the finances of it, that's a perfect flat-rate tuition. You can take as many classes as you want. I did have friends there; I wasn't like a nobody. I did live on campus, and I even had it set up for my sophomore year. I had roommates and down payment, and that happened and I was like no, I'm done. If that hadn't happened, I would still be living there, with those girls, having a much better college experience, and getting my bachelor's there and doing all that.

As is clear through her words, Harper's personal experiences push her to transfer out. For Avery, Gina, Blake, and Shane, their personal circumstances and reasons to leave their four-year colleges or universities were by choice.

Avery, the California storyteller, says, "there is something I want to talk to you about."

She proceeds with her story that ultimately reveals why she reverse transferred:

I had met someone and started talking to him a lot, and actually he's not from California. He's from here [Kansas], and he was in the Navy so was in Virginia, and I was talking to him...So, I'd just been talking to him and he was actually about to be done with his time there. So, and he'd been wanting to go back to school, too. So, I was thinking, should I tell my parents? 'Cause I would never tell my parents about a boy unless I was very serious, 'cause they would just like, my dad with a shotgun. I wish I could be more honest with them because, um, that way it's easier to not feel like, oh my God, I'm hiding this...So, I just told them anyways 'cause I wanted to get it off my chest. So, I was like, there's this boy that I like and, um, ok, and they're like, "um, no." I don't know who he is and he's way over there, and they're like, "no, that's not gonna work out." So, they were very against it for a long time. They're like, "no you're too young to date," and duh, duh, duh. They're not very open minded, as you now can tell. 'Cause I don't know, I just kept talking to him. I didn't really listen to my parents 'cause I'm like, I'm an adult. I should be able to make my decisions, but the thing that I like is that he has the same values as me and like religion-wise. So, we're both a person of faith; so, I saw a fit. Back to the school situation, I was just not sure if I wanted to pay so much to go to school and I wanted to take classes for nursing, and what-not, and I was like, I don't know, I was having this inside battle, and I was scared to tell my parents because I knew they'd be like, no, you're not going to community college. It was kinda deemed as step down. They're like, you're at this place, one of the best universities. You should stay there. It seemed more prideful, and I was like, I just want to go somewhere where I can fulfill what I want, my dreams, or whatever, and we just developed very strong feelings and we were talking about marriage and everything, and I think it's just 'cause he's in the Navy and it's a bit more easier, I guess, and things are just more stable 'cause if we get married, he has that financial stability, and if he

didn't have that, I would have said no because he didn't have that financial stability, but because he did, it was easier to be like, "yes," and to get married and do things and what not. So, I was thinking and praying about it. Like, is this supposed to happen? We are young and everyone sees it. My parents were like, "you are in no position to do that now," and I know that and a lot of people were against this, but they are not living my life, and so I just give it to God and asked him and gave it the go to put trust in it, or give me that sign....So I pretty, got eloped. I did not tell my parents.

Thus, Avery reverse transferred because she fell in love and eloped with a man from Kansas. At this point, her academic journey is connected to her new husband.

Gina simply shares, "I was pregnant with my daughter and wanted to move home to Kansas City, and this was the best option for colleges." She does not elaborate as this is a joyous experience for her.

The final personal circumstances that emerges in the interviews come from the two student athlete interview participants, Blake and Shane. Blake is a soccer player and Shane is a baseball player. Their reasons for reverse transferring from a four-year college or university, Private Presbyterian College for Blake and the Land-Grant Public-II for Shane, are due to a lack of athletic playing time. The two-year community college offers both of them a full-ride scholarship to reverse transfer, accompanied by promised playing time. Additionally, and most importantly to both Blake and Shane, due to college athletic eligibility rules, reverse transferring to a community college ensures athletic eligibility at a four-year college or university after their time at JCCC. Both Blake and Shane expand on these points in their stories below.

First, the soccer player, Blake, introduces his initial decision to go to college out of high school. He explains, "um, the initial decision was, um, the most money I could get pretty much through a soccer scholarship, and, um, [PPC] is a really nice college. It's a private school and, um, the team was really good." At PPC, Blake was offered a "90 percent, or so" scholarship.

Unfortunately, within his first semester, freshman year, Blake was not syncing with the team or coaches.

Uh, I guess, uh, coaches can be a little bit deceiving when they're recruiting you. So, um, just sitting down one-on-one with the coaches and we had very specific questions about playing time. I didn't plan on, like, not being a redshirt. I didn't plan on not playing at all on the varsity level. So, there was plenty of schools to pick from, and I knew that [PPC] was very successful so there was very specific questions that we asked about playing time and how it was going to be, and the way that most colleges do their program is there's a varsity and JV squad, and the entire year I was pretty much, uh, training with the JV squad and then sometimes getting to train with the varsity squad, but never getting in the games which was, we made it very adamant that if I wasn't going to be able to play very much my first year that there were other schools I wanted to go, and he insisted that, ya know, the way that you play and the way we've seen you play that you'll be a part of the team, and that we're gonna need you your freshman year. So, it was definitely not what I expected going into it. Uh, I didn't feel like I could trust the head coach or the assistant coaches. Um, the way that the, like the players treated each other, I guess. Like here, at Johnson County, we're like all like best friends, and I just didn't feel like any of the guys had like good relationships as like friends.

Blake expands on his PPC soccer coach:

It was 'cause, it was nonstop. He was like always yelling and cussing and yelling at people and putting them down. He was a very negative coach though I think it caused a lot of that to rub on off players and they acted like that not only on the field but off the field.

As discussed earlier, Blake “wanted to try out the culinary school here at Johnson County”; thus, that coupled with soccer pulls him into JCCC. Blake shares his thought process:

And then, then another reason why was because the assistant coach here had been an assistant coach for my club team from like 10 years old all the way up through when I graduated. So, I had a pretty good relationship with him. So, when I, when I was kinda having trouble at [PPC] I gave him a call and talked to him about different opportunities, and he said that they would be willing to offer me a scholarship. It's completely full-ride. You get 16 credit hours and then you get, uh, four hundred dollars-worth of books.

He continues, “So, it’s completely free for me to go to school right now, so that made it really easy for me to decide to come here.” Additionally, Blake expands on his plans to vertical transfer after playing soccer at JCCC for two years, and how it is connected to athletic eligibility:

You can only play two years here, but since I didn’t play at the varsity level at [PPC] I still, like you have five years to play athletics, and redshirt you can use just for your first year if you don’t play or if you get injured really bad, then you still have your four years.

While Blake’s and Shane’s interviews are one month apart, they play different sports, and they reverse transferred from two different institutions, their stories are nearly identical. Shane is a baseball player student athlete from the LGP-II, “State.” He begins his interview by simply stating, “I play here. I play baseball here at Johnson County. That was my primary reason for kinda coming to Johnson County.” Comparable to Blake, Shane’s initial decision to go to college stems from sports. He shares:

Um, well, my primary driving factor was obviously sports. I played quarterback at my high school so I didn’t really know if I wanted to play football or play baseball, and then when I was like 15 or 16, I got my offer to play baseball at [LGP-II], which was like super early but it was where I wanted to go the whole time. So, I don’t know, it was tough. I wanted to make a decision then, but I had gotten advised to like wait until July 1st. That’s like the first day that the coaches can call us, like our junior year. So, the summer after your junior year, July first. So, I waited ’til after that day, getting calls from five or six schools, narrowed it down between [LGP-II] and [LGP-I], and just ended up picking State at the end of the day just cause I’d grown up in St. Louis, for the most part, and, uh, I mean they had just gone into the SEC for baseball. It’s like the best conference you can play in. That was pretty sweet to be able to go into there. Uh, it was two hours away from home so my family could go to all of my games and stuff, too. My brother was gonna go there. Just like the big state school. If you’re in the area, everybody wants to go to the big state school.

Once at the LGP-II, Shane discusses his fall semester with an entire focus on baseball, excluding any mention of academics during this conversation:

Well, I redshirted my freshman year when I got to [LGP-II]. So, I went in my freshman fall. I was always told if you hit, then you were gonna play. So, I went in I like led the team in hitting, like when I first showed up there, which was a big deal for me, and I was like, alright, I’m gonna have the opportunity to get to play,

and I kinda learned the other side of it. I met with my coach that fall, or like that winter my freshman year, before we all went home for winter break, and he's like, we have three senior outfielders, like they're gonna play regardless of how you did. He was like, you might DH [direct hit]. So, that was like the first red flag. So, that was definitely really frustrating on my part because there was like nothing else I could have done.

Shane then proceeds into the spring semester, still solely discussing baseball:

Then, uh, I got back for the spring. I did ok, not as good as I did in the fall, and then I started to talk to the other guys that played my specific position, which was outfield, and I was just like, "how did your freshman year go?" and I think I talked to like four or five of the other guys, and one kid got like four at bats the whole season, one kid got like five bats. Basically they all got less than 20, which is like less than playing four or five games. So, I was like that's not worth a full season to me. So, I approached our director of baseball operations at State, my freshman year, and I was like, hey, I would really rather redshirt and play like a really minimal amount of games, because I feel like it would just kinda be silly for me to waste a full season when I'm not like a huge part of the team 'cause you only get four years of eligibility. Then I talked to my head coach and didn't even like know through that whole season if I was going to be able to. They were like, we'll have to see how the season plays out. We may need you.

Next in Shane's story, he shares his thought process regarding leaving the LGP-II due to a lack of athletic playing time, because he can according to athletic eligibility:

Thankfully, because I did red-shirt, I did have the opportunity to play one more year at a junior college. Because if I hadn't redshirted, I would have had to go, or basically would have gone straight to another division one and sit out a full year, or transfer just directly to a division two, but I didn't want to play division two baseball. Knew wholeheartedly that I definitely could have played at [LGP-II] or gone and succeeded at a junior college, and so I was like, alright, I'm gonna find the best junior college that I can find, just anywhere.

Shane continues with his story:

And, so, I was just like, what do I want to do? And I had a lot a lot of stuff to kinda consider. I was on pace to graduate this year from [LGP-II], so in three years. Double-major and graduate in three years. Like I had so many credit hours. So, I came in with like a year ahead and then I redshirted and I don't know, I was just super far ahead. So, I was like, what's important to me? What do I want to do? Would I rather, like, be done with college? Um, because my thought process with that, because obviously once I redshirted I still have four more years of eligibility, and so then if I were to graduate by the end of this year, if I were still at [State], then I would still have two more years of athletic

eligibility to play and two years to get a master's degree while I was at [LGP-II]. So, while I was at State, within five years, I could have played four years, gotten my undergraduate degree, and gotten my master's degree. So, I was like, alright, I have all that, but at the end of the day I wanted to play. I wanted to play baseball.

After deciding to leave the LGP-II Shane explored two-year community college options: "One in Texas, two in Georgia, one in Tennessee, and one in Florida." He proceeds:

So, the very first school that I visited was here [Johnson County] because I had a friend here. It was the closest one. I had seen the turf field, which was pretty sweet, saw the facilities inside. It wasn't like a huge drop-off from like division one to here. Like facilities, turf field, indoor, and then I had heard really good things about one of the assistant coaches here [JCCC], and so it seemed like the perfect spot.

In the end, after being "reverse recruited" by JCCC and earning a full-ride scholarship, Shane makes his decision:

I thought about it, prayed about it, and decided to go to Johnson County just because it was like this massive junior college, 20,000, 30,000 students. I really like, no junior college in the country really had the course load necessary for me to continue on my education, just because I was far enough ahead, but if there was school that could come class, it was here at Johnson County, but, like I knew it was a good academic junior college. It wasn't like I would get a degree from and that'd be like a joke. In my mind, there are like a tons of people that later in life go back to school because they either didn't want to do what they wanted to do, and I knew that if it needed to happen I knew I could get it done. I'm not gonna say that I like super furthered my education with this year here at Johnson County.

Shane and Blake, along with Harper, Justin, Samuel, Avery, and Gina, exhibit how personal circumstances, positive and negative life happenings, can push and pull their academic decisions.

Summary. Institutional fit, academics, finances, location of the two-year community college, and personal circumstances are five categories that emerge in response to answering research question three, why do students reverse transfer. The 15 voluntary students are open

and honest throughout the interview affording this exploratory study knowledge from some reverse transfer students.

Feelings about the decision to reverse transfer. Research question four asks the following: How do these students feel about their decision to reverse transfer? This question highlights the recognition of student's influence in their own academic journey decision making process. This question completes the semi-structured interviews and reveals how the reverse transfer student decision allows for continued higher education pursuit. Specifically, one theme is found in the 15 interviews; the students all have positive feelings about their decision to reverse transfer from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college.

Katie states how the reverse transfer has impacted her, overall:

I think it was what helped me decide. Like, it took pressure off was one thing with the money aspect. It took pressure off figuring out what I wanted to do so it was just kind of calm, and if I didn't want to take a full load and if I didn't want to be full time, I didn't have to. It's like I wasn't wasting classes. So, yeah, I think I definitely would not be where I am today if it was not for transferring back.

Justin explains that "like if there was no community college to go, I wouldn't go back to school, and I would never go back to a four-year school." He continued by sharing the following:

It's probably the best choice I could have made. Basically, who knows where I'd be if I didn't decide to come here. I don't know. I do know I wouldn't be doing anything. I'd probably be working a dead end job, just McDonalds as a reference, but just, ya know, I would have no, I probably wouldn't come back to any school if I didn't decide to transfer. It's probably the best thing that was for me. Originally I was driven to do it, but I'm glad I was driven to do it, and I think unconsciously I wanted to do it but I needed someone to tell me to do it. So, yeah, I think it was probably the best decision so far in my life I made. Or, I guess was made for me, but I accepted it. It was the best thing for me.

Blake discusses how the reverse transfer has been enjoyable:

Uh um, I'm really glad that I decided to transfer here [JCCC]. 'Cause I have a lot of good friends here and, um, it's just been a lot of fun, and, um, going on the trips with the teammates that I know. Compared to going on the trips with the guys that I didn't know last year. It's just been so much more fun, and, uh, just being able to be here and around family and uh my girlfriend transferred from Arkansas back to [URU] this year, um, so we're both back in town. So, that's good. It's just been all around really, really fun. I enjoy going to school here and I like my classes. It's been a lot of fun.

Jameson explains why the reverse transfer is a "good decision."

I feel very good about. Um, I feel like, um, had I stayed a student at [PRU] I would have had to been a student full time, um, and I felt like, I feel like I wouldn't have, um, continued moving. Uh I feel like I wouldn't have began to move in a direction um that I want my life to go. I feel like I would have kept waiting for something to spur me into that direction rather than jumping myself and going. So, um, I was ya know, I was able to work pretty much full time this fall which has leveled me into buying a house. So that's another really big step in my life that I get to experience because I decided to transfer here. So, um, I think it was a very good decision.

Nolan positively says,

It was definitely, going from dropping out of [PRU] to carrying appliances at GE, even though I owned my own business, it was still carrying appliances. To bein' in the oil field working nights with rattlesnakes and stuff, to being here in front of you. It's definitely been my best steps so far.

Harper powerfully shares how reverse transferring allows her to be an adult.

I'm happy about it. I'm happy that I came from a university to a community college versus a university to a university. Um, just 'cause I feel like if I went from a university to a university, I would have, I wouldn't have grown up. Um, now that I'm going from a university to a community college, I have a job, I have a family. I can make car payments. Like I can actually do adult things and I think a lot of students at universities, they get caught up in the college life and that's, that was me for a while but not really me anymore. I feel like by being at a community college, I'm able to be more of an adult. 'Cause I feel like they're more flexible and I think that, um, at universities they pressure you to be a student, and I feel like at a community college, they want you to be a student and a worker and they find a way to make it work for both, and at universities they are, you're a student first and work comes second, but that's not the reality of it. I mean not everybody has their parents paying for school and people have to work, and I think that community college, at least this one, makes it possible and helps you to do that.

Samuel explains that the reverse transfer, while a necessary move due to personal health, is a good option in order to be able to continue his higher education pursuit.

Um, well I feel good because, one, I'm familiar with this area. Not just the campus but the area, and plus, my doctors are up at KU so I'm close to them. I mean it's got the degree program or classes that I need to take, so I mean when you put all three of them there together it's kinda like a match made to go here. I like the campus. I like how the majority of the buildings are connected. 'Cause, I mean, like I can walk in the building without this [a walker], but going building to building I kinda need help. So, I mean, I really don't like using this I'm more of an independent person. So, if I don't have to use it I don't. If I can get classes and buildings that are connected, that I don't have to use it and get around without it.

Mallory notes that "it was a very good move."

Tracy states the positives of being a student at JCCC and ultimately graduating with an associate degree.

Well, it's definitely cheaper. That's pretty big. I just really liked it better here. Small class sizes, and really the dental hygiene clinic, the way that it's set up is really nice, and I really like this campus better. I like the walkways. It's more pretty. It's more all-together, as one. I mean, [URU] is all spread out all over the place, and I think if it made a difference in pay or hiring to have a bachelor's or associate's, I would have thought harder about it, but I think I still would have gone here because I just like it better.

Ross says, "I am really happy that I made the decision. Um, it was a great decision, 'cause I'm gonna do a lot better here, I know that."

Similarly, Anthony proclaims,

Uh, it was a good choice. I feel like it was definitely the right choice. I felt like it required some critical thinking on my end to evaluate the pros and cons of leaving [PRU] to enrolling here, and I think that I allowed myself to make the best, most educated, decision. I'm very happy with the decision I made to transfer to JCCC.

Gina simply states, "I really enjoy the atmosphere at JCCC, and the advising process and enrollment was very easy."

Based on the above quotes from the 15 student participants, it is clear that the option and decision to reverse transfer is a positive and beneficial experience. As reviewed in Chapter 2, in 1901 community colleges were established to serve as “People Colleges,” “Democracy Colleges,” and “Opportunity Colleges” (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; White, 2007). The transitional school, degree-granting institution, and school geared at educating the community continues to serve such purposes (Nutting, 2011; Sylvia et al., 2010; Townsend, 2001; Zamani, 2001). The 15 sampled students display a continuation of the community college’s initial purpose. The students are utilizing the reverse transfer and two-year community college as a way to enhance and achieve their varied educational goals.

Summary of Findings

Katie, Blake, Jameson, Nolan, Harper, Justin, Tracy, Shane, Avery, Cameron, Ross, Anthony, Samuel, Gina, and Mallory electively volunteer their time to share their stories, backgrounds, goals, and feelings in an effort to explore reverse transfer students through four predetermined research questions. The study and their semi-structured interviews, ranging from 14 to 78 minutes, afford this qualitative study results that I order in a thematic framework.

What is the educational background of these students who reverse transferred? The following categories emerge as themes that address research question one: entry into the higher education setting from high school, college attendance history, length of time at the four-year college or university, and the academic year during which the reverse transfer occurs. What are the educational goals of these students who reverse transfer? The 15 students share four categories of educational goals that respond to research question two: earn an associate degree, earn an associate degree and earn a baccalaureate degree, vertically transfer to a four-year

college or university to earn a bachelor's degree, and vertically transfer to a four-year institution to earn a baccalaureate degree with the intention of continuing on to graduate school. Why do some students reverse transfer? Institutional fit, academics, finances, family ties to community college location, and personal circumstances are reasons these 15 students move from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college. Last, how do these students feel about their decision to reverse transfer? One theme emerged in response to the fourth research question; the 15 students are pleased with their decision to reverse transfer in their higher education journey.

Chapter 5, discussion and conclusion, brings this study to a close by summarizing the study, interpreting the findings, discussing limitations for the study, and offering recommendations for practice and future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Summary of Study

This qualitative interview study explores why some postsecondary education students transfer from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college. I conducted 15 person-to-person interviews with students who previously attended a four-year college or university and then enrolled at Johnson County Community College, in Overland Park, Kansas, in order to respond to four research questions:

1. What is the educational background of these students who reverse transferred?
2. What are the educational goals of these students who reverse transfer?
3. Why did these students reverse transfer from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college?
4. How do these students feel about their decision to reverse transfer?

Utilizing an overarching theoretical framework, the push and pull factor (Tinto, 1982; Titus, 2006; Wright, 1973), and incorporating two additional theories, Input-Environment-Outcomes (I-E-O) (Astin, 1991) and student departure theory (Tinto, 1993), this study analyzes the experiences and reasons for these students' decisions to reverse transfer.

Discussion of Findings

Reverse transfer students, students who transfer from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college, are transferring in a pattern that meets their personal and academic needs. The push and pull theory frames the understanding of why these 15 students decided to reverse transfer. The push represents the exit from their former four-year college or

university. The pull represents their entry and selection of JCCC, a two-year community college. While findings from this study align with current literature, new themes emerged with regards to pushes and pulls and the decision to reverse transfer. The new findings are the focus of this discussion.

Pushes from the four-year college or university. New findings can be categorized as pushes affecting the student participants' decision to reverse transfer. For all 15 participants, their decision to reverse transfer was the result of one or more pushes from a four-year college or university.

Prior research studies claim that academic difficulty is the primary reason students reverse transfer (Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Renn & Reason, 2013). However, this study only found academic difficulty as the primary push from a four-year college or university for four of the 15 participants. Thus, the importance of academic difficulty supports research, but this study finds that academic difficulty is not the major reason many students reverse transfer.

A negative institutional fit pushed reverse transfer students from a four-year institution. The location of their four-year college or university, the large institution and large class sizes, difficulty making friends, and an overall poor experience are examples shared by the 15 participants when substantiating how institutional fit was a reason to transfer out. This finding aligns with Tinto's (1993) student departure theory. Specifically, Tinto claims that social and academic integration are essential to student retention (Beil et al., 2000; Jackson et al., 2003; Reason, 2009; Rendon, Jaloma, & Nora, 2003; Tinto, 1993). Academic integration indicates a student's finding and utilization of academic resources allowing a student to become assimilated to the college setting. Social integration represents a student's comfort level, found through peers and cocurriculars, external to the classroom.

Finance is listed as a reason for reverse transfer by researchers Kajstura & Keim, 1992; Townsend, 2001; Winter & Harris, 1999). Many of the students in this study noted that the high cost of the four-year college or university as compared to the lower cost of the two-year community college was a consideration, though not the only reason behind the decision to reverse transfer. Thus, cost was potentially a push factor.

Personal circumstances were reported by all 15 participants as a push from a four-year college or university. While personal reasons, as a factor of reverse transferring, are featured in current research, this study found the unique personal circumstances through the student interviews (Kajstura & Keim, 1992; Townsend, 2001; Winter & Harris, 1999). One student described how a health issue resulted in his need to leave his institution. A negative incident with a male student at another institution resulted in one student transferring from her four-year university. Depression pushed one student out of his four-year university. One student fell in love and eloped with a student out-of-state. Her love story pushed her from a four-year university in California. Lastly, two students reported lack of athletic playing time as their primary push from their institutions. For the two student athletes in the sample, the four-year college and university did not meet their athletic needs or goals and thus was a push. Each of these are idiosyncratic reasons for reverse transferring that would not have been captured by a survey method but were able to be explored in this qualitative study. The focused pushes aid in framing why students exit a four-year college or university based on personal and institutional experiences.

Pulls from the two-year community college. Recognizing the variety of possible transfer patterns, this study distinguishes the reverse transfer as a decisive movement—it did not happen by accident. The 15 participants decided to transfer to JCCC due to pulls from the two-year community college. In other words, the students believed that JCCC offered something that their former four-year college or university did not.

Seven participants discussed how reverse transferring afforded them an opportunity to earn prerequisites at JCCC. While the two-year community college serving as a stepping stone to a four-year college or university is not a new finding, a reverse transfer student describing backwards academic movement as a stepping stone is an interesting finding (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Ruud, Bragg, & Townsend, 2009). The premise of a stepping stone means progress or advancement. The definition of reverse is moving backwards. The juxtaposition of reverse and stepping stone does not align with the core meaning of the words. Thus, the frequency and agreement of the study participants discussing reverse transfer as a stepping stone was surprising to me.

Additionally, four students noted that a specific academic program pulled them into the two-year community college and supported their continued academic progression. Specifically, JCCC's culinary school, dental hygiene program, hospitality degree, and information technology program pulled Blake, Tracy, Cameron, and Samuel into the two-year community college.

Similar to the “expensive” four-year college or university being described as a push, the “cheap” two-year community college was highlighted as a primary pull for 11 of the student participants. Price serves as a pull to the two-year community college.

The desirable location of the two-year community college as a pull is cited in research (Kajstura & Keim, 1992; Townsend, 2001; Winter & Harris, 1999). However, this study

clarifies that the desirable location is connected to family ties to JCCC. Overland Park, Kansas, is not hometown for several of the student participants. Instead, a sibling now resides in the Kansas City metropolitan area or a family member previously attended JCCC. As such, many of these students already were familiar with the two-year community college and its location and had family members near the JCCC campus in Overland Park, Kansas. The fact that many of the students did not grow up in the Kansas City metropolitan area and did not have parents in the area is an interesting finding as location and hometown are often linked in research. This study demonstrates that home has different meanings for different students.

Finally, ease in transferability, including seamless transfer of credits, broad course offerings at JCCC, and accessibility of academic counselors and faculty were discussed by the 15 participants when explaining why they were pulled into the two-year community college. Articulation agreements and institutional support are found in research when discussing vertical transfer students; however, this study substantiates the importance of applying vertical transfer best practices and policies to reverse transfer students (Arnold, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Kintzer, 1996; Rifkin, 1996; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012).

Additional findings. Additional components of the reverse transfer pattern experienced by the 15 participants are not framed by the push and pull factor, yet are new findings or findings that align with current literature and further explain the reverse transfer experience. Specifically, the varied educational goals and the positive impact of reverse transfer are new findings. LeBard (1999) states that lack of confirmed educational goals is cited as a reason to reverse transfer. Other researchers find that reverse transfer students' educational goals are to earn an associate degree and intend to vertically transfer (Catanzaro, 1999; Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Renn & Reason, 2013; Shapiro et al., 2013; Winter & Harris, 1999).

This study found four categories of educational goals sought by the 15 student participants: (1) earn an associate degree; (2) earn an associate degree and earn a baccalaureate degree; (3) vertically transfer to earn an a bachelor's degree; and (4) vertically transfer to earn a baccalaureate degree, and continue to graduate school. Thus, the educational goals reported by the 15 study participants more specifically explain these 15 reverse transfer students' academic intentions at the two-year community college and at future four-year colleges and universities. Additionally, when a reverse transfer student intends to vertically transfer, the student would be defined as a swirling student (Bahr, 2012; Borden, 2004; McCormick, 2003; Rab, 2004; Renn & Reason, 2013). Specifically, the student would be considered a serial transfer. A serial transfer highlights a student who participates in one or more transfers in pursuit of his or her higher education attainment (McCormick, 2003). Thus, to learn more about reverse transfer students, colleges and universities could be informed by transfer swirl research.

Students reverse transfer for a variety of reasons. Most interestingly, the 15 students highlighted in this study demonstrate that a reverse transfer does not mean moving backwards academically or in life. In fact, the reverse transfer movement was necessary in order for them to move forward. In literature, reverse transfer is considered reverse because its direction and goals are considered opposite of vertical transfer movement and those intending to earn a bachelor's degree (LeBard, 1999; Renn & Reason, 2013; Townsend & Dever, 1999). The results of this study indicate that the 15 student participants do not consider their "reverse" transfer to be an academically negative process. The 15 students consider their reverse transfer decision a transfer advancement—moving backwards to move forward personally and academically. Based on reverse transfer research, over the last few decades, the transfer advancement concept does not align with the premise behind previous reverse transfer student research in literature.

Recommendations for Practice

As highlighted in Chapter 2, at one time, students who participated in multiple mobility patterns to achieve a higher education degree may have been considered “nontraditional students.” Now, these multifaceted trajectory patterns indicate an “American undergraduate” (Goldrick-Rab, 2006, p. 61). Katie, Blake, Jameson, Nolan, Harper, Justin, Tracy, Shane, Avery, Cameron, Ross, Anthony, Samuel, Gina, and Mallory exhibit the reality of this research. As a result of this study, higher education administrators and institutional faculty could implement recommendations for practice through policies and assessment.

First, looking to the students’ journey from high school to higher education highlights the importance of high school counselors’ impact on a student’s higher education selection. Several of the student participants in this study noted that their high school counselors’ negative opinions of starting higher education at a two-year community college affected their decision to begin their higher education pursuits at a four-year college or university. While this opinion and statement may certainly not be happen all the time, this study provides evidence that it happens frequently. Continued education and communication between high schools (teachers and guidance counselors) must be stressed in order to help students make college choice decisions that are in their best interests. Sometimes a two-year community college experience may be in the best interests of the student.

The finding that the majority of student participants refer to the two-year community college as “cheap” does not reflect on the value of a community college education; instead, the students’ references to the lower cost signify the importance of affordability with regards to higher education accessibility. Thus, keeping two-year community college courses affordable

should remain a priority. The importance of affordable higher education is relevant as the costs for college enrollment continue to escalate (Kimball, 2014). Alternatively, the students' discussions of high four-year college and university expenses highlight a need for more readily available scholarships, additional information regarding financial aid, and programming on topics such as money management. The information regarding this mobile student group ultimately has implications for both two-year community colleges and four-year institutions regarding educational costs.

Recognizing the range in number of credit hours transferred into the two-year community college from the students' former four-year institutions draws attention to the importance of two-year community colleges offering a broad range of courses and academic programs. The fact that six students within this study could reverse transfer to JCCC with 61 to 90 credit hours reveals that JCCC still has courses that meet the students' personal and academic needs. Course opportunities have an impact on enrollment at a two-year community college. A broad range in courses and academic programs is needed in order to engage students and increase enrollment. The students' varied educational goals further emphasize this recommendation for practice. A range in academic programs is relevant in contributing to students' desires to earn a variety of degrees.

Participant narratives confirm the importance of available and engaged faculty and knowledgeable academic counselors to ease transfer. Many of the study participants discuss positive impressions and experiences with JCCC faculty and counselors. For example, Justin states, "I really like the instruction of the professors. They get to know you more. They help guide you more." Nolan echoes Justin, sharing, "everybody here is just so helpful and so insightful. Counselors, teachers." Recognizing the mobility of college students, skilled

academic advisors and faculty at the two-year community colleges are important in supporting and educating reverse transfer students.

The previous paragraph reveals the importance of transfer articulation agreements. As reported in the findings, the student participants do not refer to articulation agreements by name. However, their commentary about the simplicity in reverse transferring to JCCC indicates the continued opportunity and challenge for two-year community colleges and four-year colleges and universities to be academic partners in establishing and maintaining higher education institutions that meet students' needs. Equally, assessment should occur at institutions to determine the effectiveness and transparency of transfer support: support from faculty and administrators and feasibility of transferring credits both reversely and vertically. Learning that 12 of the 15 study participants are not only reverse transfer students but also intend to be vertical transfer students in the future confirms this significance. This transfer pattern will make them a swirling student. Transfer student mobility highlights the importance of state-wide tracking systems. In addition to articulation agreements, state-wide tracking systems should be reviewed to assure that the state is able to maintain a record of credits transferred as well as transfer student movement. Finding that the state of Kansas does not have record of reverse transfer students demonstrates an area of growth for practice and policies in the future.

Lastly, recognizing that students who leave a four-year college or university may intend to return, affords four-year colleges and universities an opportunity to maintain future communication with these students. During student exit interviews, if that practice exists, four-year colleges and universities could ask students if they have plans to return. If the student says that their goal is to return and earn a baccalaureate, email communications can be made to former students with an invitation to return. This form of communication would not only

welcome students for their return, but it would also recognize and support the variety of pathways students take in their higher education pursuit.

Limitations of the Study

While this study reveals significant information about the four research questions, inevitably the study has limitations. First, due to limited resources (people, finances, and time), the study is not longitudinal representing multiple academic years or students over the span of their academic careers; the study only includes one two-year community college at one moment in time. Second, the sample institution, a two-year community college located in a Midwestern suburb, cannot be directly equated to all community colleges throughout Kansas or the country. JCCC is a unique two-year community college due to its large enrollment, sprawling physical campus, a financially healthy county to offer support, and connectivity to many of the four-year institutions in Kansas. It should not be assumed that all two-year community colleges are comparable.

Third, the sample size includes 15 student participants. A greater sample size could add additional information, stories, reasoning, and goals to better understand the reverse transfer student population. The 15 students in this study are individual reverse transfer students rather than a true representation of the broader student body. Fourth, many of the students reverse transferred from the same four-year institutions in Kansas; a more varied former four-year college or university educational background could offer new information.

Fifth, as a qualitative study, the 15 students attempt to offer a breadth of viewpoints and stories; notably, these 15 students opted-in voluntarily, perhaps due to a special interest in the topic or interest in being helpful to the researcher. Thus, because of these facets, the results do

not guarantee a reflection of experiences and opinions of the entire reverse transfer student population. Sixth, the student participants know that I am affiliated with the University of Kansas, the institution from which several of the students reverse transferred. This fact could have affected how the students responded to the questions.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study grew from my recognition that reverse transfer students are a population in need of greater understanding, specifically considering their educational backgrounds, educational goals, personal reasons for reverse transfer, and feelings about their reverse transfer decision. The results of the study, especially recognizing the variety of themes that emerge, demonstrate the opportunity to learn more about this sizeable population. Delving further into the four questions posed in this study serves as the ideal starting point. The varied students' backgrounds, goals, and purposes for reverse transferring are an important contribution of the study. Each of the themes highlighted by the student participants offers opportunities for future research.

The demographics of the study participants offer a source of future research recommendations. The following questions could be asked: Is there a relationship between first-generation college students and reverse transferring? Many of the study participants identify as white. Would a more varied racial makeup offer new information? Similarly, the oldest student in the sample is 26. Could students in their 30s or 40s, for example, shed new light on reverse transferring regarding backgrounds, goals, and reasons? Or, are the majority of reverse transfer students in their early 20s? The fact that the majority of the study participants are traditional college-age students, 18 to 22 years old, is interesting given the average age of students at JCCC

is 26. Conducting a study with an older student population could expand and/or contradict findings from this study.

These questions could be posed for further research regarding reverse transfer students' educational backgrounds (research question one). Where do negative societal views regarding two-year community college attendance originate? How do high school counselors impact where students decide to begin their college careers? How does a student's parents' higher educational background impact or predict future academic mobility? Next, additional questions related to reverse transfer students' educational goals (research question two) can be asked in future research. How does reverse transferring impact educational goals? How do educational goals evolve as a student's enrollment evolves? Does ease in reverse transferring aid or hurt educational goals?

With regards to understanding why students reverse transfer (research question three), the most interesting findings relate to the personal circumstances category: a health issue, a negative incident with a male student, depression, falling in love and eloping, becoming pregnant, and a lack of athletic playing time. Each of these responses initiates a new topic of study with a narrow focus. How do health issues impact students' educational goals and enrollment patterns? How can four-year colleges and universities keep students who have experienced a negative incident with another student? How do mental health issues, such as depression, impact students' enrollment decisions? What can four-year colleges and universities do to better support student athletes who strive for more athletic playing time? As introduced by Shane, what is "reverse recruiting" and how does this athletic recruitment strategy impact students' mobility from four-year colleges and universities to two-year community colleges? With regards

to the student, these topics highlight better understanding of a student's personal circumstances and the impact that the circumstances have on enrollment decisions.

Moreover, in referencing the three groups of reverse transfer students categorized in literature, this study solely focuses on one subcategory, undergraduate reverse transfer students. Temporary reverse transfer students and post-baccalaureate reverse transfer students could be studied further (Catanzaro, 1999; Kajstura & Keim, 1992; LeBard, 1999; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Townsend, 2001; Winter & Harris, 1999). Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 1, the emerging fourth category of reverse transfer students highlights reverse transfer credits rather than reverse transfer movement. This is another logical area of study.

To continue, as revealed by 12 of the interview participants, after their time at the two-year community college is complete, many plan to return to a four-year college or university. At that point, the student will be defined as a swirling student. While literature research exists defining transfer swirl, more information can be gained asking comparable questions about their educational background, educational goals, reasons for engaging in the swirling pattern, and their feelings about the movement. Twelve of the undergraduate reverse transfer students can also be seen as temporary reverse transfer students—if they in fact transfer back to a four-year college or university. This revelation could be studied further with a different theoretical framework and with different rules for study participant criteria.

Finally, the previously discussed limitations of the study offer opportunities for future research. Studying reverse transfer students as part of a longitudinal study could reveal the evolution of the students over several years and the impact of the reverse transfer on the students' lives. A qualitative study could still be the methodology used; however, instead of

interviewing students at one point in time, a sample of students could be interviewed over several years. Educational and professional goals could be reassessed and confirmed in follow-up interviews occurring several years after the initial interview. Additionally, this study takes place at one community college in one suburban city. Future research could occur at additional community colleges in a variety of geographical locations.

As noted, many of the participants reverse transferred to the two-year community college from the same four-year university within the same state. A future research question could delve into this topic. Do the majority of reverse transfer students reverse transfer within one state and to nearby institutions? For example, KU and JCCC are approximately 30 miles apart. For students who may not have a two-year community college in close proximity to their four-year university, does the reverse transfer or transfer movement look different? Selecting and studying reverse transfer students at a rural community college, not in close proximity to a four-year university, could result in additional findings. A benefit of the reverse transfer student research topic is the possibility of multifaceted results depending on how a future research study is approached.

Conclusion

In referencing the title of this study, “*Exploring Reverse Transfer: A Study of Why Some Students Transfer to a Community College*,” as written earlier in this chapter, I can now more specifically respond to the exploratory topic. Additionally, the four research questions facilitated inquiry regarding reverse transfer students’ educational backgrounds, intended educational goals, experiences and circumstances leading to the decisive reverse transfer, and students’ personal feelings about the transfer. Reverse transfer is necessary for many students’ higher education

pursuits. Varied educational backgrounds and educational goals represent the academic input and desired outcomes of these 15 reverse transfer students. While the 15 students experienced pushes from the four-year institutions leading to their student departure, pulls from the two-year community college led to a decisive student choice to reverse transfer. Ultimately, the decision to reverse transfer was a positive experience and viewed as a form of academic advancement.

The 15 students explored in this study voluntarily shared their stories; their academic experiences are now a part of growing research. Reverse transfer is a broad topic and transfer movement that can affect innumerable students and higher education institutions. Much can still be learned about these mobile undergraduate students who decide to reverse transfer from a four-year college or university to a two-year community college. At the conclusion on this study, my final two questions are the following: Is reverse the accurate word to utilize for this form of transfer? Is reverse transfer backwards movement, or is it a form of academic advancement?

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

1. **Tell me about yourself.**
(Probes: name, age, hometown, academic major, parents' educational background, etc.)
2. **Tell me about your decision to go to college.**
(Probes: predisposition, search, choice)
3. **Tell me about your educational background.**
(Probes: progression from high school to college, previous college(s) attended, major(s), etc.)
4. **Tell me about your educational goals.**
(Probes: intended degree, enrollment status, upon entering college, upon entering JCCC, etc.)
5. **Tell me about your experience at your previous, four-year college.**
(Probes: student experience, academic experience, institutional fit)
6. **Why did you transfer from the four-year college to JCCC (a two-year community college)?**
(Probes: social and academic integration, connectivity to the four-year)
7. **When you transferred, tell me about that process.**
(Probes: timing, key reasons, pushes from the four-year institution)
8. **Looking back, is there anything that the four-year college could have done differently to influence your decision to transfer?**
(Probes: If so, what? If not, why not?)
9. **What attracted you to JCCC?**
(Or, what pulled you into a two-year community college?)
10. **Tell me more about how JCCC (a two-year community college) contributes to your educational goals?**
(Probes: and the educational goal connection to future profession, specific offered major, intended degree(s))
11. **How do you feel about the choice you made to transfer to JCCC?**
12. **To wrap up, is there anything else you would like to add or clarify regarding your transfer student experience?**

(Probes: How did that make you feel? What happened next? Tell me more.)

Appendix B: Information Statement

Exploring Reverse Transfer Information Statement

The Department of Educational Policy and Leadership Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

We are conducting this study to better understand reverse transfer students. This will entail your participation in an interview. Your participation is expected to take approximately 60 minutes to complete. The content of the interview questions should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life.

Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of reverse transfer students. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission. A pseudonym will be provided to encourage your confidentiality. Additionally, the transcribed interviews will only be saved on the researcher's personal laptop.

This interview will be recorded. Recording is required to participate. You may stop taping at any time. The recordings will be transcribed by the principal investigator. Only the investigator and the faculty supervisor will have access to recordings which will be stored on the researcher's personal laptop saved with a required login for access.

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact us by phone or email.

Participation in the interview indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7429 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email irb@ku.edu.

Sincerely,

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Appendix C: Demographic Survey
EXPLORING REVERSE TRANSFER STUDENTS
Demographic Survey

Name: _____

Gender:

- Female
- Male

Age: _____

Ethnicity origin (or Race):

- White
- Hispanic/Latino
- African American
- Native American/American Indian
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Multiracial
- Other: _____

Marital Status:

- Single
- Married

Residential Status (tuition payment):

- In-state student
- Out-of-state student

Employment Status:

- Not employed
- Employed part-time
- Employed full-time

Parent's Education Level (may check multiple boxes to represent more than one parent):

- No schooling
- High school graduate
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree

Appendix D: University of Kansas Approval of Protocol



APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

January 2, 2015

Stefani Gerson
stefg84@ku.edu

Dear Stefani Gerson:

On 1/2/2015, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Exploring reverse transfer students: A study of why students transfer to a community college
Investigator:	Stefani Gerson
IRB ID:	STUDY00001996
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Information Statement, • Buchwitz - HSCL Initial Submission, • Interview Protocol,

The IRB approved the study on 1/2/2015.

1. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in the original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human_subjects_compliance_training.
2. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported immediately.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity.

Continuing review is not required for this project, however you are required to report any significant changes to the protocol prior to altering the project.

Please note university data security and handling requirements for your project:
<https://documents.ku.edu/policies/IT/DataClassificationandHandlingProceduresGuide.htm>

You must use the final, watermarked version of the consent form, available under the "Documents" tab in eCompliance.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Dyson Elms, MPA
IRB Administrator, KU Lawrence Campus

Appendix E: Johnson County Community College Study Approval



January 28, 2015

Dear Stefani:

Because your research design limits the research activities at JCCC to recruitment and interviews, it is my opinion (based on OHRP guidance) that under the parameters set forth in your protocol, JCCC is considered “not engaged” in your research; therefore, your study does not require review or oversight beyond HSC-L.

You are approved to recruit participants from the JCCC student body and to use JCCC facilities to conduct interviews with JCCC students. However, ***please note that JCCC staff and faculty may NOT, at any time, be involved in enrolling participants or in the process of obtaining informed consent.*** Should that occur, JCCC would no longer be considered “not engaged” in your study, and the RPPP would need to conduct additional review.

Please let me know if you want me to draft an official letter of agreement for your records; however, under the circumstances, I don’t believe such a letter is necessary. You may forward this message to anyone who wishes to verify that you have RPPP permission to recruit and interview study participants at JCCC.

Thanks,
Eve Blobaum
Chair, Research Participant Protection Program