

**The Study of Economic, Informational, and Cultural Barriers to
Community College Student Transfer Access
at Selective Institutions**

Section III

**The Life Histories of Ten Individuals who
Crossed the Border between Community Colleges
and Selective Four-Year Colleges**

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Introduction

Transfer between two- and four-year colleges can be understood from a variety of perspectives. Drawing on the stories of 10 students who transferred from community colleges to selective four-year colleges, we describe transfer as a process that involves border crossing, from one cultural setting to another. For low-income students, moving across the cultural and social border that divides two- and four-year colleges would not be imaginable were it not for the advocacy and knowledgeable guidance of individuals who act as self-appointed “transfer agents.” This is especially true because many low-income students are also members of racial and ethnic groups that only gained access to higher education in the last half of the 20th century. The life histories of the 10 successful transfer students underscore the human aspects of the transfer process and the significant role played by individual actors in making transfer to a selective institution an attainable option.

The protagonists in the 10 life histories live in different parts of the country; some were of traditional college-age when they transferred while others were older; a few had worked for many years and raised their own families. Some have experienced homelessness; while others have found it difficult to venture outside the safety of a close-knit family. Mirroring the demographics of the community college, in our sample women (N: 6) outnumber men (N: 4); and minorities (Hispanics, N: 5; African Americans, N: 1) outnumber whites (N: 4). Each of these life histories is about one person and their experience is not duplicated by the experience of the others. However, these 10 individuals share in common the experience of having been community college students of modest to very poor economic means who transferred to selective and highly selective institutions and were academically successful. At the time the students were interviewed, 8 had earned the baccalaureate, two were about to graduate; three were pursuing or

had completed MA degrees; one was a second year law student; and another was a second year Ph.D. student.

Throughout the report we employ the metaphor of border crossing because it aptly captures the cultural and social complexities experienced by low-income non-traditional students who cross over from the open-access working-class setting of community colleges to the exclusive privileged setting of liberal arts colleges and research universities. Starting out in a community college and transferring to a four-year college is likely to be accompanied by some stress for all students regardless of their socioeconomic background and past academic experiences. For students like the ones we interviewed—a one-time homeless woman, a truck driver, a former gang member, high school drop-outs; and first-generation honors students—we can well imagine that the prospect of leaving behind the academic comfort and social familiarity of the community college for an academic competitive and exclusive environment must have felt all at once improbable, exhilarating and frightening. Despite sharing membership in the higher education enterprise, the border crossing is typically unidirectional, from the poorer community college to the wealthier four-year college. Transfer is limited to a small number of students and it is regulated by structural and bureaucratic requirements. These are often difficult to decipher even for transfer, admissions, and financial aid officers and counselors.

The findings provided in the life history report are organized into three sections that build upon each other. Section III consists of 6 life history narratives that served as the database for the multi-case analyses provided in Section II. Section II is the heart of the life history report and weaves together the individual life history narratives into an integrated report organized around critical themes illustrative of the cultural, relational, and structural factors that facilitate transfer, or obstruct it. Section I is an interpretive overview of the critical themes reported in

Section II. Each section serves different purposes. Section I is a condensed interpretive overview of the most critical themes; Section II is an integrated thematic analyses that cuts across the life histories; and Section III consists of the life history narratives for 6 individuals. The life-history methods that we used are described in the appendices.

Interpretive Overview of Thematic Findings

Ricardo Stanton Salazar (1997) offers an analytic framework to depict the importance of social capital and institutional support in the educational attainment of low income and minority students. Although Stanton Salazar's model is based on the experience of primary and secondary school students we found in it important theoretical explanations that helped us put the 6 interpretive themes discussed below into a broader framework. Our interpretations of the life histories echo Stanton Salazar's perceptive observation that the educational success of underrepresented and poor youth "depend[s] upon regular and unobstructed opportunities for constructing instrumental relationships with institutional agents across key social spheres and institutional domains."

- The students were "Late Bloomers." One theme that seems to stand out for the transfer students is being "late bloomers." With the possible exception of one, all of the successful transfers seem to have discovered their full academic potential at the community college.
- The "accidental" transfer student. Becoming a transfer student and gaining admission to a selective four-year college was more by accident than by design. Many of the transfer students' stories hinged on random incidents that just happened to lead them to "transfer agents."
- The significance of "transfer agents." Students attributed their successful transfer experiences to teachers, counselors, and other authority figures that provided them with the resources to cross the cultural border that divides two- and four-year colleges. Community college "transfer agents" acted as bridges to facilitate the crossing to the four-year college and "transfer agents" at the four-year college provided entrée into a

new academic and social setting. Transfer agents as described by the students seemed to have special predispositions that motivated their advocacy.

- The significance of “out-of-class involvement” as a means of access to hidden transfer resources. Most of the participants in the interviews mentioned some kind of involvement at both the two-year and four-year institutions that proved invaluable in helping them feel connected and gave them access to various resources on campus. These experiences were noticeably absent in the narratives of students who had to work off-campus and experienced the four-year college exclusively through course-taking.
- The “relational” and “informal” elements of the transfer process. Transfer hinges on the formation of instrumental relationships between authority figures and students. However, these relationships develop informally as, for example, when an authority figure notices the potential in a student and reaches out. These authority figures are not necessarily charged with transfer-related responsibilities. Instead they seem to be driven by an inner ethical compass to use their expertise for the good of students who have otherwise been bypassed. The “relational” and “informal” elements of the transfer process were particularly noticeable at the community colleges, primarily because institutional level supports in many cases were under-resourced, underdeveloped, and unsystematic.
- The structural and formal elements of “transfer shock inoculation.” At several of the four-year institutions there were distinct programs and practices to address transfer students academic needs and prepare them for the sociocultural barriers that divide the world of open access and selective admissions and facilitate the initial period of self-doubt and difficulty in adjusting to their new environment. These programs facilitate students’ transitions through an initial period of self-doubt and difficulty in adjusting to a

new environment. These programs inoculated students against transfer shock by providing them with an “apprenticeship” (e.g., a pre-transfer summer program) in which they learned how to “decode” the new cultural and academic norms of the four-year college.

The 6 interpretive themes were derived from student experiences that are described in the extended life history analysis, which follows immediately after the section on research methods. Additionally, evidence of these interpretive themes can also be found throughout the case study analysis.

Multiple Case Study Analysis and Themes

For this report, five community college transfer students from schools on the West Coast were interviewed. This group consisted of three males and two females. Five transfer students from the East Coast were also interviewed, and in this group there were one male and four females. Because transcripts from all the interviews are utilized to examine the emerging themes for the multiple case study analysis, brief background information on all the participants is presented below. The detailed life history case studies of 6 of the participants are included in the appendix.

Participants from the West Coast

Liana Gonzalez is a 20-year-old¹ Latina who was born and reared in Pico Rivera, California, where she has always lived. She is the middle child of Mexican immigrant parents and comes from an intact family. Because her mother received a nursing degree in Mexico, technically Liana Gonzalez did not fit the profile of a low-income, first-generation college student. However, for maximum variation comparison, she is included in the report because her story offers an interesting contrast to the first-generation, traditional-age transfer students from the West. Liana Gonzalez recently transferred to West-IRU (West Independent Research University) almost as a junior and is majoring in Political Science with double minor in Urban Neighborhood Studies and Spanish. After teaching in an inner-city school for awhile, she eventually plans to earn a graduate degree in political science.

The other four participants from the West were all Hispanic, low-income, first-generation college students who transferred to West-PRU (West Public Research University) from various

¹ Ages reported here refer to the student's age at the time of the interview, not when they transferred.

community colleges in Southern California. Julio Gauna is a 25-year-old, fourth-generation Mexican American who was reared by a single-mother. For the first 8 years of his life, he lived in San Pedro/Wilmington, a high-crime area east of Los Angeles. Later his family relocated to Montebello, where he attended school and earned his GED through an independent studies program. Eventually Julio Gauna earned an AA degree from Local CC2 and transferred successfully to West-PRU. He graduated in 2005 with a BA in Communications with minors in Labor and Work Place Studies and Public Policy. Currently, he is preparing to apply to law schools or other graduate programs.

Carolina Armada is a 26-year-old, third-generation Mexican American female. She comes from an intact family but was reared for the most part by three influential women in her life—her mother, a grandmother, and an aunt. Her father was in the Navy and was often away from home until he retired as a disabled veteran. Carolina Armada obtained her GED through continuing school. After working in minimum-wage jobs for a few years, she enrolled in Local CC3. While Carolina Armada was completing her AA in Sociology and Spanish at Local CC3 and preparing to transfer to West-PRU, both of her parents lost their jobs and her family became homeless. Rather than being discouraged, Carolina Armada indicates she was more determined than ever to complete her education. She graduated in 2005 with a BA in Chicana/o Studies and is currently working toward her master's degree in the Graduate School of Education at West-PRU.

Pedro Contreras is a 24-year-old, first-generation Mexican American male who grew up in El Monte, California. He comes from single-parent/blended family situation. While working toward his AA at Local CC4, Pedro Contreras also struggled to help his mother pay the rent after she became ill and was laid off from work. In spite of many obstacles, he successfully

transferred to West-PRU, where his double majors were Sociology and Chicana/o Studies. After graduating in 2005, Pedro Contreras is presently enrolled in the master's degree program in Pupil Personnel Services at California State University-Long Beach.

Manuel Adelante is a 28-year-old, second-generation Mexican American male who grew up in the Mid-city to South Los Angeles. His mother worked as a janitor at West-IRU and always encouraged him to get a college education. However, he was placed in the non-college track for some reason and given no guidance after he graduated from high school. With no particular goal in mind, Manuel Adelante took classes at Local CC6 for a year. Later, he enrolled in Local CC5, where he heard about the transfer program to West-PRU. After eventually transferring to West-PRU, Manuel Adelante graduated in 2003 with a double major in History and Chicana/o Studies. Currently, he is a second-year Ph.D. student in American Studies at Yale University.

Participants from the East Coast

Lisbeth Marian Giles, a 52-year-old White female, is a first-generation college student who transferred from Local CCB to East-SC (East Selective College) as an East SC Fellow. She graduated from East-SC in 2005 with a degree in English and currently works as a Reading Specialist in the Center for Developmental Education at Local CCB. She is married and has three children.

Beth Mills is a 49-year-old White female who grew up in a large family with 8 brothers and sisters. Also a first-generation college student, she drove 18-wheelers for 24 years. Out of curiosity, she decided one day to take a class at Local CCV and says that her "brain was turned on." Only after 12 units, she transferred to East-PC (East Prestigious College) as an East-PC

Fellow. Beth Mills graduated in 2003 with a double major in Government and Sociology. Currently, she is in her second year at Vermont Law School. She has been with her partner for the past 19 years and has one foster daughter.

Alison Peyton, a 41-year-old White female who immigrated from England with her parents as a young child, is another first-generation college student. Because her parents were not familiar with the American educational system and financial aid, they told their children that they could only afford education up to the community college level. After earning her A.S. in medical secretarial training in 1984, Alison Peyton worked in various universities for the next twelve years. With encouragement from several older female mentors, she enrolled at Local CCH and then transferred to East-PC as an East-PC Fellow. She graduated in 2003 with a degree in American Studies and a minor in Ethics.

Anna Muskie is a 47-year-old African American female who grew up in Kansas. She is the youngest of 10 children. Although both of her parents were teachers with college educations, Anna Muskie states that she did not understand the value of a college degree until much later. For 15 years, she attempted to attend community colleges without any success. While enrolled in Technical College, she learned about transfer to four-year private colleges and became motivated. She transferred to East-PC as an East-PC Fellow and graduated in 2003 with double majors in African American and American Studies. After she earns her master's degree in American History at the University of Texas, she plans to continue in a doctoral program.

Byron Harris, a 23-year-old White male, was born in Texas but moved to Florida when he was in the third grade. With a history of poor school attendance, he eventually dropped out in the tenth grade. Working at minimum-wage jobs for several years showed him the importance of having a college degree, so he passed the GED exam and enrolled in Local CCF. After he did

well in the first semester, Byron Harris decided to transfer to a four-year institution. He was accepted by South P3 (South Private) but chose to transfer to South-PRU (South Public Research University) for financial reasons. He is currently a junior majoring in Political Science.

Table 1. Transfer Students from the West Coast

Name	Age	M/F	Ethnicity	Low Income	1 st -Gen College	2-year	4-year	Major	Graduate School
Liana Gonzalez	20	F	Hispanic	N	N	Local CC1	West-IRU	Political Science	Sch Adm (plan)
Julio Gauna	25	M	Hispanic	Y	Y	Local CC2	West-PRU	Communication	JD/PhD. (plan)
Carolina Armada	26	F	Hispanic	Y	Y	Local CC3	West-PRU	Chicana/o	West-PRU MA
Pedro Contreras	24	M	Hispanic	Y	Y	Local CC4	West-PRU	Chicana/o	CSULB MA
Manuel Adelante	28	M	Hispanic	Y	Y	Local CC5	West-PRU	Chicana/o	Yale University Ph.D.

Table 2. Transfer Students from the East Coast

Name	Age	M/F	Ethnicity	Low Income	1 st -Gen College	2-year	4-year	Major	Graduate School
Lisbeth Marian Giles	52	F	Caucasian	Y	Y	Local CCB	East-SC	English	EP6, MA
Beth Mills	49	F	Caucasian	Y	Y	Local CCV	East-PC	Government / Sociology	Vermont Law School, JD
Alison Peyton	41	F	Caucasian	Y	Y	Local CCH	East-PC	American Studies	MA/MBA (plan)
Anna Muskie	47	F	African American	N	N	Technical	East-PC	African Amer. Studies	University of Texas MA
Byron Harris	23	M	Caucasian	N	N	Local CCF	SOUTH-PRU	Political Science	Higher Ed (plan)

Case Study Analysis and Themes

Stake (1994) distinguishes three types of case study—intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. The intrinsic case study is not concerned with discovering some general abstract construct, but is interested primarily in the case itself. In an instrumental case study, a particular

case is investigated in order to gain insight into an issue or to refine a theory. A collective case study is an instrumental case study that has been extended to several individual cases in order to determine how an event influences a number of people's lives. The present study employed a collective or multiple case study method because the goal was to gain a deep understanding of how low-income, first-generation college students overcame the barriers and achieved success at a four-year institution. Specific themes that emerged across the cases are discussed below.

Transfer Students' Significant Experiences Prior to Higher Education

Early Parental/Family Influences

Most participants identified their parent(s) or family as having exerted important influences in their early life. Many of the Hispanics (traditional-age students from the West Coast) particularly described their mothers as being religious and striving to instill moral values. One student (Carolina Armada) stated specifically that all three women in her family (mother, grandmother, aunt) personified strength, pride, dignity, and self-respect. Of the five Hispanic participants, the four who were low-income, first-generation college students mentioned that their mothers worked very hard at low-wage jobs to support the family. These mothers encouraged their children to do well in school, and there is a general sense that they considered education the key to a better opportunity or future for their children. However, not having attended college themselves, they were unable to provide their children with specific guidance on how to achieve this dream. The children received general encouragement and support to go to school, but as Julio Gauna put it, there was no "model." For many of these low-income students, specific guidance they very much needed was often lacking during their formal education.

Most of the interviewees from the East Coast were non-traditional age students and the first member of their household to attend college. One student (Beth Mills) revealed that while her parents were uneducated and did not discuss college explicitly with her, in looking back she could see their influence in her early life. She attributes her strong interest in current events and international affairs to the fact that there was always something to read around the house (e.g., newspapers, *National Geographic*, etc.) while she was growing up. The student (Alison Peyton) who emigrated from England with her parents at a very early age grew up with the understanding that they would support her education only through community college. As mentioned, this was because they were not familiar with the financial aid system in the United States. She realizes that perhaps she could have gone directly to a four-year college if had she received proper information or guidance from her high school counselor; however, she sadly notes, her counselor provided “no guidance whatsoever.” For the first-generation college students, information about higher education most often came from outside the family, with teachers or counselors playing even more critical roles in guiding the students educationally. For two other students (Lisbeth Marian Giles and Byron Harris), family circumstances (e.g., parents’ divorce or father’s loss of employment) eventually led to their dropping out of school, but fortunately the community college system offered them a “second chance” at higher education.

Interestingly, two participants (Liana Gonzalez, a traditional-age student, West Coast, Hispanic; Anna Muskie, a non-traditional age student, East Coast, African American) who had at least one parent with a college education (Liana Gonzalez’s mother received a nursing degree in Mexico; Anna Muskie’s parents received teaching degrees in the U.S.) reported that the expectation for them to attend college had always been present. However, for personal reasons, they followed a different route rather than going directly to a four-year institution. Liana

Gonzalez decided to enroll in a community college first because she did not feel ready to leave home and wanted to help her parents save money by reducing the overall cost of her education. While Anna Muskie's family urged her to get a college education, she felt "conflicted" and postponed it until later in life because she was able to earn a decent salary without it by working for IBM. In both cases, participants who were not the first member of their households to attend college grew up with the expectation that they should do so simply based on their parents' educational attainment.

Negative School Experience and Its Impact

Many of the participants described their grade school experience as being largely uneventful. However, Julio Gauna, who grew up in the rough neighborhood of East Los Angeles, gave an interesting account of his having attended a private Christian school from pre-kindergarten through the third grade, which brought order and structure to his otherwise chaotic circumstances. Ironically, after his family moved to a suburb and Julio Gauna entered the public school system, a few of his seventh- and eighth-grade teachers identified him as a troublemaker. He remembers being told repeatedly by these teachers and other school officials that he would never amount to anything. As a result, he became increasingly resentful of authority figures, ditched much of the ninth grade, and switched to an independent study program for the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades.

Similarly, a couple of other students indicated that the situation became worse for them in middle school, which eventually led to their leaving school in the sophomore year. Byron Harris started skipping school in the third or fourth grade after his father lost his job. His absenteeism worsened after his family moved to Florida, and he finally dropped out of school in the tenth

grade. Carolina Armada, on the other hand, who received most of her schooling in Riverside County, California, was reportedly a straight A student until some time during middle school. That was when she began asking a great many questions in class about things that were happening in her community and throughout the world. Carolina Armada indicates she did not “fit” in as what she was “supposed” to be, which she perceived as being “silent” rather than being vocal. She felt even more estranged from the educational system when she was somehow placed in the remedial mathematics class (which she refers to as “chorlo” math) during her freshman year of high school. Curiously, Carolina Armada’s best friend, who happened to be White, was placed in the college-track mathematics class even though it was Carolina Armada who had tutored her in algebra in junior high. At the time, Carolina Armada did not realize what was going on, but now she believes that non-White, low-income students were routinely excluded from college preparatory classes (e.g., college-track mathematics and science courses) even though school counselors never discussed their future plans with them. Carolina Armada recalls feeling very angry at the whole educational system, and this was when she started to rebel. She partied, drank, took drugs, and frequently got into fights, which eventually led to her being expelled from the regular high school and ending up in the continuing education school for the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades.

Manuel Adelante shared a similar story. After finishing junior high school, he was assigned woodworking shop and auto mechanics for electives rather than being given the option to take college preparatory mathematics or science courses. Although the school never stated it explicitly, Manuel Adelante and his friends “just figured out” they were on the “c track,” which was known as the “loser track” or the non-college track. Like Carolina Armada, Manuel Adelante says that the strangest thing about this experience was the lack of transparency or the

fact that he and his parents “did not have any say” in what classes he took in high school. In fact, Manuel Adelante reports that his school guidance counselor was not very good and never provided him with any information about college. He did not even know that one had to apply for admission to college or that it was competitive.

Likewise, Liana Gonzalez experienced similar frustration and disillusionment with the educational system as she became aware of the discrepancy between the honors program and regular program in her high school. She was appalled by the lack of care and concern from the teachers and the inadequate instruction and preparation her peers received in the regular class. Like Carolina Armada and Julio Gauna, Liana Gonzalez was profoundly influenced by her negative experience in high school, and like them she pursued higher education in order to bring about educational reform at the policy or structural level.

Based on these students’ experiences, the middle school seems to be a critical period not only for their developing sense of self-efficacy, but also for determining their educational future. Particularly for low-income, first-generation college students, guidance counselors appear to play a critical role. Not only do they provide basic information about college, but they also act as gate-keepers who determine the tracks in which students are placed in high school and consequently the options they will have after graduation. Disturbingly, many of the participants (Liana Gonzalez, Pedro Contreras, Manuel Adelante, Carolina Armada, Alison Peyton, Lisbeth Marian Giles) described their high school counselors as not being very helpful (to put it mildly) and indicated that they did not provide them with the guidance they needed to understand the difference between two-year and four-year colleges, financial aid packages, application processes, and the types of courses one needs to gain admission and prepare oneself for college.

Positive Influence and Its Impact

While none of the participants spoke of their guidance counselors as having been particularly helpful, many of them mentioned teachers who had a significant positive influence on their lives. Liana Gonzalez recalled Mr. Carlisle, her seventh and eighth grade mathematics teacher who was tough but also caring and who stimulated learning. She did very well in his class, and this bolstered her self-confidence. Lisbeth Marian Giles also mentioned her eighth grade mathematics teacher who took an interest in her, found out she wanted to be a teacher, and worked with her to become a mathematics tutor. She claims this is what actually “saved” her, because her family was very poor and “dysfunctional.” Lisbeth Marian Giles states she was “silent” all through high school, but a business teacher who saw her willingness to learn took an interest in her and helped her get into a local four-year college. However, she had to leave in her first year because her parents lost their business and she could not pay the tuition, even with a loan.

Julio Gauna and Carolina Armada both left their regular high school in the tenth grade, but they each spoke of a teacher who provided the guidance they needed in the special program. Carolina Armada mentioned that Ms. Horton, her mathematics teacher in the continuing education school, was tough and had high expectations, but took a personal interest in her. In fact, Carolina Armada indicated that Ms. Horton met her family and waited with her after school until Carolina Armada’s father could pick her up after work to take her to the adult school in order for her to graduate. Carolina Armada states that while Ms. Horton was very committed to helping her get her GED, she was not particularly helpful in terms of explaining her options about applying to college. Having been given a brochure about community college, Carolina Armada just dismissed it, thinking that college was beyond her means. In contrast, Mr.

Heliotrope, Julio Gauna's independent study teacher, was not only instrumental in helping him complete his GED, but also encouraged him to think about going to a community college and then transferring to a four-year university as a real option. Julio Gauna states that Mr. Heliotrope was the first person to give him a "model" of what his future could be and how he could get a college degree. As Julio Gauna was a fourth-generation Mexican American but a first-generation college student, what Mr. Heliotrope did for him was very important because none of his family members or friends could advise him on this matter. Julio Gauna's mother, aunt, and older brother earned their GED, but college was not a "reality" in his family.

Turning Points

Many of the participants somehow managed to finish high school or got their GED and then found employment. However, most of them recalled reaching a turning point in life that led them to enroll in a community college. For example, after Carolina Armada graduated from high school, she held minimum-wage jobs (e.g., El Pollo Loco; Wal-Mart) for two to three years and was struggling with a disability that resulted from injuring her arm while working as a cashier at Wal-Mart. Then one day she "came into consciousness" about the plight of the working class while helping a handicapped lady at the store, and shortly after that experience she enrolled in Local CC3. Julio Gauna lacked only 10 units for his GED but decided to go to Miami to work as a painter with his best friend. The important lesson he learned from this experience was that he did not want to be a low-wage earner for the rest of his life, so he resumed his education. After dropping out of school in the tenth grade, Byron Harris worked for about three years. While employed at Circuit City, he had problems with his new boss, which he says turned things around for him. Realizing that he needed to get an education, he studied on his own, passed the

GED exam, and then enrolled in a community college. Anna Muskie also started working just after high school and initially found that she could make a decent living without a college education. However, after she left IBM, she learned that her work experience was not enough and she needed a degree. In various ways, each of the participants in this study got a “wake-up call” from their work situations. Many of them enrolled in local community colleges without any specific plans or ideas about what they were going to do or where they were headed. However, their different paths all converged in the community college as a result of the common notion that they needed education beyond their high school diploma.

Transfer Students’ Significant Experiences in Higher Education

Late Bloomers

In reviewing all the participants’ experiences prior to their enrolling in a community college, one theme that seems to stand out for the transfer students is that most of them were “*late bloomers.*” Many of them did not discover their full academic potential or capacity until they left primary education. This is most obvious among the nontraditional-age, first-generation college students from the East Coast, who said they missed the opportunity to attend college at the traditional age for various family-related reasons: unfortunate circumstances (Lisbeth Marian Giles), not given serious consideration as a result of working-class background (Beth Mills), and parents’ lack of information about the educational system and financial aid in the United States (Alison Peyton).

Two of the transfer students (Anna Muskie and Byron Harris) who did not come from a first-generation college background were also late bloomers. Although they were encouraged to go to college by their family and friends, Anna Muskie and Byron Harris both confessed they did

not understand the value of college degree when they were younger. They became motivated to pursue higher education after they had eye-opening experiences in their work. However, this realization came later for them as it did for many of the other transfer students. Luckily, as Byron Harris said, the community college system essentially gave them “a second chance.”

Being an older transfer student, Anna Muskie explains how it is different:

I didn't have the GPA when I was younger that I had when I was older. I didn't have the commitment when I was younger that I did when I went back and...knew that this is what I had to get done for my own sense of identity, for my own sense of challenge, for my own sense of accomplishment. I was not the same person in '97 that I was in 1980.

For most of the traditional-age transfer students from the West Coast who came from a low-income, first-generation college background, the possibility of attending college was never presented to them while they were in high school (Pedro Contreras, Carolina Armada, Manuel Adelante) and the two-year system similarly represented “a second chance” for them. Many of these participants indicated that they did not receive proper information or guidance about four-year and/or two-year colleges from their school counselor. Some said they were simply handed a brochure about community college. Overall, they felt their guidance counselor did not take the time to explain the higher education system or the application process because they were not considered “college material” and were only interested in making sure they graduated. As Pedro Contreras explained, his high school was not very good and the community college gave him an opportunity to make up for what was lacking. In this way, for many of the low-income, first-generation college students who were overlooked by the school counselor and excluded from college-track courses in high school, the community college came to their rescue. According to Pedro Contreras, Julio Gauna, Carolina Armada, and Manuel Adelante, they benefited

tremendously from various special programs (e.g., EOF, PTE Program, etc.). In effect, the two-year institutions restored the missing elements from their junior and senior years in high school by offering them college preparatory courses and developing the basic academic skills (e.g., reading, writing, and mathematics) they would need in order to transfer to a four-year institution.

Starting Community College without Guidance or Direction

For most of the transfer students, various life events that occurred after they were out of high school heightened their desire for further education and eventually led them to a community college. Many of them said the best aspect of a community college was that they could take one or two classes without altering their lives. However, this gradual approach offered by two-year institutions appears to be not only its greatest strength but paradoxically a possible weakness. The majority of participants in the study (8 out of 10) indicated that they simply enrolled in classes at a community college without any clear plan. In fact, many of them spoke about going through the first semester or the first year on their own without any guidance until they encountered a special instructor or program that gave them access to other educational resources. From this it would seem the first connection is the most critical factor in terms of making a successful transition. Unfortunately, many of the transfer students' stories hinged on random incidents that just happened to point them in the right direction. In other words, there was not a formal mechanism in place to orient these first-generation college students at the beginning of their studies. For example, Manuel Adelante's story illustrates how haphazardly he stumbled onto things. After he graduated from high school, Manuel Adelante worked at minimum-wage jobs (e.g., Taco Bell, GAP, etc.) to help support his family. Many of his peers were enrolled in community college, and from them he learned that one did not have to apply to these institutions

and admission was not competitive. Having been given this information, Manuel Adelante enrolled in Local CC6 simply because he felt it was “the right thing to do”; however, he admits that he was not serious about it at first. Still working full time, he took music, art, and other elective courses. Without having a particular goal, he felt he was just “spinning [his] wheels” at Local CC6, so a year later he decided to enroll at Local CC5. Finding a brochure about EOF (a special program for low-income, first generation college student) in his enrollment packet, he applied and was accepted. This provided him with counselors who helped him to sign up for classes following the Inter-Segmental Course Articulation Guide (e.g., hard sciences, mathematics, and English), which would prepare him to transfer to one of California’s four-year universities. Manuel Adelante eventually transferred to West-PRU and now is in a doctoral program at Yale University. However, he states that if he had not received the necessary information and guidance about college through EOF, he probably would have gone through the motions without any direction and eventually given up the idea of getting a higher education altogether.

During his first year at Local CC2, Julio Gauna indicates that he too was “doing it by myself” and taking mostly sports classes. Julio Gauna explains that he was not open or responsive to the community college experience at first and did not take advantage of various resources that were available to him, such as academic counseling. Like Manuel Adelante, Julio Gauna was just floundering about for a year, working two jobs (Big 5 and construction) and not taking school seriously. In retrospect, he believes that this was largely the result of his “confidence issues,” which made college seem unattainable. Fortunately, after a talk with a “buddy” one day made him think about what he was doing with his life and where he was going, Julio Gauna became more focused. He then connected with a counselor who was able to help

him navigate the system by mapping out all the courses he needed to take as well as introducing him to various resources on campus (e.g., leadership program, meeting West-PRU representatives, etc).

Starting Community College with a Plan

Out of all the participants, only two transfer students, Liana Gonzalez and Pedro Contreras, indicated that they began community college with a plan to transfer to a four-year university. In contrast to most students who initially enrolled without any direction, it is interesting to look at these two students in terms of how their experiences differed. First, it is important to note that Liana Gonzalez was not one of the first-generation college students, which seems to set her apart. During the interview, she explained that because her mother had a college degree from Mexico, she grew up knowing that someday she would be going to college. Liana Gonzalez was also different from other students in the study because her mother was working at the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and was well connected with various people in the educational system. During her senior year in high school, Liana Gonzalez was accepted by several West-PRU campuses, but decided not to go to any of them, primarily because she did not feel ready to leave home. Additionally, she wanted to spare her parents some expense by completing the general requirements at a two-year college. For these reasons, unlike other participants in the study, Liana Gonzalez started out at the community college with a clear focus. She knew about the transfer program (i.e., Inter-Segmental Articulation Course guide in California), and mapped out courses that would be transferable for her major at the four-year college. The only caveat for Liana Gonzalez was that she was doing this all on her own. She obtained all the information through the internet without seeking any academic advisement

on campus. This turned out to be somewhat costly for her, as she lost about a semester's worth of courses when she changed her plan to transfer to West-IRU instead of West-PRU.

Like most of the other low-income, first-generation college students, Pedro Contreras graduated from high school without any plans or direction. However, he was extremely fortunate in that a neighbor who was attending West-PRU encouraged him to participate in VICE, a one-week summer residential program that introduces underrepresented community college students and high school seniors to campus life and shows them what it means to be a scholar. VICE was extremely helpful for Pedro Contreras in terms of motivating him to enroll in a community college with the goal of preparing for transfer to a four-year institution. After attending this program, Pedro Contreras immediately enrolled in Local CC4. Initially, he faced financial hardships (difficulty in paying the rent because his mother suddenly became ill and was laid off) and academic challenges (having not learned much at El Monte High School, he was placed in the lowest level mathematics and English classes at Local CC4). However, because he began his studies at Local CC4 with a plan to transfer to a four-year institution, he had an advantage over others in that he was better able to navigate his way through the system early on and take full advantage of various programs available at the community college (e.g., peer support system through LINK, academic enhancement through PTE Program, political and community involvement through MARCH leadership program). As was the case with Julio Gauna, Pedro Contreras's active participation at the community college was valuable in terms of networking and obtaining information about four-year universities, including assistance with the application process (e.g., application fee waiver, personal statement, letters of recommendation).

“Transfer Agents” at the Two-Year and the Four-Year Institutions

Another common theme shared by most participants is that many spoke of individuals outside of their family who played a significant role in guiding them academically. Some students mentioned instructors while others talked about counselors or program directors at the two-year and four-year institutions who made a difference in their lives. However, the level of involvement and the role different key individuals played in these students’ lives varied greatly.

During the interviews, many participants mentioned an instructor at the community college who fostered their academic interests, developed their skills, and bolstered their confidence. They frequently said that the instructor “cared” about students and their learning, but was “tough.” However, instead of complaining, the participants extolled the instructor’s high standards and expectations. Those who attended schools in the low-income areas often felt ill-prepared academically and were grateful that the instructor took them seriously enough to really teach them. For example, Julio Gauna describes Ms. Raritan his first instructor at the community college, as being “inspirational” and says she provided the structure and guidance he needed. Ms. Raritan was instrumental in improving Julio Gauna’s writing skills, which gave him the confidence to do college-level work. Likewise, Anna Muskie praised a community college instructor who was quite challenging but sincerely interested in helping her prepare for a four-year institution:

And I think that also made a difference in my realization that you can...you can bridge from a community college to a stellar four-year college or university.... Yeah, well, again he brought the realization that it can be done. And also challenged us in our academic performance with critiquing our writing. It’s the first time we had been given so many texts to read in one semester. And I thought it was almost obnoxious. But it was a

challenge, and I did well, and I continued to take his courses. I think I took three of his courses, because he did inspire me to be my best. And I did feel that he was critiquing me to improve me, and not critiquing me to disprove me.

In addition to building important academic skills, some of the instructors went a step farther and also helped students to discover an area of interest that eventually became their undergraduate major and professional goal. For example, according to Beth Mills, her critical thinking professor at the community college was “exceptionally gifted in facilitating” learning in class and her brain was “set on fire.” After she had taken several more classes with him, the instructor advised her to transfer to East-PC. Beth Mills credits this professor with awakening her passion, which has resulted in her pursuing a law degree. Carolina Armada’s political science instructor at the community college stimulated her interest in Chicano/a study, which is why she chose to transfer to West-PRU. According to her, this instructor cultivated academic rigor by the way he taught and structured the course readings and writing assignments. Surprisingly, as a result of this foundation, Carolina Armada did not find the classes at West-PRU to be more challenging; rather, “some of it [was] almost a review.”

Some key individuals went beyond stimulating these students intellectually and preparing them academically. One participant described a person at the community college who mentored and guided her in a very personal way, almost as a father figure. Like most of the low-income, first-generation college students, Lisbeth Marian Giles claims she lacked confidence, even though she surprised herself by earning a 4.0 grade point average in her first year at the community college. One day when Lisbeth Marian Giles dropped by the tutoring center, she met Mr. Rollins, the director. It was he who first informed Lisbeth Marian Giles about the transfer program and encouraged her to apply. Lisbeth Marian Giles still felt she was not “smart

enough” or “rich enough” to transfer to a four-year institution, but Mr. Rollins would hear none of this. He went “beyond encouraging” Lisbeth Marian Giles and coaxed her just to come along and see the campus when he took another student for her admissions interview. When they got there, she realized Mr. Rollins had arranged for her to meet an admissions officer at East-SC. She indicates he also worked with her one-on-one by going online together to research schools, helping her with her application including editing her letter of interest, and taking her to interviews. Without his support and encouragement, Lisbeth Marian Giles states she would never have thought about applying to East-SC, where she was accepted as an East SC Fellow. According to Lisbeth Marian Giles, what is most amazing about Mr. Rollins is that she is not the only student whose life he has changed. He has helped innumerable other students in a similar fashion.

Mentors like Mr. Rollins provided the encouragement participants in the study needed to overcome psychological barriers or their own feelings of inadequacy. They build students’ confidence by believing in them and showing them the way step by step. As a result, they also served as “transfer agents” or “cultural brokers” for the higher educational system by transforming what appears to be an unattainable dream into a realistic, achievable goal.

It seems that Mr. Rollins was particularly important because the community college lacked a structure to provide students with adequate information about transfer programs or to identify them for honors programs, as was the case with Lisbeth Marian Giles. Having such a mentor appears to be particularly critical for first-generation college students who do not have a model to draw from within their own families. Having had three very influential mentors to guide her, Alison Peyton was able to articulate clearly what it meant to have these key individuals in her life. She explains that while her husband and family were always very

supportive, it was “phenomenal” to have the support of these powerful figures. Each of them was “someone outside” who saw her potential and “went beyond the call of duty” to mentor her.

At the four-year institutions, many participants identified the transfer program director (West-PRU) or academic dean (e.g., East-SC and East-PC) as the individual who helped them adjust and make a successful transition. They were also very conscious of these individuals’ presence in the transfer program, which interestingly was often tied to a specific building or house. They seemed to derive a sense of security from knowing that a key administrative figure at the four-year institution was there on their behalf and would act as their advocate. Many of the low-income, first-generation college students whose educational experiences at the primary level were disheartening as well as inadequate found it very empowering to be able to call a key official individual at the institution “their own.” These program directors or deans were available to help the transfer students any time with any difficulties, academic or personal (e.g., registration; Lisbeth Marian Giles, honorably dropping Latin; Manuel Adelante, finding an academic advisor; Pedro Contreras, paying rent).

Overall, the mechanism that is in place to assist transfer students seems more organized and structured at four-year institutions. In contrast, it seems to occur more informally at community colleges, and there is a certain haphazardness to the entire process. For example, Lisbeth Marian Giles indicates:

Because when I was a 4.0 student that first year...I never got anything. I was never offered honors. I was never offered Phi Beta Kappa. I was never offered transfer information. There was transfer information on the walls in the transfer office for...local state colleges around here. But that all had to be initiated by the student. And if you’re a timid little student who doesn’t know anything, you wouldn’t go anywhere.

Considering various students' experiences at community colleges, it appears that much depends on an individual's luck in terms of connecting with good, caring instructors or a tutoring center director like Mr. Rollins who goes beyond his official duty to help students with the transfer process. As Manuel Adelante also suggested, if students are not lucky enough to meet the right individual(s) or find the right program(s), they may continue to drift aimlessly and never make a successful transfer.

Thus, receiving support and validation from a key figure(s) within the educational institution who has the power to guide students through the system seems to play a significant role in building their confidence and helping them to develop academically. Many participants (Liana Gonzalez, Pedro Contreras, Julio Gauna, Byron Harris) also mentioned peer advisors and counselors who were helpful in terms of providing useful information, increasing their awareness of competitiveness at four-year institutions, and motivating them to build the "whole package" (Julio Gauna). However, from the way participants described different key influences, there seems to be a distinct difference between the type and level of impact made by peer advisors and that of instructors or administrators. While peer advisors were valued for their support and rapport, the participants did not describe them as being influential in overcoming a sense of inadequacy or feelings of not being "good enough."

Many of the low-income, first-generation students recalled going through the first semester or year at the community college wondering what they were doing there. On transferring to a four-year institution, most of them again felt overpowered by the sheer physicality or the architecture from the moment they set foot on campus. These students were often plagued by feelings of doubt as to whether they belonged there. Before enrolling in a community college, many of them had been told explicitly (e.g., Julio Gauna and Lisbeth Marian

Giles) or implicitly (e.g., Carolina Armada and Pedro Contreras) in middle or high school that they were not “college material.”

Unfortunately, some of the students never gained a sense of encouragement from their experience at a two-year college. According to Carolina Armada, she never considered college to be within her means, and she enrolled in the local community college without knowing anything about transfer until she saw a flyer on campus toward the end of her first year there. At that point, she went to the transfer center and began receiving guidance about college. Until then, she says she just thought West-PRU was a football team and never even knew it was a school. Because Carolina Armada was interested in Chicano/a Studies, she decided to transfer to West-PRU. She describes her transfer counselor at Local CC3 as consistent, good at keeping track of students, and interested in getting to know them and their families through special events. However, Carolina Armada says that neither her first counselor nor her community mentor believed she would be accepted by West-PRU and encouraged her to apply to West PF instead. Although this was discouraging at first, Carolina Armada knew what she wanted and found another counselor who believed in her and helped her transfer to West-PRU eventually.

Not surprisingly, many of the low-income, first-generation students have internalized the negative messages given by insensitive authority figures (e.g., teachers or counselors). Over time, these overt or subtle negative messages are often reinforced by other discouraging education experiences. For this reason, positive authority figures (e.g., instructors, directors, and administrators) seem to play a critical role for marginalized students by helping them overcome their internalized feelings of not being good enough or smart enough for college. By noticing, nurturing, and believing in students’ abilities, key individuals appear to have the power to affirm students and influence them to achieve their full academic potential.

Table 3. The presence of “*Transfer Agents*” in students’ lives

Name	At the 2-year	At the 4-Year
Liana Gonzalez	None	Orientation/peer advisor Faculty
Julio Gauna	English teacher Counselor UC representative	PPP director West-PRU advisor
Carolina Armada	Political science instructor	PPP director
Pedro Contreras	English professor Mentor—helped w/application UC representative	PPP director Peer mentor (Residential Advisor)
Manuel Adelante	Director of CC (partnership w/ West-PRU)	PPP director Advisor in the history department
Lisbeth Marian Giles	Director of tutoring center	Dean of East-SC Fellows
Beth Mills	Critical thinking professor (encouraged to apply to 4-yr)	Dean of East-PC Fellows, East-PC Professors and other school staff
Alison Peyton	Dean of the College, East-PC Director of ACC program Dean of Engineering, Univ. of Mass.	Dean of East-PC Fellows, East-PC
Anna Muskie	Academic dean and history instructor (both graduates of CC; role models)	Dean of East-PC Fellows, East-PC Professor
Byron Harris	Psychology professor Spanish professor Student/academic advisors	Provost of SOUTH-PRU

Transfer Shock Inoculation

At several of the four-year institutions (West-PRU, East-SC, and East-PC), the directors or the deans of special transfer programs appear to play a significant role in fostering one-on-one relationships with transfer students. In addition, these leaders oversee various programs (e.g., STP at West-PRU, East-SC Fellows at East-SC, East-PC Fellows at East-PC) that are designed to respond to transfer students’ academic and personal needs, as many of them go through an initial period of self-doubt and difficulty in adjusting to the new environment. Therefore, these special programs have been developed as an “apprenticeship” (Stanton Salazar, 1997) to reduce transfer shock.

On the West coast, four of the low-income community college students (Carolina Armada, Julio Gauna, Manuel Adelante, and Pedro Contreras) transferred to West-PRU. (Liana Gonzalez was the exception.) These students all mentioned participating in the STP (a summer transfer program) at West-PRU, which is a 6-week intensive summer program designed to provide orientation and academic preparation for low-income, first-generation college transfer students. Most of the students who participated in the summer program began by recalling how it oriented them to the campus physically. Although all of them grew up in Southern California (approximately 30-45 minutes from West-PRU), they described the unforgettable experience of setting foot on the campus for the very first time. Julio Gauna captured the impact of the occasion by saying that his “bubble burst” and he discovered “there is another world outside of Whittier.” Having grown up in El Monte, California, Pedro Contreras found it difficult to adjust to living in West LA at first (e.g., getting used to the city, materialism, rudeness of people assuming he was a university worker rather than a student). For Carolina Armada, being physically separated from her family and community was depressing and difficult. It took her at least one quarter to adjust to the new environment, and she indicates that some of her Latina friends struggled even longer. As mentioned previously, Liana Gonzalez’s reluctance to leave her family was the main reason she decided not to go directly to a four-year college, even though she had that option.

Many of these students recalled the “shock” of their initial exposure to the academic rigor (e.g., amount and type of critical reading, length of analytical papers) at the university. Even though all of them had taken transfer courses and earned good grades at various community colleges, they all described feeling overwhelmed and ill prepared. Julio Gauna felt that even though the community college had prepared him in terms of academic content, it had not

prepared him for academic rigor. He found the amount and type of critical reading required to be extremely overwhelming at first. From his perspective, the technical language of the educational culture (e.g., dialectical, summarize, paraphrase) is intimidating, and moreover it creates a barrier to higher education for someone like him and his friends. His initial “shock” made him wonder, “What am I doing here and why did I come so far?” In spite of having felt he did not belong at the university level, Julio Gauna mentions, as did others, that the STP was incredibly welcoming and supportive in helping him get through the first 6 weeks and prepared him for a successful transition throughout the rest of the academic year.

All of the students who went through STP at West-PRU spoke of lasting relationships they formed not only with their peers, but also with faculty members and program directors. Carolina Armada, Manuel Adelante, Julio Gauna, and Pedro Contreras all mentioned in their interview that they became well connected with the PPP transfer center and its director, who maintained the relationship with them throughout their studies at West-PRU. As PPP is housed in its own building, the students described the comfort and security of being able to hang out in a place where people knew them by their first name, knew their interests, and could offer them guidance. In this way, PPP created a community for these students in which everybody looked out for one another and helped them make their way around the larger campus throughout their undergraduate study at West-PRU.

While the summer program inoculated the low-income, first-generation college students against “transfer shock,” PPP facilitated their continued adjustment and success at the four-year institution and beyond. Many of the students recalled being encouraged to think ahead and plan for their graduate studies shortly after their transfer. After earning their undergraduate degrees, three of the West-PRU participants are currently enrolled in graduate programs (Manuel

Adelante, Ph.D. in American Studies at Yale University; Carolina Armada, M.A. in Education at West-PRU; and Julio Gauna, M.A. in school counseling program at CSU-Long Beach); the fourth West-PRU participant (Pedro Contreras) plans to apply to a graduate program.

Manuel Adelante described in detail how PPP worked closely with the honors program at West-PRU to find him an advisor in the history department. That advisor was instrumental in fostering Manuel Adelante's "intellectual formation" and guiding him through his research project, senior thesis, and application to doctoral programs.

On the East coast, four of the participants were non-traditional transfer students at Ivy League selective colleges. (The exception was Byron Harris who attended a public research university in the south.) Three of the participants (Beth Mills, Anna Muskie, and Alison Peyton) transferred from community college to East-PC through the East-PC Fellows program, and one (Lisbeth Marian Giles) went to East-SC as an East-SC Fellow. All of these participants indicated that these special programs were crucial not only in terms of transfer access, but also in helping them make successful transitions to the four-year institutions. According to Lisbeth Marian Giles, the East-SC Fellow students had a separate place on campus at which they could meet and hold various events. She says it was nice to be able to go to a place where people knew her name. She also describes the dean of the East-SC Fellow program as "very hands-on" and accessible. For example, the dean had someone from the registrar's office come to the East-SC Fellows House to help with the registration process, which made the transition smoother and less overwhelming for the transfer students. Having not gone to prep school, Lisbeth Marian Giles initially found it very intimidating to attend classes with eighteen-year-olds who were rich and smart. In fact, she says one of the biggest barriers she faced was overcoming her own prejudices toward rich young girls. According to Lisbeth Marian Giles, without the support she received

through the East-SC Fellows program, she is not certain she could have negotiated the transfer and adjustment to East-SC successfully.

The other three non-traditional students who transferred to East-PC through the East-PC Fellows program shared similar feelings of initial self-doubt as to whether they could carry the academic load as well as younger traditional students. However, they found their life experiences enabled them to bring interesting discussions to the classroom, which was an asset that most, but not all, of the faculty and their classmates appreciated. Many also mentioned that what helped them get over the initial “transfer shock” was their active involvement in the transfer program, which in turn facilitated their connection at the campus-wide level. This factor will be examined further in the following section. It is interesting to note that the rate of adjustment varied among these students. While the transition happened quickly for Lisbeth Marian Giles, Beth Mills described a more gradual change in her identity, going from a not-so-serious student, to half-and-half, and eventually to full-time student status.

Based on the participants’ stories, these special programs appear to be successful in terms of preparing transfer students for a smooth transition to a four-year institution. At the organizational structure and practices level, these programs seem to provide a solid “home base” or a separate physical space in which transfer students can gather, regroup, and find comfort and support. They were also successful in connecting the transfer students to the larger campus and helping them navigate through various programs and resources. This appears to be critical in facilitating students’ academic development and success in planning further studies. Most of all, individual attention from the head of the program seems to provide important guidance that enables transfer students to take advantage of various resources that are available at the institutional level.

Table 4. Transfer Shock Inoculation

Name	At the 2-Year	At the 4-Year
Liana Gonzalez	None	Professor (informal)
Julio Gauna	None	STP/PPP
Carolina Armada	PTE Program	STP/PPP
Pedro Contreras	PTE Program	STP/PPP
Manuel Adelante	None	STP/PPP
Lisbeth Marian Giles	Tutoring Center	East-SC Fellow
Beth Mills	Instructor	East-PC Fellow
Alison Peyton	None	East-PC Fellow
Anna Muskie	None	East-PC Fellow
Byron Harris	Phi Delta Kappa	None

School Engagement

As mentioned in the above discussion, most of the participants in the interviews indicated some kind of involvement at the both the two-year and four-year institutions that proved invaluable in helping them connect with the school and gain access to various resources on campus (e.g., Lisbeth Marian Giles, Alison Peyton, Byron Harris). Based on participants' accounts, the first connection they made at the community college and transfer four-year college was particularly critical in terms of breaking the initial sense of isolation or feeling of being lost (e.g., Manuel Adelante, Julio Gauna).

Apart from reducing transfer shock, school involvement appears to have other benefits. For example, according to Pedro Contreras, his involvement in the PTE Program at the community college helped him stay motivated academically. In order to qualify for the program, he had to work hard for a year to move from the lowest English composition class to the transfer-

level one. Julio Gauna, who participated in such extracurricular activities as BUS leadership program at the community college, also mentioned that this kept him motivated do well in school and succeed in transferring to a four-year institution.

Further confirmation of the importance of involvement in extracurricular activities at the community college level was provided by Byron Harris, who credits it with helping him succeed academically. After he did well in his first semester, he realized that he “could be successful” and became involved in school organizations. He believes this was critical for him in terms of connecting with the school as well as opening various doors. When Byron Harris joined Phi Delta Kappa, it proved to be the source of the support he needed. He later became the chapter president and was very active in the student body. Eventually, he made the honors program and Local CCF’s student ambassador program, and he also became a student assistant in the tutoring service. Byron Harris explains the benefits he found through active engagement with the school as follows:

Well, [involvement in school activities and organizations] made school a place I wanted to go to, more than just...it's not just a place where I'm going and seeing friends as well. And, like, when you're planning activities and programs, or giving tours, you're more invested in the college first...in the educational experience. But, also just, you're on campus more often, so, I don't know. Makes...it puts the school in your face, but it's in a fun way, I don't know.

Similarly, Lisbeth Marian Giles was actively involved in the tutoring center at the community college. As she helped other students there, things just “took off” for her in that she gained confidence, came “out of [her] shell,” and became more active socially on campus. When she transferred to East-SC, she volunteered to be on the East-SC Fellow council board, which

she says helped her make an instant connection with the campus. She served the board for three years and reports that this definitely helped her adjust to the four-year college. As a result of her experience, Lisbeth Marian Giles believes that becoming involved with any kind of committee or campus project is one of the best ways to make a successful transition to a new school setting.

For many of the participants, active involvement in various school organizations was important not only in terms of academic success, but also for gaining self-confidence and leadership skills. It is interesting to note that what seems to stand out in many of the transfer students' stories is the importance of involvement in activities that place the student in a position of authority and require expertise, such as tutoring (e.g., Lisbeth Marian Giles, Byron Harris, Julio Gauna, Carolina Armada, Pedro Contreras). Such activities seem to confer a sense of "validation" (Rendon), which as discussed earlier, is particularly important for low-income, first-generation college students.

Through the PTE Program, Pedro Contreras and Carolina Armada participated in the Chicana/o statewide leadership conferences and workshops. Both said the program was instrumental in their own development and also helped to raise their consciousness about problems faced by their local community. Carolina Armada explains how involvement as a student leader organizer was important for her.

'Cause I actually got to practice what I was learning. And actually do something to...to like help changes or to share knowledge and information. And I learned a lot like on having to, you know, do coalition building. I remember learning much and having to work with diverse groups of people. You know, having to...where I grew up in...in Riverside, there's a lot of tension between the [Latino] students and Black students. And just having to like address that and work on that, like, I've learned a lot as far as like, you

know, like what...what the struggles of all these other groups are, too, you know. And how they relate. And so I learned history and...fascinating stuff.

This program was designed to not only raise ethnic consciousness, but also to help low-income Hispanic students develop leadership skills for the empowerment of their community. If there had not been such a program, it might have been difficult for some of these students to take on any leadership role. It is important to note that while Lisbeth Marian Giles and Byron Harris, both Caucasian transfer students from the East Coast, found opportunities on the main campus, Pedro Contreras, Carolina Armada, and Julio Gauna, Hispanic students on the West Coast, found such opportunities through special leadership programs. Ethnic minority students who are further marginalized in the educational system sometimes find it difficult to become involved in activities that will place them in positions of authority or expertise. However, as low-income, ethnic minority students may have internalized feelings of being not good enough for the academic setting, it can be more critical for them than it is for others to be involved in leadership activities that are both empowering and motivating. Julio Gauna, Carolina Armada, and Pedro Contreras all talked about how important the leadership conferences were, not only in terms of their identity development, but also in helping them to understand the purpose of their education and their role in the community.

Interestingly, two Hispanic students who transferred successfully were not engaged in such leadership activities. Upon close consideration of their life experiences, what stands out is that both were involved in honors programs at some point in their education, which may have provided them with the validation and self-confidence they needed. For example, Manuel Adelante indicated that he had 3.89 GPA at the community college and was offered a full scholarship to West-PRU. After the first quarter there, he qualified for the honors program,

which was instrumental in establishing a connection with a history professor in his area of interest. Manuel Adelante states that this led him to his current doctoral studies at Yale University.

Liana Gonzalez, who did not grow up in a low-income neighborhood, was involved in some type of honors program throughout middle and high school. Specifically, her story mentions events in the seventh and eighth grade that helped her gain confidence in herself. After ranking first in her advanced mathematics classes for two years in a row, she claims that she was “not afraid to do anything any more.” Although Liana Gonzalez admits to having been an “overachiever” who had a 4.0 GPA in the community college, she did not mention benefiting from any honors program there. This may reflect her lack of connection with the two-year institution. However, her isolation may have resulted in part from working almost full-time to support herself through school. In fact, Liana Gonzalez continued to maintain a heavy work schedule (e.g., 36 hours per week, including the graveyard shift at Denny’s restaurant) during her first semester at West Independent Research University. During the interview, she expressed regret that her work schedule prevents her from having a social life on campus and makes it difficult for her to network with peers and faculty members. In spite of the apparent importance of student involvement, the financial situation of the transfer students seems to limit their opportunities to participate.

Table 5. Student Involvement

Name	At the 2-year	At the 4-Year
Liana Gonzalez	None	None
Julio Gauna	BUS (tutoring/leadership program)	TRUNK (educational outreach program)
Carolina Armada	PTE Program	Working for VICE CCP tutoring
Pedro Contreras	PTE Program MARCH (leadership program)	CCP tutoring
Manuel Adelante	None	Honors program, Senior thesis, research project
Lisbeth Marian Giles	Student assistant at tutoring center	East-SC Fellow council board (three yrs)
Beth Mills	None	None
Alison Peyton	None	Work study program
Anna Muskie	None	Work study program, computer intern
Byron Harris	Phi Delta Kappa, president Student Ambassador Student assistant in tutor service	University Ambassador, Dean of Student Office

Financial Aid

Not surprisingly, participants mentioned various financial difficulties at both two-year and four-year institutions. However, what stood out in all the interviews was the transfer students' fortitude and determination to not let their financial problems prevent them from reaching their educational goals. The students shared many creative strategies by which they survived from semester to semester. Most of the traditional-age transfer students reported that they worked almost full-time (Liana Gonzalez, Julio Gauna, Pedro Contreras, Manuel Adelante, Byron Harris), often holding several minimum-wage jobs in order to support their education at the community college. Because Byron Harris was technically a dependent of his parents, he did not qualify for any financial aid even though he had to pay for his schooling. This is how he managed to do so:

At [Local CCF], I worked for most of the time. But, the way finances worked at Local CCF, the first...the first semester, I paid for the entire thing on my credit card, and that put me into some debt. The second semester, I paid for most of it with a credit card.

Byron Harris suggests that it would be helpful if community colleges implemented “a payment plan option,” especially for students in circumstances like his own.

Although some of the students received financial aid, they mentioned that unavoidable expenses, such as paying for their textbooks, added to the cost of living. Having to juggle school and work in an effort to make ends meet was very stressful for them. Several of the Hispanic male students (Julio Gauna, Pedro Contreras, Manuel Adelante) said they were working almost full-time because they needed to support their family financially (e.g., by helping to pay the rent) even though they were attending school. For Pedro Contreras, things became particularly bad after his single mother became ill and was laid off from work. He recalls how he managed to get through one of the toughest times:

...I was given financial aid during that time, so I had some of my financial aid money to use. I remember I was kind of short as far as rent money and I spoke to one of my English professor there. I let her know what was going on in my situation. So she pretty much hired me to be her TA. At least, I believe it was about 10 hours for the week. So that helped out financially. Pretty much having ...being able to work at school, and being able to manage my schedule, and set up my own schedule. Financially, it was mainly financial aid and at one time it was the credit card.

Carolina Armada similarly related how she and her family faced an extremely difficult financial situation while she was in community college. At the college, she qualified for EOF, which provided book vouchers. She states that the vouchers were very helpful because the cost

of textbooks was often more than the tuition. Unfortunately, during her last semester at the community college before she was to transfer to the four-year institution, both her parents lost their jobs and consequently their home of eighteen years, whereupon they became homeless. Her family's financial crisis was devastating, but Carolina Armada indicates that education took on an even greater significance for her, and she became more focused and determined than ever. She reflects on how she managed during this time:

So I was one of those students who's kind of like, in between where I didn't necessarily completely qualify for financial aid. But then there was the cost of living that really became difficult because I did need like, I did need support on help in being in school. And that takes up so much of your time that I couldn't work full-time and do well in school. Like, it seemed like one or the other, work full-time or transfer to West-PRU. And...and so I think for a while I ended up working two part-time jobs and went to school full-time.

At the four-year institution, aided by some scholarships and a tuition Fee Waiver as a dependent of a veteran, Carolina Armada decided to take ownership of her education and invest in herself by taking out student loans to cover some of the costs.

Actually, I did summer school also. So that was like, an additional three or four thousand each summer. So I actually just kinda had to like, put that, put it aside and just seal it, you know. And for me to invest into this and focus. And...and do it. So it was hard because I...I really...I didn't want to have to be so much in debt. But I realized, "Well, my family can't give me money to go and, you know...I'm just gonna have to take out these loans to...to get by and...and live off of." And just to balance it out with work, and then scholarships and all that.

Carolina Armada's courage to take out a loan, however, seems to be more the exception than the rule for many of the participants. Two of students (Manuel Adelante and Byron Harris) indicated that their decision about the school to which they would transfer was determined largely by where they could avoid taking out a loan. Byron Harris was accepted to South P3, a prestigious private school in his area, but even with financial aid and scholarships, he would have been "short about \$10,000 a year." Therefore, he decided to transfer to South-PRU. Similarly, Manuel Adelante was accepted to West-PD, but he was offered only a Pell grant and would have to take out a loan. He decided to attend West-PRU because he was offered a full scholarship there.

Other transfer students indicated that they worked part-time or more while going to school full-time (Lisbeth Marian Giles, Beth Mills, Julio Gauna, Liana Gonzalez) in order to avoid taking out a loan and make up for what was not covered under their financial aid package. Liana Gonzalez and Julio Gauna mentioned that they held two to three jobs simultaneously, often working up to 35 hours per week even after they transferred to four-year universities because they did not want to burden their parents with their educational cost. Although they both had work-study programs, they supplemented the amount provided with income from other part-time employment off-campus. Again this was to avoid taking out a loan. During Anna Muskie's first year at a four-year institution, the dean of her transfer program found her a work-study program for 10 hours per week as a computer intern. According to Anna Muskie, her work-study along with a loan enabled her to "keep things calm" and stay focused on her studies. Other students had similar work-study programs.

Table 6. Financial Aid

Name	At the 2-year	At the Four-Year
Liana Gonzalez	Working almost full-time	Scholarships Grants Work study Working 35 hrs/wk No loans
Julio Gauna	Working full-time (two jobs) Single mother	Scholarships Financial Aid Grants No loans Work study Worked 35 hrs/wk, 1 st yr. (dependent) Worked less remaining yrs (indep.)
Carolina Armada	EOF (books) Veterans Fee Waiver	Veterans Fee Waiver Scholarships Grants Work study Loans (self-investment)
Pedro Contreras	Working almost full-time (three jobs), helping rent (single mother)	Federal & State Aid Sallie Mae and Perkins loans Scholarship Work study Maternal uncle (paid rent 1 st yr)
Manuel Adelante	EOF	Federal & State Grants Scholarships Work study (research assist)
Lisbeth Marian Giles		Perkins/Pell/College grant Stafford loan Work study Working part-time at CC (to supplement family income)
Beth Mills	Working full-time, one class at a time	Scholarships Grants Loans Retirement savings Working (truck driver ½ time)
Alison Peyton		Financial aid, 1 st semester Employee benefit (reduced tuition), remaining four semesters
Anna Muskie		Federal loans (did not care) Small Mass. State grants
Byron Harris		Two scholarships (approx. \$9000 per yr) chose SOUTH-PRU b/c cheaper than South P3

Conclusion

In this section we have provided a description of how 10 students experienced the process of starting their education in a community college and transferring to a highly selective institution. In Section IV we provide the perspective of administrators and program heads who manage the structures and services that support student transfer.

Students, as we learned in the life histories, tend to focus on specific people who inspired them to transfer. Staff and decision-makers tend to focus on procedures, services, curriculum alignment, and specialized forms of support. From the perspective of students, the act of transfer is primarily relational, and from the perspective of institutional representatives it is primarily structural. Both the relational and structural make successful transfer possible. In the next section we focus on the structural component.

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