Center *for*
Urban Education

MOVING FROM TRANSFER-RECEIVING TO TRANSFER SERVING:

HOW PRIVATE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES CAN SUPPORT THE TRANSFER FUNCTION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the Great Recession of 2008, public higher education institutions became financially limited in their capacity to increase access and success rates of students. The “exogenous shock” of crashing markets resulted in tightened budgets and “rationed” access to public universities, even as enrollment demands increased. In California, the effects of the Recession were especially pronounced at the state’s community colleges, which saw transfer rates to the University of California and California State University systems drop during this period.

At this time, private colleges and universities emerged as logical alternatives for community college students seeking to transfer. However, these institutions—unlike California’s public universities—were not founded, nor designed, to serve transfer students, particularly the low-income, first-generation, and racial and ethnic minority students that comprise the vast majority of community college students in the state. For these institutions, the critical question was: How do we transform ourselves from being “transfer-receiving” to “transfer-serving” institutions? That is, how do we move from enrolling community college students because they happen to come to us, to intentionally recruiting them, providing them with adequate financial aid, customizing our supports, and ensuring that they get a quality educational experience even if their time with us is less than our traditional student population?

This report is designed to help private institutions that seek to become “transfer-serving,” which we argue embodies the following characteristics:

1. Intentional recruitment of transfer students
2. Intentional support of transfer students
3. Inquiry into policies and practices
4. Consistent attention to and use of student data
5. Cultivating transfer agents
6. Employing equity-minded approaches and practices

It draws on a two-year pilot initiative between two private institutions in California and the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California, funded by the Teagle Foundation. Through this grant, the two institutions implemented the

Equity Scorecard, a participatory action research process that helps practitioners (a) analyze student outcomes data to uncover inequities in access, retention, and success; (b) develop evidence-based interventions to mitigate those inequities; and (c) use inquiry methods to better understand the educational experiences of their students.

In this report, we describe the process the institutions undertook to become transfer-serving institutions, a process that requires a mindful focus on transfer. The criteria we provide require that practitioners make deliberate and purposeful changes in how they view and serve transfer students. It involves taking equity-minded approaches when inquiring into the college's policies and practices, and using student data in ways that identify and address racialized gaps in transfer student outcomes. It includes the specific recruitment of transfer students, while also developing the necessary transfer agents to support these students. In essence, it requires that the colleges make intentional efforts to assess how their institution does or does not support transfer students. Our hope is that this report will help inspire practitioners who seek to improve their institution's transfer function. To this end, we include a case narrative of "Richfield College," which weaves together the story of the two institutions involved in this project and highlights both the promises and challenges of transforming from a transfer-receiving to transfer-serving institution.

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INTRODUCTION

A MATTER OF COMPETITION, COLLEGE COMPLETION, AND CONSTRAINED BUDGETS

In American higher education, the push for college attendance and completion is trending. Knowledge of other countries' achievements has led to inevitable comparisons to America's own progress in this area. China, for example, is expected to have 200 million college graduates—surpassing the entire U.S. workforce—by 2030, while India, also on the rise, will award eight million bachelor's degrees annually by 2020 (Center for American Progress & Center for the Next Generation, 2012). In 2009, over 60 percent of Koreans between the ages of 25 and 34 earned a postsecondary degree, as compared to only 40 percent of Americans (OECD, 2011). These figures, coupled with the forecast that the U.S. is expected to have three million less college-educated workers than the labor market demands (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2012), suggests that the narrative of falling behind other nations will persist for many years to come. In response, President Obama launched the American Graduation Initiative in 2008, a national effort to boost the number of community college graduates by five million by 2020 and a critical component of his goal of having once again "the highest proportion of college graduates in the world" (The White House, 2009).

Colleges and universities across the country have subsequently responded to national and state educational attainment goals. Unfortunately, for a number of public institutions of higher education, fiscal constraints stemming from the Great Recession, as well as the ensuing competition for public dollars, has diverted attention away from the need to improve student outcomes and success rates. Moreover, as the Great Recession destabilized state budgets and prompted further divestment in higher education, public institutions sought ways to offset the effects of a volatile funding environment. In some cases, the effects of budget cuts necessitated action by state institutions to "ration" access (Rhoades, 2012).

THE CASE OF CALIFORNIA: TRANSFER AS A PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION CONCERN

California, in particular, was hit hard. In the wake of growing demographic and enrollment demands, the state has struggled to maintain the intentions of the famed 1960 *California Master Plan for Higher Education*, specifically its goals of access and affordability for all students. The *Plan* established a three-tiered system of higher education, differentiated by functions and admission pools. The California Community Colleges (CCC) featured universal access, an open admissions policy to benefit any student seeking higher education, with a primary mission of providing vocational and academic instruction through the first two-years of postsecondary education. Community college students seeking a baccalaureate degree are then expected to transfer to one of the state's four-year systems, the California State University (CSU) or the University of California (UC). Indeed, this transfer mechanism has been an integral part of California's strategy to increase participation in higher education and degree attainment. This transfer structure, however, is experiencing increasing pressure as the demand for enrollment has exceeded capacity and budget reductions have undermined the ability of the CSU and UC systems to effectively plan for additional community college students. While enrollment at community colleges over the past decade has grown by approximately one million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014), the number of those who transfer has remained relative constant and may be further undercut by budget uncertainties (CITATION).

The impact of budget uncertainties on transfer is evident at the CSU, with its 23 campuses serving as the primary transfer-receiving institutions in the state. A $580 million budget reduction in the 2009-2010 academic year forced the CSU to limit enrollment to match available funding. As a result, new undergraduate admission for the Spring 2010 term was closed. While the CSU re-opened spring admission one year later with the restoration of funding, the system had limited it in Spring 2012 to students with associates degree because of a $750 million budget cut. California Governor Jerry Brown's multi-year budget plan is expected to address the enrollment demand issue but—even with increased funding—the outlook for levels of access to become proportional to demand is grim. For the 2014-2015 academic year, 61 percent of CSU campuses were considered "transfer-impacted," meaning that they receive more transfer applications relative to the number of slots available. With overcrowding becoming a greater issue at many CSU campuses, other options for higher education participation via the community college transfer pathway must be explored.

Private Colleges and universities as Transfer-Receiving Institutions

Under these circumstances, private institutions are uniquely positioned to capture students who are currently enrolled in community college and have aspirations of attaining a baccalaureate degree. As institutions that have traditionally served first-time, full-time undergraduate students, community college students have been largely overlooked as a population from which to recruit. Nonetheless, transfer students from community colleges are a growing presence at private four-year colleges and universities, as their prospects for successful transfer to the CSU or UC are increasingly challenged.

At the same time, the proportion of community college transfers to private four-year institutions remains relatively low. The very concerns that would deter first-generation, low-income, and/or underrepresented racial and ethnic minority students from enrolling at public institutions are arguably compounded with private colleges and universities. One such concern is sticker shock. Oftentimes, these students are unaware of the available options in the form of federal aid or institutional grants that would alleviate the financial burden and enable their enrollment at private institutions. Similarly, because movement from community colleges to private colleges and universities is not a traditional pathway, the latter often fail to account for the needs of transfer students in their financial aid allocations. Furthermore, just as the articulated pathways from public two- to public four-year institutions can benefit from greater clarity and transparency, so can articulated pathways from public two to private four years. Private institutions, however, have arguably less knowledge of transferable community college courses and less experience facilitating transfer than public institutions, thus making a difficult task even harder. In addition, the majority of their programs and course sequences are not designed with transfer articulation in mind such that students may be required to re-take courses they have already fulfilled at the community college. Every class that students re-take delays their graduation and impinges on their limited financial aid. In sum, without intentional efforts to recruit and—importantly—support the enrollment, transition, and retention of community college transfer students, those who "happen" to take this non-traditional pathway to a baccalaureate degree are usually left to fend for their own success.

The increasing number of transfer students at private colleges and universities could be thus be described as *accidental*, meaning that institutions one day realize the presence of these students, or *strategic*, that is, institutions actively "pump" enrollment and revenue dollars by bringing in transfer students. In neither case are the needs of transfer students—many of whom are first-generation, low-income, and/or underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities—taken into consideration. Even those private institutions that purposely seek transfer students as a way to increase the diversity of their student bodies would be hard-pressed to properly support student programming efforts that are explicitly designed with them in mind. Without these efforts, transfer students will remain primarily an enrollment management gasket to fill the attribution gap unmet by incoming freshmen.

Understanding these concerns, a growing number of private liberal arts institutions are taking steps to not only recognize and develop target support for transfer students, but to create purposeful relationships with community colleges to enhance transfer pathways. Private institutions' focused investment toward establishing effective transfer pathways with public two-year institutions is significant on several levels. First, public community colleges are a significant gateway to higher education nationally, enrolling 33 percent of all undergraduates in the United States in fall 2012; only public four-year institutions enroll more students, approximately 39 percent of undergraduates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Public community colleges also enroll over three million students of color, which is more than any other higher education sector (i.e. as compared to public and private four-year institutions and private two-year institutions). Second, California, which is already a majority-minority state (California Department of Finance, 2013), serves as an example of where the country is likely heading, demographically, over the next several decades. In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau announced that 50 percent of babies born in the United States were racial or ethnic minorities and predicted that by 2043, no racial majority group will exist in the country (Cohn, 2014). Given these projections, it stands to reason that the majority of college-going students in the coming decades will be African American, Asian, Latino, Native American, or other racial or ethnic minority. According to National Center for Education Statistics projections, the total undergraduate enrollment composition is increasing racial or ethnic minority representation (see Figure 1). Already, the student body at California's community colleges is over 60 percent students of color, a figure that is predicted to grow over time (see Figure 2) (Wilson, Newell, & Fuller, 2010). These figures suggest that racial and ethnic minority students should make up a notable portion of the transfer student population. Third, private institutions in the state of California, as well as across the United States, were in general not founded to serve students who start their undergraduate education at another college or university. That is, private institutions were for the most part set up to offer a baccalaureate education to students who entered college at 18 and left with a degree at 21 or 22 years of age. This notion of a "traditional-age" college student continues to pervade our understanding of who attends college, even though data shows that the number of older college students is on the rise (Hussar & Bailey, 2014). As mentioned, research suggests that various underrepresented populations are disproportionately enrolled in community college. Their success is critical to both the economic and social vitality of the nation.

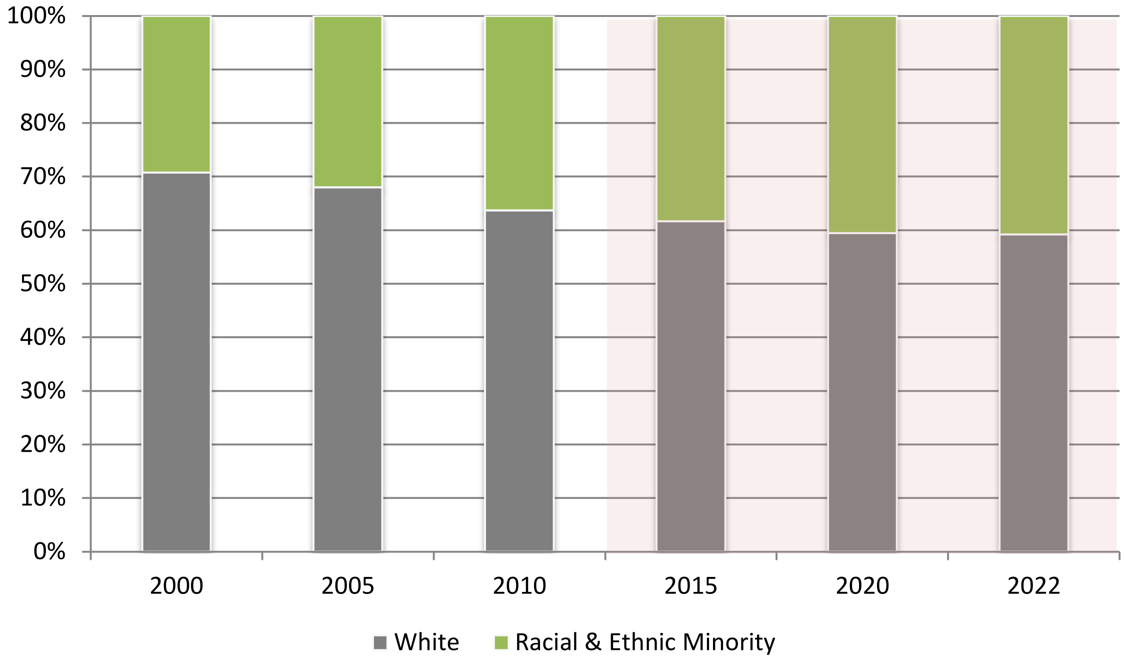

Figure 1. Actual and projected total undergraduate enrollment (Hussar & Bailey, 2014, p. 67). Racial and ethnic minority includes Native American, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Black, and Latino. Projected figures in shaded area.

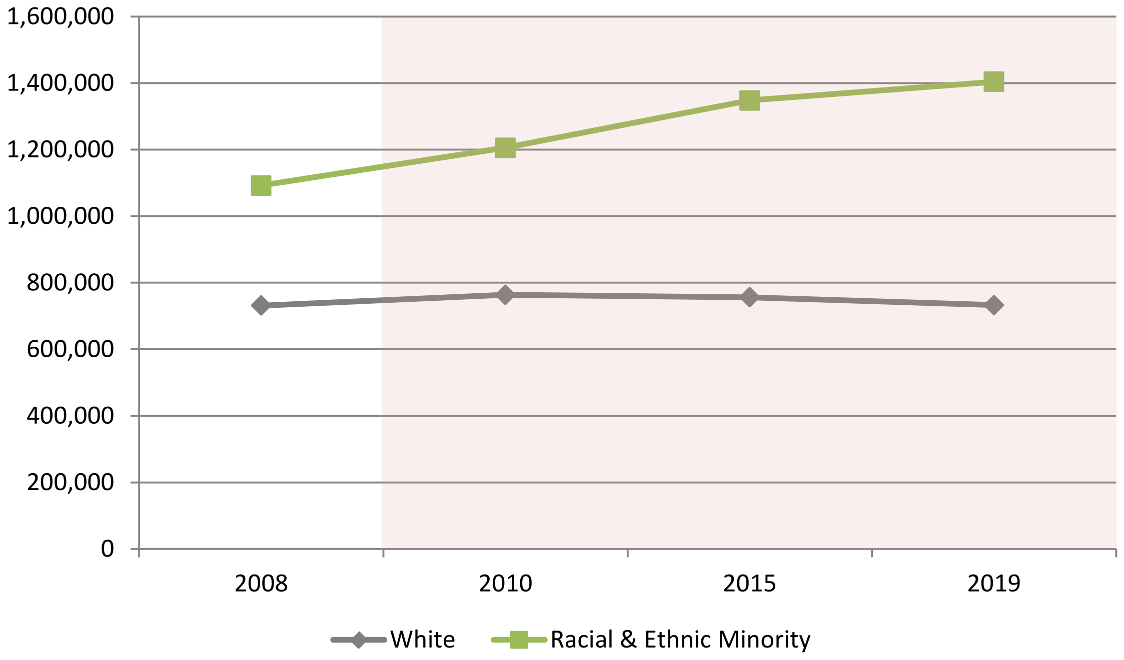

Figure 2. California Community Colleges Actual and Projected Enrollment Demands (Wilson, Newell, & Fuller, 2010). Racial & ethnic minority includes Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, and Latino. Projected figures in shaded area.

EXPANDING TRANSFER PATHWAYS INTO PRIVATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: A PILOT STUDY

In 2011, two private liberal arts institutions in California partnered with the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Southern California on a two-year project to identify and investigate the issues and barriers community college students—particularly those who are underrepresented in higher education—face when transferring to private colleges and universities. The primary aim of the project was to foster these students' equitable access, retention, and graduation. By engaging a small group of faculty, student affairs professionals, administrators, and other practitioners in a structured inquiry process, the project brought to light the realities of what private institutions must do to successfully expand transfer pathways and to create the conditions necessary for improving admission, persistence, and completion rates, especially among underserved, first generation students of color. Specifically, this structured inquiry process created a foundation on which to examine critically existing policies and practices that facilitate or hinder the academic experiences of community college transfer students. The impetus for this project came from concerns about the effects of capped enrollments at public institutions in California. In addition, the two private institutions sought to respond to the national college completion agenda by realizing their capacity to enroll more community college students seeking baccalaureate degrees.

Though unique in their histories and contexts, these institutions share similar qualities that are characteristics of many private liberal arts colleges and universities. Both demonstrate a commitment to learning that goes beyond its economic value, equipping students with transferable critical thinking and writing skills that are crucial to addressing complex social issues and to adapting to an ever-evolving world. Indeed, a liberal arts education is usually touted for creating a well-rounded learning experience, both of which these institutions strive to provide. Moreover, as perhaps with many other private colleges and universities, both institutions are coming to terms with the growing reality of a changing student demographic, with the faces of the students who now arrive at their doorsteps vastly different from the graduating class pictures of years past that line their buildings. Given this increasing student diversity, past social and economic realities have changed to involve an appreciation for and awareness of this fact. Investment into expanding transfer pathways from community colleges to private colleges and universities engages these qualities. By participating in this timely effort, the two private institutions stand to represent many others that seek effective strategies to respond to the needs of their current students and the higher education environment in which they now operate. Indeed, these institutions can serve as models for peer colleges and universities in California, as well as across the country, seeking to transform from transfer-*receiving* to transfer-*serving* institutions.

About this Report

In what follows, we aim to enhance understanding of the process by which private colleges and universities can become transfer-serving institutions. Our purpose is to explicate the challenges and opportunities of adapting long-standing institutional traditions to current conditions, demands, and needs. We draw on data collected over the course of this two-year project, which included interviews with the practitioners who were involved, field notes from observations of meetings and related events, and analysis of relevant documents. While this report is meant to detail change that occurred at the institutional level, we envision as our primary audience practitioners who work at private four-year institutions. Our focus on the role of practitioners in this process stems from one of the underlying assumptions of the structured inquiry process that framed this project: institutional change is ultimately the product and outcome of practitioner-level learning and change. Put simply, practitioners possess the potential to be agents of change and transformation at the institutions in which they work.

This report consists of four sections and an appendix. Following this introduction, we outline criteria that define what it means for an institution to be transfer-serving. These criteria are informed both by the experiences of the private institutions in this project and extant scholarly literature. Next, we describe the structured inquiry process that the two institutions undertook to become transfer-serving. This process focused in particular on how a team of practitioners at each institution looked at the educational outcomes of their community college transfer students, the way in which these students are currently supported, and what can be done to improve their academic experiences. We then present the case of Richfield College, a composite that is based on the experiences of the practitioners involved in the project. Here, we draw on data collected through interviews with practitioners at both institutions in summer 2013. We highlight the learning that took place at individual and team levels as a result of the structured inquiry process, and demonstrate how that learning sparked the formation of recommendations to improve how the institution supports transfer students. We conclude the report with a brief discussion of [DESCRIBE CONCLUSION].An appendix, which features the tools that the practitioner team used to conduct their inquiry, follows the report.

DEFINING TRANSFER-SERVING

What does it mean for an institution to be transfer-serving? In this section, we identify and describe six characteristics of transfer-serving institutions:

1. Intentional recruitment of transfer students
2. Intentional support of transfer students
3. Inquiry into policies and practices
4. Consistent attention to and use of student data
5. Cultivating transfer agents
6. Employing equity-minded approaches and practices

Importantly, these criteria are premised on an institution having a *conscious focus on transfer*.

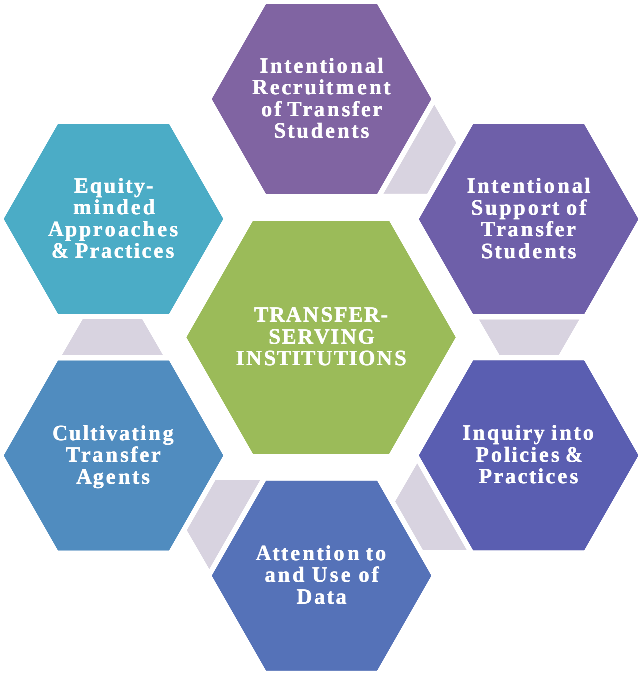

Figure 3. Criteria for Transfer-Serving Institutions

INTENTIONAL RECRUITMENT OF TRANSFER STUDENTS

Like at most private colleges and universities, practitioners at the two institutions in the project noticed enrollment of community college students was increasing over time. As mentioned earlier and as noted in previous studies (e.g. Dowd et al., 2006), this trend is the result of “accidental,” not intentional, recruitment efforts to bring these students to campus. Students entered private institutions by chance, through their own individual effort or with the assistance of community college counselors with whom they had come into contact. When private institutions explicitly considered the recruitment of community college students, they often did so to manage the undergraduate enrollment of the college, filling seats when there were not enough freshmen applicants to do so. Indeed, one institution in this project pursued this specific recruitment strategy. While recruiting transfer students for the purposes of enrollment constitutes a *conscious focus on transfer*, this strategy is not transfer-serving. It positions transfer students as a means through which an institution can meet enrollment targets; in these cases, transfer students are valued for the revenue they bring into the institution, not for their potential contributions along academic, social, cultural, or other lines. By *intentional recruitment of transfer students*, therefore, we suggest that private colleges and universities proactively recruit community college students because of the myriad ways they can enrich the campus community. For instance, since a significant number of community college students are students of color, their intentional recruitment enables a private institution to further diversify their student population. A racially and ethnically diverse student body, in turn, is a necessary condition of having cross-racial interactions, which have been associated with gains in students' cognitive development and self-confidence (Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa, 2006).

The specific form that intentional recruitment takes at a college or university depends on institutional context and needs. In its most basic form, intentional recruitment involves the development of an enrollment management plan that:

- Identifies the staff members responsible for recruiting students from community colleges;
- Describes the recruitment programs and activities;
- Earmarks funds and other material resources needed to support these efforts;
- Proposes specific goals and targets for community college student recruitment;
- Outlines an evaluation strategy to assess whether goals and targets are being met.

INTENTIONAL SUPPORT OF TRANSFER STUDENTS

Unlike first-time freshmen, community college transfer students arrive at four-year institutions with an understanding of what it means to be a college student. As practitioners at one institution in the study discovered, these students possessed a working knowledge of what college is and how it operates. In addition, since they were farther along in their studies, they were keen to connect quickly with faculty who could advise them in their major and facilitate internship opportunities. Given these distinct differences between transfer students and their first-time counterparts, private institutions must consider developing curricular and co-curricular supports geared specifically for the former. Private colleges and universities, however, may lack specialized practitioners or services for transfer students. For example transfer students may have to attend the same orientation as first-time freshman students. While information shared during orientation can be of value to both groups of students—say, the location of different campus services—there are perhaps other things that transfer students do not need to focus on given their existing knowledge of and experience with college. In fact, both institutions in the project offer orientation programs especially for incoming transfer students. As was discovered during the structured inquiry process, transfer students at one institution value the orientation session because it showcases campus resources and supports that are suited to their needs. *Intentional support of transfer students*, therefore, demands attention to and understanding of transfer student needs, and from there, the development of programs and services that address those needs.

INQUIRY INTO POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Admission and student services are two important areas that private colleges and universities must examine closely to determine whether existing policies and practices are facilitating or hindering the access and success of transfer students. In general, however, institutions should investigate all policies and practices that may inadvertently disadvantage transfer students, or diminish the quality of the education they would otherwise receive. By looking critically at policies and practices, particularly as they are currently enacted, institutions can discover whether the "way things are done" on an everyday, routine level are indeed fostering the success of transfer students. For instance, practitioners at one institution conducted a structured inquiry of its honors program and found that transfer students are ineligible for the program because of a policy which states that honors students must enter as freshmen. The director of the program noted that this policy could dissuade students from transferring to the university, particularly if they are in the honors program at their community college. In response, the institution modified the policy to allow automatic admission into its honors program for transfer students who were in a community college honors program. A more thorough discussion of conducting inquiry is offered in the next section, "Becoming Transfer-Serving Institutions."

CONSISTENT ATTENTION TO AND USE OF STUDENT DATA

All institutions collect and analyze vast amounts of data on student admission, retention, performance, engagement, program participation, completion, and the like. Whether these data are used by practitioners who are responsible for different aspects of students' college experiences, however, is another question entirely. As Alicia Dowd (2005) suggests in her report, *Data Don't Drive*, practitioners should be seen as important users of data, not only as decision makers who make small as well as significant choices about programs, policies, and practices, but also as potential agents for change. In Dowd's model, practitioners, not the data, are central: while data can serve informational and diagnostic functions, practitioners must interpret data to determine their meaning within an institutional context. Thus, by *consistent attention to and use of student data*, we argue that practitioners not only examine data to determine how students are progressing in their academic and personal development, but also to make meaning of data and to use their interpretation to inform next steps, improvements, and changes.

To facilitate the interpretive process, data can be presented in a number of ways. Disaggregating data based on specified criteria is a relatively simple yet effective strategy that we suggest is critical to understanding whether and how transfer students are faring at an institution. For example, breaking data down so that they are specific to "traditional" and "transfer" students enables practitioners to compare the two student groups and to determine whether there are gaps in terms of these students' access, retention, performance, completion, etc. at the institution. In turn, identifying these gaps makes possible subsequent inquiry into why they exist and perhaps persist over time. Additionally, since transfer students include a notable number of students of color, further disaggregating student data by race and ethnicity can help reveal whether particular transfer students are faring better than others on specific outcomes.

CULTIVATING TRANSFER AGENTS

Building on Ricardo Stanton-Salazar's (2011) notion of "institutional agents"[1], transfer agents are practitioners who use their organizational roles, positions, and authority to provide transfer students with educational opportunities, resources, and support. Transfer agents at private four-year colleges and universities not only help transfer students transition to the institution, but they also assist students in navigating and making sense of the particular culture, discourse, and networks that operate on a campus. What transfer agents can do for students is shaped largely by how their institutional roles are defined. For example, when speaking of institutional agents, Estela Bensimon and Alicia Dowd (2012) state that while faculty are in the position to support students directly, deans are more likely able to develop new support programs, raise funding, and inform institutional-level policy and changes.

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[1] See Bensimon and Dowd (2012) for more on institutional agents.

For instance, a faculty transfer agent has data on incoming transfer students who have expressed interest in his area of expertise, political theory. He reaches out to these students by email before they arrive on campus, inviting them to ask him questions about major requirements and other concerns they may have. A dean is unlikely to engage in similar actions, but what she may do as a transfer agent is to develop a specific orientation programs for transfer students in response to student feedback that the regular orientation is geared more for first-time college students.

Common to the faculty member and dean is a notable commitment to enhancing the educational experiences of transfer students. Not all practitioners, however, possess a similar level of commitment to transfer students. These practitioners may lack awareness of transfer students because of their limited interaction with these students, have competing claims on their time, or may possess the belief that students—transfer or otherwise—are responsible for figuring out college on their own. Transfer-serving institutions, however, need transfer agents who have a conscious focus on transfer students and thus must find ways to cultivate them. Fostering transfer agents requires institutional efforts such as promoting the work of existing transfer agents on behalf of transfer students, or creating a professional development sequence in which practitioners have the opportunity to learn and experiment with different transfer-serving practices.

Employing Equity-Minded Approaches and Practices

Given the increasing proportion of racial and ethnic minority transfer students, as well as transfer being an active pathway through which students of color matriculate at baccalaureate institutions, private colleges and universities must develop “equity-minded” approaches and practices to help ensure these students’ equitable access, retention, completion, and overall success. According to Estela Bensimon (2012), “equity-mindedness” is a cognitive frame or way of thinking that entails:

- Race consciousness;
- Awareness that race-neutral or color-blind beliefs, assumptions, and practices can inadvertently disadvantage students of color;
- Awareness that even though racism is oftentimes covert within institutions of higher education, racial and ethnic inequities are perpetuated by policies and practices that are embedded with racialized patterns;

- Willingness to change policies and practices in order to eliminate inequities;

As suggested by these characteristics, the underlying assumption of equity-mindedness is that race is not merely a demographic category used to describe students; rather, race is more importantly an active force that shapes and influences the educational experiences of students, whether they are Black, Latino, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, multi-ethnic, or White. For example, a White student at a predominately White college or university will generally experience the institution differently from a Black or Latino student. The critical mass of White peers, faculty, and administrators may help him adjust to campus life in the first year as he is more easily able to make new friends and actively engaging in class discussions. In contrast, students of color at predominantly White institutions may find their transition less smooth. They may perceive discrimination based on their race or ethnicity, which Daniel Solórzano and colleagues (2001; 2009) have shown is associated with negative student outcomes, particularly for Black and Latino students. As such, if private colleges and universities are to serve well transfer students of color, and indeed students of color more generally, they must attend to how their campuses foster environments that are more hospitable to certain student groups over others. In addition, these institutions should consider how their histories and traditions, particularly if they stem from being founded to serve a White student population, inadvertently create conditions that question transfer students of color's sense of belonging.

Equity-minded practitioners understand that race has the ability to differentiate college student experiences, often in negative ways for racial and ethnic minorities. This understanding enables them to recognize that existing policies and practices were created, intentionally or unintentionally, for those who tend to fit our collective imagination of a "college student": self-motivated, self-starting, and goal-oriented 18 year olds who come from White, middle class families in which the value of a college education was never questioned. With the cognitive frame of equity in mind, practitioners can approach these policies and practices with a critical eye, and interrogate them from the standpoint of whether they benefit or disadvantage first generation, low-income students of color. Furthermore, equity-mindedness enables practitioners to develop approaches in which equitable outcomes for students are a central concern.

ENACTING TRANSFER-SERVING CRITERIA

With their conscious focus on transfer, transfer-serving institutions cultivate transfer agents, establish routines and practices that benefit transfer students, and actively monitor transfer student data, all in an effort to ensure that transfer student outcomes and educational experiences are of the highest quality. Enacting the six criteria outlined above, however, will likely require the concerted effort of practitioners at private colleges and universities. Above all else, these practitioners must examine and if necessary shift how they think about and serve transfer students. Rather than “accidental” practices that without intention benefit transfer students, practitioners must deliberately and purposefully engage with these students. The next two sections describe in more detail the concerted effort undertaken by the two institutions in this project to become transfer-serving institutions. As alluded to earlier, this effort took the form of a structured inquiry process that enabled practitioners to conduct research into how their institutions currently serve transfer students and what can be done to serve them better.

BECOMING TRANSFER-SERVING INSTITUTIONS

At the heart of the project, *Expanding Transfer Pathways and Success in Private Postsecondary Institutions for Underrepresented Community College Students*, was a structured inquiry process that would enable two private institutions, with assistance from the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California, become transfer-serving. Specifically, this process helped the institutions:

- Examine critically the ways in which current policies and practices facilitate or potentially hinder the access, retention, and graduation of underrepresented minority transfer students; and

- Use the findings from their investigation to determine what must be changed or done so that equitable outcomes in access, retention, and completion are achieved.

Over the course of the two-year project, a group of practitioners at each institution focused on the access and retention of transfer students from community colleges. They examined transfer student data, identified equity gaps, examined why these gaps exist, and proposed a series of recommendations to alleviate the inequities. Their structured inquiry process involved several stages of work, which are described below. A running example is used to illustrate the different components in this process.

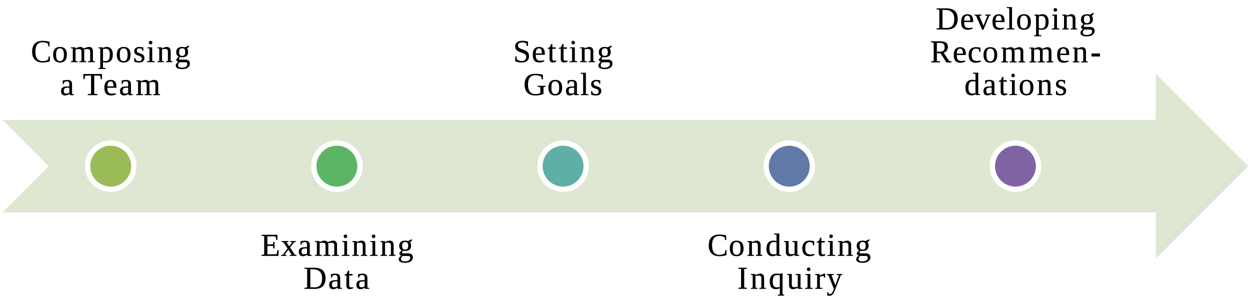

Figure 4. Structured Inquiry Process

COMPOSING A TEAM

The structured inquiry process begins with the formation of a team comprised of practitioners, including faculty, administrators, and student services staff, at each campus. Team members are chosen for their:

- Commitment to improving the outcomes of transfer students;
- Broad knowledge of institutional structures, policies, and practices, particularly those that affect the educational experience of transfer students, as well as students of color more generally;
- Willingness to think critically and in collaboration with others about issues that challenge their institution's capacity to support transfer students from admission to graduation;
- Ability to share what they have learned in this project with colleagues on campus;
- Reputation on campus as leaders who are committed to achieving equitable outcomes for students.

In addition, the team includes the campus' institutional researcher who is charged with providing needed expertise and analysis of student outcomes data.

EXAMINING STUDENT OUTCOMES DATA DISAGGREGATED BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

The structured inquiry process is premised on the idea that the team needs a baseline understanding of how transfer students are doing in terms of gaining access to the institution and being retained once there. This baseline understanding draws on analyses of transfer student outcomes data that have been disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Looking at disaggregated data enables the team to see whether gaps in educational outcomes exist across transfer students from different racial and ethnic groups. For example, to better understand the pipeline of transfer students, one institutional team analyzed data on transfer student applications received over the course of one academic year. What the team discovered was a gap in the number of applications and the matriculation rate between the all-transfer-student average and both African American and Asian-Pacific Islander community college students. From there, the institutional researcher conducted further data analysis, comparing the institution's community college transfer population and the available pool of community college transfer-eligible students from three nearby counties over a five-year period. This additional analysis revealed that Asian-Pacific Islanders account for only 10 percent of the college's transfer students even though they comprise 27 percent of eligible transfer students across the three counties. Moreover, the team found that only seven percent of the college's transfer students are African American even though African Americans make up 11 percent of transfer-eligible students from community colleges within a 25 miles radius.

SETTING GOALS

By using disaggregated transfer student outcomes data to identify gaps such as those described above, the team next proposes goals towards which an institution can move to close those gaps over a specific period of time. The team, for instance, stated that in five years, the institution will increase the number of African American community college student transfer applications from seven percent to nine percent, and the number of Asian-Pacific Islander applications from nine percent to 15 percent. Similarly, they set matriculation goals for these two student populations: over a five-year period, the institution will increase the percentage of African American community college transfer student enrollees from seven to nine percent, and the percentage of Asian-Pacific Islander students from eight to 14 percent. An important feature of this step in the process is to translate these percentages into the actual number of students the institution needs to impact to meet its goals. Thinking in terms of numbers rather than percentages helps make the achievement of these goals reasonable and tangible. For instance, while raising the percentage of Asian-Pacific Islander who matriculate to the college by six percentage points may seem daunting, knowing that six percentage points is equivalent to enrolling an additional 20 Asian-Pacific Islander students over a five-year period may appear more manageable.

CONDUCTING INQUIRY

In addition to goal setting, disaggregating outcomes data by race and ethnicity helps the team pin point potential trouble spots—that is, equity gaps—in the transfer pathway that warrant further investigation. Once these trouble spots are identified, the team investigates the nature of these gaps to determine why it exists, how institutional policies and practices enable them to persist, and—importantly—what the college can do to reduce its impact on the outcomes and trajectory of transfer students. To guide its inquiry into the trouble spot, the team develops a series of inquiry questions. One inquiry questions was, “What are our transfer recruitment practices?” since the team observed that fewer African American and Asian-Pacific Islander community college students submit transfer applications, relative to the all-transfer-student average. In particular, the team sought to discover whether the college’s transfer student recruitment policies and procedures were differentially affecting these two student populations. Creating inquiry questions that get at different aspects in a transfer student’s career at a four-year institution (e.g. pre-enrollment, 1st academic year, graduation) can be a potentially fruitful way of guiding inquiry at this stage. Sample questions are provided in the appendix.

The team’s inquiry is further directed by the use of inquiry tools that have been developed by the Center for Urban Education (CUE). These tools, which include protocols for interviews, observations, document analysis, and webscans, encourage the team to take a close look at how the work of the institution is done and to interrogate whether policies and practices that intend to serve transfer students in fact do. Determining which inquiry protocols to use for which inquiry questions is typically a negotiation that occurs among team members and with the assistance of a CUE consultant. First, the team considers which tool—or tools—best enable them to answer the inquiry questions at hand. Second, the team tailors the tool to suit the question and the context in which the question will be explored. To answer the inquiry question about the college’s recruitment practices, the team used multiple tools. The team customized CUE's interview protocol guide to design interviews with enrollment management staff. In addition to interviews, the team utilized CUE's document analysis protocol to review the enrollment management office's mission, vision, and goals statement, as well as the policies and procedures for recruiting transfer students. Together, the findings from the interviews and document analysis showed that the enrollment management office lacked a mission and vision statement to inform transfer recruitment, admissions and practices. Moreover, while transfer recruitment officers receive relevant training, transfer recruitment policies and procedures are not formalized. A more detailed description of CUE's inquiry tools can be found in the side bar, *Inquiry Questions and Tools*, and the appendix.

DEVELOPING RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE AN INSTITUTION'S TRANSFER FUNCTION

Once the team has conducted its inquiry into the trouble spots and collected and made sense of its findings, it is ready to develop recommendations for enhancing how the institution supports transfer students from access to completion. These recommendations can take the form of proposed changes in everyday practice, to amendments in policy, or the introduction of new policies. They can include a combination of "low-hanging fruit," which are changes that can be made immediately with little resistance, as well as aspirational recommendations, which may be more difficult to implement but that vastly improve the institution's transfer function. Importantly, the recommendations must be based on the evidence collected during the inquiry process. For instance, drawing on the evidence that the college is missing formally documented transfer recruitment procedures, the team recommended that enrollment management develop mission, vision, and goal statements to inform the recruitment of transfer students. In addition, the team proposed that enrollment management create formal documentation of policies and procedures for transfer student recruitment, as well as guidelines for the collection and analysis of data on transfer students.

In developing recommendations, team members must rely on their intimate knowledge of institutional culture, history, and the political and social dynamics of the campus. Indeed, while the team can develop any number of recommendations based on the evidence collected, ensuring that the recommendations are adopted by practitioners, departments, and the institution more broadly is another matter. Thus, the team must also develop a strategy for communicating the recommendations to campus leadership and colleagues to gain the necessary buy-in to ensure their smooth implementation. Communication can take place formally, for example, at faculty senate meetings, or informally, in one-on-one conversations with department heads. The team can also consider publishing a story about its work on the college website and in campus publications. Finally, the team can encourage campus leadership to highlight the importance of serving transfer students and how the work of the team will help the college's ability to do so.

Communication, in turn, must be accompanied by a serious conversation with campus leadership about the resources (including funding) and support that are needed to implement the recommendations. Some recommendations entail little or no financial resources, but may demand strong support from the president, provost, and dean. Alternatively, some recommendations require funding, but need only the approval of one department head.

Finally, the team must be realistic about the time period in which recommendations are adopted and implemented. That is, some recommendations can be accepted and put in place quickly, while others must go through formal governance procedures and as such, can take upwards of six months to implement. Being realistic about the time it will take to put a recommendation in place may curb the frustration that will inevitably emerge when campus constituents resist proposed changes.

THE BENEFITS OF A STRUCTURED INQUIRY PROCESS

Undertaking structured inquiry into an institution's transfer policies and practices yields several benefits for individual team members, the team as a whole, and the campus more broadly. Perhaps most notably, this process brings together practitioners from across a campus who have an interest and expertise in supporting transfer students. Often, individual practitioners may feel isolated in their commitment to transfer students, particularly at institutions where the "traditional student" comprises the majority of students served. Having a formal venue in which to discuss issues related to transfer can connect these practitioners together. Furthermore, structured inquiry creates a space in which practitioners can collectively investigate the extent to which a college is realizing the potential of its transfer function. Using CUE tools to navigate this inquiry helps uncover *how* a college in general and practitioners in particular are supporting transfer students, as well as *what* can be done to improve these efforts. Finally, structured inquiry affords team members with a learning opportunity. Team members not only learn more about the institution's transfer function, but also how to conduct inquiry into their own practices. In so doing, they develop a set of skills and capacities that can be used to inquire into other issues and challenges facing the institution, for example, the persistent gap in students who major in STEM across race and ethnicity. Most importantly, they develop a new way of seeing how the student experience can be shaped by race and ethnicity and—crucially—how institutional policies and taken-for-granted practices and routines contribute to these differential experiences. This new way of seeing enables practitioners to shift the burden of student success from being the sole responsibility of students to a shared responsibility between student and institution.

SIDEBAR: INQUIRY QUESTIONS AND TOOLS

Over the past fifteen years, CUE has worked with practitioners at XXX institutions of higher education on confronting issues of equity for underrepresented students of color. This experience, combined with a deep understanding of relevant educational research and scholarship, has generated a wealth of knowledge and practical know how on which CUE has drawn to develop inquiry tools, a few of which are described below. Guiding CUE's inquiry tools is the notion that critically examining how practitioners enact institutional policies, procedures, and practices opens an important window into understanding whether a college or university as a whole is in fact serving students, particularly students of color, at the highest possible levels. Thus, for a college that espouses a goal of being a transfer-serving institution, the inquiry tools offer a systematic means of determining whether and how the everyday actions and routines of those who are responsible for doing the business of the college align with that goal.

- **Document analysis protocol**, which can be used to assess the ways in which important institutional documents such as mission and vision statements, recruitment tools, and course syllabi communicate to students.

- **Webscan protocol**, which can be used to analyze whether the content and design of institutional web pages facilitate or hinder transfer students' access to critical information, such as specific requirements for admission.

- **Observation protocol**, which can be used to guide observations of transfer or academic support centers from a transfer students' perspective.

- **Interview protocol**, which can be used to guide interviews with transfer students to better understand their experience, or practitioners to know how they currently support transfer students.

The following table offer suggestions for how these various tools can be used to address specific inquiry questions.

Table 1. Sample Inquiry Questions and Tools

Inquiry Question	Inquiry Tool
What are the college's recruitment practices?	Document analysis of transfer recruitment policies and procedures. Interviews with admissions staff who focus on transfer recruitment. Interviews with admitted transfer students. Observation of recruitment practices at community college transfer fair.
How does the college communicate with community college students who are interested in transferring?	• Document analysis of online and print marketing materials. • Interview with transfer recruiters.
What are the transfer practices and programs that address the needs of underrepresented students of color?	• Interview with transfer recruiters. • Interview with staff who oversee special programs that recruit underrepresented transfer students.
How are transfer students advised once they are at the college?	• Interviews with associate deans and staff who advise transfer students. • Document analysis of brochures given to transfer students. • Document analysis of advising policies. • Interviews with transfer students.

FOSTERING TRANSFER-SERVING CHANGE

In this section, we attempt to more vividly illustrate the structured inquiry process described in the previous section, as well as how this process fostered the transfer-serving capacity of the two institutions in this project. Rather than share the explicit details of each institution's process, we have chosen to aggregate their experiences into a single storyline, a composite we call Richfield College. Our composite of Richfield borrows characteristics of both institutions, for example, the racial and ethnic composition of their faculty and student body. While this approach demands the loss of nuances that would otherwise be incorporated into a narrative featuring both institutions as separate entities, our intention in this report is to provide an illustration that inspires action from practitioners at other private colleges and universities that seek to transform their institution into one that is transfer-serving. To that end, the story of Richfield College is designed to offer a glimpse into the nature of the work that the practitioner teams undertook under the auspices of the project. Using interviews that we conducted with practitioners from both institutions in summer, 2013, we re-create an interview with one team member and a team discussion. Our purpose in presenting these two narratives is to enable the sharing of practitioners' actual thoughts and words, to the extent possible. When appropriate, we highlight the transfer-serving criteria the narratives touch on.

PROJECT BEGINNINGS

Richfield College is a liberal arts college located in California. Founded in 1875, Richfield is a religiously affiliated college whose original mission was to prepare young men for a life of vocation and service. The College has always embraced a liberal arts curriculum and sees to foster their students' critical thinking, reasoning, and writing capacities. Richfield turned co-educational in 1969 and while it always had a small population of racial and ethnic minority students, the size of that population has grown noticeably in the last two decades. Currently, Richfield's serves an undergraduate student body of 3,500 students, 35 percent of whom are racial-ethnic minorities, mostly Latino/a. As such, Richfield was recently designated a Hispanic-serving institution. While the College's student body is racially and ethnically diverse, it leadership and faculty is not. Only two of the 10 senior leaders on campus are minority—one is Black and the other Asian. Of the Richfield's 100 full-time, tenure/tenure-track faculty members, only 18 are faculty of color.

Many of Richfield's Latino students entered the college through one of the community colleges in the county. Their arrival remained largely unnoticed until a new vice president for enrollment management observed the numbers in a report she asked her staff to create to help her become more familiar with Richfield's enrollment streams. She raised the issue with the President's cabinet, which agreed that a systematic review of the college's transfer policy, services, and support—in the ways the currently exist—were in order. At his previous university, the dean of the college had worked with the Center for Urban Education on an initiative to facilitate transfer between state systems of higher education. Having found that work useful, as well as successful in improving outcomes for transfer students, he suggested that Richfield partner with CUE in this effort.

THE TEAM

Richfield's team included four practitioners who are the focus of our narrative:

- Mariela Avalos is a student success coordinator. She works with students regularly and so she was asked to join the project team from its inception.
- Braxton Davis is the institutional researcher at Richfield. He is familiar with the institution's data and is responsible for collecting information about the numbers of students in the institution and course pass rates.
- Jerry Simms is a professor and chair of the chemistry department. He serves as a student advisor and works closely with first-year and transfer students
- Juliette Jones is the financial aid director at Richfield. She has regular contact with students and is familiar with institutional financial aid policies.

From interviews with team members, we gleaned how these individuals comprehend their roles with regards to transfer students, how they hope the college will evolve as a transfer-serving institution, and what must be done to create equitable opportunities for transfer students. We begin with a one-on-one interview with Mariela Avalos, the student success coordinator.

A TEAM MEMBER'S PERSPECTIVE

In response to an initial question about her experience learning about the needs of Richfield's transfer students, Mariela said, When I learned about the project, I didn’t really know what to expect. As with all our students, we thought we understood our transfer students. It wasn’t until the team looked at our numbers of transfer students that we realized about 20-25 percent of our student body is made up of transfer students. We said, “Wow! We didn’t realize that it was that high, that large of a percentage. We realized that we needed to start thinking about how we’re recruiting these students, how are we going to do that. And so that would begin the slow process of changing how admissions did stuff.

Mariela’s comment about the team’s reaction to data about the number of transfer students at Richfield reveals several issues worth raising. First, it demonstrates a disconnect between practitioners’ working knowledge and the reality of the college’s transfer student population. While the team was aware that students were transferring to Richfield, that they comprised a significant part of the college’s entire student body was a more opaque fact. Second, this disconnect is powerful because it catalyzed a connection to current practices, and importantly, how they should be revamped in light of what the team now knew. By **attending to and using data**, the team deepened their understanding of Richfield’s transfer students.

Upon learning about the numbers, Mariela also noted,

Even now, we have to be mindful not to see transfer students as fillers or dollar signs. Because I think that, you know, if we didn’t make our class, we would say we’ll accept another 200 transfer students to make our class. So, there’s the idea that they fill seats and they generate money. I think there was really a lot of that sort of situation, where transfers can come to Richfield but there was no intention of them really having a full Richfield experience. I think our mindset has shifted now that they’re not just filling seats, but they’re really adding to our community.

Mariela’s point is important to reiterate. Transfer students at Richfield were “accidental” or “strategic” from the point of view of the institution. That is, either their admission was the result of their effort and/or that of their community college counselor, or the outcome of an enrollment management strategy to fill seats that were left empty by prospective freshmen. As Mariela noted, lacking from Richfield’s approach to transfer students was their **intentional recruitment** for what they can contribute to the campus community. With transfer students going unnoticed or used for the revenue dollars they generate, one can imagine them wondering whether Richfield is an appropriate institution for them.

Mariela then shared how the team moved from simply recognizing transfer students to considering how they can best serve them. Her description of the transition highlights the next indicator of a transfer-serving institution, **intentional support of transfer students.**

For a lot of years, it was just like, “Oh, they appear.” And there wasn't really effort put into having them here. So that changed. Now, we have formal transfer events, which they never used to before. Now, there’s formal thought given around campus to like “oh, when these people enter our college, what should they do?”

Initially, when the team sought ways to address transfer students’ needs, Mariela noted that the services they identified as “transfer-student focused” were actually offered to all incoming students. Recognizing that these services could be considered “irrelevant, fluff activities” for transfer students who enter with their own college experience, Mariela stated:

We could do all the programs we want, we can give them a bunch of free food, and all that stuff that students like, but if there’s dissatisfaction with how their courses are transferred over or they feel like they’re having to repeat courses they’ve already taken, they’re not coming in with a real good feeling and they’re probably going to leave with a lot more debt. That affects retention and graduation rates.

Here, Mariela acknowledged the importance of going beyond the “stuff that students like” so that Richfield can address their actual needs.

As tempting as it may have been for practitioners to move from identifying an issue to proposing recommendations for change, the team first conducted **inquiry into transfer policies and practices** to ensure that their proposals were grounded in evidence. Team members conducted an observation of the fall and spring orientation sessions for incoming students. They reviewed documents about Richfield’s academic advising structure, as well as interviewed several department chairs to ascertain how different academic departments set up advising relationships with transfer students. They conducted a webscan of the financial aid web pages to better understand what transfer students confront when they attempt to gather information about securing grants and loans to pay for their education. They also interviewed Juliette Jones, the director of financial aid, and two members of her staff, to gather more intimate knowledge of the ways financial aid officers currently interact with transfer students. Finally, the team distributed a survey to transfer students to determine whether there are areas where students feel more or less supported. Mariela observed that the survey findings were particularly enlightening:

In orientation, transfers feel like they're being treated like kids because freshmen coming from high schools need to get certain information. These college students feel, “I already know that. Why are you telling me this?” Some are non-traditional students and they don't want to waste their time in certain activities like team-building activities that freshmen need to have, the transfers felt, “I'm already too old for that or I've already been in college for two years, I don't need that.”

The team then engaged in more conversations with transfer students, which raised Mariela’s and her colleagues’ understanding of these students’ experience. She says she realized,

It’s not about creating duplicate systems. We’re not trying to replicate what we do for first years because transfers need something specific.

This initial inquiry fueled additional questions that the team attended to next: What are transfer students’ needs? What’s the student experience? What are the students’ struggles? What are the students’ concerns? Are they commuters or on-campus residents? What are they involved in? What are they asking for? What is Richfield deficient in?

Mariela and other team members searched for answers to these questions by connecting with campus committees such as the student affairs transfer advisory committee, as well as student groups such as the Black Student Union (BSU). The BSU leaders and members were an especially valuable resource for the team, both for the insights they shared and for their potential involvement in transfer student recruitment efforts. Mariela shared:

There are some things that students from the BSU can do like helping with the phone calls, going to college fairs, on occasion, or outreach to African-American applicants or African-American students who have been offered admission between the time they're offered admission and the time they make a decision about which college to enroll at.

Mariela learned that connecting with student groups is one step in understanding students’ experiences. She also learned the importance of speaking with others on campus about transfer students’ needs and noted, It’s clear that not quite enough is being done for transfer students. I think the colleges or the associate deans in the colleges recognize that. Some of them are beginning to do things, some of the colleges are talking about different approaches. And, certainly there’s an awareness on the part of associate deans and it’s my hope that this awareness becomes shared. We need to have a broader and more complete sense of the challenges that face transfer students and maybe even a broader array of ways we might deal with that.

As the team members continued their inquiry, they amassed a rich set of qualitative data about Richfield’s transfer function and transfer student experiences. This data, combined with the quantitative data on transfer student outcomes, became the foundation on which the team developed their recommendations.

A TEAM’S EFFORT

As Mariela’s narrative indicates, the work she conducted in this project was part of a larger team effort. In this section, we present a focus group interview with the team to showcase the way in which such group conversations can transpire, the sensemaking about transfer that occurs at a collective level, and the negotiation that takes place when members propose differing ideas. In this discussion, we focus on how team members learned about where the institution was deficient in its support of transfer students, the steps they began to take, and programs they implemented to address this need.

Interviewer: What was one of the key issues your team noted as you began to look at the transfer students’ experience?

Mariela Avalos: In terms of their classes, our support of transfer students looks different from what we offer freshman, but some might say we don’t always treat them fairly. For instance, four years ago, before I became coordinator of the student success center, you had to come in as a freshman in honors to be in honors. I met several transfer students who had been in honors at their previous institution and were sad that they weren't able to be in honors here. I spoke with someone here who told me that a protocol was created that would allow students who were in honors at a previous institution to join honors without any kind of vetting or anything, just, you already demonstrated you're in honors. All we required was that the prior school's honors program was nationally recognized so we would have similar commitments and stuff like that. So now, they come in and we count all of their honors classes for honors classes we had here. We began to notice an increase in transfer students interested in honors. So we were actually beginning to get those honors student transfers.

Interviewer: I guess that’s a win-win as you begin to assess the results of your efforts.

Jerry Simms: Well, they're a different group than the first-year students, and we need to treat them as a different group and we need to be able to see them as “this is a transfer student and these are your needs.” As opposed to “here's another student and here are your needs.” So it's changed a lot of the way that I approached transfer students and has me thinking more about what else I can do for them.

Interviewer: That’s a good point, so what are some of the things that have come to be since you decided to focus on your transfer student population?

Braxton Davis: More from the administrative side, in the marketing materials, there weren’t diverse groups of faces on the marketing materials that were sent to both our freshmen prospective students and our transfer students. That’s something that admissions could work on and change right away. With that addition, they were producing new print materials for the new recruitment season.

Jerry Simms: Before moving to full-time faculty, I started in fall 2008 as the program coordinator for transfer programs. That was to my knowledge the first official job at Richfield that had a transfer focus. Obviously in the past there had been academic advisors, and people who have worked with transfer students. But this is the first time in our division we have someone focused on the transfer population. .

Juliette Jones: Well, in our office—financial aid—getting the information out to them so they know what to expect about their financial aid. Looking at the bill. Trying to help them come up with a payment plan. I think sometimes we expect that our transfer students are able to sort out the financial aid on their own, so we don’t always give them what they need. I keep learning in this process. I’ve heard that the student services office is doing some new things…oh, Mariela, you’re probably closest to the work that was done, why don’t you tell us about that.

Mariela Avalos: We’ve done a couple of different things. Rather than sending a message to make announcements to the general campus community, we have found different ways to message—through the transfer-student barbecue and during orientation, we give them a student resource guide which has all that information in there. Then, one thing we started doing, my office sends transfer students relevant emails that may list transfer-specific events that are housed outside the transfer residence hall. All students are invited, but really, it's marketed towards the transfer students. They have officials from the various offices come and talk to the students, so we work with them in small, more intimate settings.

Interviewer: Oh, so it sounds as though you're focusing and narrowing your efforts more. Can you tell me a bit about what the college does specifically for transfer students before they arrive?

Jerry Simms: Well, before we didn't think about having recruitment strategies, if they were here, they were here and that was great. *Now* we actually hold a couple different events, called transfer days, where the focus is really on bringing in transfer students from a variety of local universities, community colleges so they can learn about campus, meet faculty, etc. Some of the barriers for transfer students successfully transitioning to four-year colleges have to do with just understanding how four-year colleges operate, so we try to deal with that.

Interviewer: Oh, ok. What else do you do for students before they arrive?

Jerry Simms: Well, this isn't before they arrive, but we realized they need that more direct attention like, "Here's a two-year plan to get you out of here" and so even though we don't try to do stuff like that because we don't know what next year's classes are going to be, we can give them a general idea of "here are the remaining classes and this is generally when they are offered." And they appreciate that, they love it. So, though we're not currently doing that yet, we have discussed it. I think making an effort to do more of that would be great—we would only do it for students who asked for it. Now, we just need to tell them like, "We can create a two-year plan. Is that something you want to do now?" I decided to spearhead that effort in our department and then worked with other departments so they could incorporate similar structures in their departments

Braxton Davis: Well, from a "before they enter" perspective, I know some of the things we've started to do from an enrollment management standpoint is to have some events and things like that where we can help transfer students, whether or not they formally commit to Richfield by talking about some of the barriers and things that they need to look at.

Juliette Jones: Like financing this college experience.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. And, now, as you start to look toward the future, what are some things you'd like to see in the college's plan for transfer students?

Jerry Simms: One of the things that we've talked about was, what if we had transfer students register for classes in June. And how do we provide for them? As someone said in our team meeting, it might not look the same, and that's fine, it doesn't need to mimic, but we need to offer them same access to classes as freshmen. So first year students have access to classes in June. Transfer students should have access in June as well. Same as with jobs, if we're hiring on campus. That's one area that student affairs takes care of. Transfer students should have the same access to jobs.

For the academic and social supports, I'd like us to get them connected with somebody in their major, early in the summer, do it by email, they don't need to come in, they can pre-register. Then when they get to campus, they meet with their peer mentor—we found that they loved having a peer mentor who had been a transfer student—that was great, they loved that.

Mariela Avalos: In my ideal world, they would have their own center here that they would be able to go to. They have it at community colleges and they look for it here. Now we don't obviously need a transfer center to send them out anywhere, we want to keep them. But we do need some location or some type of area where they can go and talk and feel like, "Hey, I have somewhere to go" where they feel really comfortable and here I think they struggle to try to find that place.

Juliette Jones: From our team discussions, it seems we need to have a person who's available on the academic side, but also on the student affairs side. We've had transfer resources on the student affairs side, which Mariela's been coordinating. And only recently with Jerry's new appointment as a student advisor do we have someone on the academic side. But we need more Mariela's and Jerry's at Richfield, who can support transfer students throughout their two, three, four years here.

Braxton Davis: I'd like to see us continue to use data to investigate our practices. Now it takes time to impact practice and it's not a one-time shot at anytime. You have to keep bringing relevant data back to the table to show changes, to show impact as things go along, so it's not a one-time thing. You can't say, so here's the data to change practice. We say, here's the data we change practice, and as we change practice, we put into place an impact study immediately so that we collect data on an ongoing basis. Then we can say some time in the future whether or not that particular practices has a negative, positive, or no impact.

SUMMARY

The interview with Mariela and the team focus group interview demonstrate the structured inquiry process that the team undertook to address the needs of transfer students at Richfield College. Multi-faceted, enlightening, time-intensive, and valuable, this process served as the beginning of Richfield’s long-term commitment to fostering the success of its transfer students and to eliminating inequities that may exist between transfer and “traditional” students on the one hand, and transfer students from different racial and ethnic groups on the other hand. The team’s process began with a review of transfer student enrollment and success data, which showed that up to a quarter of its student body comprised of transfer students. Further investigation of outcomes data suggested that a noticeable percentage of these students were not achieving success at the college. This initial information formed the basis on which they started their inquiry.

Once they received this data, they conducted **inquiry into policies and practices** with staff from the college’s Admissions office to learn about its recruitment and enrollment of transfer students. From their interviews of staff, they noticed that the college was not **intentionally recruiting transfer students**. In fact, their efforts were somewhat haphazard and in some cases, could be described as non-existent. As a result, at least one member of the team acknowledged the need to expand efforts to recruit transfer students. In a later conversation, the team member noted that the college had taken steps to redesign its website based on the team’s findings from a webscan activity. Concurrently, team members engaged in interviews with student groups, met with campus committees, and reviewed responses from surveys to learn about the important factors to consider as they determined transfer students’ needs. They then worked with campus departments and offices to figure out how they could engage in practices that would reflect and result in **intentional support of transfer students**. From discussions with participants from campus student groups such as the Black Student Union, team members learned about campus policies and procedures that were welcoming and supportive for students, as well as those that resulted in students feeling separate from the campus community. These conversations prompted ideas about how practitioners at the college can work together to **cultivate transfer agents**.

After team members conducted inquiry activities and came back together to discuss their findings, they questioned how and why certain campus policies and procedures were in place, how these policies and practices served students, and whether or not they reflected **equity-minded approaches**. Before making decisions about how to adjust policies and procedures, they reviewed relevant student data to ensure they were not basing decisions on feelings or suppositions. By **attending to and using data** throughout the structured inquiry process, the team began to uncover places where existing structures limited, and were even unfair for, transfer students (e.g. attaining honor student status).

In sum, we hope that these interview excerpts illustrate how a team of practitioners, with the support of campus leadership and the guidance of a structured inquiry process, can begin to transform a private college or university from a transfer-receiving to a genuine transfer-serving institution. In foregrounding the experiences of practitioners in this process, we have demonstrated how structured inquiry can facilitate the learning process at individual and team levels around issues of transfer at an institution. Such learning, we posit, is crucial to making the lasting changes that are needed to not only alter long-standing institutional policies structures, but—equally important—the routines and practices that govern the work that practitioners do on a daily basis. Put simply, such learning is critical to establishing holistic change and institutional transformation for the benefit of transfer students.

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APPENDIX

Included in this appendix are inquiry tools developed by the Center for Urban Education.

1. Sample inquiry questions
2. Document analysis protocol
3. Webscan protocol
4. Observation protocol
5. Interview protocol

SAMPLE INQUIRY QUESTIONS

UNDERSTANDING TRANSFER STUDENTS' PROGRESSION AT MY COLLEGE

One potential way of structuring an inquiry into the experience of transfer students is to consider the major milestones that punctuate their career at a four-year institution, beginning with recruitment and ending with graduation. Framing inquiry in this manner could prove a useful way for team members to envision what is it like for transfer students at these critical moments in their progression towards earning a baccalaureate degree. For each milestone, the team would together determine the specific inquiry questions on which to focus. A few examples are noted below.

Recruitment

- How do community college students learn about [institution]?
- Are there campus visits organized for transfer students interested in attending [institution]?
- What information is provided to community college students about [institution]?
- In what ways does recruitment information encourage community college students of color to apply to [institution]?
- What information do community college students seek about [institution]?
- Who at [institution] is responsible for recruiting community college lents?
- else at [institution] plays a role in recruiting community college lents?
- n which community colleges does [institution] typically recruit?
- t is the racial and ethnic composition of the student body at

Orientation

- What kinds of activities are planned that are specific to transfer students?
- Which of these activities are transfer students *required* to attend?
- What information are transfer students expected to learn at orientation?
- Can you list the specific programs and their expected outcomes offered to transfer students at orientation?

Admissions

- What do community college students need to know about applying and enrolling at [institution]? How can students access this information?

First Academic Year

- In what courses should transfer students be enrolled in their first academic year at [institution]?
- How do transfer students register for courses?
- How often should students be meeting with their advisor?
- How often should students be meeting with the transfer office?
- In what kinds of activities should students be participating?
- Is there an emergency system in place to ensure that students receive the resources they need?
- How do students become aware of opportunities and activities that will enhance their academic experience (e.g. high-impact practices such as internships, study abroad)?

Second Academic Year

- In what courses should transfer students be enrolled in their second academic year?
- How do students become aware of graduation requirements and their eligibility?
- Who/what office is responsible to tracking the retention of transfer students?
- How often should students be meeting with their faculty advisor/transfer office to ensure timely graduation?

Graduation

- In what ways are transfer students supported with their post-graduation planning (e.g. in terms of careers, graduate school)?
- Is there an exit survey for transfer students to learn about their experience at [institution]?
- How is this survey data used?

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

DESIGNING AND CONDUCTING DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Institutional documents embody assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about students and the learning environment that an institution seeks to foster on campus. While documents can be analyzed from any number of perspectives, this protocol foregrounds transfer and equity-mindedness given the overarching concern for transfer students of color. By looking specifically for the ways in which institutional documents do and do not address issues of race, ethnicity, and transfer, this protocol offers a way for practitioners to examine the embedded messages that transfer students receive when reading these documents. Moreover, this critical examination provides practitioners with important insight into the kinds of changes that need to be made to improve the educational experience of transfer students.

1

SELECT DOCUMENTS TO

The team should select documents based on the area of inquiry and specific inquiry questions. For example, if the team is examining transfer student retention and asks the inquiry question, *In what ways are transfer students supported academically*?, then the team may choose to analyze documents that can be found at the academic support center. If the team is investigating transfer student access, then the team could analyze recruitment materials, admission letters, or financial aid documents. The key is to pick documents that students receive from the institution.

2

PREPARE FOR THE DOCUMENT

ENVISION A STUDENT LENS: When conducting the document analysis, team members should imagine reading the document from the perspective of a transfer student who may not be familiar with the ins and outs of the institution. Important to consider is

ADOPT AN EQUITY-MINDED FRAME: Team members should also keep in mind that the document's content, as well as the means by which that content is expressed

- May not adequately consider the unique backgrounds that transfer students, especially transfer students of color, bring to the institution;
- May promote or contribute to institutional policies and practices that indirectly but effectively challenge the success of transfer students of color at the college.

REVIEW THE DOCUMENT ANALYSIS QUESTIONS: Reviewing the document analysis questions below will help team members see the documents from a transfer students eyes, as well as from an equity-minded frame.

3

CONDUCT THE DOCUMENT

4 POST DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PRESENTATION AND

PRESENTATION: The team members should present findings with the team, highlighting areas where documents seem effective in helping / supporting, as well as where they seem ineffective for transfer students. Team members should also underscore areas where they found evidence of equity-mindedness.

TEAM DISCUSSION: Following the presentation, the team as a whole should reflect on the document analysis process, as well as discuss the team's next steps. Next steps include making possible changes to the documents and determining how those changes might be undertaken. Questions that can help guide this discussion include:

- What did you learn from the document analysis? What surprised you? What didn't?
- What do the findings reveal about the campus' attitude towards and assumptions about transfer students? Transfer students of color? What are some issues that should be raised for departmental and campus discussions?
- How might the documents provide different messages or better service to some students over others? (e.g. traditional vs. transfer students; White students vs. African American, Latino/a, Native American students; middle-class vs. first generation / low-income students)?
- How do the findings inform the team's inquiry area and inquiry stions?
- can the documents be modified so that they better support the cess of transfer students of color?

SAMPLE DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

TONE

- Was the document welcoming? Why or why not?
- Was the language used accessible for all students? Encouraging? Respectful?
- Did the document send messages that may marginalize some student groups, such as a lack of visibility of students from racial/ethnic backgrounds, language use, placement of information.

INFORMATION

- Was the information presented on the document clearly explained? Thorough?
- Was contact information provided in case a student has further questions?

TRANSFER STUDENTS

- Does the document contain information specifically for transfer students or suggest that the information is applicable to transfer students? If yes, then how?
- Does the document encourage community college students to pursue transfer at your college? Why or why not?
- Does the document communicate to transfer students where they can access resources and support? If yes, then how?

EQUITY-MINDEDNESS

- Does the document acknowledge that transfer students come to the college with valuable cultural and life experiences that can positively

CONDUCTING A WEBSCAN

An institution's website reflects the attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, and expectations about students and the learning environment on that an institutions seeks to foster on campus. This activity asks team members to imagine themselves as current students, particularly underrepresented Latino/a, African American, and Native American transfer students, experiencing their institution's website as they look up information about academics, student affairs, financial aid, and/or other administrative procedures or policies. It guides team members to consider what kinds of cultural assumptions are being communicated that might influence a student's perception of the institution.

Reflecting on your institution's website gives you a way to generate dialogue with your team and the college at large about the information that is communicated to students. This exercise asks that your team consider how the institution's website may be connected to the equity gaps identified in the institutional data.

1

SELECT APPROPRIATE WEB

The team should select web pages to analyze based on the area of inquiry and specific inquiry questions. For example, if the team is examining transfer
cess and asks the inquiry question, *What information does the*
office provide for transfer students on its website?, then the team
duct a webscan of admissions webpages.

2

PREPARE FOR THE WEBSCAN: ENVISION A ‘STUDENT

When conducting the webscan, team members should imagine viewing the website from the perspective of a transfer student who does not know the ins and outs of the college. Reviewing the webscan questions (see below) will help team members see the web pages from a transfer student’s eyes. The team should decide which questions to foreground during the webscan.

3

CONDUCT THE

ANALYSIS: Select at least two team members to conduct the webscan. Each team member will scan the selected webpages and answer the chosen webscan questions as they go along. Team members should refrain from answering questions in a yes/no manner and document their findings in a demonstrative manner (e.g. copy images, quote direct text, include links).

DOCUMENTING: Team members should document their findings and then meet to discuss the results of their analysis. Following this discussion, team members should prepare a summary that can be shared with the team. The summary should include a description of the webscans’ purpose, the method used to select the web pages, copies of the web pages, and findings.

4

POST WEBSCAN PRESENTATION AND

The team members should present findings with the team, highlighting areas where web pages seem effective, as well as where they seem ineffective for transfer students. Following the presentation, the team as a whole should reflect on the webscan process, as well as discuss the team’s next steps. Questions that can help guide this discussion include:

- What did you learn from the webscan? What surprised you? What didn’t?
- What do the webscan findings reveal about the campus’ attitude towards

SAMPLE WEBSCAN

TONE

- Was the webpage welcoming? Why or why not?
- Was the language used accessible for all students? Encouraging? Respectful?
- Did the website send messages that may marginalize some student groups, such as a lack of visibility of students from racial/ethnic backgrounds, language use, placement of information.

FUNCTIONALITY

- How easy is it to find this web page? How many links did you click to get here?
- Were the links updated and current? Did the links take you to the correct page?
- Describe the overall functionality of the web page design and layout.

INFORMATION

- Was the information presented on the web page clearly explained? Thorough?
- Was it easy to navigate the web page and find answers to questions?
- Was contact information provided in case a student has further questions?

there a FAQ section? If yes, did it address your questions?

R STUDENTS

e transfer student application easily accessible on the admissions
e?

- What information is provided specifically for transfer students?

OBSERVATION

DESIGNING AND CONDUCTING AN OBSERVATION

Observations provide practitioners with a first-hand look into students' experiences at an institution. Team members gain insights into how students experience institutional offerings, such as how and what the institution communicates to students, how the institution conducts business with students, and what messages are conveyed to students. Observation activities give teams the opportunity to research institutional practices (e.g. events, activities, and/or student services) that may be contributing to the equity gap. During observation activities, team members are asked to consider what kinds of messages are being communicated that might discourage and/or confuse students. Observations can also prompt dialogue about espoused values as compared to routine practices on campus.

1

SELECT THE OBSERVATION

The team should select an observation based on the area of inquiry and specific inquiry questions. For example, if the team is examining transfer student retention and asks the inquiry question, *In what ways are transfer students supported academically*?, then the team may choose to conduct an observation of the academic support center.

2

PREPARE FOR THE

ENVISION A STUDENT LENS: When conducting the observation, team members should imagine viewing the observation site from the perspective of a transfer student who does not know the ins and outs of the college, such as registering for classes or seeking support from a counselor or advisor. The following questions can be used to guide the team towards a student-focused lens: *What might student anxieties, needs, or concerns be while interacting with faculty, staff, or administrators at your institution? In what ways are these anxieties, needs, or concerns specific to students of color?*

DEVELOP QUESTIONS TO STRUCTURE THE OBSERVATION: Prepare a semi-structured list of questions that will further the team's understanding of the area of inquiry and inquiry question. Sample questions are included below.

ASK PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE OBSERVATION: Prior to conducting the observation, team members should seek permission from the faculty, staff, or administrator in charge of the observation site.

3

CONDUCT THE

Select at least two team members to conduct the observation. Each team member will observe the site and answer the chosen questions. Team members should refrain from answering questions in a yes/no manner and document their findings in a descriptive manner. Team members should provide an accurate description of their experience, indicating what is done well and what needs to be improved.

4

POST OBSERVATION RECORDING AND

OBSERVATION SUMMARY AND RECORDING: Following the observation, team members should document and discuss their findings. Based on the discussion, team members should create a summary that they can then share with the rest of the team. The summary should include a description of the observation's purpose, the methods used for information gathering and selection of the observation area, and copies of documents and materials taken from, as well as photos taken of, the site.

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CUSSION: Once team members have presented their findings, the uld discuss what was shared. The following questions can be used to team discussion: *How might the information gathered during the on contribute to the gaps found in the data? How might the findings*

SAMPLE OBSERVATION

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND STAFFING

- What do you see as you walk through the door?
- What is the physical nature of the space? What is present? What is its age and condition? Is it large enough to accommodate a group of students?
- Where is the space located on campus? Is it central? Are entrances clearly marked so students can find it easily?
- Does the space have culturally relevant material on display?
- How many staff (professional and student workers) do you see? Are they sufficient in number to help the students present? What is their racial/gender make-up? What is their demeanor?

USAGE AND ACTIVITY

- How many students visited the office, participated in an activity, or used resources? What is their racial/ethnic and gender breakdown?
- How long do students spend in the office?
- Are there services that target students of color? Are there services that used the most by students of color?
- Do students seem satisfied when they leave the space? Provide examples.

INTERACTION WITH STUDENTS

- How does the staff greet/welcome students?
- How long do students typically wait before they are seen?

CONDUCTING AN INTERVIEW

DESIGNING AND CONDUCTING AN INTERVIEW

Interviews provide an opportunity to understand the experiences and feelings of the campus community in regards to the team's area of inquiry. The semi-structured interview is perhaps the most widely used method for data collection as it follows a specific protocol, however the rules of engagement are flexible, allowing the interviewee to have some influence over the direction of the interview. In many respects, interviews are like conversations in which individuals ask questions, listen to answers, probe for further information, and change the subject when necessary. The key difference between semi-structured interviews and conversations lies in the fact that the former are utilized to gather specific data on people's thoughts, feelings, actions, and experiences. Thus, the questions asked are intended to elicit responses that shed light on a particular subject.

1

DETERMINE WHO TO

The team should choose who to interview based on the area of inquiry and specific inquiry questions. For example, if the team is examining transfer student retention and asks the inquiry question, *In what ways are transfer*
upported academically?, then the team may choose to interview the
the academic support center . Identify multiple potential
es since not everyone asked will say yes.

2

PREPARE FOR THE

REQUEST INTERVIEWS WITH POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES: The team member conducting the interview or another team member who knows the potential interviewee can make the request. In the request, indicate the interview's purpose and why the interviewee is valuable to better understanding the area of inquiry.

DETERMINE WHERE AND WHEN THE INTERVIEW WILL TAKE PLACE: With the interviewee, determine the location and time of the interview. Ideally, the interview will be conducted in a quiet place.

DEVELOP YOUR SEMI-STRUCTURED PROTOCOL: Prepare a semi-structured list of questions that will further the team's understanding of the area of inquiry and inquiry question. Sample questions are included below. Refrain from asking questions that would elicit a yes/no answer; rather, develop questions that encourage articulation and explanation. Ask interviewees to provide examples. See below for a sample protocol.

3

CONDUCT THE

STARTING THE INTERVIEW: Remind the interviewee what the team is trying to accomplish, why the s/he is important to the investigation, and that participation is voluntary. Ask the interviewee's permission to record the conversation to facilitate notetaking. Begin the interview with questions that draw on the interviewee's personal experience. Doing so helps interviewees

4

POST INTERVIEW DOCUMENTING, ANALYSIS, AND

INITIAL DOCUMENTING: Following the interview, write a summary that details basic background information on the interviewee, the topics covered, initial impressions, emerging patterns and themes.

ANALYSIS: Listen to the interview (or if the interview is transcribed, read the transcript) with the purpose of identifying themes or patterns in terms of conversation topics, language, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, sayings. Develop a “storyline” that unites the themes—*What is this story about?* Identifying lingering questions to ask the interviewee in a follow-up email or conversation.

SUMMARY DOCUMENT: Document the analysis in a manner than can be shared with the team, providing a comprehensive understanding of how the interview advanced the overall purpose of the inquiry and the methods used for information gathering and interviewee selection. Describe main findings (i.e. themes and patterns from the analysis), providing sufficient description and use of direct quotations to support the analysis. Based on the findings presented, recommend changes in policy and practice, or discuss their implications.

TEAM DISCUSSION: Share the analysis document with the team and facilitate
on of the findings. Possible questions to guide discussion are: *How*
information gathered during the interview impact the area of
o the findings from this interview support or counter other

SAMPLE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

When designing the interview protocol, keep in mind the specific area of inquiry and inquiry questions. Consider the topics that need to be addressed/covered to answer the inquiry question, and then articulate a rationale explaining why it is important to gather information about this topic. From there, develop three to four specific interview questions in the following four areas:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Practices
- Contextualizing student success
- Impact of assessment and evaluation

In addition to the main interview questions, develop relevant prompts that can extract more detailed information from the interviewee.

EXAMPLE: STAFF INTERVIEW AT ACADEMIC SUPPORT CENTER
GOAL: To investigate factors that promote transfer student success on our campus.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- What is your role at [academic support center]?
- What are your responsibilities?
- What activities do these responsibilities entail?
- Are these activities expected of you in your job title? If not, how did you come to do them?

PRACTICES

- Can you walk me through what happens when a student arrives at the [academic support center]?
    - Prompts: How are they greeted? What information are they giving about the center? How are their needs assessed?
- What are the different ways in which you work with students?
    - Prompts: Individualized tutoring? Group work? Homework