

ABSTRACT

Charles Raymond Gilmore III, PROVIDING TRANSFER STUDENT CAPITAL TO VERTICAL TRANSFER-TRACK STUDENTS IN A VERTICAL TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS COURSE: AN ACTION-RESEARCH STUDY (Under the direction of Dr. Heidi Puckett). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2022.

Nearly 40% of all first-time college attendees in the United States begin their post-secondary education at a community college. The community college has increasingly become the entry point for many students, especially those from under-represented populations, whose goal is to transfer to a 4-year institution to pursue a baccalaureate education. However, for numerous reasons, many of these vertical transfer-track students never accomplish their goal of earning a bachelor's degree. The focus of this study was to understand how the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College provides Transfer Student Capital (TSC) to vertical transfer-track students, to identify and implement changes to ACA 122 to improve the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students, and to understand and assess how the changes made to ACA 122 may affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. The results of the study indicate that vertical transfer-track students believe the topics of student support services and academic planning as the most useful types of TSC. In addition, faculty participants believe the topic of financial aid is of equal importance. The findings of the study have several implications for higher education practitioners who work directly with vertical transfer-track students. Recommendations for future studies are discussed.

PROVIDING TRANSFER STUDENT CAPITAL TO VERTICAL TRANSFER-TRACK
STUDENTS IN A VERTICAL TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS COURSE: AN ACTION-
RESEARCH STUDY

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership
East Carolina University

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of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Charles Raymond Gilmore III

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to those who were down from day one—my parents, Lisa and Charles Gilmore. Throughout my life you have demonstrated that hard work, teamwork, and perseverance, no matter the circumstance, will ultimately lead to success. I am immensely grateful and thankful to have parents like yourselves. And even though I never became a rocket scientist, at least there is now a “doctor” in the family! Thank you, Mom and Dad.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For many students who begin their post-secondary academic career at Wayne Community College (WCC), attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher at a 4-year institution is their goal. Higher education practitioners and researchers use the term "vertical transfer-track students" to refer to this student population. As an instructor and academic advisor in the college transfer division at WCC, I have witnessed vertical transfer-track students' strong desire to continue their education at a 4-year institution after attending the community college. I have also witnessed, however, many students who are never able to transfer to a 4-year institution and some students who do successfully transfer to a 4-year institution only to return to WCC a semester or two after they transferred. For several reasons discussed throughout this chapter, it is imperative that WCC provides these vertical transfer-track students with the necessary tools to transfer to and earn a bachelor's degree from a 4-year institution, regardless of background and previous educational experiences.

The mission of WCC is to meet the educational, training, and cultural needs of the communities it serves. For many students who enroll at WCC, successful transfer to a 4-year institution, and ultimately graduating with a bachelor's degree, is not only a desire, but a necessity. As an institution, unfortunately, WCC does not currently investigate what causes students to either not be able to successfully transfer to a 4-year institution or what inhibits their persistence at the 4-year institution after transferring from the community college. Undoubtedly, the reasons for why students are unable to transfer to a 4-year institution or persist after they do transfer vary widely and the complexity of the matter makes researching it complicated and challenging. However, to fulfill the mission of the College, attention must be given to understanding what contributes to, or limits, the successful transfer and persistence of

vertical transfer students from WCC. By doing so, the institution can provide an educational experience for its vertical transfer-track students that will adequately prepare them to successfully transfer to, thrive at, and graduate from a 4-year institution in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Because of its propensity to increase vertical transfer success and performance of students who transfer from a community college to a 4-year institution, the concept of Transfer Student Capital (TSC) was used as the foundation of the present study. Put succinctly, TSC refers to the skills, knowledge, and expertise related to the transfer process that vertical transfer-track students acquire during their time at the community college (Laanan, 2007). As the accumulation of a student's TSC increases, so does the student's likelihood of transferring successfully and ultimately earning a bachelor's degree (Laanan, 2007). Where and how students accumulate TSC varies widely. However, for many vertical transfer-track students, a large quantity of the TSC they accumulate at the community college can be acquired by enrolling in and completing a vertical transfer student success course. Therefore, the present study, through a data-informed redesign of the College's current vertical transfer student success course, ACA 122, intended to positively affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC. The study also aided WCC administrators, faculty, and staff to make informed decisions about future policies, procedures, practices, and programs impacting the preparation of vertical transfer-track students for success at their desired transfer institution.

The following sections provide information concerning the background of the focus of practice, the focus of practice statement, the guiding questions of the study, the theoretical foundation used, definition of key terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, the limitations, and the significance of the study.

Background of the Focus of Practice

Since the inception of what is today known as the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) in the 1950s, the educational requirements of those seeking employment have changed dramatically. The initial establishment of Industrial Education Centers (IECs), many of which became the first community colleges in North Carolina, served to assist citizens by providing educational services beyond high school to pursue employment in a workplace that was rapidly shifting from agricultural to industrial (Lancaster, 1999). In 1963, the IECs, along with other community colleges in the state, were combined into a single comprehensive system of community colleges called the NCCCS (Wescott, 2014). Although workforce education and training presently remain a significant part of the NCCCS mission, preparing students for the pursuit of a baccalaureate education has increasingly become a point of emphasis for community colleges in the state.

Though the North Carolina Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (NCCAA) is policy among the state's 58 community colleges today, this was not always the case. It was not until 1997 that the first articulation agreement between the 16 four-year public universities in North Carolina and the NCCCS was established (Wescott, 2014). The initial agreement, which was comprised of 44 credit hours transferable to all 16 four-year public institutions in North Carolina, preceded hundreds of thousands of community college students successfully transferring to a 4-year institution to pursue a baccalaureate education. The most recent update of the NCCAA has expanded to include over 400 transferable courses, a transfer credit appeal procedure, a transfer assured admissions policy, and a requirement of all University of North Carolina (UNC) System institutions to develop and maintain 4-year baccalaureate degree plans (North Carolina Community College System [NCCCS], 2014). These plans serve as an academic pathway for

vertical transfer-track students to follow while they are enrolled at the community college. While the NCCAA aids community college students in transferring smoothly to most 4-year institutions in North Carolina, once these vertical transfer students arrive at their transfer institution, several factors will impact the likelihood of them persisting and ultimately graduating with a bachelor's degree.

There exists a plethora of studies examining the factors that influence vertical transfer student success and performance at the 4-year institution. Typically, these factors are categorized as being either individual-level factors or institutional-level factors. Examples of individual-level factors include the student's academic ability and preparation for college-level work (Adelman, 2006; Umbach et al., 2019; Wang, 2009), student demographics (Bailey, 2004; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Lee & Frank, 1990), psychosocial factors (Richardson et al., 2012; Robbins et al., 2004), and psychological factors (Gifford et al., 2006; Smart & Pascarella, 1986). Examples of institutional-level factors, specifically those of the community college, include the demographic makeup of the community college, the size of the community college, student exposure to part-time faculty, and degree options available (Baker, 2016; Calcagno et al., 2008; Eagen & Jaeger, 2009; Wassmer et al., 2004). Clearly, the factors that impact vertical transfer student success and performance at the 4-year institution vary widely. This variation makes creating a comprehensive theoretical foundation with which to study the topic a difficult, albeit important, task.

Recently, however, the concept of TSC has emerged, which provides researchers with an alternative viewpoint in which to study vertical transfer student success and performance. The concept of TSC, developed originally by Dr. Frankie Santos Laanan (1998, 2004, 2007) and expanded upon by others (Laanan et al., 2010; Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020; Moser, 2012, 2014), places a strong emphasis on vertical transfer students' community college

experiences. The theoretical foundation suggests that vertical transfer-track students, those who wish to transfer from a community college to a 4-year institution, acquire specific skills, knowledge, and expertise during their time at the community college that aids them in being successful once they transfer. Research indicates that sources of TSC are numerous, and a student can acquire TSC in several ways. As the amount of TSC acquired by the student increases, so does that student's vertical transfer performance (Laanan, 2007; Moser, 2012, 2014; Starobin et al., 2016). Most of the research studying TSC or using it as a theoretical foundation in which to study vertical transfer student success and performance are quantitative rather than qualitative. While quantitative studies can investigate what sources of TSC are, qualitative studies can help in determining how TSC is acquired (Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020). Therefore, the qualitative nature of the present study made it a valuable and needed contribution to understanding how TSC is acquired by vertical transfer-track students at WCC and the impact that TSC has on the vertical transfer student success and performance of vertical transfer-track students within the study's context.

Although not explicitly stated in course descriptions, vertical transfer student success courses are intended to be a significant source of TSC for vertical transfer-track students at community colleges. Students usually complete these types of courses during their first semester enrolled at a community college. These courses typically cover topics which can include, but are not limited to, orientation to the college, learning and study strategies, non-academic skills such as soft skills, and academic and career goal exploration and planning. The prevalence of these types of courses in the community college, and the subsequent role they play in preparing vertical transfer-track students to transfer to a 4-year institution successfully, cannot be understated. Therefore, designing the curriculum of these courses, such that they maximize the

amount of TSC accumulated by vertical transfer-track students, is essential. Aside from the contribution mentioned previously, the present study sought to provide practitioners with strategies on how to better provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students within the vertical transfer student success course classroom.

Context of the Study

Situated in Goldsboro, North Carolina, WCC is a learning-centered, public, associate degree-granting institution with an open-door admissions policy, which allows any person with a high school diploma or equivalent to attend. As a community college, WCC offers a wide range of academic programs and serves students of nearly every demographic background. The College's largest population of students are vertical transfer-track students. The academic goal of these students is to begin their postsecondary education at WCC and transfer to a 4-year institution to pursue and earn a bachelor's degree. A significant portion of this cohort of students comes from low-income families, are first-generation college students, or both.

To help vertical transfer-track students achieve their academic goal of earning a bachelor's degree, several strategies have been or are currently being used at WCC. One such strategy that recently ended is the College's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) initiative. The initiative, entitled *OnPoint: Student Success-Based Advising*, was implemented in January of 2016 and officially ended in May of 2021. As an initiative designed to increase vertical transfer success of vertical transfer-track students at WCC and at the 4-year transfer institution, *OnPoint* created numerous changes to policies, procedures, and practices at WCC. These changes included moving from a centralized advising structure to a shared advising structure to increase one-to-one advising. Additionally, WCC adopted the Appreciative Advising model, utilized an early alert software to aid in the identification and assistance of students who are experiencing

academic challenges, and provided faculty advisors with numerous professional development opportunities related to academic advising. At the core of the QEP, however, was the revamped curriculum of the vertical transfer-track student success course, ACA 122. The course curriculum was altered to focus heavily on preparing vertical transfer-track students to transfer successfully to the 4-year institution.

Assessment of the QEP's impact on student learning in the ACA 122 classroom indicates that the initiative overall was somewhat successful in helping most vertical transfer-track students at WCC acquire the skills, knowledge, and expertise needed to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. Furthermore, the performance of vertical transfer students who transferred from WCC to a 4-year institution, according to the metrics that the NCCCS uses, is above the NC community college average (NCCCS, 2019, 2021). Undoubtedly, this was due in part to the efforts that have been made and are being made by students, faculty, and staff at the College. However, there remains work to be done to ensure that every vertical transfer-track student at WCC is adequately prepared when they transfer to their 4-year institution, and, once there, is successful in earning their bachelor's degree.

Therefore, part of the present study's focus of practice, which is discussed in greater detail in the following section, was to understand how the current iteration of ACA 122 at WCC provides Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students. It is important to note that previous initiatives and strategies implemented by the College to increase vertical transfer student performance, including the most recent QEP, were designed and assessed largely using quantitative data. Until this time there have not been any attempts at WCC to increase vertical transfer student success and performance using qualitative inquiry. By examining vertical transfer student performance through a qualitative lens, the present study provided information

on the unique individual experiences of those who are most impacted by policies and practices implemented to increase vertical transfer student performance. The present study was also the first time the concept of TSC has been explicitly applied to the design of the ACA 122 course curriculum to affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC.

Statement of Focus of Practice

The focus of this inquiry was to understand how the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College provided Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students, to identify and implement changes to ACA 122 to improve the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students, and to understand and assess how the changes made to ACA 122 may affect the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students.

Nearly 40% of all first-time college attendees in the United States begin their post-secondary education at a community college (Ginder et al., 2015; Shapiro et al., 2016). The community college has increasingly become the entry point for many students, especially those from under-represented populations, whose goal is to transfer to a 4-year institution to pursue a baccalaureate education (Handel, 2013; Horn, 2009; Horn & Skomsvold, 2011; LaSota & Zumeta, 2016). However, for numerous reasons, many of these students never accomplish their goal of earning a bachelor's degree (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006). Given the fact that 42% of the students who begin their post-secondary education at the community college are from low-income families, it is clear that socioeconomic status plays an integral role in determining vertical transfer student success and performance (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011). In North Carolina specifically, community college students from low-income

families are less likely than community college students from high-income families to earn a bachelor's degree after transferring from a community college to a 4-year institution (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Wayne County, the location of WCC and the context of the present study, is a mostly rural county and among the most impoverished counties in North Carolina. Wayne County also has one of the lowest rates of bachelor's degree attainment in the state.

The decision to understand how the current iteration of ACA 122 at WCC provided Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students was made for several reasons. First, ACA 122, as mandated by the NCCCS, is a required course for all students pursuing what is colloquially known as a "college transfer degree" (e.g. Associate in Arts; Associate in Science). Because students are required to take the course, ACA 122 has the potential to help a large portion of the student population at WCC. Beyond the context of the study, however, the findings can serve to assist other NCCCS institutions in preparing their vertical transfer-track students to transfer to a 4-year institution. Second, it is important to note that the student learning objectives of the course, as prescribed by the NCCCS, align with the concept of TSC. Assessing ACA 122 to ensure that these course objectives are being fully met, and therefore providing the necessary transfer-related skills, knowledge, and expertise to the students who take the course, is of major importance for the vertical transfer-track students at WCC and the College as a whole. Lastly, and possibly most crucial for the study to be conducted as intended, is the fact that I am currently the ACA 122 coordinator at the College. Because the study took place within my actionable space, there was a stronger possibility that positive change would be enacted.

Ultimately, the end result of the present study was to improve the vertical transfer performance of the students who attend WCC before transferring to a 4-year institution. By doing so, the College is creating increased social mobility among the citizens of Wayne County.

Being a mostly rural, low-income county, increasing the educational attainment of the citizens in Wayne County is an effective way for individuals and families to move into higher socio-economic levels and decrease economic inequalities (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006). When WCC students, who are often first-generation college students, transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution with their bachelor's degree or higher, they are providing a stable foundation for themselves, their families, and their community upon which to improve their socio-economic outcomes (Harris, 1996; Hollenbeck & Kimmel, 2002; London, 2005). The present study may aid the citizens of Wayne County in improving their lives through education by increasing and sustaining economic and social mobility.

Focus of Practice Guiding Questions

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. How does the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?
2. How can the current ACA 122 course be changed to better provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?
3. How do the changes implemented in the ACA 122 course affect the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?

Overview of Inquiry

To answer these questions, an action-research inquiry design was used. In general, action-research is “systematic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical, and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry” (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990, p. 148). Due to the focus of practice, the cyclical nature of the present study, and active participation by participants

and stakeholders, action-research was appropriate. In keeping with the tenets of action-research, the present study was comprised of three phases, or cycles of inquiry, in which I created a plan of action to improve what was already happening, acted to implement the plan, observed the effects of the action in the study's context, and reflected on these effects for further planning and subsequent action (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Phase I

In Phase I, the aim was to understand how the current iteration of ACA 122 at WCC provided TSC to vertical transfer-track students and how the course could be improved to better provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. During Phase I, qualitative data was collected by interviewing current vertical transfer-track students to understand their perceptions of ACA 122 as they related to how the course provided them with TSC. Interviews were also used to gather recommendations from students related to improvements that can be made to the current ACA 122 course to affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. Vertical transfer-track students who completed ACA 122 were eligible to participate during Phase I. Potential student participants were identified by creating an enrollment report that listed all the students who completed ACA 122. Potential participants were contacted via email. Student interviews were conducted in-person. Initially, the goal was to interview 12-16 students. Justification for this range of student interviews stemmed from the research conducted by Guest et al. (2006) who found that thematic saturation, or the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data, largely occurs after 12 interviews. Several similar studies serve to confirm their findings (Francis et al., 2010; Hagaman & Wutich, 2017; Namey et al., 2016). However, due to the difficulty in recruiting student participants caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, a total of five students were interviewed during Phase I.

Qualitative data was also collected by interviewing faculty who had taught ACA 122 within the last two years to understand their perceptions of ACA 122 as they related to how the course provided TSC to the vertical transfer-track students who were enrolled in their course section. These faculty members were identified by me and contacted via email. Faculty interviews were also used to gather recommendations for how the current ACA 122 course can be changed to affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. Faculty interviews were conducted virtually. Initially, 12-16 faculty interviews were to be conducted. However, a total of nine faculty interviews were conducted during Phase I, which took place between June 2021 and November 2021.

Phase II

In Phase II, the aim was to design an ACA 122 course that better provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students. The design of the course was based on the qualitative baseline data collected during Phase I, as well as the strategies for enhancing the long-term positive effects of student success courses discussed in Chapter 2. The baseline data analysis was conducted by me and subsequently reviewed by the student and faculty participants from Phase I, as well as several inquiry partners who are administrators at WCC. Phase II resulted in the redesigned ACA 122 course to be implemented and assessed during Phase III. Phase II took place between November 2021 and February 2022.

Phase III

In Phase III, the aim was to implement the redesigned ACA 122 course and to understand and assess how the changes made to ACA 122 may have affected the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. During this Phase, qualitative data was to be collected by interviewing vertical transfer-track students to understand their perceptions of the

redesigned ACA 122 course as they relate to how the course provided them with TSC. Initially, vertical transfer-track students who completed the redesigned ACA 122 course during the fall semester of 2021 were eligible to participate during Phase III. Student interviews were to be conducted in-person, or if the situation necessitates, virtually. Similar to student interviews conducted in Phase I, a goal of 12-16 student interviews was to be conducted in Phase III. Qualitative data was also to be collected by interviewing the three faculty who taught one of the three course sections of the redesigned ACA 122 course to understand their perceptions of the course as they related to how it provided TSC to the vertical transfer-track students who were enrolled in their course section. The student and faculty data collected during this phase was to be compared to the student and faculty data collected during Phase I. Through collaboration with the study's inquiry partners, the data was intended to be used to make further improvements to ACA 122.

Phase III was intended to take place between August 2021 and February 2022. However, due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions which adjusted the timeline of the study, Phase III was not conducted in the timeframe initially proposed. Further details describing why Phase III was not conducted as intended and information pertaining to when and how Phase III will be conducted in the future are included in Chapters 4 and 5.

Inquiry Partners

Stakeholders are defined as those individuals who are affected by organizational change. When implementing any changes within an organization, it is essential that all relevant people are engaged. Without adequate stakeholder engagement, the success of any implemented changes is likely to suffer (Hodges, 2018). For the purposes of the present study, stakeholders

included vertical transfer-track students who had taken ACA 122, faculty members who had taught and/or are teaching ACA 122, and several members of the College's administration.

Engaging with vertical transfer-track students was critical for understanding how the current iteration of ACA 122 at WCC provided TSC to vertical transfer-track students. Implementing changes to ACA 122 to affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students without first receiving feedback from this group of students would be ineffectual. The participation of faculty who have taught ACA 122 is of almost equal importance. These faculty members who have taught the course know first-hand what is and what is not working. Also, as the current ACA 122 coordinator, I have witnessed that many faculty members who have taught the course are incredibly talented at developing creative ways in which to teach the course's content. Tapping into this talent and creativity will only serve to enhance the improvements made to ACA 122. Furthermore, faculty who are teaching ACA 122 are ultimately the ones who will be responsible for enacting change. Engaging via collaboration with these faculty during the course's redesign process helped garner support for and lower resistance to the changes that were implemented (Holbeche & Matthews, 2012).

When implementing changes that impact students and faculty, support from key administrators is also essential. Administrators involved with the present study included the Vice President (VP) of Academic and Student Services, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, the Director of the College Transfer Advising Center (CTAC), and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Innovation (IEI). These inquiry partners served to provide guidance and feedback during all phases of the inquiry process. Inquiry partners were also needed to address any researcher bias that might have occurred during analysis of the data. For this reason, all analyses were shared with and reviewed by the aforementioned administrator inquiry partners.

Theoretical Foundation

The present study was guided by and drew upon the concept of Transfer Student Capital (TSC). Developed initially using quantitative analysis by Laanan (1998), the concept of TSC suggests that community college students acquire skills, knowledge, and expertise related to the transfer process during their time at the community college. In other words, community college students build capital, such as understanding how credits will transfer, the GPA requirements for transfer, etc., that facilitate their transition from the community college to the 4-year institution (Laanan et al., 2010). As the accumulation of a student's TSC increases, so does the student's likelihood of transferring successfully and ultimately earning a bachelor's degree (Lannan, 2007). Since its inception, the concept of TSC has been expanded upon by several qualitative studies (Mobley & Brawner, 2019; Moser, 2012, 2014; Starobin et al., 2016). The present study intended to add to the limited body of qualitative research that exists concerning the concept of TSC and the impact that TSC has on vertical transfer performance as a whole and within the context of the study. A detailed description of the study's theoretical foundation is included in Chapter 2.

Definition of Key Terms

Appreciative advising: A student-centered advising approach designed to help students enhance their educational experiences, achieve their goals, and fulfill their potential by asking students generative, open-ended questions (Bloom et al., 2008).

Articulation agreement: An agreement between community colleges and 4-year institutions, which are oftentimes legal documents crafted by state legislatures, to facilitate the transfer of general education requirements from community colleges to 4-year institutions. These agreements also typically include policies and procedures surrounding the process of transferring

from a community college to a 4-year institution (Kintzer & Wattenbarger, 1985; Taylor & Jain, 2017).

Dually-enrolled students: Students who are simultaneously enrolled in high school and at a community college taking college-level courses that count as high school and college credit (Karp et al., 2007).

Open-door admissions policy: The guarantee that an institution makes to applicants that ensures they will be accepted to the institution if they meet the basic requirement of having earned a high school diploma or equivalent. These types of admission policies are commonly practiced at community colleges (Ingram & Morrissey, 2009).

Transfer Student Capital: The skills, knowledge, and expertise related to the transfer process acquired by vertical transfer-track students during their time at the community college (Laanan, 1998, 2004, 2007).

Vertical transfer: The typical definition of transfer where a student transfers from a two-year college to a 4-year college (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007).

Vertical transfer student: A student who began their post-secondary education at a community college and has transferred to a 4-year institution to earn a bachelor's degree (Zhang et al., 2017).

Vertical transfer-track student: A student who begins their post-secondary education at a community college with the intention of transferring to a 4-year institution to earn a bachelor's degree.

Vertical transfer student success course: A course, typically offered at community colleges, for vertical transfer-track students to prepare them to successfully transfer to and persist at a 4-year institution.

Assumptions

For the present study to be conducted, several assumptions were made. It was assumed that participants interviewed would be honest and forthright when answering interview questions. It was made known to study participants that the information they provided would be kept confidential and that anonymity would be preserved by using pseudonyms to present any data or results. The value that was provided to the study by participants answering questions truthfully and candidly was also explicitly expressed. The selection criteria used to select participants was also assumed to ensure that all participants have experienced the ACA 122 course either as a student who had taken the course or as an instructor who had taught the course. It was also assumed that the faculty who teach the redesigned ACA 122 course would do so fully and to the best of their ability. To help with this, the faculty who were selected to teach the redesigned ACA 122 course were volunteers and were selected based on their enthusiasm with which they taught the course previously.

There were also assumptions made of qualitative research that are relevant to the present study. It was assumed that the reality of each participant is subjective and that each participant may therefore have a different experience of reality (Hasse & Myers, 1988; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although participant realities are subjective, it was assumed that they are as legitimate as any objective data sources. In qualitative research, it is assumed that the researcher and the participant are interrelated, the participant is viewed as a partner of the researcher, and that researcher-participant interrelation influences the entire research process (Hasse & Myers, 1988). Assumptions specific to the study's research methodology, action-research, are included in Chapter 3.

Scope and Delimitations

The present study was conducted within predetermined boundaries to manage the size and scope of the study so that it was feasible and focused. Improving or increasing vertical transfer success is a complex and complicated endeavor. The research focused on this topic varies widely and the practical approaches used to help vertical transfer students achieve their academic goals are plentiful. Therefore, I decided to focus the present study on increasing the amount of TSC that ACA 122 provides to vertical transfer-track students at WCC. Other factors that influence vertical transfer success but are not directly related to increasing the amount of TSC provided by ACA 122, were not included in the present study. The present study was intended to focus specifically on vertical transfer-track students at WCC. Therefore, the findings of the inquiry were not intended to be generalizable outside of the context of the study.

Limitations

The present study was limited by the shortcomings that are associated with the selected inquiry design. The qualitative nature of the present study created several limitations. One of the major limitations of the present study was time. Engaging in qualitative research and conducting interviews with participants are time-consuming processes. Analyzing qualitative data is also laborious. The number of participants that can be included in this type of study was limited by the finite amount of time allotted for the project to be completed.

Other limitations of the present study are the transferability and dependability of the study. Transferability is the extent to which the study's findings can be applied in other contexts. To increase transferability of the study, the use of thick description was used to present the study's findings (Lincoln et al., 2018). Dependability is the extent to which the study can be repeated by others and that the findings of such studies would be consistent with the findings of

the present study. To increase dependability of the study, the methods and inquiry procedures used are described in as much detail as possible in Chapter 3 (Yin, 2014). Limitations specific to the study's research methodology, action-research, are included in Chapter 3.

Significance of Inquiry

The present study was significant in advancing equity and social justice, as well as advancing practices within higher education.

Advancing Equity and Social Justice

The educational attainment gap between low-income and high-income students is a persistent problem area in the field of higher education. The participants selected for inclusion in this study, vertical transfer-track students from a community college situated in a rural, low-income area of North Carolina, was purposeful and done so with the hope that the information and insights gathered will be able to assist in shrinking this gap. It is important to note that the present study did aim to help all vertical transfer-track students at WCC, regardless of background, social class, ethnicity, or age, achieve their goal of successfully transferring to and graduating from a 4-year institution. Although this was the case, this study may improve the likelihood that vertical transfer-track students at WCC who do come from low-income families, are first-generation college students, or are otherwise underrepresented receive the necessary skills, knowledge, and expertise that they need to earn a baccalaureate education. By assisting this population of students in their pursuit to earn a bachelor's degree, this study may increase underrepresented students' ability to enhance their own social and economic mobility, as well as the social and economic mobility of their families and their communities.

Advances in Practice

Within the context of the present study and beyond, several advances in practice were anticipated. First, the study may have aided in changing the culture currently surrounding ACA 122 at WCC. Currently, based on having taught the various iterations of the course for nearly 10 years, students do not always take the course seriously. Some students appear to assume that because the course is only worth one credit hour, that it is either not worth their time or not an important component to achieving success. By working closely with vertical transfer-track students to redesign the course, student attitudes towards the course will hopefully begin to, albeit slowly, change from unimportant to critical for current and future academic success. This culture change may increase students' effort while taking the course, which may result in them benefiting more from the course both in the short-term and long-term. In addition to changing student attitudes, the present study may also create a change in faculty attitudes toward the course. In some cases, faculty are not always enthusiastic about teaching ACA 122, which becomes evident in the amount of time and attention they give to the course and their students. Involving faculty in the redesign of the course could begin the process of increasing faculty enthusiasm for the course, enhance their teaching experience, and subsequently the experiences of the vertical transfer-track students who enroll in their ACA 122 course sections.

Second, the present study may have created a renewed interest in ACA 122 among WCC administrators. By demonstrating the positive impact that the course can make on vertical transfer-track student success at WCC and the 4-year institution, the present study may have increased the real value of the course, which in turn may have increased the perceived value of the course. Recognizing the value of ACA 122, administrators at WCC may decide to allocate more resources towards studying, enhancing, and teaching the course. With this type of impact, it

might be possible to create a standalone academic department with faculty whose responsibility is to only teach ACA 122.

Third, the findings of the present study, although not intended to be generalizable beyond the context of the study, may be valuable for other community colleges in the state. Within the NCCCS, ACA 122 is a required course for all students pursing a college transfer degree (e.g. Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Associate in Engineering, etc.). As a system of community colleges with similar goals in mind, it is important that information is shared among the 58 community colleges in the state. Because of this, the present study has the potential to bring about positive change to the vertical transfer student-related practices of other NCCCS institutions who are wanting to improve the success of their own vertical transfer-track students. By ensuring that ACA 122 on their campus is providing students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise that they need to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution, these institutions are not only helping themselves and the students they serve but are also helping the entire NCCCS system achieve success.

Summary

Chapter 1 provided information necessary to understand the background of the focus of practice, the context of the study, the statement of focus of practice, and the focus of practice guiding questions. Also discussed is a brief overview of the inquiry procedures, the inquiry partners of the study, the theoretical foundation of the study, definitions of key terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the inquiry.

In Chapter 2, an expanded discussion of the theoretical foundation used for this study, Laanan's Transfer Student Capital, is included, as well as a review of the literature relevant to the present study. Literature review topics covered include the role of the community college,

vertical transfer-track students, student success courses, community college student perceptions of student success courses, community college faculty perceptions of student success courses, and enhancing long-term positive effects of student success courses.

In Chapter 3, details on the methods of inquiry utilized for data collection in this study are discussed. The rationale and considerations made for using the selected methods of inquiry are also included.

In Chapter 4, the results of the study are discussed. Also included in the chapter is the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the methods of inquiry outlined in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 5, a discussion of the results is included. Additionally, the implications of the findings for practice, the social justice impact of the study, recommendations for future research, and a reflection about my experience conducting the study are discussed.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The focus of this inquiry was to understand how the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College provides Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students, to identify and implement changes to ACA 122 to improve the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students, and to understand and assess how the changes made to ACA 122 may affect the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students. The following chapter provides the rationale for and a detailed explanation of the theoretical foundation of the study, as well as a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the focus of practice.

Theoretical Foundation

To understand the adjustment process for students transitioning to the college environment, there exist numerous theoretical foundations from which to choose. One of the most widely cited and relied upon theoretical foundations used is Tinto's Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure (Milem & Berger, 1997). Central to the theory is the assumption that the degree to which a student is integrated into the academic and social communities of the college directly influences commitment to the institution and the likelihood that the student will persist (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Another highly respected theoretical foundation is Astin's Student Involvement Theory. According to Astin (1975), there are two main factors predicting the outcome of the adjustment process for entering college students. These factors are personal factors, such as past academic grades, educational aspirations, and study habits, and environmental factors, such as employment and academic involvement. Although these two theoretical foundations have near paradigmatic status within the field of higher education, they are largely focused on the adjustment process of students transitioning from high school to the 4-

year institution. Because of this, they do not neatly apply to the adjustment process experienced by vertical transfer students as they transition from the community college to the 4-year institution. Furthermore, they do not take into consideration the experiences of vertical transfer-track students while they are enrolled at the community college. For these reasons, Laanan's Transfer Student Capital was used as the theoretical foundation of the present study.

In many studies focused on the adjustment process for vertical transfer students, the term "transfer shock" is commonly used to describe the temporary reduction in GPA that many vertical transfer students experience during their first semester after transferring (Diaz, 1992; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Hills, 1965; Knoell & Medsker, 1965; Peng & Bailey, 1977; Townsend, 1995). Another term used to describe the social and psychological aspects involved in the experience of moving from one educational institution to another is culture shock (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Unfortunately, the number of studies conducted to determine why transfer shock occurs, as well as the social and psychological aspects of vertical transfer adjustment, is limited (Laanan, 2004).

To create a new framework in which to study the vertical transfer student experience and move beyond "transfer shock," Laanan (1998) developed the Laanan-Transfer Students' Questionnaire (L-TSQ). Designed to measure vertical transfer students' non-cognitive and affective traits, the L-TSQ consists of 304 survey items and is organized into three main sections: social demographics; community college experiences; and university experiences (Laanan, 1998, 2004, 2007). The social demographics section contains items related to background information, such as year transferred, community college attended, high school GPA, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment of parents. The community college experiences section contains items such as hours spent on campus, time spent preparing for class, quality of effort in courses, and

participation in campus organizations. The university experiences section contains items such as major, GPA, reasons for transferring, experiences with faculty, and participation in campus organizations (Laanan, 2004).

Following the creation and testing of the L-TSQ, Laanan et al. (2010) expanded upon this new framework for studying vertical transfer student experiences by testing a hypothetical predictive model for academic transfer adjustment and social transfer adjustment. Each predictive model includes student background characteristics, community college and 4-year experiences of the student, and sources of transfer student capital. The researchers concluded that, among other factors, academic adjustment was positively impacted by academic counseling experiences at the community college and learning and study skills acquired at the community college. Both of these factors are sources of Transfer Student Capital (Laanan et al., 2010).

Defined by Laanan (2004, 2007), TSC refers to the skills, knowledge, and expertise that community college students acquire during their time at the community college that help them navigate through the transfer process. Students can gather TSC from a variety of sources, including peers, family members, high schools, and community college advisors and faculty (Maliszewski Lukso & Hayes, 2020). Examples of TSC are varied and include understanding how credits will transfer to the 4-year institution, GPA requirements for transfer, increasing self-efficacy for transfer, learning from others' experiences, knowledge of financial aid, and information about experiences at the 4-year institution after transferring (Laanan et al., 2010; Maliszewski Lukso & Hayes, 2020). As the amount of TSC acquired by a student increases, so does that student's likelihood of vertical transfer student success (Laanan, 2007).

To better understand the complexity of the vertical transfer experience, Moser (2012) furthered the concept of TSC by adding and testing several new constructs to the T-LSQ that are

specific to student experiences at the community college. Included in these additions are community college staff validation, community college faculty validation, community college faculty mentoring, formal collaboration with community college faculty, financial knowledge, coping style, motivation, self-efficacy, and social support at the 4-year institution. These additional constructs were found to be significantly related to vertical transfer students' adjustment (Moser, 2012). For example, transfer students were more likely to earn higher GPAs at the transfer institution if they had formally collaborated with faculty at the community college. This collaboration acts to increase students' beliefs that they can be successful at the transfer institution, as well as strengthens their intentions to complete their bachelor's degree. Furthermore, transfer students who had a faculty mentor at the community college were well-practiced in communicating with faculty and therefore better equipped to effectively approach faculty when problems arose at the transfer institution (Moser, 2014).

Although somewhat limited, there exists valuable qualitative research investigating the impact of TSC on student retention and persistence. Focused on the experiences of female vertical transfer students majoring in STEM fields, Starobin et al. (2016) deconstructed the concept of TSC by exploring how cultural and social capital impacts vertical transfer student success and performance. The researchers concluded that students who transferred to the 4-year institution more easily had greater amounts of cultural and social capital than those students who found the transfer transition more difficult. To better understand the sources of TSC and how TSC is used by vertical transfer students at the 4-year institution, Maliszewski Lukszo and Hayes (2020) determined that family and peers act as students' main source of TSC. It was also found that although advisors and faculty at the community college did not serve as a main source of TSC, they did provide encouragement and support to students which helped to build their self-

efficacy for transfer. According to the researchers, increased self-efficacy for transfer can motivate vertical transfer-track students to work to increase their academic success and give them the confidence to apply to 4-year institutions where they previously thought they had very little chance of being accepted (Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020).

A review of the relevant literature related to the focus of practice follows. Literature review topics discussed include the role of the community college, vertical transfer-track students, student success courses, community college student perceptions of student success courses, community college faculty perceptions of student success courses, and enhancing the long-term positive effects of student success courses.

The Role of the Community College

From their original purpose of providing post-secondary education to help young people be better homemakers or local workers (Cohen, 2001), to their present-day mission of providing high school equivalencies, workforce training, and various associate's degrees to all who wish to further their education (Grubbs, 2019), community colleges are an integral part of the American higher education system. Community colleges, sometimes referred to as city colleges, county colleges, technical colleges, or junior colleges, are an American invention (Grubbs, 2019) that date to the early 20th century (Dougherty, 1994). In the United States today, there are over 1,000 community colleges (Carnegie Foundation, 2019) providing a plethora of educational services beyond the high school level to millions of individuals, allowing them to earn credentials and qualifications that positively influence and impact their lives and the lives of their families.

Though community colleges offer an extensive number of academic programs and credentials to a diverse student population, one of the most essential functions of the community college is to prepare students to transfer to a 4-year institution (Dougherty et al., 2017; Laanan,

2007; Taylor & Jain, 2017; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Wang et al., 2016). In fact, one of the reasons why the creation of community colleges was desired is because 4-year institutions believed that they would be able to “abandon their freshman and sophomore classes and relegate the function of teaching adolescents to [the community colleges]” and they “would not become true research and professional development centers until they relinquished their lower-division preparatory work [to the community colleges]” (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 6). Although the teaching of general education courses (i.e. freshman and sophomore courses) by 4-year institutions did not cease to exist, the notion that the role of community colleges is to provide students with these types of courses so that they can transfer to a 4-year institution remains popular. Today, community colleges are heavily invested in being the postsecondary entry point for vertical transfer-track students and many of the policies, practices, and programs are centered around that student population.

Existing in the middle ground between high schools and 4-year institutions, the role of the community college is multifaceted and complex. Observed from several perspectives, community colleges can be considered centers for providing occupational education for those wanting to enter the workforce, offering continuing education for those needing to enhance their skills, assisting the academically underprepared through developmental education, enhancing communities through cultural education, and preparing those looking to earn a baccalaureate education. For many, the role of the community college is to provide all these functions to the communities they serve (Cohen et al., 2014).

The role of the community college is oftentimes influenced by where it sits within the educational spectrum. On the secondary education side of this spectrum, community colleges are required to work with high schools to ensure that graduation standards are satisfactorily aligned

and prepare students for college-level coursework. On the postsecondary side of the spectrum, community colleges must develop and maintain mutually beneficial partnerships with 4-year institutions to provide a seamless pathway for vertical transfer-track students to earn a bachelor's degree (Cohen et al., 2014). Outside of this education spectrum, community colleges are also called upon by local business owners, industry leaders, and government officials to assist in training the unemployed or underemployed, increase the skills of workers, and to aid in the economic development of the community (Dougherty et al., 2017). Community colleges must therefore take into consideration the educational institutions on either side of them, as well as entities within their surrounding area when developing and enacting programs and policies (Cohen et al., 2014).

While it is understood that community colleges can serve many roles simultaneously, the focus of this study necessitates the need to discuss at greater length the community college function of preparing entering postsecondary students for vertical transfer. According to some of the most recent calculations, approximately 80% of students entering community colleges state that they aspire to earn a baccalaureate degree (Cohen et al., 2014; CCRC, 2018). Because many students entering the community college have the desire to transfer to a 4-year institution, community colleges, community college systems, and state legislatures have spent a substantial amount of time and resources on this student population.

Commitment to the success of the vertical transfer-track student population is apparent in several ways. At the local-level, many community colleges have adopted the use of the "guided pathways" model intended to help entering vertical transfer-track students choose and stay on an academic pathway intended to move them towards successfully transferring to a 4-year institution (Bailey et al., 2015; Jenkins et al., 2017). Implementing this type of program involves

many changes within the community college. These changes include redesigning academic programs and courses, revamping advising structures and processes, and ensuring that course and program learning outcomes align with those at the 4-year institution (Dougherty et al., 2017). Because of the complexity and extensive variation of degree programs at 4-year institutions, developing these guided pathways for vertical transfer-track students require that community colleges and 4-year institutions work collaboratively.

Community colleges have also implemented practices that “create a transfer-affirming culture that permeates the community college and is clearly reflected in their mission, organization, and public presentation” (Dougherty et al., 2017, p. 16). Specific measures to create a transfer-affirming culture include ensuring that instruction is rigorous and equal to that of the 4-year institution (Wyner et al., 2016), encouraging vertical transfer-track students to complete an associate’s degree before transferring (Jenkins & Fink, 2016), and improving the quality of advising for vertical transfer-track students (Dougherty et al., 2017). To implement these measures, along with changes needed when adopting the guided pathway model, community colleges are required to devote an appreciable number of resources towards vertical transfer-track students in an environment where resources are already scarce and where community colleges are expected to provide adequate support for all of the students they serve.

To help support the community college role of preparing vertical transfer-track students for transfer to the 4-year institution, community college systems and state legislatures oftentimes create programs and policies specific to vertical transfer. At the state-level, one of the most utilized strategies demonstrating a commitment to the success of vertical transfer-track students is the use of articulation agreements (Taylor & Jain, 2017). Although there exists variation between articulation agreements state-to-state, these documents, which are oftentimes legal

documents, are generally intended to facilitate vertical transfer and include policies that aim to increase the number of students who successfully transfer to a 4-year institution. Vertical transfer-friendly policies found in these articulation agreements include establishing an agreed upon set of general education and pre-major courses that universally transfer to 4-year institutions, creating a common course numbering system for community colleges to use (ECS, 2020), assuring admission into a 4-year institution for students who complete an associate's degree (Smith, 2010), and providing additional funding to community colleges based on various transfer-related metrics (Taylor & Jain, 2017). Unfortunately, research focused on the impact of articulation agreements is limited and findings are mixed. While some studies have indicated that articulation agreements do positively impact educational outcomes for vertical transfer-track students (Baker, 2016; Gross & Goldhaber, 2009; LaSota & Zumeta, 2016), other studies found that these agreements had no effect on vertical transfer (Anderson et al., 2006; Roksa & Keith, 2008).

Vertical Transfer-Track Students

Vertical transfer-track students are students who begin their postsecondary education at a community college with the intention of transferring to a 4-year institution to earn a bachelor's degree. As is the case with the community college student population as a whole, the vertical transfer-track student population is also highly diverse. To describe who this community college student sub-population is, the following section provides details pertaining to the demographic makeup of vertical transfer-track students in the state of North Carolina who are 18 years or older. Also included, is a discussion focusing on the expectations, perceptions, and experiences related to the vertical transfer process that is unique to this student sub-population. Although most of the research focused on the expectations, perceptions, and experiences of vertical

transfer-track students occurs after the student has transferred, the information gleaned from these studies is still useful to the present study. By highlighting who these students are, where they come from, and what their perspective of higher education looks like, the contextual understanding of the student population included in the present study is enhanced.

NCCCS Vertical Transfer-Track Student Demographics

Between the fall 2015 and fall 2019 semesters, the demographic composition of NCCCS vertical transfer-track students, not including dual-enrolled students, has changed in several ways. During this time period, the total number of NCCCS vertical transfer-track students has decreased (see Table 1). The enrollment of full-time students, part-time students, male students, and female students have followed along the same declining trend. Although student enrollment in each of these categories has decreased over this time period, the number of part-time students enrolled has remained higher than the number of full-time students enrolled. Also, the number of female students enrolled has remained higher than male students enrolled (NCCCS, 2020).

The racial/ethnic composition of NCCCS vertical-transfer track students, not including dual-enrolled students, has also changed during this time (see Table 2). From the fall 2015 semester to the fall 2019 semester, the number and percentage of students who identified as being White, Black, Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Native American, or Unknown Race/Ethnicity decreased. However, the number and overall percentage of students who identified as being either Hispanic or of Multiple Races/Ethnicities increased (NCCCS, 2020).

The ages of NCCCS vertical transfer-track students, not including dual-enrolled students, has changed slightly between the fall 2015 semester and the fall 2019 semester (see Table 3). The age group with the greatest number of students during this time period has been students in the 18-24-year-old range, however, the number and overall percentage of these

Table 1

NCCCS Vertical Transfer-Track Student Enrollment Trends – Fall 2015 and Fall 2019

Number of students	Fall 2015	Fall 2019	% Change
Total	83,588	76,036	-9.03
Full-Time Students	40,889	36,950	-9.63
Part-Time Students	42,699	39,086	-15.58
Male Students	33,422	28,697	-14.14
Female Students	50,166	47,399	-5.52

Note. Adapted from “Analytics and Reporting: Dashboards,” by NCCCS, 2020 (<https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/analytics/dashboards/enrollment-curriculum>).

Table 2

NCCCS Vertical Transfer-Track Student Race/Ethnic Composition – Fall 2015 & Fall 2019

Race/Ethnicity	Fall 2015		Fall 2019		% Change
	n	%	n	%	
White	47,251	56.53	40,465	53.22	-14.36
Black	18,790	22.48	16,581	21.81	-11.76
Hispanic	8,365	10.01	9,949	13.08	+18.84
Asian	2,496	2.99	2,381	3.13	-4.61
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	178	0.21	150	.20	-15.73
Native American	1,301	1.56	1,045	1.37	-19.68
Multiple	2,377	2.84	2,652	3.49	+11.57
Unknown	2,830	3.39	2,813	3.70	-0.6

Note. Adapted from “Analytics and Reporting: Dashboards,” by NCCCS, 2020 (<https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/analytics/dashboards/enrollment-curriculum>).

Table 3

NCCCS Vertical Transfer-Track Student Ages – Fall 2015 & Fall 2019

Age Range	Fall 2015		Fall 2019		% Change
	n	%	n	%	
<18	3,207	3.84	3,885	5.12	+21.14
18-24	55,770	66.72	52,223	68.68	-6.36
25-44	21,356	25.55	17,493	23.01	-18.09
45-64	3,167	3.79	2,348	3.09	-25.86
65+	88	0.11	87	0.11	-1.14

Note. Adapted from “Analytics and Reporting: Dashboards,” by NCCCS, 2020 (<https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/analytics/dashboards/enrollment-curriculum>).

students has declined. Students between the ages of 25 and 44 comprise the second largest age group during this time period. The number and overall percentage of these students has also declined. The age group with the greatest overall percentage increase is the < 18-year-old age group (NCCCS, 2020).

Vertical Transfer-Track Student Expectations

There exists much research concerning the expectations of traditional-age 4-year institution students. However, at this time, there is very little research focused on the expectations that vertical transfer-track students hold. However, interviews of vertical transfer-track students have yielded some interesting insights. Moving from the community college to the 4-year institution, vertical transfer-track students expect larger class sizes, a larger and more diverse student population, and less approachable faculty. Overall, vertical transfer-track students expect their 4-year transfer institution experience to be different from their community college experience (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007).

In some cases, research focused on vertical-transfer track student expectations is conducted after they transfer to a 4-year institution. In a case-study that involved interviews with faculty and staff at a 4-year institution to better facilitate vertical transfer-track student success, Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) found that many vertical transfer students hold untrue expectations about their 4-year, transfer institution. These expectations, or assumptions, are manufactured through the vertical transfer student's past experiences at the community college (Monroe, 2006). One staff interviewee from the study stated that “[vertical] transfer students come in with a lot more preconceived notions than freshmen [and] assume a lot of things are the same [as at their previous institution, but] every college does [things] differently” (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012, p. 397). Another participant in the study added that vertical transfer students coming from

small community colleges to a large 4-year institution mistakenly expect that staff and faculty members at the 4-year, transfer institution will do things for them as staff and faculty members had done for them at the community college. For example, vertical transfer students might expect that someone at the 4-year institution will contact them to apply for financial aid because that was their experience at the community college. Unfortunately, however, this type of outreach does not typically occur at a 4-year institution and can result in the student feeling confused or frustrated (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012).

Vertical Transfer-Track Student Perceptions

Most of the research focused on vertical transfer-track student perceptions takes place after the student has transferred to the 4-year institution. A case-study conducted by Townsend (1995) focused on the perceptions that a group of vertical transfer students had about various aspects of the 4-year transfer institution. The perceptual aspects included in the study were academic standards, tests and assignments, student-student interactions, student-faculty interactions, faculty attitudes and behaviors, and student attitudes and behaviors. Most of the students involved perceived the academic standards of the 4-year, transfer institution as being greater than that of the community college. Several vertical transfer students also felt that attending community college did not adequately prepare them for coursework at the 4-year, transfer institution. Many vertical transfer students were concerned that their writing abilities were not suited to meet the writing demands that many tests and assignments required. Some vertical transfer students were surprised to encounter a level of competitiveness among the native students at the 4-year, transfer institution that resulted in less cooperation among students. In some cases, vertical transfer students were afraid to ask questions in class because they did not want to be perceived by other students as unintelligent. Some vertical transfer students believed

that the faculty members at the 4-year, transfer institution were accessible, but over half perceived faculty as unhelpful, dismissive, and unsympathetic when they asked for assistance (Townsend, 1995).

In a more recent study, Gard et al. (2012) investigated the perceptions of vertical transfer students as they relate to transitioning to the 4-year institution. Using focus groups, it was found that vertical students perceived the financial aid process as being biased and difficult to navigate. They also perceived that the amount of financial aid that was awarded was not appropriate given the much higher cost of attending the transfer institution.

A North Carolina-based study focusing on how the experiences and perceptions of vertical transfer students can be used by administrators to improve vertical transfer success found that vertical transfer students perceived themselves as being quite different than the native students at the 4-year, transfer institution (Walker & Okpala, 2017). Overall, vertical transfer students felt that native students were better prepared academically and technologically. They also felt that they did not belong or were not as much of a part of the 4-year institution as were the native students. Because of these differences, the vertical transfer students in the study felt that the resources available to them were not designed to meet their unique needs. One such need, orientation to the institution, was tailored to freshmen students and not specific to vertical transfer students. Although these vertical transfer students were experienced, they still needed an orientation to the new academic environment. Participants also expressed that because they were different from native students, they faced non-academic barriers to success that native students did not experience. In particular, vertical transfer students voiced concern about having to work full-time to support their families and faculty being too rigid with due dates. They stated that

some faculty did not take into consideration these barriers and that negatively impacted their retention and persistence (Walker & Okpala, 2017).

Vertical Transfer-Track Student Experiences

There currently exists a limited number of studies that focus on the experiences of vertical transfer-track students at the transfer institution (Nunez & Yoshimi, 2017). However, a large portion of the research that has been conducted focuses on the academic outcomes of vertical transfer students once they transfer to the 4-year institution and the differences in academic achievement between vertical transfer students and native students (Ishitani & McKitrick, 2010). In several of these studies, it was reported that vertical transfer students experience a drop in grades, referred to as “transfer shock”, during their first semester or two after transferring (Diaz, 1992; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Hills, 1965; Knoell & Medsker, 1965; Peng & Bailey, 1977). If experienced by the vertical transfer student, the effect of transfer shock on grades tends to dissipate after the first year at the transfer institution (Diaz, 1992). Also, whether a vertical transfer student experiences transfer shock is partially influenced by the major they are pursuing. In one study, it was found that vertical transfer students who majored in education, fine arts and humanities, and social sciences actually demonstrated an increase in grades after transferring, which indicates that little to no transfer shock was experienced (Cejda, 1997).

Other research investigating the experiences of vertical transfer students after transferring focus more on qualitative measures. Townsend and Wilson (2006) found that vertical transfer students experienced difficulty with orientation, academic integration, and social integration. Participants in the study expressed concern that the orientation process at the 4-year, transfer institution did not effectively orient them to the campus, and they struggled to know what to do

and where to go in certain situations. Academically, vertical transfer students experienced faculty who were more interested in research than teaching. They were enrolled in classes that, unlike at the community college, did not take attendance and did not assign homework regularly. Because of the sizeable student population and class sizes at the 4-year, transfer institution, students experienced a sense of anonymity in and outside of the classroom. Socially, vertical transfer students had trouble connecting to professors and making friends (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

For some vertical transfer students, experiencing a sense that they may not belong at the transfer institution is common. Laanan et al. (2010) found that many vertical transfer students experienced stigma from having previously attended a community college. It was reported that both native students and faculty underestimated vertical transfer students' abilities because of this stigma. Similar findings were made in a recent study conducted by Shaw et al. (2019). In their study, some vertical transfer students who participated in focus groups experienced feeling academically inadequate because they previously attended a community college. Interestingly, this stigma was experienced by academically prepared and ultimately successful vertical transfer students, not just those students who may have been considered less academically prepared or at-risk. Furthermore, experiencing this stigma may create feelings of being an imposter for vertical transfer students (Shaw et al., 2019).

Student Success Courses

Community colleges historically have been, and continue to be, an accessible entry-point into postsecondary education for a large portion of the higher education student population who otherwise would not be able to attend college (O’Gara et al., 2009). Unlike the students who enroll directly into a 4-year institution, community college students tend to be less academically prepared for college-level coursework. In addition, community college students typically

experience challenges and obstacles along their path toward achieving their academic goals, which may include needing to work and taking care of their families. Because of the uniqueness of the community college student population, many two-year institutions have relied on the use of student success courses (O’Gara et al., 2009). These courses, for the most part, are designed to help orient new students to campus, increase students’ college-level study skills, expose students to student support services offered by the college, and assist students in making decisions regarding academic majors and career selection to plan future courses accordingly (Karp et al., 2017). Student success courses improve student persistence, academic performance (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003), increase the likelihood of earning an associate’s degree, and strengthen the probability of transferring to a 4-year institution (Cho & Karp, 2013; Zeidenberg et al, 2007).

Background of Student Success Courses

The use of student success courses within the United States’ higher education system has been in place since the 1880s (Habley et al., 2012). Although undergoing many changes in name, delivery method, format, and curriculum, student success courses continued to gain in popularity among colleges and universities until the 1960s because of the perception that student success courses lacked academic rigor (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003). However, during the 1970s, due to the increased college enrollment of non-traditional, first generation, and minority students at that time, these types of courses intended to increase student success became prominent once again. With 96% of community colleges now offering some sort of student success course (Crisp & Taggart, 2013), these types of courses are readily available to students and widely relied upon by community colleges to help prepare vertical-transfer track students to successfully transfer to a 4-year institution. While the course names, delivery methods, formats, and curriculums vary from institution to institution, the roles and outcomes of student success courses remain similar.

Roles and Outcomes of Student Success Courses

Typically found and discussed in the literature, student success courses serve three main roles. Student success courses serve to increase student connectedness to the institution by facilitating students' academic and social integration, help develop students' academic and non-academic skills early in their postsecondary experience, and positively impact student persistence and academic progress. Through these three roles, student success courses also improve the academic outcomes of the students who enroll in them.

Increasing Student Connectedness to the Institution

It is well-established within the literature that a student's connection to the institution is positively correlated with a student's likelihood of remaining at the institution and achieving success. To feel connected to the institution, a student must integrate into the institution both academically and socially (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Grades and intellectual performance influence academic integration. Satisfactory grades and positive perceptions about the value of higher education can result in feeling more connected to the institution. Social integration occurs through peer associations, participation in extracurricular activities, and interactions with faculty and staff at the college. By experiencing generally positive social encounters, students are more likely to integrate socially and, therefore, more likely to feel connected to the institution (Tinto, 1975).

Student success courses help to increase student connectedness to the institution by providing students with vital information pertaining to available resources and student services on campus of which they otherwise may not be aware. Examples of resources and student services include knowing where the financial aid office is located, learning about student clubs and organizations, and how to utilize on-campus tutoring services. Essentially, this information

serves as an orientation to the campus (O’Gara et al., 2009). Because many students who enroll at a community college are first-generation college students, they usually do not enter their postsecondary career with this sort of knowledge or even know to ask about these types of resources and student services. By knowing about and subsequently taking part in these resources and student services, students increase their interactions and involvement on campus. The increase in interactions and involvement leads to increased integration into the institution, which results in a greater sense of connectedness to the institution (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Besides providing students with an orientation to the campus and valuable information pertaining to available resources and student services, student success courses also teach students how to form student-student and student-faculty relationships (O’Gara et al., 2009). For vertical transfer-track students, developing this skill during a student success course is important to not only feeling connected to the community college, but also serves to aid them in creating a connection with their 4-year institution once they transfer (O’Gara et al., 2009). It is well documented that when vertical transfer-track students are more involved at their 4-year institution, they are more satisfied with their experience, feel more connected to the institution, are more likely to persist, and ultimately more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Lee & Schneider, 2018; Wang, 2009).

Developing Student Academic and Non-Academic Skills

Given the high number of entering community college students who are required to take developmental or remedial courses before taking college-level coursework, it is evident that many of the students served by community colleges are not academically prepared when they arrive at the 4-year institution (Bailey & Cho, 2010). To help these students succeed academically, the majority of student success courses, especially at community colleges, focus

heavily on the development of basic academic skills. Examples of basic academic skills taught in these courses can vary, but usually include learning strategies, such as effective notetaking, active reading techniques, discipline-specific study methods, and test-taking strategies (Cho & Karp, 2013; Zeidenberg et al., 2007). By appropriately remediating and improving students' basic academic skills, student success courses provide a foundation upon which students can build successes and achieve their goals.

In addition to lacking academic skills vital to success in the classroom, many entering community college students also show deficits in non-academic skills (Zeidenberg et al., 2007). Examples of non-academic skills developed in student success courses include time management, learning styles and preferences, goal setting, decision-making strategies, academic and career planning, financial literacy, and health and well-being strategies (Crisp & Taggart, 2013; Derby, 2007; Zeidenberg et al., 2007). Of these non-academic skills, the development of academic and career planning early in the postsecondary career of vertical transfer-track students is of vital importance. Through providing opportunities for academic and career planning, student success courses help vertical transfer-track students build a pathway that leads to their timely transfer to and graduation from a 4-year institution.

Impacting Student Persistence and Academic Progress

One of the central issues faced by many community colleges is the low rate at which entering community college students persist and make satisfactory progress towards degree completion (Bailey et al., 2005; Goldrick-Rab, 2010). While this issue is complex and the reasons for why a community college student may not persist are numerous, it is evident that enrolling in a student success course can improve the chances that a student is successful. When community college students enroll in a student success course within their first semester, they are

more likely to persist to their second academic year than students who do not take a student success course (Cho & Karp, 2013; Kimbark et al., 2016; Zeidenberg at al., 2007).

In general, satisfactory academic progress (i.e. successfully completing credit hours attempted) is also positively influenced by taking a student success course. Completing 30 credit hours during the first year of enrollment significantly increases the likelihood that a vertical transfer-track student will successfully transfer to a 4-year institution (Davison, 2015; Leinbach & Jenkins, 2008; Moore et al., 2009). Specific to the type of course completed, when a student takes a student success course the probability of completing college-level English and mathematics courses dramatically increases (Kimbark et al., 2016). Enrolling in and completing college-level English and mathematics courses positively impacts a vertical transfer-track student's probability of successfully transferring to and graduating from a 4-year institution (Cohen & Kelly, 2019; Leinbach & Jenkins, 2008; Moore et al., 2009; Roksa & Calcagno, 2008).

College Transfer Success, ACA 122

Within the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) course catalog, 11 student success courses exist. Some of the more commonly offered student success courses include Improving Study Skills (ACA 085), College Student Success (ACA 111), Success and Study Skills (ACA 115), and College Transfer Success (ACA 122). Although all of these courses are intended to help community college students achieve postsecondary success, it is ACA 122 that is specific to assisting vertical transfer-track students in being successful at the community college and at the 4-year transfer institution. In the *NCCCS Combined Course Library*, the course description is stated as follows:

This course provides information and strategies necessary to develop clear academic and professional goals beyond the community college experience. Topics include the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA), college policies and culture, career exploration, gathering information on senior institutions, strategic planning, critical thinking, and communication skills for a successful academic transition. Upon completion, students should be able to develop an academic plan to transition successfully to senior institutions (NCCCS, n.d., para. 11).

The course is worth one credit hour, counts as two contact hours, and is included in the current version of the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA). Because of this, the credit hour for the course transfers to all University of North Carolina System (UNC System) 4-year public institutions, as well as selected independent 4-year colleges and universities in the state. Transfer of credit, however, is contingent upon the student completing the course with a grade of C or better. The course is also required to complete one of the several “college transfer” degree programs offered within the NCCCS and at WCC. These degree programs include Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Associate in Engineering, Associate in General Education, Associate in General Education – Nursing, Associate in Arts – Teacher Preparation, and Associate in Science – Teacher Preparation.

Since the debut of ACA 122 in 2009, the importance of the course has become increasingly emphasized at both the state-level and local-level. At the state-level, the North Carolina Student Success Center and the College Transfer Program Association (CTPA) provide support for ACA 122 and for those who are responsible for coordinating and teaching the course. Currently, the North Carolina Student Success Center hosts a webpage dedicated to collecting and disseminating materials that practitioners can use to design and improve the ACA 122

curriculum on their respective campuses. The CTPA holds an annual conference open to NCCCS personnel who work with vertical transfer-track students and typically includes workshops specific to ACA 122. In addition to those two organizations, a North Carolina ACA 122 Conference is held yearly. This conference provides individuals working directly with ACA 122 opportunities to network with colleagues, learn about what other institutions are doing with their ACA 122 courses, and receive vital information pertaining to vertical transfer trends and policies in North Carolina. Conference attendance has steadily increased each year it has been held.

At the local-level, several community colleges in North Carolina are leading the way in finding new and innovative ways to ensure that ACA 122 is providing vertical transfer-track students with what they need to be successful. For example, at least two of the community colleges in the NCCCS have recently shifted from teaching both ACA 115 and ACA 122 to now only offering ACA 122. The impetus for this shift was the discovery that many of the non-transfer-track students (i.e. students in an Associate in Applied Science degree program) at these institutions were transferring to 4-year institutions after completing their associate's degree. Because these past non-transfer-track students had only taken ACA 115, they did not receive much needed vertical transfer related information. The institutions felt that it was necessary to provide this information to students to ensure that any student who is planning on transferring to a 4-year institution, regardless of academic program, has the skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary to do so.

Other NCCCS institutions have reviewed and adjusted the ACA 122 course content and curriculum to maximize the benefits that students receive by taking the course. As mentioned previously, the CAA between the UNC System and the NCCCS includes several provisions to aid in the vertical transfer process. One such provision is the requirement that all UNC System

institutions create and publish 4-year degree plans for vertical transfer-track students. In the CAA it states:

Each UNC institution will develop, publish, and maintain 4-year degree plans identifying community college courses that provide pathways leading to associate's degree completion, admission into the major, and baccalaureate completion. Students who complete the AA or AS degree and the degree plan tracks published by a UNC institution, and who are accepted into that institution and into that major within four years of initial enrollment at the community college, will continue into that major at the UNC institution with all courses fulfilling lower division general education and other degree requirements. (NCCCS, 2014, p. 9)

To help facilitate the academic planning aspect of ACA 122, these 4-year degree plans have been incorporated into the ACA 122 curriculum by many NCCCS institutions. Although institutions may vary on how heavily they utilize the 4-year degree plans, at a minimum, students are usually required to locate the plan or plans for the academic programs they are wanting to pursue at the 4-year transfer institution. In many cases, students are then required to use the 4-year degree plans they found to build a semester-by-semester plan detailing the courses they need to take while at the community college. These semester-by-semester plans are usually reviewed by the ACA 122 instructor or an academic advisor to ensure accuracy.

ACA 122 at Wayne Community College

Currently, ACA 122 is offered every fall, spring, and summer semester at WCC. Approximately 450-500 students enroll in ACA 122 yearly. Enrollment for the course is the highest during the fall semester due to the high number of new students enrolling at WCC during that time. On average, 300 students enroll in the course for the fall, 150 students enroll for the

spring semester, and 30 students enroll for the summer semester. Although it is not mandatory that new students take the course during their first semester at WCC, it is strongly recommended that they do. It is recommended that new students take this required course as soon as they possibly can to ensure that they begin their postsecondary career equipped with the skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary to be successful at the community college and beyond. The course is housed within the Division of Arts and Sciences and led by an ACA 122 coordinator who is responsible for overseeing course section scheduling, developing and updating the course curriculum, and providing professional development opportunities for those who teach the course. Arts and Sciences faculty teach the course and do so on a rotating basis. On average, a faculty member will teach the course every three to four semesters.

The method in which the course is delivered at WCC has adjusted over time due to student input and instructor availability. During the first few years after the course was adopted by the NCCCS, ACA 122 was delivered as a hybrid format, which met once a week in the classroom and included outside-of-class work to be done online. With the implementation of the most recent Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) at WCC and data collected by conducting focus groups with vertical transfer-track students, the most typical course delivery method over the past few years has been a traditional format. In this configuration, classes meet in the classroom twice a week for a total of 100 minutes per week. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all sections of ACA 122 at WCC moved to a fully online format starting in the fall 2020 semester.

The course topics covered in the current iteration of ACA 122 are quite varied. At the beginning of the course, emphasis is placed on understanding the student support services on campus, learning style and preferences, and learning strategies, such as study skills, note-taking skills, and time management. The middle portion of the course focuses on students gaining an

understanding of their personal interests and matching those interests with potential careers. Once students decide on a few possible careers, they begin researching institutions that offer the degree or degrees needed to pursue employment within those careers. Upon determining these institutions, they begin the process of building several academic plans intended to make their transfer to those institutions as seamless as possible. The last few weeks of the course cover the topics of financial literacy, information literacy, stress management, and soft skills. For a syllabus and a complete list of the topics covered in the current iteration of ACA 122, see Appendix D.

ACA 122 Research

It is evident that ACA 122 is critical for providing vertical transfer-track students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. To date, there exists no scholarly journal articles published that focus on ACA 122. The only empirical research focusing on the course that exists is from two dissertations. Paul (2017) quantitatively evaluated the differences in performance and success rate between students who took an eight-week ACA 122 course and students who took a 16-week ACA 122 course. Using a mixed-methods approach, Sutkowski (2015) evaluated the extent to which ACA 122 can assist vertical transfer-track students in deciding upon a career path and to which 4-year institution they want to transfer. Although these two studies provide potentially useful information for those individuals responsible for coordinating and teaching ACA 122, they do not focus specifically on how ACA 122 can better provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. Besides the use of focus groups in the latter mentioned study, neither study relied heavily on the use of qualitative data. Because of this, the following section of the chapter focuses on understanding how students who took a student success course perceived the course.

Community College Student Perceptions of Student Success Courses

To help inform the direction of the intervention to be implemented in the present study, qualitative data was collected by interviewing vertical transfer-track students who have taken the vertical transfer-track student success course, ACA 122, at WCC. Although this type of student data is vital to enacting positive change, it is oftentimes an afterthought of the researcher looking to improve a course. Hunter (2006) affirms by stating,

Perhaps the most overlooked and underappreciated resource available to us are the students themselves. It is far too common for campus officials to spend an inordinate amount of time and energy developing strategies to improve the first college year without ever asking for student involvement. Not only can students provide valuable information to inform our work, but they can also be highly effective partners in the delivery of programs and services (p. 4).

With this in mind, a review of the research focused on how community college students perceive student success courses and what they believe are the most useful components of such courses is needed for the present study.

In a qualitative study conducted by Nodine et al. (2012) consisting of current and former community college students across four states (Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas), focus group discussions uncovered several interesting student perceptions related to the student success course the students had taken. For some students, the student success course they had taken was not perceived as being beneficial (Nodine et al., 2012). Of those who did not see value in the course, criticisms included not being able to articulate what they had learned in the course, finding the course information to be common knowledge, seeing the course as a hurdle that they had to overcome, and, in some cases, a waste of time. Students also were concerned about

student success courses being made mandatory. For these students, the only time someone should have to take a student success course was if they truly needed the support that the courses offered (Nodine et al., 2012).

Many of the students in the study did find the course as beneficial to their academic success (Nodine et al., 2012). Several students in the focus groups noted that they perceived the student success course to be valuable overall and found several course topics relevant to them and their academic goals. Some of the topics mentioned included time management, test-taking skills, study skills, reading skills, how to think critically, and how to communicate effectively. One student is quoted as saying “[The student success course] helped me learn a lot about myself [and] how to learn” (Nodine et al., 2012, p. 9).

Regardless of whether the participants perceived the student success course to be beneficial or valuable, results of the focus groups indicated that students had several suggestions on how to improve or maximize the course content to meet their needs (Nodine et al., 2012). Course topics that were identified by students to be the most impactful and therefore absolutely necessary to cover in a student success course included information about the college’s various programs of study, information about the college’s student support services, information about how to prepare for meeting with an advisor, and increasing time that students spend with peers, advisors, and instructors to build trust. Other students also mentioned that the student success course might be the most beneficial for students during their second semester, rather than taking it during their first semester. In this way, students can already know in what areas they are struggling and can be purposeful in the way they approach the course content (Nodine et al., 2012).

In another qualitative study exploring community college students' perceptions of a student success course they had taken, Duggan and Williams (2010) sought to understand the teaching methods that students find most helpful, the course topics that students found most useful, and how the courses can be altered to better serve students. Of the students who participated, most found the student success course to be beneficial. Students were quoted as saying the course was a "great experience", "[I] learned a lot about the campus", and "[I] received good tips on studying" (Duggan & Williams, 2010, pp. 124-125). Other students mentioned that the course served to make college seem less unnerving and enjoyed the opportunities that the course provided for students to connect with faculty and other students in their prospective majors. Some students, however, were less excited about the course, stating that "others needed the course more than I did" and "I'm not sure it was worthwhile for me" (Duggan & Williams, 2010, p. 125).

During participant interviews, students stated that their student success course was lecture-based (Duggan & Williams, 2010). In many cases, guest lecturers were used to deliver course content. Several students also mentioned the use of campus field trips where they visited the offices of various student support services. For the most part, group work inside and outside of the classroom was not utilized. Worksheets were assigned to students to cover topics such as goal setting, money management, and study habits. Some students felt inundated at times with the number of worksheets, handouts, and information presented to them. Although few students completed any type of career or major assessment during the course, those who did found doing so to be very helpful and useful. Overall, students did not have a strong preference for any single type of instructional method (Duggan & Williams, 2010).

Students in the study found several course topics to be beneficial, while also indicating other topics they found to be not helpful or useful at the time (Duggan & Williams, 2010). Topics such as information about college clubs and student organizations, time management, organizational skills, learning how to use the college's online learning management system (e.g. Blackboard, Canvas, etc.), and work-life balance were cited as being extremely helpful by most students. One student was quoted as saying "If I did not use either [time management or organizational skills], my life would be a mess" (Duggan & Williams, 2010, p. 126). Academic skills, such as study skills, note-taking skills, and test-taking skills, were also mentioned by several students as being beneficial. Some students, however, felt that some of what they were being taught in the course, such as study skills and job searching skills, were not a good use of time because they already knew how to study or they were not actively searching for a job (Duggan & Williams, 2010).

Overall, students were satisfied with the course and the topics that were covered (Duggan & Williams, 2010). Nevertheless, students did have some recommendations on other topics that should be covered. A few students stated that they would like to see the inclusion of information pertaining to employability skills, how to search for a job, writing effective resumes, and making career choices. They also mentioned that they would benefit from information about how to use their college experience to get a job or a better job. One student even mentioned that information pertaining to vertical transfer would have been a valuable addition to the course. This student was quoted as saying, "They should tell us more about what courses to take and when to take them so we will be ready to transfer at the end of any semester" (Duggan & Williams, 2010, p. 128).

In a similar qualitative study mirroring the purpose of the two previously discussed studies, O’Gara et al. (2009) found that community college students who took a student success course perceived the course to be beneficial and useful in several ways. For the students who participated in the study, it was cited that the student success course they had taken was a very convenient and coherent way in which to gather information essential to their success. They also mentioned that they felt confident that the information they gathered in the course was accurate, which helped to alleviate any uncertainty concerning the validity of the information (O’Gara et al., 2009). Course topics pertaining to college-related information and student resources, such as counseling services, academic advising, on-campus tutoring, vertical transfer advising, and student activities were noted by students as being important parts of the student success course. Some students were even surprised to find out about all the student support services that the campus offered. Much of the college-related information and student resources topics were covered by guest speakers from specific support services offices on campus or discussed while touring these offices on campus (O’Gara et al., 2009). By having this information, students stated that they felt more comfortable accessing these support resources. In fact, the researchers noted that students who took the student success course were more than twice as likely as students who did not take the student success course to make use of tutoring services on campus (O’Gara et al., 2009).

Beyond college-related information and information about student resources on campus, students in the study made it known that the student support course provided them with valuable information concerning courses, course selection, and graduation requirements (O’Gara et al., 2009). In contrast to the sometimes hurried and rushed course registration meetings that community college students sometimes experience when registering for courses, the student

success course provided students with an opportunity to discuss course plans specific to their individual goals. Students felt that the level of academic advising they received from their instructor during their student success course was superior to the level of academic advising they had received previously from general college advisors. Students also found information presented in the student support course related to other programs and majors at the college to be helpful in making decisions regarding their academic and career goals (O’Gara et al., 2009).

As is the case with similar studies, students in the study also reported that the student success course helped them develop some of the non-academic skills and personal habits necessary to be successful in college (O’Gara et al., 2009). For many students, learning how to manage their time wisely and how to study efficiently and effectively were among the best and most useful topics covered in the course. In addition to learning about these types of skills, students also felt that the course helped them build relationships with peers and faculty. During the course, students oftentimes worked in groups and had class discussions. In many cases, students mentioned that if it were not for taking the student success course, they would have not formed these meaningful relationships (O’Gara et al., 2009).

Overall, students who take a student success course are satisfied with the course, perceived the course to be beneficial in several ways, and are willing to recommend such a course to other students. To gather an understanding of the perspective from the other side of the classroom, the next section of this review discusses the perceptions of community college faculty who teach or have taught student success courses.

Community College Faculty Perceptions of Student Success Courses

For the vast majority of community college faculty, teaching is their main responsibility (Cohen et al., 2014). Because they can focus mainly on teaching, community college faculty are interacting with students more frequently and more intimately than any other people on campus. Due to the time spent in the classroom and connections made, community college faculty also understand what their students need to be successful in college. Therefore, it stands that community college faculty can serve as a critical source of information when attempting to improve course content and curriculum. This holds especially true for student success courses where the goal is to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise they need to be successful at the community college and beyond. The following is a review of the research focused on what community college instructors perceive to be the most useful components of student success courses and how they perceive their experience of teaching a student success course.

Currently, the research that exists focusing on community college faculty perceptions of student success courses is limited. Of the studies conducted, all have been doctoral dissertations. Although this is the case, these studies still provide much insight into what community college faculty think about student success courses, how they experience them, and how they can be improved upon. Furthermore, many of these studies employed the use of a qualitative research design, which helps further illuminate and understand this topic.

In one of the first these of studies conducted, Ellison (2010) sought to explore the perceptions of community college faculty to determine what topics are necessary to include in a student success course and to make the course as useful as possible for students. To accomplish this task, focus groups were conducted with full-time and part-time faculty. From these focus

groups, several themes emerged, which include the college experience, academic skill development, academic and career planning, and life management (Ellison, 2010). Faculty stated that students, especially first-year students, needed to understand the differences between high school and college, the purpose of higher education, and have knowledge of the student support services that the college offered. They also made it known that students should understand how to effectively take notes and that students oftentimes do not know how to or choose not to take notes in class. Other academic skills mentioned by faculty include reading comprehension, study strategies, basic writing skills, and critical thinking skills (Ellison, 2010). Faculty expressed their concern for students to understand how academic programs and careers are interconnected and that students should be completing assessments aimed at aligning their interests and abilities with potential careers. Lastly, faculty stressed the importance of goal setting to help students figure out who they are and what direction they want their lives to go. In addition, faculty felt that if students are to achieve their goals, they also need to understand how to manage their time and how to manage stress in a healthy and effective manner (Ellison, 2010).

In a similar study focused on improving student success course curriculum, McLeod (2018) interviewed several student success course instructors at a community college in North Carolina to determine the topics that are essential to include in a student success course. Based on the instructor interviews, several themes and suggestions emerged. According to those interviewed, the two most important topics covered in the student success course were time management and financial aid. Instructors noted that community college students, unlike their 4-year counterparts, must find a balance between school and other competing demands on their time such as having a full-time job and having a family (McLeod, 2018). Without the ability to manage one's time wisely, instructors felt that students would not be successful. Participants also

made it clear that although students typically receive financial aid information during orientation, they are unable to fully comprehend what they are being told due to the overwhelming amount of information covered in an orientation session. By reviewing pertinent financial aid information in the student success course, students are better able to absorb what they are learning and therefore better equipped to overcome future financial aid hurdles. Other topics that participants mentioned as being critical include learning styles, stress management, career exploration, and academic major exploration (McLeod, 2018).

Beyond identifying what instructors perceive to be the most necessary, useful, or beneficial topics to include in a student success course, other research has focused on community college instructors' perceptions of teaching a student success course. Focusing on an online student success course, Parker (2017) employed a mixed-methods research design to identify and describe the implementation barriers, the quality of instruction, level of faculty preparation, and the challenges and benefits of teaching a student success course as perceived by community college instructors who taught the course. Using a survey, it was found that participants perceived teaching an online student success course as being more difficult, took more work, and took more time than teaching traditional face-to-face courses (Parker, 2017). Although teaching an online student success course was more strenuous than teaching a face-to-face course, most participants felt that the online student success course was as pedagogically advantageous, of equal quality in content and instruction, and equal in learning outcomes as a traditional face-to-face student success course. Numerous instructors teaching the online course felt that they were adequately prepared to do so, however, this sentiment was not expressed by every participant. Several participants made it known that they were able to participate in professional development opportunities aimed at learning how to teach an online student success course and

observe other faculty who teach an online student success course, while others were not able to do so. Some also believed that they had the technical and pedagogical skills necessary to teach an online student success course, while others felt that they were lacking in these essential skills (Parker, 2017).

To identify and describe the challenges and benefits of teaching an online student success course, Parker (2017) conducted semi-structured interviews with some of the participants who previously completed a survey. Through analysis of the qualitative data collected, eight themes, or codes, were identified. These themes included courses, engagement, experience, learning, office hours, online, skills, and student. Some interviewees indicated that there was a need for incorporating pedagogical practices that improve student engagement in the online environment, such as virtual face-to-face meetings. Some interviewees also suggested that their experience, or lack thereof, with teaching online courses hindered their ability to be as effective in teaching the course as they potentially could be (Parker, 2017). It was also noted that the nature of an online course may be a challenge for some students who are not particularly suited to that delivery modality due to their learning style and other personality characteristics. However, some participants did mention that all students can benefit from taking an online course. Overall, the interviews highlighted the need for including engaging pedagogical practices in an online student success course and that faculty need adequate training and experience to effectively serve students and enhance student skills while teaching an online student success course (Parker, 2017).

Even though the research that exists focusing on community college faculty perceptions of student success courses is limited, the studies that have been conducted offer valuable information to help understand what faculty think about these courses and how they experience

them. By conducting this type of research, practitioners are better equipped to make decisions about how to improve student success courses and ensure that they are providing students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise they need to be successful. Therefore, the present study aims to add to this body of research.

Enhancing Long-Term Positive Effects of Student Success Courses

Using community college student and community college faculty perceptions of student success courses to improve the extent to which these courses provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students is needed. However, it is also imperative to understand the literature pertaining to how the initial positive effects of student success courses can be made to persist long-term. The following section provides an overview of this literature.

Student success courses are offered by the vast majority of community colleges and are designed to help orient new students to campus, increase college-level study skills, expose students to student support services on campus, help students plan future courses, and make decisions regarding major and career selection (Karp et al., 2017). These courses improve retention and academic performance (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003), increase the likelihood of earning an associate's degree, and strengthen the probability of transferring to a 4-year institution (Cho & Karp, 2013; Zeidenberg et al., 2007). Though student success courses appear to be beneficial to students, it has been shown that the positive effects of these types of courses do not persist long-term (Rutschow et al., 2012). Increasing the long-term positive effects of these courses is especially important for vertical transfer-track students who oftentimes complete a student success course during their first semester at the community college, but do not transfer to a 4-year institution for several semesters or years afterwards. For student success courses to create long-term positive impacts for students, adjustments can be made to course content,

pedagogical and instructional approaches, selection of faculty who teach the course, and professional development opportunities for faculty teaching the course (Karp et al., 2012).

Narrowing Course Content

Typically, student success courses are designed to include as much information as possible in a relatively short period of time. Because of the aim to cover a large number of topics, many student success courses are teacher-directed and lecture-based (Karp et al., 2012). Including as much information as possible in student success courses is done with the best of intentions, however, overloading student success courses with an overabundance of information inhibits the long-term effectiveness of these courses. The term used to describe the benefits of taking a student success course diminishing over time is sometimes referred to as a *fade-out effect* (Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994). One way in which to decrease this *fade-out effect*, or to improve the long-term positive impact of student success courses, is to review the course's content to remove any extraneous information or information that can be acquired in other places besides the course itself. By narrowing course content or the focus of the course to only essential topics that are relevant to student needs, goals, and interests, instructors are allowed more time to incorporate reflective and interactive course activities, which facilitates deeper metacognitive learning among students (Karp et al., 2017).

For vertical transfer-track students, the content of the student success course must align with their goal of successfully transferring to and graduating from a 4-year institution. By actively engaging with current vertical transfer-track students, the present study aims to determine the skills, abilities, and expertise that this population of students at WCC needs to be provided in ACA 122. The data collected will be used to narrow the course content of ACA 122, which will aid in increasing the long-term effectiveness of the positive effects of the course.

Using Active Pedagogical Approaches

Most of the literature focused on how individuals learn states that passively presenting students with content and new skills does not translate into knowledge retention or long-term use of the content and skills. The passive transmission of information to students does not allow for students to reflect on what they are learning or how to use this information critically (Bransford et al., 2000; Perin & Hare, 2010). Furthermore, utilizing a teacher-directed and lecture-based pedagogy in a student success course does not allow for deeper metacognitive student learning to occur (Karp et al., 2012; O’Gara et al., 2009). However, by narrowing the content of a student success course to the most student-relevant topics, the pedagogies that are needed to transmit a large amount of information in a short period of time are no longer needed or required.

To enhance the long-term positive effects of student success courses, alternate pedagogical and instructional approaches have been identified. In general, active pedagogies, rather than passive ones, increase students’ understanding of course content and enhance knowledge (Braxton et al., 2000). One such active pedagogy, known as *enhanced discovery learning*, has been shown to increase student learning (Alfieri et al., 2011). Although there is no agreed upon definition of this approach in the literature, “discovery learning occurs whenever the learner is not provided with the target information or conceptual understanding and must find it independently and with only the provided materials” (Alfieri et al., 2011, p. 2). Within this approach, instructors utilize guided discussions, scaffolded tasks, and provide worked examples showing a solution to similar problems (Alfieri et al., 2011; Sweller et al., 2007).

Another example of an active pedagogy specifically designed to be used in the community college student success course classroom is the *teaching-and-learning for application* framework developed by Karp et al. (2012). Informed by learning theory and

developmental psychology, the framework creators posit that student success courses must provide a deeper learning experience where students can not only learn the skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary to be successful in college, but are also given opportunities to practice them and learn to apply them in new contexts and situations. Created to increase the long-term persistence of the initial positive effects that students experience in student success courses, the framework consists of four pedagogical approaches and three student outcomes (Karp et al., 2012). The pedagogical approaches include (1) making content relevant to student needs, goals, and interests, (2) utilizing learner-centered teaching strategies, (3) fostering a classroom environment that supports relationship building, and (4) providing students opportunities to practice. The three student outcomes, which lead to long-term impacts, are (1) new knowledge about academic habits, student success skills, and available campus resources, (2) self-awareness of how and when to use skills and access resources, and (3) agency and motivation to use the skills and access resources (Karp et al., 2012).

To assess the effectiveness with which the *teaching-and-learning for application* framework can increase the long-term persistence of the initial positive effects of student success courses, Karp et al. (2017) conducted a study using a mixed-methods research design to evaluate the student outcomes of a student success course at Bronx Community College (BCC) that was restructured using the author's framework. Both quantitative and qualitative data collected indicates that the restructured student success course was effective at achieving its goals. Compared to BCC students in the study who did not take the restructured student success course, those students who did participate in the course earned a higher grade point average (GPA) at the end of their first semester, completed a greater number of course credits during their first semester, and persisted to the next semester at a higher rate (Karp et al., 2017). These positive

impacts persisted for this population of students one year after taking the student success course. From a qualitative standpoint, students reported that they were exposed to essential skills and knowledge in the student success course, were able to practice what they learned through class activities, and were able to apply what they had learned in subsequent classes and future situations (Karp et al., 2017).

Using an active pedagogy in a student success course provides students with ample time to process the information they are encountering, which allows them to develop the metacognitive skills required to utilize knowledge in different contexts (Bransford et al., 2000). For vertical transfer-track students, this ability to apply the skills, knowledge, and expertise (i.e. Transfer Student Capital) provided by a student success course to other classes, situations, and academic institutions is an essential component of successfully transferring to and graduating from a 4-year institution.

Using Dedicated Instructors and Providing Professional Development

The use of dedicated student success course instructors, and providing professional development to those instructors, increases the pedagogical effectiveness of the course (Karp et al., 2012). In most cases, student success courses are taught by individuals who have other teaching or work responsibilities. It is uncommon for an institution to have faculty who are fully dedicated to teaching only student success courses (Groccia & Hunter, 2012). Some institutions must rely on adjunct faculty, whose understanding of the institution can be limited, to teach student success courses (Karp et al., 2012). Though it may be difficult to do because of human and financial resource constraints, staffing student success courses with faculty whose only responsibility it is to teach the course increases the perception that the course is important for student success. However, doing this also allows for faculty teaching the course to develop and

refine their pedagogical approach via experience and participation in professional development opportunities related to teaching a student success course (Groccia & Hunter, 2012; Karp et al., 2012).

When searching for faculty to be dedicated student success course instructors, several characteristics and attitudes are important to take into consideration (Groccia & Hunter, 2012). Faculty who teach student success courses should be interested in creating a student-centered learning environment. As opposed to other types of courses, lecture should not be the sole delivery method of information in a student success course. Faculty teaching these courses must be able to shift from focusing on teaching and instead focus on student learning. This requires that instructors are familiar with interactive methods of information delivery, such as classroom discussions (Groccia & Hunter, 2012). They should also be flexible in their approaches to teaching by being willing to learn new classroom strategies. Since these faculty are typically working with first-time college students, they must be patient and willing to take the time to help their students learn about their new college environment and adapt to a new academic culture. Though it is ideal that student success course faculty already have these characteristics, it is possible to develop them through providing instructors with professional development opportunities (Groccia & Hunter, 2012).

Depending on the size, culture, and general characteristics of the institution, training programs or professional development opportunities for student success course faculty can look very different. However, it is suggested that these trainings include information pertaining to several topics (Groccia & Hunter, 2012). Faculty should be given an opportunity to learn about college student development theory. For first-time college students, the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that occur make the first year of college for most students very

difficult and challenging. When faculty understand these developmental changes and challenges, they are better equipped to teach their students. Student success course faculty should be provided with information about student learning goals and institutional expectations of first-year college students, the available student support services on campus, how to sequence student success course content, and learner-centered teaching strategies (Groccia & Hunter, 2012).

Summary

Chapter 2 provided an expanded discussion of the theoretical foundation for this study, Laanan's Transfer Student Capital, and the justification for its use. Also covered in Chapter 2 was a review of the literature relevant to the present study. Literature review topics covered include the role of the community college, vertical transfer-track students, student success courses, community college student perceptions of student success courses, community college faculty perceptions of student success courses, and enhancing long-term positive effects of student success courses.

In Chapter 3, the study's methods of inquiry are discussed to provide sufficient detail in the event the study was to be replicated. The rationale and considerations made for utilizing the selected methods of inquiry are discussed. Also included in Chapter 3 is information pertaining to the context of the study, the inquiry partners involved, the ethical considerations made, the inquiry procedures used, ensuring inquiry design rigor, the delimitations, limitations, assumptions of the study, and the description of the role of the scholarly practitioner.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

The focus of this inquiry was to understand how the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College provided Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students, to identify and implement changes to ACA 122 to improve the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students, and to understand and assess how the changes made to ACA 122 may affect the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students.

This chapter outlines the study's guiding questions, the inquiry design used and the rationale for using it, the inquiry procedures used, the inquiry design rigor, the delimitations, limitations, and assumptions of the study, as well as the role of the scholarly practitioner in the study.

Focus of Practice Guiding Questions

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. How does the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?
2. How can the current ACA 122 course be changed to better provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?
3. How do the changes implemented in the ACA 122 course affect the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?

For a quick overview of how the guiding questions align with the Phases of the study, the data that was collected intended to help answer each question, and the intended timeline of each Phase, see Table 4.

Table 4

Phases of the Study

Phase	Guiding Question Answered	Data Collected/Used	Intended Timeline
Phase I	How does the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?	Baseline qualitative data from student and faculty interviews	January 2021-March 2021
Phase II	How can the current ACA 122 course be changed to better provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?	Using baseline qualitative data collected in Phase I	April 2021-July 2021
Phase III	How do the changes implemented in the ACA 122 course affect the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?	Qualitative data from student and faculty interviews	August 2021-February 2022

Guiding question #1 allowed for the collection of baseline data. The aim of this question was to understand how the current iteration of ACA 122 was providing TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC before proceeding with the design or implementation of any changes to the course. To answer guiding question #1, semi-structured interviews were conducted with vertical transfer-track students who had taken ACA 122 and faculty who had taught ACA 122 to gather baseline qualitative data. This guiding question was answered during Phase I of the study, which was originally intended to span from January 2021 to March 2021.

Guiding question #2 helped identify how ACA 122 should be redesigned. The aim of this question was to determine how the course could be altered so that it better provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC. To answer guiding question #2, an analysis of the baseline data collected during Phase I was conducted. The analysis was then shared with and reviewed by the inquiry partners of the study. This guiding question was answered during Phase II of the study, which was originally intended to span from April 2021 to July 2021.

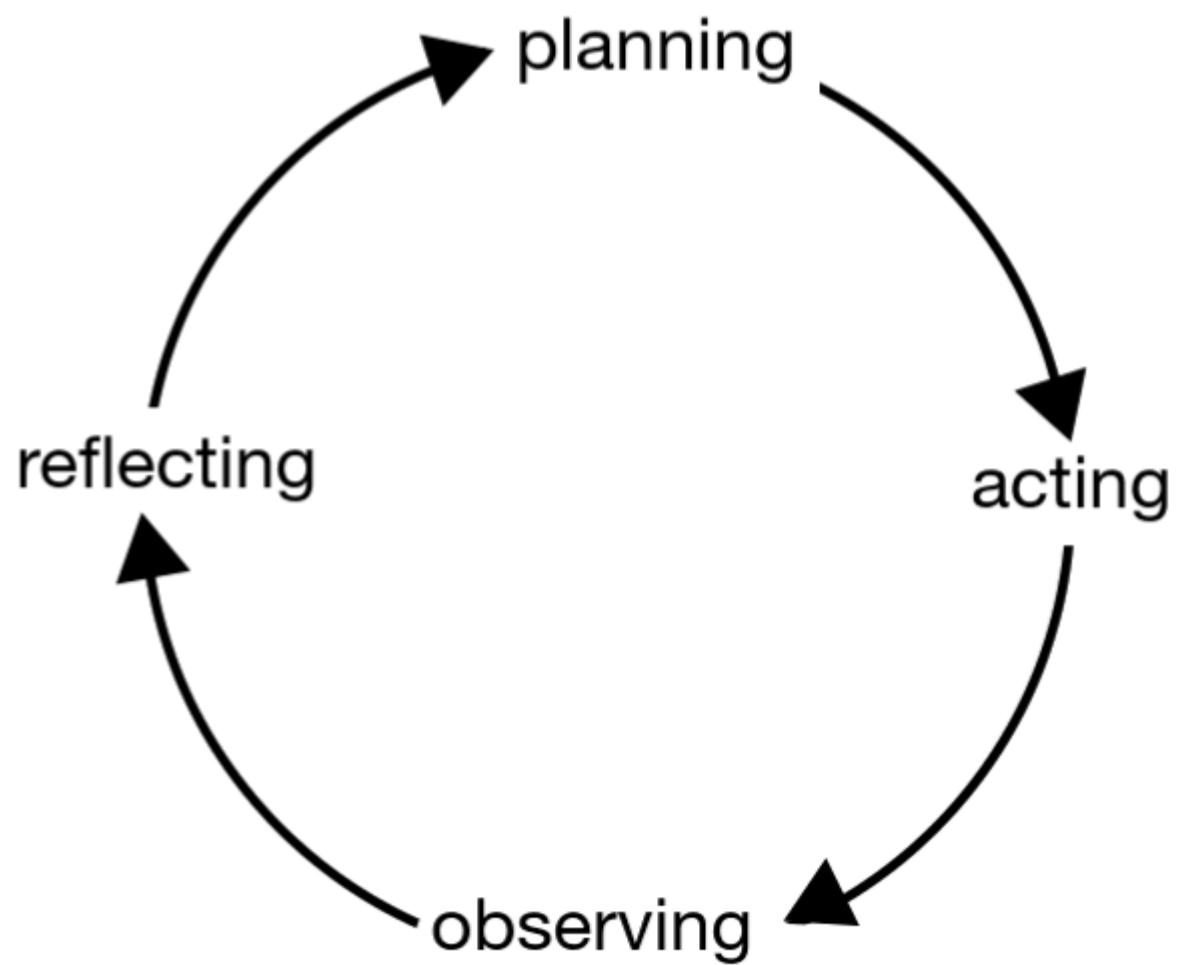
Guiding question #3 was intended to assess and understand the extent to which the changes made to ACA 122 during Phase II may have affected the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. To answer guiding question #3, semi-structured interviews were to be conducted with vertical transfer-track students who had taken the redesigned ACA 122 course and faculty who had taught the redesigned ACA 122 course. This guiding question was to be answered during Phase III of the study, which was originally intended to span from August 2021 to February 2022. However, due to the restrictions surrounding course structure and modality caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Phase III was not conducted during the initially proposed timeline of the study.

Inquiry Design and Rationale

To affect the ability of ACA 122 to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC, an action-research (AR) methodology was used. Though it is used in numerous disciplines and professions, AR is particularly valuable and widely used within educational contexts. One aspect of AR that lends itself to being so widely used in education is the fact that any educator can utilize it. This enables practitioners to systematically investigate from within their own practices, as opposed to the traditional notion of research where professional researchers conduct research on practices from the outside (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

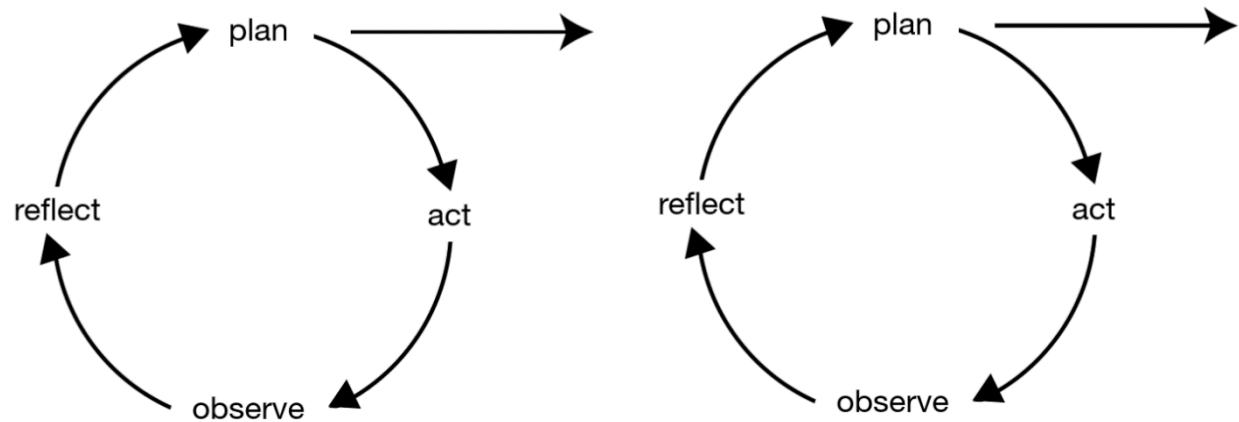
Credited as one of the first to discuss the methodology and its practical applications, Kurt Lewin (1946) describes in his article *Action-research and Minority Problems* that AR is a series of steps involving planning, fact-finding, and execution. This series of steps developed by Lewin eventually became known as an action-reflection cycle (see Figure 1). In this cycle, the four steps are planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. As illustrated in Figure 2, an initial action-reflection cycle could be continued as a new cycle resulting in a series of ongoing and interconnected action-reflection cycles (McNiff, 2013). It is important to note that although AR can include several action-reflection cycles, due to the time limitation of the present study, only one full action-reflection cycle was intended to be utilized.

Given the focus of the study and the associated guiding questions, however, AR methodology was most suitable for the present study for two noteworthy reasons. First, AR is about improving practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). The present study aimed to improve the practices surrounding ACA 122 to positively impact the extent to which the course can provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC. To accomplish this aim and improve this specific practice, three phases of inquiry were used. Described in greater detail in a latter portion of this



Note. (McNiff, 2013, p. 57).

Figure 1. Action-Reflection Cycle.



Note. (McNiff, 2013, p. 57).

Figure 2. Series of ongoing Action-Reflection Cycles.

Chapter, the study's three phases of inquiry align with the action-reflection cycle of AR and as mentioned previously, the study's three guiding questions.

In Phase I and II of the present study, the first step of the action-reflection cycle, planning, takes place. Planning occurred in Phase I by collecting baseline data relevant to the purpose of the study. Planning continued during Phase II by designing an ACA 122 course that was intended to affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC. Once this planning step had taken place in Phases I and II, the next step in the action-reflection cycle, acting, was intended to occur during Phase III. Also intended to occur during Phase III, were the third and fourth steps of the action-reflection cycle, observing and reflecting. By utilizing AR methodology, the present study made contributions to the practice of designing and teaching ACA 122.

Second, AR is about generating new practical, but potentially theoretical, knowledge (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Previous ways of thinking suggest that real knowledge creation, that is theoretical and conceptual knowledge, is solely the domain of professional researchers. Practitioners, therefore, can only generate practical knowledge that, while being useful, is not real theory and less than the knowledge created by professional researchers. In other words, it was once assumed by many that knowledge generated by practitioners is not real knowledge and should not be considered equal to the knowledge generated by professional researchers (Schon, 1995). However, with the increased usage of and reliance on AR by practitioners, especially by those in education, this sentiment has changed. McNiff and Whitehead (2011) explain this by stating,

Many people working in higher education positions now perceive themselves as practitioners in a workplace with the responsibility of supporting people in other

workplaces, while also generating their living theories of practice about how they do this. Action-research as a recognized practice has legitimized their positioning as practitioners who are supporting other practitioners and who are creating democratic communities of practice committed to a scholarship of educational inquiry (p. 23).

By utilizing AR methodology to conduct this study, it was possible to generate my own living theory of practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Though the aim of the present study was not intended to generate new theoretical knowledge, the use of AR methodology offered the possibility that the practical knowledge generated by this scholarly inquiry may have resulted in enhancing or transforming the theoretical knowledge of TSC.

Context of the Study

As one of the first Industrial Education Centers (IEC) in North Carolina (Wescott, 2014), WCC, as it is known today, was founded in 1958 and has served the citizens of Wayne County and surrounding areas for nearly 62 years. Situated on a 175-acre campus in Goldsboro, NC, WCC currently offers over 140 academic programs which are designed to meet the educational, training, and cultural needs of those in the community. These academic programs are housed within one of the five curriculum divisions or within workforce continuing education. Facilities include 12 buildings consisting of over 400,000 square feet of classrooms, laboratories, and offices. WCC also offers courses off-campus at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base and at the Wayne Executive Jetport. The institution is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and was most recently reaffirmed in 2016 (WCC, 2019).

Although individuals decide to attend WCC for several reasons and to achieve various academic and professional goals, the student population included in this study is vertical transfer-

track students. The academic goal of these students is to begin their postsecondary education at WCC and transfer to a 4-year institution to pursue and earn a bachelor's degree. A significant portion of this cohort of students come from low-income families, are first-generation college students, or both. To help vertical transfer-track students achieve their academic goal of earning a bachelor's degree, the College's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) initiative was implemented in January 2016. The initiative, entitled *OnPoint: Student Success-Based Advising*, was designed to increase vertical transfer student success of vertical transfer-track students at WCC and at the 4-year transfer institution. Because of this purpose, *OnPoint* created numerous changes to policies, procedures, and practices at WCC. At the core of the QEP, however, was the revamped curriculum of the vertical transfer-track student success course, ACA 122. The course curriculum was altered to focus heavily on preparing vertical transfer-track students to transfer successfully to the 4-year institution.

At its conclusion in 2021, *OnPoint* served over 1,200 vertical transfer-track students during its five-year lifespan. The performance of vertical transfer students who transferred from WCC to a 4-year institution since the implementation of the QEP, according to the metrics that the NCCCS uses, is above the NC community college average (NCCCS, 2019, 2021). Furthermore, the institutional assessment of the QEP's impact on student learning in the ACA 122 classroom indicates that the initiative was somewhat successful in helping most vertical transfer-track students at WCC acquire the skills, knowledge, and expertise needed to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. However, there remains much work to be done to ensure that every vertical transfer-track student at WCC is adequately prepared to transfer to a 4-year institution, and, once there, is successful in earning a bachelor's degree.

The present study aimed to apply the concept of TSC to the design of the ACA 122 course curriculum to affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC. Until this time there have not been any attempts at WCC to increase vertical transfer student success and performance solely through the use of qualitative inquiry. By examining vertical transfer student performance through a qualitative lens, the present study helped to understand the unique individual experiences of those who are most impacted by policies and practices implemented to increase vertical transfer student performance.

Inquiry Partners

For the purposes of this study, stakeholders included vertical transfer-track students who had taken ACA 122, faculty members who had taught and/or are teaching ACA 122, and several members of the College's administration staff. Engaging with vertical transfer-track students was critical for understanding how the current iteration of ACA 122 at WCC provided TSC to vertical transfer-track students. Implementing changes to ACA 122 to affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students without first receiving feedback from this group of students would be ineffectual.

The participation of faculty who have taught ACA 122 was of almost equal importance. These faculty members who have taught the course know first-hand what is and what is not working. Also, I have witnessed that many faculty members who have taught the course are incredibly talented at developing creative ways in which to teach the course's content. Tapping into this talent and creativity served to enhance the improvements made to ACA 122. Furthermore, the faculty who teach ACA 122 are ultimately the ones who will be responsible for enacting the changes made to ACA 122. Engaging these faculty via collaboration during the

course's redesign process helped to garner support for and lower resistance to the changes that were made to the ACA 122 course during this study (Holbeche & Matthews, 2012).

Administrator staff members involved with the present study include the Vice President of Academic and Student Services, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, the Director of the College Transfer Advising Center (CTAC), and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Innovation (IEI). The Vice President of Academic and Student Services oversees all academic programs and is responsible for any program changes. The Dean of Arts and Sciences oversees all academic departments in the Arts and Sciences Division and is responsible for any curricular changes within the Division. Involving these two individuals was required to obtain approval to make changes to the ACA 122 course and implement those changes in the future. The Director of the CTAC oversees all advising processes pertaining to vertical transfer-track students and works closely with this student population daily. Because of this experience, this individual provided insight into what vertical transfer-track students at WCC need to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. The Office of IEI oversees all institutional research and aided with participant selection and data collection. Altogether, these inquiry partners served to provide guidance and feedback during all phases of the inquiry process. These inquiry partners were also needed to address any researcher bias that might have occurred during analysis of data. For this reason, all data analyses were shared with and reviewed by the aforementioned administrative staff members.

To demonstrate the engagement of these inquiry partners, data was intended to be collected in two main ways. First, all meetings with inquiry members were to be documented. Information such as the meeting day, meeting time, the meeting modality, who was present, and the topics covered was to be collected and stored electronically. Phone conversations were to be

treated similarly to face-to-face or virtual meetings. Email correspondence between myself and inquiry partners were also to be saved and stored electronically. However, due to the busy schedules of these inquiry partners and the limitations of meeting in-person due to the COVID-19 pandemic, collaboration between them and myself was conducted solely via email. The collaborative efforts and processes between myself and inquiry partners are discussed further in Chapter 4.

Ethical Considerations

Because the study involved human participants, several ethical considerations had to be made. Informed consent was obtained from the participant before participation was allowed. To obtain informed consent, the form found in Appendix B was used. In this form, potential participants were provided with the information that they needed to make a fully informed decision about whether to take part in the study. Information in the informed consent form included:

1. Identification of the principal investigator
2. The purpose of the study and what is hoped to be learned
3. How participants were selected to take part in this study
4. What participants will be asked to do during the study
5. Any benefits or risks associated with participating in the study
6. A guarantee that all participant information gathered will be kept confidential
7. Ensuring that participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time
8. Contact information of the principal investigator should questions arise

I ensured that each participant read and understood the information contained within the consent form and answered any questions that participants had related to participation in the study.

Before participation was allowed, all participants signed the informed consent form. I collected and kept all consent forms secured in a locked filing cabinet. These forms will be stored for the required three years.

The research design was such that no harm came to participants, inquiry partners, or me. The questions contained in the interview protocols were appropriate to the focus of the study and did not create any unnecessary disclosure of information on the part of study participants. Information collected during the interview was recorded electronically and stored on a password protected computer. During the study, any personal identifying information was removed from audio recordings and file names used to store the audio recordings used pseudonyms rather than the participant's actual name. After the conclusion of the study, all audio recordings were deleted. Pseudonyms were used when discussing any findings or results. To ensure all ethical and legal guidelines were followed, I submitted the study proposal to the local Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval. Approval was granted by the IRB prior to the start of the study (see Appendix A).

When conducting research, it is also important to consider the ethical dimensions of leadership. Although my role as the current ACA 122 coordinator carries with it no official administrative power, it was still necessary to take into consideration my positionality in relation to the participants, both students and faculty, in the study. Because I am the person who developed the current iteration of ACA 122, participants, especially faculty participants, might have been hesitant to provide information that is critical of the course or which may have offended me. It was my responsibility to ensure that students and faculty who participated in the study felt comfortable answering interview questions honestly and openly. To do this, I ensured every participant that the information they provided would be used for research purposes only

and anonymity and confidentiality was of the upmost concern. Both student and faculty participants knew that the insights they provided would only be used to help improve the ability of ACA 122 to provide vertical transfer-track students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise they need to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. Any information provided by participants during the study, especially information that was critical of the current iteration of the course, was considered objectively and without offense.

Inquiry Procedures

The present study was intended to take place over three Phases. In Phase I, the aim was to understand how the current iteration of ACA 122 at WCC provided TSC to vertical transfer-track students and how the course could be improved to better provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. During Phase I, qualitative data was collected by interviewing current vertical transfer-track students to understand their perceptions of ACA 122 as they related to how the course provided TSC to themselves. Qualitative data was also collected by interviewing faculty who had taught ACA 122 within the last two years to understand their perceptions of ACA 122 as they related to how the course provided TSC to the vertical transfer-track students who were enrolled in their course section. Phase I was originally intended to take place between January 2021 and March 2021 but was delayed due to the restrictions created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, Phase I took place between June 2021 and November 2021.

In Phase II, the aim was to design an improved ACA 122 course that affected the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. The redesign of the course was informed by utilizing the strategies for enhancing the long-term positive effects of student success courses discussed previously, as well as the baseline qualitative data collected from students and faculty during Phase I. The redesign of the course was conducted by me in

collaboration with the inquiry partners of the study. Phase II was intended to take place between April 2021 and July 2021. Instead, Phase II was conducted between November 2021 and February 2022.

In Phase III, the aim was to implement the redesigned ACA 122 course and to understand and assess how the changes made to ACA 122 may have affected the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. During this Phase, qualitative data was to be collected by interviewing vertical transfer-track students who took the redesigned ACA 122 course to understand their perceptions of the redesigned ACA 122 course as they related to how the course provided them with TSC. Qualitative data was also to be collected by interviewing the faculty who taught a section of the redesigned ACA 122 course to understand their perceptions of the course as they related to how it provided TSC to the vertical transfer-track students who were enrolled in their course section. Phase III was intended to take place between August 2021 and February 2022. Due to the adjustment of the originally intended timeline of the study because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Phase III will be conducted during the fall semester of 2022. More details related to the future implementation and assessment of the redesigned ACA 122 course are provided in Chapters 4 and 5.

Phase I

For Phase I, baseline data was gathered from current WCC vertical transfer-track students who had taken ACA 122 and from current WCC faculty who had taught and/or were teaching ACA 122. The purpose of the baseline data collection during Phase I was to answer guiding question #1, which asked, “How does the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?” To answer this question, semi-structured interviews were utilized. The following

subsections include detailed information pertaining to the description of participant eligibility, the participant recruitment strategies used, the instrumentation used to conduct the semi-structured interviews, the procedures used for data collection, and the data analysis strategies used.

Description of Participants and Recruitment Strategies

Participants in the Phase I data collection were selected using a purposeful sampling strategy. In general, purposeful sampling strategies are used in qualitative research to ensure that those participating can provide information pertaining to the focus of practice and guiding questions of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling was used in this study intentionally to ensure that those who participated had experienced ACA 122 as either a student who had taken the course or an instructor who had taught and/or was teaching the course.

To be eligible to participate in Phase I, student participants were required to be currently enrolled WCC vertical transfer-track students who had previously taken the current iteration of ACA 122. Student participants were also required to be 18 years of age or older. Students who met these requirements were contacted by me via email. Initially, I intended to include a total of 12-16 student participants in the baseline data collection during Phase I. Justification for this range of student interviews stemmed from the research conducted by Guest et al. (2006) who found that thematic saturation, or the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data, largely occurs after 12 interviews. Several similar studies serve to confirm their findings (Francis et al., 2010; Hagaman & Wutich, 2017; Namey et al., 2016). Due to the difficulty in recruiting student participants for this study because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, student participation was limited.

Although students had to meet several eligibility requirements to take part in Phase I, the selection of student participants was random. Student participants were selected using a random purposeful sampling strategy. Using this type of purposeful sampling strategy helped to add credibility to the sample and the study overall (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The Office of IEI was utilized to assist in identifying students who met the eligibility requirements mentioned previously. A list of the eligible students was then created. To randomly select student participants, the number of students on the list was divided by 16 and that number was used to select the first student on the list and so forth until 16 student participants had been chosen. This method of randomly selecting participants is usually referred to as precision-equivalent random sampling (Fowler, 2014). After completing this task and emailing the students selected, the procedure had to be repeated using the remaining number of students on the list divided by the number of participants still required. Several attempts were made to gather 12-16 student participants, but ultimately those efforts fell short of that original goal. A total of five students participated in a semi-structured interview during Phase I.

To be eligible to participate in Phase I, faculty participants were required to be currently employed at WCC and to have taught ACA 122 at WCC at least once since the spring semester of 2019. This eligibility requirement ensured that the faculty participants in the study had taught the current iteration of ACA 122. Also, allowing faculty participants who had taught ACA 122 within two years prior to the beginning of the study was necessary to ensure that there were an adequate number of faculty participants from whom to select. Furthermore, allowing this enhanced the likelihood of including faculty participants with diverse ACA 122 teaching experiences. Faculty who met these requirements were contacted by me via email. A total of 12-16 faculty participants were intended to be included in the baseline data collection in Phase I.

Faculty participants were selected using a maximum variation purposeful sampling strategy. This type of purposeful sampling strategy is utilized when the intention is to select participants who have varying experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I wanted to ensure that the faculty who took part in this study were not homogenous in their experiences with teaching ACA 122. I wanted to gain insights from faculty who enjoyed teaching the course and those who did not enjoy teaching the course. I wanted to learn from those who taught the course with enthusiasm and those who were not as enthusiastic about teaching the course. I wanted to gather information from those who taught the course well and those who could have taught the course better. As the current ACA 122 coordinator, I was knowledgeable about the faculty who had taught the course and was well-suited to make faculty participant selections during Phase I. A total of nine faculty members participated in a semi-structured interview during Phase I.

Instrumentation

To collect baseline data during Phase I and answer guiding question #1, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected student participants and the selected faculty participants. When conducting semi-structured interviews with participants, it is important to use an interview guide or interview protocol that included the open-ended questions to be asked. By doing so, I ensured that each participant was asked the same overall questions and the necessary data was collected in the allotted interview time. Although the interview protocol served as a roadmap to help the interview process proceed as intended, it was acceptable to diverge from the interview protocol to ask probing questions when more detail was required (Patton, 2015). The interview protocol used for both the student and faculty participant groups was similar but contained some necessary differences.

Student Interviews. Before beginning the interview, student participants read and signed the informed consent form (see Appendix B). To start each student interview, I introduced myself and took a few moments to talk with the student about topics such as how their semester was going, what 4-year institution they were thinking of transferring to, what they were doing during the upcoming weekend, and so forth to build rapport with the student. Once rapport had been established, I proceeded with the open-ended questions included in the student interview protocol (see Appendix C).

The questions used during the interview were intended to gain information pertaining to ACA 122. Students were asked about their expectations of ACA 122 and their experiences while taking the course. They were asked to discuss which topics covered in the course they found to be the most useful and which topics they found to be the least useful. In addition, they were asked to explain whether they felt that the course provided them with the skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. They were also asked to discuss how they thought the course could be improved or changed to better provide vertical transfer-track students with TSC. During the interview, it was important to ask the participant to provide concrete examples of their experiences. This information provided a richer and fuller understanding of their experience while taking ACA 122. In turn, these details were used to make informed decisions about how to change the course so that it was better able to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students.

Once all the open-ended questions included in the interview protocol had been addressed, I asked the student participant if they have any questions for me and thanked them for their time. I provided the student participant with my contact information should they happen to think of

more information to provide or if questions arose in the future. I also let the student participant know that they would be provided a transcript of the interview to review for accuracy.

Faculty Interviews. Before beginning the interview, faculty participants read and signed the informed consent form (see Appendix B). Although I was already familiar with the faculty participants and the faculty participants were already familiar with me, building rapport in the beginning of the interview was not as important as it was with student participants. However, instead of moving directly into the interview questions, I still took a few moments to ask them how they were doing, how their classes were going, and so forth to help establish relational trust. After that, I proceeded with the open-ended questions included in the faculty interview protocol (see Appendix C).

The questions used during the interview were intended to gain information pertaining to ACA 122. Faculty were asked about their expectations of ACA 122 and their experiences while teaching the course. They were asked to discuss which topics covered in the course they found to be the most useful for their students and which topics they found to be the least useful for their students. In addition, they were asked to explain whether they felt that the course provided their students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. They were asked to discuss how they thought the course could be improved or changed to better provide vertical transfer-track students with TSC. During the interview, it was important to ask the participant to provide concrete examples of their experiences. This information provided a richer and fuller understanding of their experience while teaching ACA 122. In turn, these details were used to make informed decisions about how to change the course so that it was better able to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students.

Once all the open-ended questions included in the interview protocol had been addressed, I asked the faculty participant if they have any questions for me and thanked them for their time. I provided the faculty participant with my contact information in the event they thought of more information to provide or if questions arose in the future. I also let the faculty participant know that they would be provided a transcript of the interview to review for accuracy.

Baseline Data Collection

The collection of baseline data during Phase I was to provide myself and the inquiry partners of the study with the data that was necessary to make informed decisions regarding the redesign of ACA 122. Upon approval of the study by IRB, baseline data collection was to begin. Within two weeks of study approval, the Office of IEI assisted in identifying potential student participants. These students were contacted by me via email. Students who consented to be a participant in the baseline data collection were contacted by myself to schedule an interview. During the same time, I began identifying potential faculty participants. Faculty who consented to be a participant in the study were contacted by me via email to schedule an interview.

Student and faculty interviews were originally intended to be conducted between January 2021 and March 2021. Due to the restrictions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, semi-structured interviews did not begin until June 2021 and lasted until November 2021. Interviews ranged in duration from less than 30 minutes to almost two hours. Interviews with students were conducted in-person and in my office on campus. Interviews with faculty participants were conducted virtually via Google Hangouts. Regardless of interview modality, all interview audios were recorded to aid in accurate transcription. As a contingency, in the event the audio recording failed or was damaged such that it was no longer usable, I kept some written notes throughout the interview. Written notes were also kept during the interview to record any non-audio

behavior that might have been valuable to include during analysis of the data. During Phase I, a total of five students and nine faculty members participated in semi-structured interviews.

Baseline Data Analysis

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research data analysis happens while data is being collected rather than after all data has been collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because of this and to make appropriate use of the limited amount of time to collect and analyze baseline data, analysis of the data began as soon as the first interview was conducted and continued during the entire data collection period. Interview recordings were transcribed by me prior to being analyzed or winnowed. The process of winnowing the data was needed to make sense of the immensely dense data that was collected during the student and faculty interviews (Guest et al., 2012). The data analysis was conducted by utilizing the qualitative data analysis software, Quirkos. Using Quirkos, the chunks of the transcribed text were placed into term-labeled categories. These categories, or codes, which emerged from the data, as opposed to being predetermined, were used to identify themes in the data. Themes were used to create textural descriptions (what they experience) and structural descriptions (how they experience) of the participants as they related to their experiences with ACA 122 (Moustakas, 1994). A narrative of each theme was then written and is included in Chapter 4 (Creswell, 2016).

Summary of Phase I

The aim of Phase I was to answer the guiding question of “How does the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?” by collecting baseline data through interviewing current WCC vertical transfer-track students and WCC faculty. The data collected

and analyzed during Phase I was used during Phase II to redesign ACA 122 to improve the extent to which the course provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC.

Phase II

For Phase II, ACA 122 was redesigned to affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC. The purpose for redesigning ACA 122 during Phase II was to answer guiding question #2, which asked, “How can the current ACA 122 course be changed to better provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?” The following subsections include detailed information pertaining to the intervention design process used to redesign ACA 122.

Inquiry Intervention Design Process

Since baseline data needed to be collected during Phase I to inform the redesign of ACA 122 in Phase II, all of the strategies that were applied to the course to affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC emerged during the inquiry intervention design process. To identify and determine which strategies to apply, a collaborative approach involving myself and the inquiry partners of the study was utilized. Members of this collaborative effort included me, the participants who volunteered for an interview during Phase I, and the administrative inquiry partners of the study outlined previously.

The baseline data analysis conducted in Phase I was sent to and reviewed by these individuals to identify and determine which specific strategies would be applied to redesign ACA 122. The strategies for enhancing the long-term positive effects of student success courses discussed previously were also taken into consideration. Once these specific strategies had been determined, I used them to redesign the ACA 122 course. The redesigned course was then sent to those involved in this collaborative effort for review. Feedback was gathered and used to adjust

the initial redesigned ACA 122 course. The finalized version of the redesigned ACA 122 course was sent to the VP of Academic and Student Affairs for approval. Approval was given to implement the redesigned ACA 122 course.

Summary of Phase II

The aim of Phase II was to answer the guiding question of “How can the current ACA 122 course be changed to better provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?” by designing an improved ACA 122 course that was intended to affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC. By collaborating with the study participants and the administrative inquiry partners, the course was redesigned, finalized, and approved for implementation. The redesigned ACA 122 course was intended be implemented during Phase III of the study, which was originally scheduled to take place during the fall semester of 2021. Again, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of the redesigned ACA 122 course was delayed but will be conducted during the fall semester of 2022.

Phase III

For Phase III, the redesigned ACA 122 course is to be implemented, and an analysis of the course’s impact is to be conducted. The purpose for implementing and analyzing the course’s impact is to answer guiding question #3, which asks, “How do the changes implemented in the ACA 122 course affect the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?” Although Phase III has not yet been conducted due an adjusted study timeline because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the following subsections include detailed information pertaining to the proposed implementation of the redesigned ACA 122 course. Included is the description of participants and recruitment strategies to be used, the instrumentation to be used to conduct the analysis of the course’s impact, the procedures to be

used for data collection, the data analysis strategies to be used, and the analysis of the intervention.

It is important to note that information contained in the following sections apply to the originally intended timeline of the study. Apart from the adjusted timeline of the study, the rest of the information provided is accurate and will be utilized when Phase III is conducted during the fall semester of 2022. More details are provided in Chapters 4 and 5 about when and how Phase III will be conducted.

Implementing the Redesigned ACA 122 Course

The redesigned ACA 122 course was to be implemented in three of the approximately 10 course sections offered during the fall 2021 semester. The remainder of the ACA 122 course sections offered during the fall semester of 2021 were to be taught using the current iteration of the course. The course sections utilizing the redesigned ACA 122 course were to be open to all vertical transfer-track students. However, only students who met the eligibility requirements detailed in the next section would be allowed to participate in the data collection to take place in Phase III.

Description of Participants and Recruitment Strategies

To be eligible to participate in Phase III, student participants were required to be currently enrolled WCC vertical transfer-track students and who had completed one of the redesigned ACA 122 course sections offered during the fall 2021 semester with a grade of C or better. Student participants were also required to be 18 years or older. Students who met these requirements were to be contacted by myself via email. A total of 12-16 student participants were intended to be included in the Phase III data collection.

As was the case in Phase I, student participants in Phase III were to be selected using a random purposeful sampling strategy. The Office of IEI was to be utilized to assist in identifying students who met the eligibility requirements mentioned previously. A list of the eligible students was to then be created. To randomly select student participants, the number of students on the list was to be divided by 16 and that number was to be used to select the first student on the list and so forth until 16 student participants had been chosen. For example, if there were 180 students on the list, every 16th student on the list was to be selected. This method of randomly selecting participants is usually referred to as precision-equivalent random sampling (Fowler, 2014). If 16 student participants could not be secured upon completing this procedure, the procedure would be repeated using the remaining number of students on the list divided by the number of participants still required.

Faculty participants in the Phase III data collection process were to be the three faculty who taught the redesigned ACA 122 course sections.

Instrumentation

To collect data during Phase III and answer guiding question #3, semi-structured interviews were to be conducted with the selected student participants and the faculty participants. The interview protocol to be used for both the student and faculty participant groups was similar, but with some small variations.

Student Interviews. Before beginning the interview, student participants were to read and sign the informed consent form (see Appendix B). To start each student interview, I was to introduce myself and take a few moments to talk with the student about topics such as how their semester was going, what 4-year institution they were thinking of transferring to, what they were doing during the upcoming weekend, and so forth to build rapport with the student. Once rapport

had been established, I was to proceed with the open-ended questions included in the student interview protocol (see Appendix C).

The questions used during the interview were intended to gain information pertaining to the redesigned ACA 122 course. Students were to be asked about their expectations of ACA 122 and their experiences while taking ACA 122. They were to be asked to discuss which topics covered in the redesigned course they found to be the most useful and which topics they found to be the least useful. In addition, they were to be asked to explain whether they felt that the course provided them with the skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. Lastly, they were to be asked to discuss how they thought the course could be improved or changed to better provide vertical transfer-track students with TSC.

Once all the open-ended questions included in the interview protocol had been addressed, I had planned to ask the student participant if they had any questions for me and to thank them for their time. I was to provide the student participant with my contact information should they have thought of more information to provide or if questions arose in the future. I was to also let the student participant know what they would be provided a transcript of the interview to review for accuracy.

Faculty Interviews. Before beginning the interview, faculty participants were to read and sign the informed consent form (see Appendix B). Because I would already be familiar with the faculty participants and the faculty participants would already be familiar with me, building rapport in the beginning of the interview would not have been as important. However, instead of moving directly into the interview questions, I would have still taken a few moments to ask them how they were doing, how their classes were going, and so forth. After that, I intended to proceed with the open-ended questions included in the interview protocol (see Appendix C).

The questions used during the interview were intended to gain information pertaining to the redesigned ACA 122 course. Faculty were to be asked about their expectations of ACA 122 and their experiences while teaching the course. They were to be asked to discuss which topics covered in the course they found to be the most useful for their students and which topics they found to be the least useful for their students. In addition, they were to be asked to explain whether they felt that the course provided their students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. Lastly, they were to be asked to discuss how they thought the course could be improved or changed to better provide vertical transfer-track students with TSC.

Once all the open-ended questions included in the interview protocol had been addressed, I was to ask the faculty participant if they had any questions for me and to thank them for their time. I was to provide the faculty participant with my contact information should they think of more information to provide or if questions arose in the future. I was to also let the faculty participant know that they would be provided a transcript of the interview to review for accuracy.

Data Collection

Originally, student and faculty interviews for Phase III were to be conducted between January 2022 and March 2022. Interviews with students were to be conducted in-person and in my office on campus. Interviews with faculty participants were to be conducted in-person and in the faculty member's office. If in-person interviews were not possible, interviews were to be conducted virtually using Google Hangouts, a software application to which both students and faculty have access. Regardless of interview modality, all interview audio was to be recorded to aid in accurate transcription. As a contingency, in the event the audio recording failed or was damaged such that it was no longer usable, I would have kept written notes throughout the

interview. Written notes were to also be kept during the interview to record any non-audio behavior that might have been valuable to include during the Phase III data analysis. A total of 12-16 student participants were intended to be interviewed during Phase III. A total of three faculty participants, those who taught the redesigned ACA 122 course, were intended to be interviewed during Phase III.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected, the same data analysis procedures that were used in Phase I were to be used in Phase III. Analysis of the data would have begun as soon as the first interview was conducted and would have continued during the entire data collection period. Interview recordings would have been transcribed electronically prior to being analyzed by the same qualitative data analysis software, Quirkos, used during Phase I. Using Quirkos, the transcribed text would have been placed into term-labeled categories. These categories, or codes, which emerge from the data, as opposed to being predetermined, were to be used to identify themes in the data. Themes would have been used to create textural descriptions (what they experience) and structural descriptions (how they experience) of the participants as they related to their experiences with the redesigned ACA 122 course (Moustakas, 1994). A narrative of each theme would have then been written and included in Chapter 4 (Creswell, 2016).

Analysis of Intervention

To determine the impact that the redesigned ACA 122 course had on the amount of TSC it provides to vertical transfer-track students, the data analysis conducted in Phase III was intended to be compared to the baseline data analysis conducted in Phase I. The results of this comparison would have been used by me and the inquiry partners of the study to make decisions

regarding how to improve ACA 122 moving forward. In this way, another action-reflection cycle would have begun and kept the process of continually improving the course in motion.

Upon completion of the analysis of intervention, the results were to have been provided to faculty and staff members who might have benefitted from the findings of the inquiry. Focus was to be given to those faculty and staff who interact and work directly with vertical transfer-track students at WCC. Faculty and staff who work with a similar student cohort, but at other NCCCS institutions, may have also benefitted from the inquiry findings. If feasible, I plan to share the findings of the present study with colleagues at topic-relevant workshops and conferences, such as the annually held North Carolina ACA 122 Conference.

Summary of Phase III

The aim of Phase III was intended to answer the guiding question of “How do the changes implemented in the ACA 122 course affect the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?” by implementing the redesigned ACA 122 course, collecting and analyzing data from the students who participated in this course and the faculty who taught this course, and comparing it to the data analysis conducted in Phase I. The conclusion of Phase III would have constituted one complete action-reflection cycle, which is the intention of the present study. True to the AR methodology used in the present study, however, it was assumed that the conclusion of this single action-reflection cycle would spawn the beginning of another. More information pertaining to the implementation and assessment of the redesigned ACA 122 course is provided in Chapters 4 and 5.

Inquiry Design Rigor

Inherent in any qualitative inquiry or research design is the issue of design rigor or trustworthiness. To enhance inquiry design rigor, I incorporated the strategies of member

checking, thick description, and presenting discrepant information. Member checking involves presenting inquiry findings to participants to ensure accuracy. Participants reviewed the findings and commented on any inaccuracies or discrepancies, which helped to increase the authenticity of the findings. When presenting findings, the use of thick description provided the reader with in-depth and detailed accounts of the participants' experiences. This strategy allowed me to directly connect raw data collected from participants to themes that emerged during the analysis of the data, enhancing the credibility of the study. By presenting any discrepant information, or information that counters themes that emerged from the data, I was able to demonstrate trustworthiness to the reader. Using these strategies increased the overall validity of the study (Lincoln et al., 2018).

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

The present study was conducted in a context that is defined by several intentional boundaries and parameters. The study was conducted within the College's Division of Arts and Sciences. Other academic divisions at WCC are not intended to prepare students to transfer to a 4-year institution and were therefore excluded. Initially, student participants were required to be pursuing one of the majors offered by the Division (e.g. Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Associate in Engineering, etc.). However, due to the difficulty with which I had gathering student participants, it became necessary to include some students who were officially pursuing non-transfer degree programs, but who also were strongly considering transferring to a 4-year institution to earn a bachelor's degree. Faculty participants were required to have taught ACA 122 within the past two years to ensure that their recollection of the course was accurate. Also, beyond that time parameter, the curriculum of ACA 122 was not as it is currently. Any

recommendations on how to improve the course from faculty who had taught the course before that time would not be valid or representative of the current iteration of the course.

The use of AR methodology was appropriately suited for this study. However, several inquiry technique limitations did exist. The uncontrollability of the environment in which the study takes places was one such limitation. The present study's context, due to factors that could not be entirely mitigated by myself, was ever-changing in unexpected ways that could not be accurately predicted (Kock, 2004; Mumford, 2001). The present study was also limited by the amount of control that I had over the actions of the participants involved (Kock, 2004). Because I am currently the coordinator for ACA 122 at WCC, there was an inherent level of subjectivity when it comes to the analysis of the findings (Kock, 2004). To address this researcher bias, all data analyses were reviewed by relevant inquiry partners and study participants. Furthermore, to address potential researcher bias and establish the study's credibility, study participants were given the opportunity to review interview transcripts for accuracy.

The present study utilized an action-research (AR) methodology, which like all research methodologies, involved several epistemological and methodological assumptions (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). First, AR methodology assumes that knowledge is uncertain and created, rather than discovered, through trial and error. For action-researchers, there is no one single answer to a question and any answers are always considered tentative. Because of this assumption, it is important to note that the results of the present study are relevant only to conditions in which the study was conducted (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

Second, it is assumed that the creation of knowledge is a collaborative process, which involves other people at all stages of the research process. Given this assumption, the present study was conducted in conjunction with the study participants rather than conducted on the

study participants. Also, the inclusion of working closely with several other inquiry partners reflects the idea that knowledge is created collaboratively (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

Third, it is assumed that AR is conducted by practitioners who are agents rather than neutral, value-free observers. It is the responsibility of the action-researcher to question why things are the way that they are, to question whether the current situation is satisfactory, and how things can be changed or improved (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

Lastly, in opposition to other research methodologies, it is assumed that AR methodology is open-ended and developmental in nature. Although the present study did have an endpoint, it is assumed that the research conducted here will persist and that one complete cycle of action and reflection will lead to subsequent others (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

Role of the Scholarly Practitioner

I have worked at WCC since January of 2013, first as a psychology instructor, and later volunteering for leadership opportunities, such as leading Institutional Learning Outcome assessments, coordinating ACA 122, and leading the implementation and assessment of the College's Quality Enhancement Plan. During my time at WCC, I have worked almost exclusively with vertical transfer-track students. I teach and advise students from all backgrounds and life situations. Most of these students enter WCC with the intention of transferring to a 4-year institution and the goal of earning their bachelor's degree. Unfortunately, a large majority of those hopeful students ultimately are unable to transfer to a 4-year institution, or if they do transfer, are not able to persist at the 4-year institution.

Of the students who transfer to a 4-year institution, but do not persist, some return to WCC to continue to take classes or pursue a different program of study. When I see these students on campus, and ask them what happened, I can hear in their voices and see on their

faces the disappointment with having to leave the 4-year institution and put on hold or abandon their goal of earning a bachelor's degree. The reasons these students give for why they left the 4-year institution vary. Maybe they were unaware of the size of the institution, larger class sizes, and limited one-to-one professor interactions. Maybe they did not know how to apply for additional or emergency financial aid. Maybe they felt alienated and lost.

One commonality that runs through every reason I have heard is lack of information or understanding. Had the student understood the realities of attending a 4-year institution or how to seek out help when needed, they may have persisted. In other words, if the student had been provided an adequate amount of TSC before transferring, they may have achieved their academic goal of earning a bachelor's degree. Therefore, given my position and ability to enact positive change, I believe I am obligated to do what I can to help vertical transfer-track students at WCC realize their academic goal, fulfill their potential, and live a life of which they are proud. It is for this reason that I have chosen this focus of practice.

Unlike the students I teach and advise, I was not a vertical transfer student. After graduating high school, I enrolled at a 4-year institution and was fortunate enough to graduate, even though it took me five years instead of four. The experience I had as an undergraduate student is markedly different than those students with whom I interact daily. Unlike the students I am wanting to help, once I became acclimated to my 4-year institution, I did not have to worry about making the transition to another one. Unlike the students I am wanting to help, I could walk to or take the bus to class and did not have to worry about transportation. Unlike the students I am wanting to help, I knew exactly what courses I had to take for my academic program and did not have to worry about courses transferring to another institution. Compared to

the educational experiences of the students I am wanting to help, my undergraduate educational experience was fairly simple and straightforward.

Although my experience in higher education is unlike that of the students I am wanting to help, I am still able to relate to them and their experiences. Having grown up in a military family, I am no stranger to coping with transition, change, and having to start over. Moving to a new city, in a new state, and having to find your place at a new school in the middle of the school year every few years was difficult. However, doing so allowed me to develop the skills and ability needed to adjust to any new situation quickly. It is only recently that I have realized how valuable those experiences have been for me. I know that without those experiences I would not be the person I am today and would not be in the position I am to help the students I am wanting to help.

Being an insider conducting research within my own context is exciting because it allows me to see the value that it brings to the institution and the benefits it provides to the students about whom I care. I truly want what I have done with this project to be a success. Having said that, I know that there is a possibility that what I attempted to do will not be successful. Regardless of the outcome of the project, it was my duty to report all findings, positive and negative, without influence from my own biases, presuppositions, or agenda. To manage this responsibility, I tried to be objective in my approach and not presume that the efforts made in this study will indeed enhance or improve the current state of things. To help with this, I incorporated the use of memos during the study. By keeping memos, or reflective notes, I can begin to think about my own experiences and how these experiences may influence my interpretation of the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Summary

Chapter 3 provided the information required to conduct the study and to replicate it if needed. Included in Chapter 3 was the rationale and considerations made for utilizing the selected methods of inquiry, the context of the study, the inquiry partners involved, the ethical considerations made, a detailed description of the inquiry procedures used, the approaches used for ensuring inquiry design rigor, the delimitations, limitations, assumptions of the study, and the description of the role of the scholarly practitioner.

In Chapter 4, the results of the study are presented. Included in Chapter 4 is a description of the participants, an analysis of the data collected, and a description of the intervention to be implemented.

In Chapter 5, a discussion of the results is provided. Included in Chapter 5 is a summary of the findings, an interpretation of the findings as they relate to previous research studies, how the findings relate to the theoretical foundation of the study, limitations and delimitations of the study, the implications of the findings for practice, the social justice impact of the study, recommendations for future research, and a reflection about my experience conducting the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The focus of this inquiry was to understand how the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College (WCC) provides Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students, identify and implement changes to ACA 122 to improve the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital (TSC) to vertical transfer-track students, and understand and assess how the changes made to ACA 122 may affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students.

As previously stated in Chapter 1, the community college has increasingly become the entry point for many students, especially those from under-represented populations, whose goal is to transfer to a 4-year institution to pursue a baccalaureate education (Handel, 2013; Horn, 2009; Horn & Skomsvold, 2011; LaSota & Zumeta, 2016). However, for numerous reasons, many of these students never accomplish their goal of earning a bachelor's degree (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006). In North Carolina specifically, community college students from low-income families are less likely than community college students from high-income families to earn a bachelor's degree after transferring from a community college to a 4-year institution (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Wayne County, the location of WCC and the context of the present study, is a mostly rural county and among the most impoverished counties in North Carolina.

Ultimately, the result of this study was to improve the vertical transfer performance of the students who attend WCC before transferring to a 4-year institution. By doing so, the College aids in increasing social mobility among the citizens of Wayne County and surrounding service areas. Being a mostly rural, low-income county, increasing the educational attainment of the citizens in Wayne County is an effective way for individuals and families to move into higher socio-economic levels and decrease economic inequalities (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006).

This qualitative study was guided by the following questions:

1. How does the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students?
2. How can the current ACA 122 course be changed to better provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students?
3. How do the changes implemented in the ACA 122 course affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students?

To answer these guiding questions, an action-research methodology was used. The study consisted of three Phases, with each Phase corresponding to a specific guiding question (see Table 4).

Chapter 4 provides the results of the study. In addition to the impact that the COVID-19 Pandemic had on the study, included in Chapter 4 is an overview of the demographics of the participants in Phase I, a description of the participants in Phase I, the data collection procedures used in Phase I, an analysis of the baseline data collected in Phase I, a description of the inquiry partner consultation data collection and analysis conducted in Phase II, a description of the data-informed intervention created in Phase II, an explanation of the implementation and assessment of the data-informed intervention in Phase III, and an analysis of the study's guiding questions.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

The current study, like so many others, was designed prior to the proliferation of the novel COVID-19 virus, which severely impacted the lives and livelihoods of billions. In response to this event, the WCC campus closed for a week in March 2020. Upon reopening, services and classes were largely held virtually and for the duration of 2020 and 2021. Because of this unforeseen turn of events, the study procedures outlined previously had to be adjusted.

The two most notable changes that had to be made were the way in which participant interviews were conducted and the timeline of the study. In an effort to remain as socially distant as possible, and respect the wishes of others, the majority of the participant interviews were conducted virtually. Although I preferred and planned to conduct interviews in-person, doing so virtually was adequate, but not a perfect substitute for in-person interviews. For example, in a few instances, technology and connectivity issues made communicating with participants more difficult than communicating in-person, which made gathering data more cumbersome.

In addition to how some participant interviews had to be conducted, the pandemic also altered the timeline of the study because of the COVID-19 restrictions that were put in place. Among other things, these restrictions limited the extent to which holding in-person classes was possible. Furthermore, it would not have been ideal to implement the redesigned ACA 122 course during the fall semester of 2021 like originally planned because most classes were still being offered either fully online or online with virtual meetings. Implementing the redesigned ACA 122 course via fully online or synchronous online during the fall semester of 2021 would have contradicted the fact that both student and faculty participants in this study agree that the course should be taught in-person. Therefore, implementing the redesigned course before the end of COVID-19 restrictions would have yielded data that may not have been very useful from a practitioner's perspective.

Because of the abrupt pivot to a virtual learning environment and all the work required to continue teaching in this modality, the start of Phase I, which was originally set to start at the beginning of 2021, did not begin until later in the year. The increased workload thrust upon college instructors in March 2020, in combination with the stress, fatigue, and uncertainty felt by myself and many others during the many months following, not only delayed the start of Phase I,

but also created a situation where completing Phase III of the study was not feasible given the temporal constraints in which the study had to be completed. Fortunately, however, Phases I and II were able to be completed given the time allotted and during the COVID-19 restrictions that were in place during 2020 and 2021. The outcome of these two Phases of the study, the redesigned ACA 122 course, is detailed in this chapter, but will be implemented and assessed during the latter portion of 2022. More details related to the eventual completion of Phase III, the implementation and assessment of the data-informed intervention, are provided in a latter section of Chapter 4.

Phase I: Participant Demographics

A total of 14 individuals, five students and nine faculty members, participated in Phase I of the study. Table 5 provides an overview of the student participant demographics in Phase I of the study. Of the five students who participated, three identified as White and two identified as Hispanic. Three student participants identified as male and two identified as female. The average age of student participants was 18.6 years old. Table 6 provides an overview of the faculty participant demographics in Phase I of the study. Of the nine faculty participants, six identified as White, two identified as Hispanic, and one identified as Black. Three faculty participants identified as male and six identified as female. The average age of faculty participants was 46.1 years old.

Phase I: Description of Participants

To answer guiding question #1, students and faculty were interviewed. Participants in the Phase I baseline data collection were selected using a purposeful sampling strategy. Typically, a purposeful sampling strategy is used in qualitative research to ensure that those participating can provide information pertaining to the focus and guiding questions of the study (Creswell & Poth,

Table 5

Student Participant Demographics

Participant Name	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Age	First-Generation College Student	Academic Program
Megan	Hispanic	Female	19	Yes	Associate Degree in Nursing
Patty	White	Female	20	No	Associate Degree in Nursing
Thomas	Hispanic	Male	18	Yes	Associate in Arts
Jimmy	White	Male	18	No	Associate in Applied Science- Game Art and Animation
George	White	Male	18	Yes	Associate in Science

Table 6

Faculty Participant Demographics

Participant Name	Race	Gender	Age	Academic Discipline
Bob	White	Male	60	Psychology/Sociology
Angela	Hispanic	Female	43	Communication
Maria	White	Female	42	Psychology
Nancy	White	Female	50	English
Matt	White	Male	50	Mathematics
Daniel	Black	Male	50	Sociology
Amanda	White	Female	50	Art
Denise	Hispanic	Female	33	English
Kelly	White	Female	37	Mathematics

2018). Purposeful sampling was used in this study intentionally to ensure that those who participate have experienced ACA 122 as either a student who has taken the course or an instructor who has taught the course. Apart from ensuring that each participant has had experience with ACA 122, this sampling strategy also increased the heterogeneity of the participant backgrounds and generated a sample that was somewhat representative of the larger participant pool. Each student and faculty participant has been assigned a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

Descriptions of Student Participants in Phase I

The following sub-sections provide relevant background information about the five student participants who volunteered their time to be interviewed.

Megan

As is the case with many young high school and college students, Megan believed she knew what she wanted to attend college for and initially set off to complete a degree in criminal justice. However, after taking a few criminal justice courses, she decided that criminal justice was not for her. It was not until she observed the home healthcare nurses that took care of her grandfather that she realized a career in the health field was the right fit for her. Seeing how much their care meant to her grandparents and the rest of her family motivated her to pursue a career where she can provide the same to other families in need. Ultimately, Megan made the decision to apply to the Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program at WCC because it was close to home and would provide her with a great foundation in nursing before eventually completing a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN).

After graduating with her ADN in May 2022 and earning her nursing license shortly thereafter, Megan plans to work for a couple of years before completing her BSN online. Her

hope is to then be able to work as a traveling nurse, which will allow her the opportunity to see how other hospitals in the state operate and to increase her nursing acumen. Eventually, she would like to also work as a hospice nurse, which is why she got interested in nursing in the first place.

Patty

Throughout her time in K12, Patty enjoyed science and anatomy and initially planned to become a veterinarian. Unfortunately, her allergies to animals made that nearly impossible. Although she could not be a veterinarian, she still wanted to work in the health care field because of her passion to help others in need. Ultimately, Patty decided to pursue nursing as a career. Prior to choosing to attend WCC, she was homeschooled. Because of this, she decided that going directly to a 4-year institution was not for her. Besides that, she chose to attend WCC because of the reasonable financial cost, being able to stay close to home, and the prestige of the nursing program at WCC. Apart from academics, she is also an active member in her church, the 2022 ADN class president, and a member of the WCC Bass Club.

Currently, Patty is working on finishing her ADN and will graduate in May of 2022. After graduation, she hopes to start working as a clinical research nurse. Once she has gained some work experience, she plans on returning to school to complete a BSN at one of the nearby 4-year institutions. Upon earning her BSN, Patty wants to work in an emergency department at a hospital.

Thomas

For many years, Thomas has had an interest in criminal justice and criminology. After graduating from high school, he decided to attend WCC mainly because it was far cheaper than going directly to a 4-year institution. He also felt that attending a community college would serve

as a midway point, or steppingstone, between high school and the 4-year institution. In this sense, attending a community college first has helped him acclimate to the college environment, especially the academic aspect of college. In addition to his coursework, Thomas also enjoys playing the piano and practicing martial arts.

Thomas is currently in his first semester at WCC and hopes to graduate with his Associate in Arts within the next couple of years. After graduation, he plans to transfer to a 4-year institution to earn a bachelor's degree in either criminal justice or criminology. Upon graduating from a 4-year institution, he hopes to be able to work as a crime scene investigator.

Jimmy

One of Jimmy's earliest and most fond memories is of him sitting on his father's lap while his father played a video game. It was this experience that ultimately led him to decide on pursuing a career in the video game industry. His decision to first attend a community college stemmed mostly from his parents making the suggestion that he do so. However, attending WCC has allowed him the space and time to figure out exactly what it is he wants to do in the video game industry. Besides his interest in video games, Jimmy is also passionate about writing. Because of this passion, he feels that he would be best suited as a script/story writer for video games.

Currently, Jimmy is working on finishing up his first semester at WCC. After graduating from WCC, he plans on transferring to a 4-year institution to earn a bachelor's degree in video game design or related subfield. Once completed, he hopes to be able to use his bachelor's degree to start working in the video game industry as a script/story writer and designer.

George

For the majority of his life, George has enjoyed anything that has to do with being outdoors. In fact, it is his passion for hunting and fishing that has led him to pursue a career in wildlife conservation and management. To him, protecting the environment and the animals who thrive in it is important if future generations are to enjoy the outdoors like he has been so fortunate to enjoy. By attending WCC, George has been able to begin his academic journey towards becoming a wildlife biologist, while at the same time remaining close to home and keeping education costs relatively low.

After graduating from WCC with his associate's degree, George plans to transfer to a 4-year institution within the state to complete his bachelor's degree. Eventually, he plans on continuing his education to earn a master's degree. As far as his career is concerned, George would prefer to work out in the field in a hands-on environment rather than as an administrator in an office. Ideally, he would like to work for the state as a white-tailed deer biologist/conservationist.

Descriptions of Faculty Participants in Phase I

The following sub-sections provide relevant background information about the nine faculty participants who volunteered their time to be interviewed. It is important to note that as the ACA 122 coordinator for many years, I have come to know each of these faculty participants and understand how they approach teaching ACA 122.

Bob

Prior to becoming a full-time faculty member at WCC in 2015, Bob taught Psychology and Sociology as an adjunct instructor at a local private 4-year institution starting in 1996. During his many years at the 4-year institution, he also served as a senior academic advisor for

425 students and was responsible for training new academic advisors with a focus on retention and academic success strategies. Bob has also taught Psychology and Sociology as an adjunct instructor at one other community college in the area. Currently, Bob is working towards finishing and defending his dissertation to complete a PhD program.

While at WCC, Bob has taught the current iteration of ACA 122 four times between the fall semester of 2016 and the fall semester of 2021. Based on my past experiences working with Bob as the ACA 122 Coordinator, I believe that he is truly interested in teaching the course. While teaching the course, I have witnessed him investing the time and energy required to make sure that his students receive the attention and assistance they need. Overall, I consider Bob to be an instructor who enjoys teaching ACA 122 as much as he enjoys teaching courses within his discipline.

Angela

Before starting her career in higher education, Angela worked in the public relations industry for 15 years. Her work experiences during this time helped to prepare her to work closely with students from various backgrounds, as well as understanding that each student has individual needs that must be taken into consideration. In 2016, Angela joined the faculty at WCC as a full-time communication instructor and has served on several college committees. Angela has also been a lead instructor and implementer of the North Carolina Scholars of Global Distinction program at WCC, which facilitates the development of global competencies and skills needed for the ever-increasingly diverse workforce.

During her time at WCC, Angela has taught ACA 122 two times. Her approach to teaching ACA 122, much like her approach to teaching her communication courses, is to make the class team based. She feels that this helps create a sense of belonging among her students. As

the ACA 122 coordinator, my experiences working with Angela have demonstrated that she is passionate about teaching the course and does so with the same vigor as she does with her communication courses. Furthermore, it is well known that she has a reputation among students of being an instructor who cares deeply about the success of all students. Overall, Angela finds teaching ACA 122 to be rewarding and believes that the course should be the cornerstone of a vertical transfer-track student's higher education career.

Maria

While in graduate school, Maria worked as a psychotherapy intern for the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Her duties included conducting drug screenings, performing psychological testing, providing individual and group psychotherapy, and psychoeducation for inmates. Upon finishing her master's degree in psychology in 2004, Maria began teaching at WCC as a full-time psychology instructor. She has served on various college committees but has most consistently been an integral part of the eLearning/Distance Education committee. This role has required her to work closely with faculty from all areas of campus to ensure that they receive the professional development they need to be effective online instructors. Currently, Maria teaches exclusively online, but has experience teaching all instructional modalities and formats.

As one of the most experienced faculty members at WCC, Maria has taught several iterations of ACA 122, including the predecessors of the course. She has taught the current iteration of the course three times. Although challenging to teach online, she believes that the course is invaluable, especially for students new to the higher education environment. Beyond the informational and conceptual components of the course, she also feels that the course can serve to increase student self-efficacy and therefore student success. Overall, Maria holds that

ACA 122 allows students to focus on their academic futures in a controlled and topic-focused setting.

Nancy

Nancy's teaching experience spans from 1994 to the present. While finishing her Masters in Literature, Nancy worked for an assistantship program and taught college-level English Composition and English Research courses for the college at which she was enrolled. Upon completion of her master's degree, she worked part-time at a local private 4-year institution teaching English Composition, English Research, and other upper-level literature courses. Simultaneously, Nancy also worked as a senior leader at a local Montessori school. While most of her teaching experience is in the K12 classroom, she has been a full-time English instructor at WCC since 2018. During her time at WCC, she has taught mostly English Composition courses, but has also served on various committees as a representative of the English Department. Nancy has also been a lead instructor and implementer of the North Carolina Scholars of Global Distinction program at WCC.

Since 2018, Nancy has taught the current iteration of ACA 122 two times. Although her experience with teaching the course is somewhat limited compared to others, her diverse experiences in education have provided her with a strong foundation upon which to teach the course. She demonstrates a clear passion and ability for helping students figure out how they can get from where they are to where they want to go and who they want to be. Overall, I consider Nancy to be a more than competent ACA 122 instructor who enjoys helping students achieve their goals.

Matt

Prior to joining the faculty at WCC as a full-time mathematics instructor in 2000, Matt taught pre-curriculum mathematics part-time at another community college in the area for several years. After starting at WCC, he quickly moved on to teaching curriculum mathematics, which includes algebra, trigonometry, and calculus. He has also served on several college committees and played a role in developing the first ACA 122 course offered at WCC. With over 33 years of teaching experience, Matt is currently one of the most experienced instructors at WCC.

The total number of times that Matt has taught ACA 122 is unknown, however, since 2016, he has taught the current iteration of the course three times. In working with Matt as the ACA 122 coordinator, I have come to know him as a dedicated mathematics instructor who is generous with his time and focused on student success but at the same time does not coddle students. According to Matt, teaching ACA 122 is very different from teaching a mathematics course. His pragmatic approach to teaching, which works well in the mathematics classroom, sometimes does not translate well into the ACA 122 classroom. Overall, Matt is someone who understands the value of ACA 122 and teaches the course with the same academic rigor that he maintains in his mathematics courses.

Daniel

At a young age, pursuing higher education was not something that Daniel sought to do. However, after a few years in the Army as a cargo specialist and working odd jobs here and there after separating from the military, he made the decision to return to school and began attending WCC in the mid-90s. After a couple of years at WCC, Daniel decided to transfer to a local 4-year institution to earn a bachelor's degree in sociology. Eventually, he was able to continue his

education to complete a master's degree in sociology in 2007 and a PhD in 2018. While completing his master's degree and PhD, Daniel also served as an instructor teaching undergraduate-level sociology courses at the 4-year institution he was attending. He began as a full-time sociology instructor at WCC in 2013. During his time at WCC, he has served on various committees and informally assisted in the creation of the current iteration of ACA 122.

Since 2016, Daniel has taught the current iteration of ACA 122 three times. While he prefers to teach sociology courses, Daniel understands the value of ACA 122 and teaches the course with this understanding in mind. He admits that teaching the course can be a struggle at times, but also believes that when students take the course seriously, they will benefit far greater than if they merely "go through the motions." Daniel is able to bring his varied life experiences into the ACA 122 classroom to provide students with a perspective that goes beyond simply delivering course content and transfer-related information. Because of these experiences, many students in his sociology and ACA 122 courses, see him as a role model and example of how hard work and determination can result in achieving your academic and professional goals regardless of who you are and where you come from.

Amanda

After deciding to make a career change, Amanda began teaching in the K12 system in 2009. In 2012, she realized her goal of teaching in higher education by starting as a part-time Art instructor for a local community college. One year later Amanda began working at WCC as a full-time Art instructor. Currently, she teaches several Art courses including Art Appreciation, Art History, and various studio courses. In addition to teaching, she, along with several others, is also responsible for producing a yearly fine arts festival that showcases the talents of the students at WCC. Amanda is also a strong advocate for her Art students and has been instrumental in

fundraising for student scholarships and helping students transfer to various 4-year art schools and programs.

While at WCC, Amanda has taught the current iteration of ACA 122 three times. As is the case with several instructors, she prefers to teach the course in-person rather than online. Although she is an experienced and effective online instructor, she has made it clear that teaching ACA 122 online is not ideal for her. Amanda believes that in order for the course to be successful, one must be able to build a rapport with students and teaching the course online makes doing so very difficult. Overall, Amanda is highly dedicated to ensuring that her students achieve their goals and is willing to do all that is in her power to make that happen.

Denise

While completing her Master of Arts in English, Denise taught as a graduate teaching assistant and worked as a tutor for a summer start program and an academic support program for student athletes. Because her higher education career as a student started at the community college, her goal was to work with community college students, specifically vertical transfer-track students. After completing her degree, Denise began as a part-time English instructor at WCC in 2013 and became a full-time instructor in 2014. During her time at WCC, Denise has also served as the Honors Program coordinator and as a member of the eLearning and Professional Development committees.

Since 2016, Denise has taught the current iteration of ACA 122 three times. In fact, she was one of the first instructors to teach the current iteration of the course and was instrumental in helping make incremental changes and improvements to the course during 2016 and 2017. For her, teaching ACA 122 is a unique experience given the fact that she took a version of the course while attending WCC as a student. Because Denise was once a vertical transfer-track student

herself, she can relate to the students she teaches in ways that many other instructors cannot.

Overall, Denise is a capable ACA 122 instructor who can also serve as a role model for students aspiring to transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution.

Kelly

Before joining the faculty at WCC in 2013, Kelly began teaching mathematics at a local high school in 2005 after finishing her Master of Arts in Secondary Mathematics Education. At the high school level, she taught various mathematics courses and served as an advisor for a small group of high school seniors. As an advisor, it was her responsibility to help her assigned students plan and apply for colleges and scholarships. Currently, Kelly is a lead instructor in the mathematics department at WCC and teaches everything from basic math skills to calculus. She has also served as a member of the Technology Committee, the Faculty Assembly secretary, and a faculty advisor for several student organizations on campus.

During her time at WCC, Kelly has taught the current iteration of ACA 122 three times. Besides teaching the course, she has also been helpful in making small adjustments to the course since 2016. Her ability to creatively engage students in the mathematics classroom has translated well into the ACA 122 classroom. As the ACA 122 coordinator, I have had several discussions with her on ways in which to better engage students and increase student commitment to ACA 122. For Kelly, it is the genuine enjoyment she gets from teaching and learning from her students that drives her passion for guiding those students along their academic journey. Overall, Kelly is an excellent ACA 122 instructor who has an uncanny ability to motivate and support her students to achieve their academic goals.

Phase I: Baseline Data Collection Procedures

The following sub-sections outline the data collection processes used to gather baseline data from student and faculty participants during Phase I of the study.

Student Semi-Structured Interviews

To select student participants for Phase I, a purposeful sampling strategy was used. After identifying which students would be eligible to participate in the study, an email (see Appendix E) was sent to the participant pool on Monday, June 7, 2021. Unfortunately, the email was unable to garner any student interest. Because of this, I had to ask faculty and advisors to assist me in recruiting student participants. Ultimately, however, I had to contact students directly either via email or in-person. Following this direct outreach, five students agreed to participate in the study and semi-structured interviews were conducted with each.

It is important to note that with each subsequent student interview, it became clearer to me as to what details were important and should be probed further. Consequently, the first student interview was the shortest in duration and the last student interview was the longest in duration.

Megan

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was given to Megan to read. The form was then signed by Megan. The interview with Megan took place on Monday, November 8, 2021 at 1:15 PM EST. The interview was conducted in-person in my campus office and took 12 minutes to complete. The questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The interview audio was recorded using my personal cell phone. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was six pages long.

Being the first interview conducted with a student, the conversation with Megan revolved mostly around the pre-determined interview questions and did not include many lines of inquiry tangential to those questions. Also, since it had been over a year since Megan took ACA 122, the recollection of the course was not as salient as some of the latter student interviewees' recollection. Although this gap in time contributed to her lack of remembrance, Megan was still able to provide me with some interesting insights into what she feels the course should focus on based on her academic experiences and challenges during the subsequent semesters after taking ACA 122. As a first-generation college student with a lot of experience in higher education, Megan understands what new college students need and should learn early in their academic careers if they are to be successful at achieving their goals.

Patty

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was given to Patty to read. The form was then signed by Patty. The interview with Patty took place on Friday, November 5, 2021 at 11:30 AM EST. The interview was conducted in-person in my campus office and took 16 minutes to complete. The questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The interview audio was recorded using my personal cell phone. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was eight pages long.

As was the case with the first student interview, the interview with Patty was impacted by the amount of time between when she took ACA 122 and when the interview was conducted. Fortunately, however, I was able to learn from the first student interview and managed to ask more probing questions outside of the pre-determined interview questions. Because of this, the interview with Patty was much more conversational than the first student interview. Again, the

interview provided me with the perspective of an experienced college student reflecting on her experience of taking ACA 122 as a novice college student.

Thomas

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was given to Thomas to read. The form was then signed by Thomas. The interview with Thomas took place on Thursday, November 18, 2021 at 10 AM EST. The interview was conducted in-person in my campus office and took 20 minutes to complete. The questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The interview audio was recorded using my personal cell phone. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was eight pages long.

Although Thomas had previously taken a course that I taught and was familiar with me prior to the interview taking place, he still appeared shy and reserved. Because of this, the interview started slowly, but progressed well after he began to feel comfortable. The previous two student interviews also prepared me to be able to ask probing questions, which helped in gathering more details than Thomas initially offered. Unlike the previous two student interviewees, Thomas had taken the course much more recently and was able to recollect more about his experience taking ACA 122. The bulk of the interview centered around how taking ACA 122 has helped Thomas acclimate to the college setting and his thoughts on the ideal course modality for ACA 122.

Jimmy

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was given to Jimmy to read. The form was then signed by Jimmy. The interview with Jimmy took place on Friday, November 19, 2021 at 11 AM EST. The interview was conducted in-person in

my campus office and took 20 minutes to complete. The questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The interview audio was recorded using my personal cell phone. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was nine pages long.

The interview with Jimmy provided me an opportunity to speak with a student who began his academic career as an Associate in Arts student but changed majors after taking ACA 122. Before taking the course, he did not realize that there was another academic program offered at WCC that would allow him to begin studying what he was interested in well before transferring to a 4-year institution. Much of what was discussed during the interview with Jimmy revolved around his discovering of the Associate in Applied Science – Game Art and Animation program while taking ACA 122 and how beneficial that sort of information could be to other students similar to him. Beyond that, Jimmy also provided some useful information on how some aspects of the course helped him become a better college student and how those aspects can be changed to help all vertical transfer-track students be successful early in their higher education career.

George

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was given to George to read. The form was then signed by George. The interview with George took place on Tuesday, November 23, 2021 at 10 AM EST. The interview was conducted in-person in my campus office and took 30 minutes to complete. The questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The interview audio was recorded using my personal cell phone. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was 13 pages long.

By the time I conducted the interview with George, I had accrued enough interview experience to be able to gather some detailed answers to the pre-determined interview questions by knowing which and what type of probing questions to ask. During the interview, George spoke openly about his experience taking ACA 122. Although he had done some preliminary academic planning prior to starting at WCC, he made it clear that by taking ACA 122 he was able to get a solid grasp on what he needed to do to successfully transfer to a 4-year institution. It was also mentioned that some of the course content in ACA 122 overlapped with some of the course content of other courses he had taken. Similar to other student interviewees who took ACA 122 during the last year, George mentioned that he would prefer the course to be offered as an in-person course rather than a synchronous online course.

Faculty Semi-Structured Interviews

As stated previously, purposeful sampling was used to select faculty participants. To recruit faculty participants, an email (see Appendix F) was sent to every faculty member in the Arts and Sciences Division on Monday, June 7, 2021. Potential participants were given five days to reply. During that time, five faculty members reached out willing to participate in an interview. To increase the number of faculty participants, individual emails were sent to several faculty members after the five days had elapsed. A total of nine faculty members were interviewed during Phase I. Descriptions of those faculty interviews follows.

Bob

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was emailed to Bob. The form was read and signed by Bob and returned to me via email. The interview with Bob took place on Thursday, June 10, 2021 at 11 AM EST. The interview was conducted using Google Meet and took 42 minutes to complete. The questions from the

interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was 16 pages long.

During the interview, Bob appeared to be enthusiastic about participating and showed a sincere interest in the purpose of the study and the potential positive outcomes of the study. After some initial rapport building, I began asking the interview questions and the interview proceeded without interruption. The conversation centered mostly around the pre-determined interview questions, but did, at times, wander to topics tangential to the interview questions. Overall, the interview was successful and provided me with several insights concerning ACA 122.

Angela

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was emailed to Angela. The form was read and signed by Angela and returned to me via email. The interview with Angela took place on Tuesday, June 15, 2021 at 1 PM EST. The interview was conducted using Google Meet and took 43 minutes to complete. The questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was 18 pages long.

Although somewhat disjointed at times, the interview with Angela provided an opportunity to hear from an instructor who has substantial online teaching experience and someone who has taught ACA 122 online. Her knowledge of pedagogical approaches to teaching online fortuitously colored the answers she provided to the pre-determined interview questions. While she feels that most courses can be taught online as well as they can be taught face-to-face, she did express that the current iteration of ACA 122 does not translate well to the online

environment. Overall, the interview with Angela was helpful in understanding how ACA 122 can be changed to improve the effectiveness of the online modality.

Maria

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was emailed to Maria. The form was read and signed by Maria and returned to me via email. The interview with Maria took place on Tuesday, June 15, 2021 at 2:30 PM EST. The interview was conducted using Google Meet and took 108 minutes to complete. The questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was 35 pages long.

Of the faculty interviews conducted, the interview with Maria was the longest. Her substantial knowledge of teaching online was fully demonstrated through the answers she provided to the pre-determined interview questions. Much of the interview centered around the format or structure of ACA 122, with less attention paid to the actual content of the course. This focus provided an interesting perspective on how the course should unfold rather than merely discussing what topics or content should or should not be included. Overall, the interview with Maria was very detailed and generated several ideas on how the course should be structured so that it can better provide vertical transfer-track students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise needed to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution.

Nancy

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was emailed to Nancy. The form was read and signed by Nancy and returned to me via email. The interview with Nancy took place on Thursday, June 17, 2021 at 10 AM EST. The interview was

conducted using Google Meet and took 56 minutes to complete. The questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was 20 pages long.

The interview with Nancy proceeded with little deviation from the pre-determined interview questions. It was obvious that due to her limited experience teaching the course, she did not have as much to say about ACA 122 as some of the other faculty participants in this study. She also appeared somewhat inhibited in her answers and seemed to not want to talk negatively about the current iteration of the course. I believe this stems from the fact that I am the creator of the current course and she possibly did not want to insult or offend me. While the interview was not as fruitful as others, some valuable data was still captured.

Matt

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was emailed to Matt. The form was read and signed by Matt and returned to me via email. The interview with Matt took place on Monday, June 21, 2021 at 1:30 PM EST. The interview was conducted using Google Meet and took 56 minutes to complete. The questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was 23 pages long.

As expected, the interview with Matt was concise but comprehensive. The interview focused on several aspects of ACA 122, which included course assignments, course format, and student sentiment about the course. Similar to many others, Matt has experienced difficulty in getting some ACA 122 students to take the course seriously and turn in assignments. We spent

much of the interview talking about this aspect of the course and generated some interesting ideas on how to improve the way in which students view the course. Overall, the interview with Matt provided insights into the perspective of an instructor who is dedicated to student success but does not pamper or overindulge students.

Daniel

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was emailed to Daniel. The form was read and signed by Daniel and returned to me via email. The interview with Daniel took place on Tuesday, June 22, 2021 at 2 PM EST. The interview was conducted using Google Meet and took 30 minutes to complete. The questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was nine pages long.

Expectedly, the interview with Daniel was relatively brief, but at the same time provided a beneficial critique of the current iteration of ACA 122. As mentioned previously, ACA 122 is not Daniel's favorite course to teach. It is this preference that ultimately led to having an engaging conversation that focused mainly on how to change ACA 122 to improve the course for both the students who take the course and the instructors who teach the course. Overall, the interview with Daniel highlighted many aspects of the course that appear small or insignificant but have a greater impact on the success of the course than most people can see or realize.

Amanda

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was emailed to Amanda. The form was read and signed by Amanda and returned to me via email. The interview with Amanda took place on Thursday, June 24, 2021 at 11 AM EST. The

interview was conducted using Google Meet and took 51 minutes to complete. The questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was 40 pages long.

The interview with Amanda was fast-paced and covered several aspects of ACA 122 including course topics, the types of assignments used, teaching modalities. Unsurprisingly, the main focus revolved around the online aspect of the course. For Amanda, the current iteration of the course is not ideally suited to the online learning environment. Much of the time was spent discussing ways in which to change the course so that it can better provide online vertical transfer-track students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise they need to transfer to and successfully graduate from a 4-year institution. Overall, the interview was successful in brainstorming ideas on how to improve the online offering of ACA 122.

Denise

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was emailed to Denise. The form was read and signed by Denise and returned to me via email. The interview with Denise took place on Tuesday, June 29, 2021 at 10:30 AM EST. The interview was conducted using Google Meet and took 37 minutes to complete. The questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was 13 pages long.

Although the interview with Denise was one of the briefer faculty participant interviews, it still yielded some interesting and useful data. For the most part, the interview focused on the vertical transfer process and the aspects of ACA 122 that were the most crucial for students to

know and understand if they are to successfully transfer to a 4-year institution. By extension, the complexities of guiding students through the transfer process as an instructor were also discussed. Overall, the interview with Denise, even though it was relatively brief, helped to gather several practical ideas that can potentially be implemented in ACA 122 so that it provides students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise they need to successfully navigate the transfer process.

Kelly

Prior to the interview taking place, an informed consent form (see Appendix B) was emailed to Kelly. The form was read and signed by Kelly and returned to me via email. The interview with Kelly took place on Monday, October 12, 2021 at 2:10 PM EST. The interview was conducted using Google Meet and took 37 minutes to complete. The questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix C) were used during the interview. The audio-recording of the interview was transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated online transcription service. The transcription was 15 pages long.

The interview with Kelly was originally scheduled for late June of 2021. Due to several extenuating circumstances, however, the interview had to be rescheduled twice. Although conducted later than expected, the interview with Kelly was enlightening in several ways. The most noteworthy part of our conversation centered around some of the ways in which she engages her students in the ACA 122 classroom. This information is of particular interest and usefulness as it is typically difficult to get most students to earnestly focus on and see the value in the course topics and associated course activities. Overall, the interview with Kelly helped to discover ways in which to enhance student perception of ACA 122 through thoughtful engagement and commitment.

Phase I: Baseline Data Analysis

Upon completion of the semi-structured interviews with students who have taken ACA 122 and faculty who have taught ACA 122, the automated transcriptions of the interviews were reviewed for accuracy. When using an automated transcription software, it is imperative that this first step be completed prior to coding the data. To ensure accuracy, each line of the transcriptions was read carefully, and errors were corrected by comparing the transcription text to the interview audio. Once all transcription errors were corrected, I proceeded to the next step of the qualitative data analysis process, which was coding the data.

First Cycle Coding Process

Because of my many years of experience coordinating the ACA 122 course, I knew that it was necessary for me to utilize an inductive coding method when analyzing the data to eliminate as much bias as possible. Inductive coding, as opposed to deductive coding, uses a bottom-up approach instead of a top-down approach to creating codes. In other words, inductive coding is the creation of original codes spontaneously as the data is reviewed for the first time as opposed to using pre-determined codes to analyze the data (Saldaña, 2021). Employing this coding method allowed me to analyze the data with an open mind and as impartially as possible.

Interview transcriptions were coded manually and inductively using a qualitative analysis software called Quirkos. Although this software does not automate the data analysis process, it does provide a simple and efficient way to organize and code interview data electronically rather than doing so using paper and highlighters. Prior to coding the interview data, the corrected interview transcripts were uploaded to Quirkos as Microsoft Word files. Each interview transcription, or source, was then assigned several properties including age, race/ethnicity, gender, interviewee type (*student* or *faculty*), time at WCC (only for faculty), academic

discipline (only for faculty), and academic program (only for students). These source properties were used during the data analysis process as searchable terms to compare participant sentiments based on these properties.

To conduct the first cycle coding process, I started by reading through each interview transcript. First cycle codes were created quickly and without too much deliberation during this first pass through the interview transcripts. Because I did not use pre-determined codes, the number of codes rapidly increased during the review of the first few interview transcripts. As I continued to review subsequent interview transcripts, the frequency with which new codes were created slowly decreased. Eventually, most of the data from the latter reviewed transcripts was able to be coded using the codes that were created earlier in the interview transcript review process.

Transitioning from First Cycle to Second Cycle Coding

Before proceeding to the second cycle of coding, it was necessary to first utilize a transitional analytic process method. The purpose of any first cycle coding to second cycle coding transitional process method is to further review the first cycle coding effort so that one can strategically move forward to additional coding and qualitative analytic methods (Saldaña, 2021). To accomplish this pre-second cycle coding preparatory process, I employed the use of code charting. This method involves succinctly summarizing each participant interview in one column, while including their respective major, or primary, codes in another column (Saldaña, 2021). These primary codes can then be used during the second cycle of coding to ultimately determine themes within the data. Tables 7 and 8 provide the outcome of the code charting transitional analytic process method used for this study.

Table 7

Phase I Baseline Data Analysis: Student Participant Primary Code Chart

Student Participant	Interview Summary	Primary Codes
Megan	Expected ACA 122 to help her acclimate to the college environment. Opened her eyes to how different college was compared to high school. Helped her figure out that nursing was her ideal career path and is expecting to transfer to earn a BSN.	GETTING USED TO COLLEGE CAREER PLANNING STUDY SKILLS PROFESSIONALISM
Patty	Heard from others that ACA 122 taught you how to be a college student. Felt that the course involved a lot of busy work but did see the value in some of it. Found the learning styles/preferences to be useful. ACA 122 confirmed her decision to be a nurse. Thinks assignments should be more application-based. Would like to see more attention paid to financial resources.	EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION PREPARED TO TRANSFER BEING A COLLEGE STUDENT BUSY WORK ACA 122 VALUE LEARNING STRATEGIES CONFIRMED CAREER CHOICE APPLICATION BASED ASSIGNMENTS FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Table 7 (continued)

Student Participant	Interview Summary	Primary Codes
Thomas	<p>Expected ACA 122 to teach him about how to do well in college, study skills. Enjoyed figuring out what his ideal career path should be and how to accomplish his career goals. ACA 122 has helped him acclimate to college and believes the course is worth more than the one credit hour you earn. Would prefer the course to be in-person meeting twice a week and should be required during first semester.</p>	SUCCEEDING IN COLLEGE LEARNING STRATEGIES CAREER PLANNING GETTING USED TO COLLEGE ACA 122 VALUE FACE-TO-FACE MEET TWICE A WEEK FIRST SEMESTER COURSE
Jimmy	<p>Thought ACA 122 would be one of his easier courses and was correct. Found the career planning portion of the course to be very useful. Enjoyed the learning about notetaking, which has helped in math. Already understood his learning style. Understands that he should be more aware of the courses he takes so that he is not wasting time or money. Increased transfer confidence. Would prefer in-person course.</p>	EASY COURSE CAREER PLANNING NOTETAKING SKILLS USEFUL HELPS SUCCESS IN OTHER COURSES LEARNING STYLES COURSE SELECTION SELF-EFFICACY FOR TRANSFER FACE-TO-FACE

Table 7 (continued)

Student Participant	Interview Summary	Primary Codes
George	<p>Unsure of what to expect from ACA 122 and worried about it being an online course. Found ACA 122 assignments to be easy. Instructor was helpful. Already knew what he wanted to do as a career, but ACA 122 helped him plan better. Learned about free on-campus tutoring for first time. Already skilled in time management and other learning strategies. Thinks students should take ACA 122 their first semester. Did not see value in having a required textbook.</p>	<p>NO ACA 122 EXPECTATIONS ONLINE COURSE HESITANT HELPFUL INSTRUCTOR CAREER PLANNING STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES LEARNING STRATEGIES FACE-TO-FACE FIRST SEMESTER USE OF TEXTBOOK</p>

Table 8

Phase I Baseline Data Analysis: Faculty Participant Primary Code Chart

Faculty Participant	Interview Summary	Primary Codes
Bob	<p>Expected ACA 122 to be close to what it was. Though it would be mostly focused on student success strategies/resources. Did not expect to spend so much time on academic planning. Exceeded expectations. Found the academic planning portion of the course to be the most useful.</p> <p>Helped increase student motivation/saw the door opening. Especially helped first-generation students realize that vertical transfer is a real possibility. Felt like it was his responsibility to guide students along their academic journey. Successfully connected with most of the students.</p> <p>Meeting twice per week helped form relationships. Found certain topics to be important but mundane. ACA 122 prepared students for vertical better than not taking the course.</p> <p>Incorporated representatives from 4-year institutions and students responded well to that. Can see a difference when students take the course seriously.</p>	<p>EXPECTATIONS EXCEEDED</p> <p>ACADEMIC PLANNING</p> <p>INCREASED STUDENT MOTIVATION</p> <p>FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS</p> <p>A RESPONSIBILITY TO GUIDE STUDENTS</p> <p>CONNECTED WITH STUDENTS</p> <p>PREPARED FOR TRANSFER</p> <p>FACE-TO-FACE</p> <p>MEETS TWICE PER WEEK</p> <p>STUDENT EFFORT = BETTER VERTICAL TRANSFER PREP</p>

Table 8 (continued)

Faculty Participant	Interview Summary	Primary Codes
Angela	<p>Thought ACA 122 would be just like a student success course taken as a student. Very eager to teach the course. Thinks all topics are useful.</p> <p>Did not feel confident with the advising component of the course.</p> <p>Was able to be more effective teaching the course in-person than online. Had retention issues teaching the course online. Does not think the course should be offered mostly online.</p> <p>Vastly different experience teaching in-person than online. Would like to see students make more connections in the ACA 122 classroom. Build a community within the class for support. Thinks having a group of instructors who teach the course regularly would help.</p>	<p>TOOK STUDENT SUCCESS COURSE</p> <p>EAGER TO TEACH</p> <p>COURSE TOPICS USEFUL</p> <p>LOW ADVISING CONFIDENCE</p> <p>FACE-TO-FACE</p> <p>STUDENT RETENTION ISSUES</p> <p>POOR ONLINE EXPERIENCE</p> <p>COMMUNITY BUILDING</p> <p>FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS</p> <p>CONSISTENT INSTRUCTORS</p> <p>ONLINE = LIMITED CONNECTION</p>

Table 8 (continued)

Faculty Participant	Interview Summary	Primary Codes
Maria	<p>Having previous experience teaching ACA 111, knew that ACA 122 would cover student success strategies. Also realized that the course would go beyond ACA 111 to include information on vertical transfer. Found all course topics to be useful. Would like to see more application-based assignments. Thinks the course should be broken into two halves. The first half should focus on career and academic planning. The second half should focus on various topics already a part of the course but reinforced with enhanced assignments/tying concepts back to the plan created in the first half. Believes ACA 122 instructors should be more mentors than advisors. Focus less on creating a perfect academic plan and more on process used to plan. Managing vertical transfer-related expectations.</p>	<p>VAST SUCCESS COURSE TEACHING EXPERIENCE</p> <p>VERTICAL TRANSFER SUCCESS</p> <p>COURSE TOPICS USEFUL</p> <p>APPLICATION-BASED ASSIGNMENTS</p> <p>REFLECTIVE ASSIGNMENTS</p> <p>INTERVIEW PROFESSIONALS</p> <p>MENTOR VS ADVISOR</p> <p>PROCESS ORIENTED COURSE</p> <p>REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS</p>

Table 8 (continued)

Faculty Participant	Interview Summary	Primary Codes
Nancy	Heard from other faculty that the course was not exciting to teach. Did not realize the course would be set up for her/she did not have to design the course herself. Found that the ACA 122 helps students better navigate college/where to go when they need help. Helped students formulate their goals. Had issues with students dropping the course. Would prefer either fully online or fully in-person. No synchronous online/hybrid. ACA 122 gives students space to think about where they want to go. Found college transfer advising to be complex and difficult.	HEARSAY/GRAPEVINE NOT EXCITING TO TEACH LIMITED PREPARATORY WORK STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES FORMING GOALS STUDENT RETENTION ISSUES FACE-TO-FACE FULLY ONLINE FINDING YOUR DIRECTION DIFFICULT TO ADVISE COLLEGE TRANSFER

Table 8 (continued)

Faculty Participant	Interview Summary	Primary Codes
Matt	<p>Had experience with teaching previous versions of ACA 122. Liked the increased focus on academic planning in the current iteration. Students enjoyed when college representatives came to class. Thinks the course can be condensed to an 8-week format. Should also incorporate other academic programs on campus in case some students really do not want to transfer to a 4-year. Limited by ability to teach topics like study skills/not what he is comfortable teaching. Needs to be in-person meeting twice per week. Lots of student issues when taught online such as not turning in assignments, careless/thoughtless work.</p>	VAST SUCCESS COURSE TEACHING EXPERIENCE ACADEMIC PLANNING 4-YEAR COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVES 8-WEEK COURSE EXPOSURE TO OTHER ACADEMIC PROGRAMS NOT CONFIDENT IN TEACHING SOME TOPICS FACE-TO-FACE LACK OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION/EFFORT

Table 8 (continued)

Faculty Participant	Interview Summary	Primary Codes
Daniel	Expected to teach students about resources at WCC and beyond. Confirmation of expectations but went beyond initial assumptions. Enjoyed teaching the course. Did not enjoy the advising responsibilities tied to teaching the course. Had difficulty getting students to turn in work or turn in completed work. Would prefer the course be in-person. Those students who took the course seriously benefited the most/better prepared to transfer. Believes ACA 122 can transcend into other courses for students. Needs stronger emphasis on soft skills.	LIMITED EXPECTATIONS MORE TO THE COURSE ENJOYED TEACHING DISLIKED ADVISING LACK OF STUDENT EFFORT/PARTICIPATION FACE-TO-FACE PREPARED TO TRANSFER BENEFICIAL BEYOND ACA 122 CLASSROOM INCREASE SOFT SKILLS CONTENT

Table 8 (continued)

Faculty Participant	Interview Summary	Primary Codes
Amanda	<p>Had limited background knowledge about student success courses before teaching ACA 122. Thought it would be an extended orientation. Felt that some of the assignments were busy work and that this negatively impacted student sentiment. Did see the value in creating the academic plan. Felt disconnected to her students when teaching the course online. Prefers in-person. Her students seemed to respond well to learning about time management. Would like to see more emphasis placed on financial literacy and soft skills. Would eliminate the section on health and wellness/condense topics to make it an 8-week course. Students need to take ownership of their academics/self-sufficient. Was not confident in her ability to advise properly/constantly looking up information. Wants to help students realize their passions and potential. ACA 122 is a good start for preparing to transfer.</p>	<p>LIMITED EXPECTATIONS EXTENDED ORIENTATION BUSY WORK = LOW VALUE ACADEMIC PLANNING INCREASE SOFT SKILLS CONTENT INCREASE FINANCIAL LITERACY CONTENT CONDENSE TOPICS 8-WEEK COURSE STUDENT OWNERSHIP SELF-SUFFICIENT LOW ADVISING CONFIDENCE REALIZING POTENTIAL PREPARING FOR TRANSFER</p>

Table 8 (continued)

Faculty Participant	Interview Summary	Primary Codes
Denise	Expected ACA 122 to help students be academically successful and build an academic plan. Likes that the current iteration of the course focuses more on academic planning than previous versions but still incorporates study skills and other student success topics. Believes the academic planning portion of the course to have the most immediate value. Students seemed to complete assignments with little thought put into them/did not get enough out of the assignment. Would adjust how time management is approached/discussed. Needs to focus more on time management skills/strategies. Prefers in-person class, especially for younger students. Hard to build relationships online.	ACADEMIC SUCCESS ACADEMIC PLANNING LOW STUDENT EFFORT LIMITED STUDENT VALUE FACE-TO-FACE BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ONLINE NOT FOR EVERYONE

Table 8 (continued)

Faculty Participant	Interview Summary	Primary Codes
Kelly	<p>Expected students to be more prepared than they were. Found many students had little to no idea of how to achieve their goals. Noticed many students were incorrectly placed on a vertical transfer-track and actually needed to be in another academic program on campus. Students finding their baccalaureate degree plans was one of the most valuable parts of the course. Brought in representatives from counseling services, career services, and other academic departments. Students responded well to that. ACA 122 needs more of that. Students do not realize what else is out there. Students pushed back on the learning strategies and questioned why they needed it. If students take the course seriously, it will help prepare them for vertical transfer. Approach to teaching about student support services needs to be more hands-on rather than simply informational. Increase emphasis should be placed on campus policies and procedures.</p>	<p>LOW STUDENT PREPARATION</p> <p>INCORRECT STUDENT PLACEMENT</p> <p>ACADEMIC PLANNING</p> <p>REPRESENTATIVES FROM OTHER AREAS OF CAMPUS</p> <p>LOW STUDENT VALUE FOR LEARNING STRATEGIES</p> <p>STUDENT SERIOUSNESS/EFFORT = PREPARED TO TRANSFER</p> <p>INCREASE HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES</p> <p>INCREASE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES</p>

Second Cycle Coding Process

Upon completion of the code charting method used after the first cycle of coding to identify each participant's primary codes, I proceeded with the second cycle of coding. The goal of this second cycle of coding was to condense the numerous primary codes into a smaller number of secondary codes from which themes can then be derived. To accomplish this final step of the overall inductive coding process, I utilized a second cycle coding method known as Pattern Coding. In its essence, Pattern Coding is analogous to the factor and cluster analysis methods used in quantitative research in that it allows one to reduce a large number of variables or primary codes into a fewer number of factors or themes based on commonality (Saldaña, 2021). Pattern codes, therefore, are “explanatory or inferential codes” that identify a theme and turn the results of the “first cycle of coding into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 322).

Through the use of Pattern Coding, I was able to condense the large number of primary codes into several secondary codes. These secondary codes were then used to derive the five pattern codes, or themes, of the study. Table 9 provides the results of this second cycle of coding and the themes that emerged. It should be noted that due to the identical nature of the interview questions posed to both student and faculty participants, and the similarities among interviewee responses to those questions, it was not necessary to create a separate set of themes for each participant group. The following sub-sections provide descriptions of each theme and the data justifying and supporting each theme.

Description and Support of Theme #1

Based on the data analysis, the first theme identified was that ACA 122 provides what students need to be successful, but only if students take the course seriously and effortfully. As

Table 9

Phase I: Second Cycle Codes Condensed to Pattern Codes/Themes

Second Cycle Codes	Pattern Codes/Themes
CONFIRMED CAREER CHOICE	Theme #1: ACA 122 provides what students need to be successful, but only if students take the course seriously and effortfully.
SELF-EFFICACY FOR TRANSFER	
INCREASED STUDENT EFFORT	
COURSE TOPICS USEFUL	
INCREASED STUDENT MOTIVATION	
LOW STUDENT EFFORT = LOWER TSC	
HIGH STUDENT EFFORT = HIGHER TSC	
TWICE A WEEK	Theme #2: ACA 122 should be an 8-week course that meets in-person twice per week.
CONDENSE COURSE TOPICS	
8-WEEK COURSE	
ONLINE COURSE HESITANCY	
ONLINE = LIMITED CONNECTION	
POOR ONLINE EXPERIENCE	
FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS	Theme #3: ACA 122 should be taken during the first semester by new vertical transfer-track students.
FIRST SEMESTER COURSE	
HELPS SUCCESS IN OTHER COURSES	
BENEFICIAL BEYOND ACA 122 CLASSROOM	
FINDING YOUR DIRECTION	

Table 9 (continued)

Second Cycle Codes	Pattern Codes/Themes
4-YEAR COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVES	Theme #4: ACA 122 should incorporate and introduce students to 4-year college representatives and other academic programs on campus.
EXPOSURE TO OTHER ACADEMIC PROGRAMS	
REPRESENTATIVES FROM OTHER AREAS OF CAMPUS	
INCORRECT STUDENT PLACEMENT	
APPLICATION BASED ASSIGNMENTS	Theme #5: ACA 122 content and content-reinforcing activities should be application-based, vertical transfer process-oriented, reflective, and applicable to where students want to go.
CAREER PLANNING	
ACADEMIC PLANNING	
PROCESS ORIENTED COURSE	
REFLECTIVE ASSIGNMENTS	

an action-research study aiming to enhance the way in which ACA 122 can provide transfer student capital (TSC) to vertical transfer-track students, it was first necessary to determine how the current iteration of the course is, or is not, doing this already. To accomplish this task, student and faculty participants were asked about their experiences with taking the course or teaching the course. They were asked more specifically about the aspects of the course that they found useful or not useful and about the extent to which they believe the current iteration of the course provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students. Participants were also asked about how adequately they believe the current iteration of ACA 122 prepares vertical transfer-track students to transfer successfully.

Based on the interview data analyzed, it quickly became apparent that the current iteration of ACA 122 does provide what students need to be successful, but only if students take the course seriously. In other words, the current design of the course does provide vertical transfer-track students with the TSC they need to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. However, acquiring the necessary TSC depends largely on the student's motivation, attitude, and behavior while taking ACA 122. Both student and faculty participants echoed this overall sentiment.

When asked about whether or not ACA 122 prepares vertical transfer-track students to transfer successfully, all interviewees responded with "Yes." Participants were then asked why they believe this to be true. Jimmy, a student participant, replied by saying that "I do think so...I think [ACA 122] has shown me how I should be more careful about the classes I take...Yes, it's helped a lot." Another student participant, Megan, who is a nursing student but plans to transfer to a 4-year institution to earn a BSN, said, "I think [ACA 122] helped with my overall professionalism...I think it just helped me communicate a little more easily with instructors over

email.” Megan also made it known that before taking ACA 122, she was unsure of what she wanted to pursue as a career and said:

[ACA 122] helped me because before I wasn’t considering nursing, I wasn’t considering it at all. I thought for sure I was going to go into criminology, but I think [ACA 122] helped me kind of gear towards my interest of science and health care... [ACA 122] planted a seed, and then life just pushed me towards that way.

George, a student participant, had a bit more to offer by stating:

I could definitely say that [ACA 122] helped make sure that I was on track or prepared to transfer because it lays out your classes and makes sure you know what university you want to go to. And like the credible sources assignment, it also involved your research and the major you wanted to go into...so, [ACA 122] lets you explore several careers...and write out the specific requirements for each career. It has definitely helped me prepare [for transfer].

In addition to being prepared for transfer from an informational and academic standpoint, student participants also noted that ACA 122 has helped increase their confidence, or self-efficacy, to transfer to a 4-year institution. To paraphrase several statements made by Jimmy, ACA 122 has helped him build the confidence to take ownership of his education because the course has allowed him to realize that he can look things up on his own and that he does not need to rely on his parents, advisors, or other academic professionals to tell him what he needs to do. Patty, a student participant, also praised the extent to which ACA 122 has increased her self-efficacy for transfer but admits that “when [she] was taking the class, [she] didn’t really think about it long-term” and that “[she] should have had a better outlook on what the class was trying to offer” rather than simply “focus[ing] so much on the grade.”

Faculty participants also had much to say about the extent to which ACA 122 currently provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students and how student characteristics impact the acquisition of TSC. Put succinctly, Daniel stated that “those [students] who took the course seriously and put the effort in, yes...it prepared them more than those [students] that didn’t put that type of effort in.” Daniel also mentioned he can “see a difference in various student attitudes coming into [ACA 122] and the amount of effort that they [are] willing to put into their work.”

When asked about the same matter, Kelly said:

That depends on the student. If the student took it seriously and really did the assignments...and treated ACA 122 as a college course? Yes, they are completely ready [to transfer]. They are transferred. If it is a student who did the bare minimum just to barely squeak by with that C, they still can’t log into Self-Service and register themselves [for classes]. So, are they going to be able to hit a university and pick their courses and register and be successful? I don’t think so. I mean, we try to give them everything we have. But unless they utilize it and learn the skills and techniques, it’s on them.

When speaking about one of the major assignments in the current ACA 122 curriculum, Amanda made it clear that “if [students] really do the project and take the gumption to figure it out, I think it would save [students] a lot of heartache.” One faculty participant, Bob, even estimated the percentage of students whom he thinks are prepared for transfer after completing ACA 122 by stating “I would say it prepared probably at least 80% of [students].” The same participant also mentioned that:

Yeah, I think for the most part, overall, yes, [ACA 122] prepared [students] a lot more than not. You know, I think if we didn’t do this, they would be completely lost because

our advising center is so, I think, overwhelmed. Yea, I think we have a lot higher [vertical] transfer rate than we would have without it. Absolutely.

Based on conversations with students and faculty, it appears that the current iteration of ACA 122 is, for the most part, providing students with the TSC they need to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. It is also clear, however, that adjustments to the course can still be made to ensure that all vertical transfer-track students who take ACA 122 are able to acquire the necessary TSC. Therefore, the remainder of the themes discussed are meant to serve the purpose of this study by enhancing the ability of ACA 122 to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students.

Description and Support of Theme #2

Based on the data analysis, the second theme identified was that ACA 122 should be an 8-week course that meets in-person twice per week. Throughout my time as the ACA 122 coordinator, the course has been offered in just about every format and modality that exists within higher education. For various reasons over the past eight years, ACA 122 has been taught as an 8-week class, a 16-week class, an in-person class, an online asynchronous class, an online synchronous class, an in-person hybrid class, and an online hybrid synchronous class. After speaking with students and faculty, however, it has become apparent that the most popular format and modality for ACA 122 is for the course to be an 8-week course that meets in-person twice per week.

Of the students who participated in this study, two had taken ACA 122 as a 16-week course that met in-person twice per week and three had taken ACA 122 as a 16-week online hybrid synchronous course that met virtually once per week. When asked about what they thought would be the best format and modality for the course, all student interviewees responded

by saying that the course should be an in-person class. When asked why, Thomas, who took ACA 122 as an online hybrid course that met virtually, replied, “So [ACA 122] could be more interactive.” Thomas also added that he feels if ACA 122 met twice per week, it would be more beneficial, but did not give a reason as to why he believes this. George, another student participant who experienced ACA 122 as an online hybrid course that met virtually responded simply by saying, “Just because I don’t really like online classes...I’d rather be in-person.” Jimmy, who took the course in the same format as Thomas and George, learned after taking ACA 122 that he “feel[s] like [he] would do better in-person completely instead of hybrid.”

Faculty participants, who are tasked with teaching ACA 122, also had plenty to say about the ideal format and modality of the course. Amanda, who has taught the course in several formats and modalities, believes that “if the course were more streamlined, [ACA 122] could be done in eight weeks instead of 16 weeks.” Amanda also spoke about her experiences teaching the course online versus in-person:

The third time I taught [ACA 122] was online, and to be honest with you, it just was not the same [as teaching ACA 122 in-person]. I did not feel like I was able to connect as well. I don’t think the students reached out nowhere near as much as they did face-to-face. And I think [students] just went through the motions. And to be honest with you, I kind of did the same because I just didn’t feel that connection. I would say the second time I taught the course [in -person] was a much better experience than any other time I’ve had [teaching ACA 122].

One faculty participant, Matt, was forthright in his thoughts about the course being offered in a 16-week format as opposed to an 8-week format:

I just feel like I'm wasting hot air talking for 50 minutes. And I think, in my opinion, some of the stuff we can condense...I've done [ACA 122] in eight weeks, 16 weeks, two days a week, one day a week online...It can be done in eight weeks and I'm sure you've heard that before, too, you know, because it just seems it's so.

Matt later revisited the topic to say, "I think face-to-face is better for [ACA 122] in general...because when you're online, I don't think [students] are getting that interaction."

Speaking to whether or not the course should meet in-person once or twice per week, Bob said:

I think the two-session [per week] class is beneficial. Dedicating the second class of the week to allow students time to research is beneficial. I gave that second class [of the week] an opportunity for students to go through their assignments...for me to answer questions.

Description and Support of Theme #3

Based on the data analysis, the third theme identified was that ACA 122 should be taken during the first semester by new vertical transfer-track students. Apart from the format and modality of ACA 122, the majority of participants mentioned that they believe vertical transfer-track students are best served if they take the course during their first college semester. Thomas, a student participant, when asked if new students should take the course during their first semester, said "Definitely. It's a massive help, right? Sure, it's only [a] one credit hour [course], but it's worth it, right?" He continued later to say, "I feel like you should be required [to take ACA 122] at the start because it's just so important...It's just [students] might not realize it, but it helps a lot." George also had much to offer when asked if vertical transfer-track students should take ACA 122 during their first semester:

Yes, definitely. Because the longer you wait [to take ACA 122] the worse off you're going to be. The further you get into the year, or the further you get into your degree, not having the courses you actually need, you know, wasting money, basically wasting your time, taking classes that maybe you do need, maybe you don't need. So, I would definitely say it needs to be in the first semester because you can plan out your second semester [to] go ahead and get started so you're not continuing to take useless classes.

As a first-generation college student, Megan's paraphrased thoughts on the subject are that all students can benefit from taking ACA 122 their first semester, but it is first-generation college students who may benefit the most since they do not know many people who have attended college to guide them through their higher education experience.

Faculty participants also stressed how important it is for new vertical transfer-track students to take ACA 122 during their first semester of college. The most common sentiment among the faculty participants was that taking ACA 122 early helps new students acclimate to a college-level learning environment and to the specific campus environment at WCC. One faculty participant, Matt, even went as far as to say that "it should be mandatory for new students to take ACA 122 during their first semester because it helps students understand what is going on at WCC." Faculty participants also mentioned that the course helps new students understand what sort of student support services exist, when to use them, and how to use them. Angela explained this by saying, "if students wait until their last semester to take [ACA 122], they may miss out on taking advantage of the [student support] services that are available to them, especially counseling services, which are increasingly needed and not cheap elsewhere [in the private sector]."

In addition, several faculty participants mentioned that taking ACA 122 early helps new vertical transfer-track students find their “academic direction.” In her experience, Kelly has noticed that “several students are unsure of their direct path when beginning their collegiate career and ACA 122 allows them the opportunity to explore some different careers and narrow down their path to the future.” Bob, who enjoys staying in contact with and seeing the progress of the students who take ACA 122 with him, shared the following:

I think that every student at WCC who is considering transferring to a [4-year] institution should take part in ACA 122 their first semester [because] the class not only helps students understand the resources available to them on our campus, but maybe more importantly offers students a clear understanding of how that [vertical transfer] process works...the planning that goes into [transferring to a 4-year institution]...and also gives [students] a go-to person when they need advice and help with the [vertical transfer] planning process.

In some cases, students will change their mind after deciding on a particular academic path or direction. To this point, Denise stated that “even if students don’t stick to what they plan during their first semester [in ACA 122], they should still take ACA 122 in their first semester because it gives [students] the know-how, the navigational tools, and resource awareness to redirect themselves when they change their mind.”

Description and Support of Theme #4

Based on the data analysis, the fourth theme identified was that ACA 122 should incorporate and introduce students to 4-year college representatives and other academic programs on campus. In many instances, college student success courses provide an opportunity for new college students to engage in much needed academic and career exploration so that they

can make well-informed decisions regarding their academic trajectory and career path. Taking ACA 122 during their first semester of college can certainly help novice students accomplish this task, but only if the course introduces students to a diverse set of options and possibilities. The current iteration of ACA 122, while it does allow students opportunities to explore their interests and align those interests with potential careers, does not place much emphasis on introducing students to representatives of 4-year institutions or exposing students to the various academic programs available on campus. In other words, ACA 122 currently gives students a space in which to explore what they are passionate about, but sometimes students are limited by the options they know exist and do not realize that there may be other options available that are a better fit for them, their interests, and their abilities. Therefore, ACA 122 should incorporate and introduce students to 4-year institution representatives and other academic programs on campus to widen their exploratory lens.

Out of the five student participants in this study, only Jimmy mentioned the need to integrate more 4-year institution and other academic program representatives into the ACA 122 curriculum. Even though he was the only student participant to mention this, his case for why it should be included was a strong one. Initially, Jimmy was an Associate in Arts student because he knew that he wanted to earn a video game design related bachelor's degree and assumed that pursuing a vertical transfer-track degree would help him accomplish that goal. It was not until he started to do some investigation into the matter that he realized he could change his major and still transfer to a 4-year institution to earn his bachelor's degree. He quickly moved from the Associate in Arts degree to the Associate in Applied Science-Game Art and Animation program at WCC. Doing so allowed him to start studying and learning about what he is interested in and graduate with a work-ready degree in the event that his academic goals change.

One faculty participant, Kelly, made this issue abundantly clear by telling the story of a student who took her ACA 122 class because he was erroneously placed into the Associate in Science Degree when he should have been placed into one of the Associate in Applied Science (AAS) programs on campus. At some point early in the semester, the student mentioned to Kelly that “he could not wait to get into the machining lab and do all of the engineering stuff that is on campus.” As an experienced instructor, Kelly quickly realized that this student had been placed into a vertical transfer-track degree program, when what he really wanted to do was something much closer to one of the AAS programs offered at WCC. After further discussion with the student, Kelly determined that he was placed into a vertical transfer-track degree program because during his admissions process he told an admissions specialist that “he wanted to do engineering.” The admissions specialist incorrectly assumed that the student intended to transfer to a 4-year institution to pursue an engineering degree. Fortunately for this student, the error was corrected, and he was placed into the appropriate degree program.

The same faculty participant shared other examples of how impactful it can be for students when they are introduced to an option or possibility that they had no idea existed. One such example involved a single mother of four who planned to transfer to a local 4-year institution to earn a BSN. According to Kelly, this student was unaware that there were several practical nursing to BSN programs in North Carolina. It was not until a representative from a 4-year institution that is over 100 miles away from WCC visited the class did the student realize that there were more options available. According to Kelly, the student had never considered this 4-year institution because “she could not drive that far”, but by the time the representative left the classroom, the student was excited because she had learned that the program was fully online and cost less than the other practical nursing to BSN program she was considering.

Although Kelly had much to share on the subject, she was not the only faculty participant to explain how important it is for students to be introduced to options that they had not considered simply because they did not know they existed. One such faculty participant, Bob, discussed how some of his ACA 122 students have really been able to connect with representatives from 4-year institutions who visited his class:

I think it has really had an impact. I know of at least two of my students who formed a relationship with 4-year college representatives that visited our class. The representative gave the students his card and told them that they could contact him with any questions that they have. Really, the students were given a connection to that school, just like we are trying to do here [at WCC].

Aside from introducing and connecting students to representatives from 4-year institutions, faculty participants also encouraged inviting representatives from other academic programs on campus to the ACA 122 classrooms. Kelly, who has a propensity for inviting guest speakers to her ACA 122 classes, mentioned a time when a representative from the nursing department on campus visited her class. She explained that before this individual gave his presentation, nearly half of the class was leaning towards nursing or the health care field. She continued by saying that “by the end of his spiel, the half [of the class that wanted to go into health care] had dropped to a quarter [of the class].” In this example, the nursing program representative actually made students change their minds about what it was they thought they wanted to do. In effect, this presenter potentially saved these students from spending a lot of time and energy pursuing a career path that was not suited to them.

Description and Support of Theme #5

Based on the data analysis, the fifth theme identified was that ACA 122 content and content-reinforcing activities should be application-based, vertical transfer process-oriented, reflective, and applicable to where students want to go. The current iteration of ACA 122 covers a wide range of topics and information geared towards helping new vertical transfer-track students acclimate to the college-level learning environment and engaging students in the vertical transfer planning process. While the academic and career planning portions of the course are very much personalized for each student, other topic areas of the course tend to be more generic and far less individualized. In speaking with student and faculty participants, this lack of individualization for some of the topics covered creates a personal disconnect between the material and the student. This disconnect can limit student engagement with the course and can result in students not putting in the effort required to gain the TSC necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. Therefore, it stands to reason that the assignments and activities in ACA 122 should be application-based, vertical transfer process-oriented, reflective, and applicable to where students want to go.

Both student and faculty participants made it clear that the topics and information covered in ACA 122 are sufficient for most and well-suited at preparing vertical transfer-track students for transfer. However, the most salient issue appears to lie in the delivery of some topics and information, as well as the assignments currently used to reinforce this material. Patty, a student participant, characterized some of the assignments and activities currently used in ACA 122 as “busy work.” Several faculty participants also shared this sentiment with Patty. Amanda, a faculty participant, described the course as “having a lot of redundancy and busy work and not really [focused] on what the course was designed for.” Fortunately, however, the idea of “busy

work” was more common among those students who took the course online and those faculty who have only taught the course online.

To improve the quality of the course and decrease the sentiment that the course is “busy work,” student and faculty participants provided several suggestions. Patty, a student participant, when asked about how she would improve the way in which ACA 122 provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students, said:

I think I’d make it a little bit more application-based where possible and a little less information-based because some of the information stuff, especially when we’re talking about resources at the college, are pretty straightforward. I feel like most people would understand that [information] just [by] reading it or hearing about it. But how does it affect me and my college experience? How can I use these resources to benefit my success? I think that’s a better way to talk about some of these things.

Maria, a faculty participant who currently teaches exclusively online and focuses on making her online courses as engaging and student focused as possible, believes that ACA 122 could better provide students with TSC by making assignments and activities more reflective and personal. She described her experience in doing this with her own classes and how it could be applied to ACA 122 as such:

I noticed that when I flipped my general psychology classes this semester and made [assignments] more reflective, it really helped engage students. So, make ACA 122 [assignments] more applicable to their plan and their situation and they’ll get more interested in it. I think you could really strip out some of those very flat [ACA 122] assignments and make it more reflective [by] making [students] think about their

situation. I think the assignments can be shifted a little bit to make it more relatable to the individual [student].

Amanda, a faculty participant, also shared her thoughts on making the assignments and activities in ACA 122 individualized to the student and the next step on their academic journey. Her example, although specific to one topic in the course, could be applied other aspects of ACA 122:

We talk about things in the course like financial literacy. It's a lot of good information, but how does it practically relate to [students] where they are now and where they are planning on going? Instead of just telling [students] about financial aid, credit scores, and whatnot, let's have them work through scenarios that they might face now while they're at WCC. Let's also have them work through scenarios but as their future selves...when they transfer to a 4-year institution, specifically the [institution] they are thinking about transferring to.

Phase II: Inquiry Partner Consultation Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

After completing the baseline data collection and analysis in Phase I, inquiry partners of the study were consulted during Phase II to assist in the creation of the redesigned ACA 122 course. In addition to the vertical transfer-track students and faculty members who participated in the semi-structured interviews in Phase I, several members of the College's administration were included as inquiry partners and consulted during Phase II of this study. Because of their experience, expertise, and decision-making abilities, the Vice President of Academic and Student Services, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, the Director of the College Transfer Advising Center (CTAC), and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Innovation (IEI) were consulted during Phase II. Along with the students and faculty who participated in interviews, including these

individuals helped to increase the likelihood that the changes made to ACA 122 maximize the ability of the course to provide vertical transfer-track students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise they need to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution.

The procedures used to engage these inquiry partners during this consultation process were simple and straightforward. Due to the demanding schedules of those involved, it became necessary to rely on email correspondence to complete this part of the inquiry design rather than meeting and discussing in-person. To begin the inquiry partner consultation, an email was sent to student participants, faculty participants, and the aforementioned administrators. Included in this email was a brief description of the purpose of the study, an outline of the five themes of the study, a brief description of the purpose of the inquiry partner consultation, and an attachment that contained the descriptions and support for each theme determined during the Phase I data analysis (see Appendix G). Those consulted were asked to review the five themes and provide their thoughts on them. Specifically, they were asked to explain why they did or did not agree with the theme(s) presented as well as any advice or suggestions that they may have pertaining to the redesign of ACA 122. Feedback from inquiry partners was limited. Of the inquiry partners who did provide feedback, most simply said they agreed with the data analysis and themes with little to no explanation as to why they thought this way. Suggestions for redesigning ACA 122 were also lacking. While the dearth of feedback from inquiry partners was insufficient, it is assumed that this was more than likely due to the limited amount of time available for those whom feedback was requested.

Upon receiving the feedback of the baseline data analysis by the study participants and the inquiry partners, the redesigned ACA 122 course was created. To continue ensuring collaboration, a draft of the redesigned ACA 122 course was emailed to the study participants

and the inquiry partner administrators detailed previously (see Appendix H). Unfortunately, feedback from inquiry partners related to the proposed redesign of ACA 122 was also very limited. Of the feedback received, most revolved around specifics regarding the content-reinforcing activities of the course. Nevertheless, this limited feedback from inquiry partners was taken into consideration and used to create the final version of the data-informed intervention, the redesigned ACA 122 course.

Phase II: Description of the Data-Informed Intervention

Using the baseline qualitative data and subsequent data analysis completed in Phase I, along with the inquiry partner consultation data gathered during Phase II, the current iteration of ACA 122 was redesigned during Phase II to enhance the ability of the course to provide vertical transfer-track students with the TSC necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. Table 10 provides an outline of the data-informed intervention, the redesigned ACA 122 course. The redesigned ACA 122 course is intended to be taught in-person, meet twice a week, and last for eight weeks. The following sub-sections provide a week-by-week description of the redesigned ACA 122 course, the rationale for the content covered in each week, and a brief description of the content-reinforcing activity for each week. A copy of the syllabus for the redesigned course can be found in Appendix H.

Week 1: Establishing Your Vision, Mission, and Core Values

The purpose of Week 1 is to give students an opportunity to establish their personal vision statement, mission statement, and core values. Beginning the course with this type of activity helps students start the process of figuring out where they want to go, how they can get there, and how they will act to achieve their goals. Furthermore, determining their personal vision, mission, and core values can assist students during times of difficulty, struggle, and

Table 10

Outline of the Redesigned ACA 122 Course

Week	Topic Covered	Content-Reinforcing Activity Description
Week 1	Establishing Your Vision, Mission, and Core Values	Students will create their personal vision, mission, and core values
Week 2	Understanding Your WCC Student Support Services	Students will describe the resources of 10 different support services, how they can utilize these services, and where they are located on campus
Week 3	Assessing Your Career Interests and Work Values	Students will complete two inventories to define their career interest and work values and find careers that match their results
Week 4	Exploring Your Career Options and Identifying Potential Transfer Institutions	Students will further investigate three careers that they have selected based on the outcome of Week 3
		Students will match those careers with specific academic programs at various 4-year institutions
Week 5	Finding, Understanding, and Using Your Baccalaureate Degree Plans	Students will find the baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs) for the academic programs they identified in Week 4
		Students will use these BDPs to create academic plans
Week 6	What to Expect at Your Potential Transfer Institutions	Students will further investigate several characteristics and requirements of three potential transfer institutions
Week 7	Paying for Your Education	Students will research the financial aid resources that are available at the three 4-year institutions they identified previously
Week 8	Revisiting Your Vision, Mission, and Core Values	N/A

uncertainty. When faced with these types of challenges, students can review and remind themselves of their destination, how they intend on arriving at that destination, and the types of behaviors they should exhibit to aid them in achieving their goals.

The content-reinforcing activity for Week 1 asks students to write out their personal vision statement, their personal mission statement, and their core values (see Appendix J). To help students with these tasks, explanations are given as to what a vision statement is, what a mission statement is, and what core values are. Instructors will lead an in-class discussion to introduce students to these concepts and to explain the purpose of doing this type of work. Students will revisit and revise their personal vision, mission, and core values during Week 8 of the course.

Week 2: Understanding Your WCC Student Support Services

The purpose of Week 2 is to introduce students to the various student support services available to them at WCC. By making students aware of these services, the resources these services can provide, and where these services are located on campus, students are more likely to seek out assistance when they encounter obstacles along their academic journey. In addition to assisting students during difficult times while they are enrolled at WCC, knowing that these types of support services exist at most colleges and universities should encourage students to seek out analogous services when facing similar difficulties at their 4-year transfer institution.

The content-reinforcing activity for Week 2 asks students to describe the services offered by 10 of the most utilized student support services at WCC such as the Academic Skills Center, Career Services, Counseling Services, and the Financial Aid Office. Additionally, students will be asked to explain how the service can help them achieve success at a personal level, as well as where the service is located on campus. To find this information, students will be required to

navigate through the WCC website (see Appendix K). After completing this activity, instructors will lead an in-class discussion covering those 10 student support services and will add in any gaps that may be missing from what students included in their assignment. They will also discuss the fact that these types of support services are available at most 4-year institutions and students should seek them out if needed after transferring.

Week 3: Assessing Your Career Interests and Work Values

The purpose of Week 3 is to give students an opportunity to complete two inventories that will assess their career interests and work values. For students who are unsure of what career they want to pursue, completing these two inventories can help them start the process of determining what career is best for them. For students who enter ACA 122 knowing the career they are wanting to pursue, these inventories can help solidify their decision. In some cases, students may enter ACA 122 thinking they know which career they are wanting to pursue, but upon completion of these inventories realize that that career is not for them. In any case, Week 3 is intended to be the starting point for the multi-week process requiring students to engage themselves in exploring their career interests, identifying potential transfer institutions, and crafting an academic plan to get them from WCC to a 4-year institution and eventually their chosen profession.

The content-reinforcing activity for Week 3 asks students to complete two inventories, the Interest Profiler and the Work Values Sorter, via the College Foundation of North Carolina (CFNC) website (see Appendix L). After completing these two inventories, students will be asked to explain their results, whether or not they agree with their results, and to list three careers that match their results. The careers that students identify in Week 3 are then used in the

following weeks as a guide to exploring potential 4-year institutions to which they may choose to transfer.

Week 4: Exploring Your Career Options and Identifying Potential Transfer Institutions

The purpose of Week 4 is for students to spend some time exploring the details of three of the potential career options that they identified in Week 3. At first glance, some career options may seem appealing to students for many reasons. Upon further investigation, however, some students come to realize that these careers are not suited for them. For example, a student may decide that a career in engineering sounds interesting, but after realizing the advanced mathematics requirements for such academic programs they decide that engineering is not the correct career path for them. In addition to learning more details about three potential career options, students will also begin identifying academic programs at potential transfer institutions that match these career options.

The content-reinforcing activity for Week 4 asks students to utilize the CFNC website to find out more details pertaining to each of the three potential careers they have identified. For each career they choose to investigate, they will answer the same five questions (see Appendix M). These five questions are intended to get students to fully understand what each career entails. The questions to be answered revolve around the typical workday for people in these careers, the average annual and starting wage of these careers, the employment outlook of these careers, and the level of education needed for these careers. The fifth question asks students to list three potential 4-year transfer institutions that have academic programs that align with these careers. This last question acts as a segue between Week 4 and Week 5.

Week 5: Finding, Understanding, and Using Your Baccalaureate Degree Plans

The purpose of Week 5 is for students to find the baccalaureate degree plan (BDP) for the academic programs at three of the potential 4-year transfer institutions they identified during Week 4. As a part of the articulation agreement between the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) and the University of North Carolina (UNC) System, all public, and some private, 4-year institutions are required to publish BDPs. These BDPS are intended to be used by vertical transfer-track students to understand what courses they need to complete at the community college to make transferring to a 4-year institution as seamless as possible. In addition to finding their BDPS, students will also learn how to read and understand their BDPS so that they can use them effectively.

The content-reinforcing activity for Week 5 asks students to locate the BDPS for the academic programs that they are interested in pursuing (see Appendix N). Once located, students, with help from the instructor, will review them to ensure that they understand how to read each BDP. Lastly, students will use their BDPS to create an academic plan for each academic program that includes the courses they need to take during their subsequent semesters at WCC. These academic plans will be reviewed by the instructor and feedback will be given when necessary. Because of the time-consuming process of reviewing academic plans, Week 5 may stretch into Week 6.

Week 6: What to Expect at Your Potential Transfer Institutions

The purpose of Week 6 is for students to conduct in-depth research on the three 4-year institutions they identified previously and for which they created the academic plans in Week 5. In doing so, students will have the opportunity to get an idea of what they can expect to experience at these institutions. Even though a 4-year institution may offer an academic program

that meets a student's long-term needs, in some cases certain characteristics of the institution may clash with that student's ideal learning environment. For example, if a student knows that they would be uncomfortable, unsuccessful, or feel lost at a larger institution, then they may decide that attending a smaller institution would be a better fit for them. Apart from such institutional characteristics, students can also determine things such as application requirements, cost of attendance, financial aid resources, availability of student support services, and access to student clubs/organizations. All this knowledge can assist a student in making an informed decision with regard to which 4-year institution they choose to transfer.

The content-reinforcing activity for Week 6 asks students to answer the same 15 questions for the three 4-year institutions they identified previously (see Appendix O). Questions to be answered include things such as GPA requirements for transfer students, application due dates and materials, yearly cost of attendance, information about financial aid resources, average class sizes, tutoring services available, and types of student clubs/organizations they are interested in possibly joining. Students will also be asked to speak with someone they know who attended these 4-year institutions to get a first-hand account of what life is like on campus. If students do not know anyone who has attended these institutions, they are encouraged to try and schedule a campus visit in the near future.

Week 7: Paying for Your Education

The purpose of Week 7 is to introduce students to the concept of financial literacy. Although many new vertical transfer-track students may still live at home and have little to no financial responsibilities, providing these students with the basics of financial literacy can assist them when they inevitably venture out on their own. Specifically, Week 7 will focus on the types of financial aid that exist, what the eligibility requirements are for each, and how to apply for

different types of financial aid. Additionally, attention will be given to discussing what satisfactory academic progress (SAP) is and how it impacts a student's overall financial aid situation.

The content-reinforcing activity for Week 7 is vertical transfer-related and applicable to the institution(s) the student is interested in attending (see Appendix P). Students will be asked to utilize the website of each the three 4-year institutions they have already identified to answer several financial aid related questions. Questions include things such as cost of attendance at each institution, the types of financial aid resources available at each institution, and the minimum requirements to remain eligible for financial aid at each institution. Special focus will be given to those financial aid resources that do not have to be repaid such as scholarships and grants. Only after those resources have been exhausted, are students to rely on student loans to cover their education costs.

Week 8: Revisiting Your Vision, Mission, and Core Values

The purpose of Week 8 is to allow students the opportunity to revisit their vision, mission, and core values from Week 1. After working through Weeks 2 through 7, students will more than likely want to adjust and update these accordingly. Also, ending the course revisiting and revising these will help keep this information at the forefront of students' minds and encourage students to stay focused on their goals. Students will be encouraged to write down or print their vision statement, mission statement, and core values and place them where they will see them every day. In this way, they are giving themselves daily reminders as to what their goals are, how they plan to achieve them, and the behaviors they must exhibit in order to be successful. There is no graded content-reinforcing activity to be completed and turned in for Week 8.

Phase III: Implementation and Assessment of the Data-Informed Intervention

Due to circumstances previously mentioned, it was not possible to complete Phase III, the implementation and assessment of the data-informed intervention, during the temporal parameters in which this study was conducted. Because of this, the data-informed intervention, the redesigned ACA 122 course, will be implemented during the fall semester of 2022. The course will then be assessed near the end of 2022. In accordance with the objectives of any action-research study, the results of that assessment will be used to continue improving how ACA 122 provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students.

Out of the 12 course sections of ACA 122 being offered for the fall semester of 2022, three course sections will utilize the curriculum of the redesigned ACA 122 course. Two of these course sections are in-person classes that are scheduled to meet twice per week. For comparison's sake, the third course section is an online class that does not meet either in-person or virtually. Although student and faculty participants agree that the course should be face-to-face, it is still necessary to offer ACA 122 in an online modality as many students are unable to attend in-person classes due to distance or other conflicting obligations. By assessing all three course sections, it will be possible to understand how the changes made to ACA 122 have impacted the ability of the course to provide vertical transfer-track students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise they need to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution.

To assess these three course sections, data collection and data analysis procedures will be mostly identical to that of the baseline data collection and baseline data analysis conducted in Phase I. One major difference, however, will be how student participants are recruited to participate in the assessment. Since two of the ACA 122 course sections included in the

assessment meet in-person, I will be visiting these classes around Week 6 to explain the purpose of our course evaluation and to encourage students to participate. Doing this may help increase the number of student participants and therefore increase the amount of qualitative data that can be gathered. Because the third section of ACA 122 included in this assessment is an online class, it may prove difficult to obtain many student participants from that course section. Faculty participants in Phase III will include those three faculty members who will teach the redesigned ACA 122 course sections. Both student and faculty participants in Phase III will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview much like the participants in Phase I.

Once the semi-structured interviews are conducted with students who completed the redesigned ACA 122 course and the faculty members who taught the redesigned ACA 122 course, the data will be analyzed using the same methodology that was used in the baseline data analysis in Phase I. An effort will be made to conduct this Phase III data analysis as quickly as possible so that the course can be changed/updated if needed before the start of the spring semester of 2023. In effect, Phase III of this study serves as the beginning of another action-reflection cycle. These cycles will continue on a regular basis for as long as I remain the ACA 122 coordinator. Additionally, the procedures and methodology used in these action-reflection cycles will be informally assessed such that they can be updated and improved upon to increase their effectiveness. Inevitably, a time will come when I am no longer the ACA 122 coordinator. It is my hope that even when I am no longer responsible for overseeing the course, whomever is responsible will carry on assessing and updating ACA 122 to ensure that it is providing the vertical transfer-track students at WCC with the TSC they need to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution.

Results

In addition to the thematic analysis presented in an earlier section of Chapter 4, the following sub-sections provide answers to the first two guiding questions of this study. To answer these two guiding questions, the analysis of the qualitative data gathered from student and faculty interviews during Phase I and the results of the inquiry partner consultation in Phase II was used. As previously discussed in Chapter 4, it was not possible to answer the third guiding question due to the time parameters in which the study had to be conducted. It was possible, however, to formulate the data-informed intervention to be implemented and assessed at another time. A description of the intervention, the redesigned ACA 122 course, is included in a latter section of Chapter 4.

Analysis of Guiding Question #1

Guiding Question #1: How does the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students?

Guiding question #1 allowed for the collection of baseline qualitative data. The aim of this guiding question was to understand how the current iteration of ACA 122 provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC. To answer guiding question #1, semi-structured interviews were conducted with vertical transfer-track students who have taken ACA 122 and faculty who have taught ACA 122. The specific semi-structured interview questions posed to student and faculty participants that were used to answer guiding question #1 are included in Table 11.

While conducting interviews with students and faculty and after completing the baseline qualitative data analysis conducted in Phase I, it became apparent that the current iteration of ACA 122 provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students in two main ways. To determine this,

Table 11

Specific Interview Questions Used to Answer Guiding Question #1

Student Participant Interview Questions	Faculty Participant Interview Questions
Overall, did you find any of the topics to be useful? If so, which ones were the most useful and why?	Overall, did you find any of the topics to be useful to your students? If so, which ones were the most useful and why?
Overall, did you find any of the topics to be not useful? If so, which ones were the least useful and why?	Overall, did you find any of the topics to be not useful to your students? If so, which ones were the least useful and why?
Do you feel that taking ACA 122 has helped you prepare to transfer to a 4-year institution? In other words, do you think that ACA 122 has provided you with the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year intuition? If yes, please explain how the course did this. If no, please explain how the course did not do this.	Do you feel that taking ACA 122 prepared your students to transfer to a 4-year institution? In other words, do you think that ACA 122 has provided your students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year intuition? If yes, please explain how the course did this. If no, please explain how the course did not do this.
Do you feel that taking ACA 122 has positively impacted your confidence in your ability to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution? If yes, please explain how the course did this. If no, please explain how the course did not do this.	

participants were asked about whether or not they found any of the topics covered in the current iteration of ACA 122 to be useful. When posed this question, all interviewees had something positive to share about the course, but most commonly participants spoke highly of the academic planning portions and the student support services portion of the course.

Although he was honest in saying that he had not given much thought as to the usefulness of the topics covered in ACA 122, Daniel, a faculty participant, elaborated on his answer to this question by saying:

[Students] make the linkage between their interests, as well as what the courses they would have at Wayne Community College and then what other [4-year institutions] that they were thinking about attending for them to actually come up with a plan to actually not just achieve an associate's [degree], but how those credits would translate to their chosen [4-year institution]. I feel that that is really important.

In effect, Daniel was sharing that he thought one of the most useful topic(s) covered in ACA 122, from a TSC standpoint, are the academic planning portions of the course. These portions of the course allow students to investigate their interests, align those interests with potential careers, understand the educational requirements for those potential careers, and build an academic plan that will allow them to move smoothly from the community college to the 4-year institution of their choice. Of course, Daniel was not the only faculty participant who shared similar sentiments about these portions of the course. Denise stated that if she were to keep only one aspect of ACA 122 to focus on, she would keep the academic planning aspects of the course "because that is what prepares [students] to be independent academically and the immediate future." Speaking specifically about many of the vertical transfer-track students enrolled at WCC, Bob shared the following:

When [students] have parents who never finished high school, or did not go to college, [the parents] really do not know how to help their kids through getting to college or anything like that. The course helped these students understand how to do this step-by-step. When we put them in touch with their school and what they were wanting to major in, I think it really provided a lot of good motivation for them. They saw the door opening. They saw how they could pass through this [transfer] process a lot easier. And I think that was probably the most useful.

Student participants also found the academic planning portions of the current iteration of ACA 122 to be useful. Kelly made it abundantly clear that her favorite part of ACA 122 was the academic planning portion of the course. For her, figuring out exactly what courses she needed to take in order to apply to the ADN program and eventually pursue a BSN degree at a 4-year institution was invaluable. She also shared that by investigating the program requirements for BSN programs at various 4-year institutions, it became clear to her that she had more options than she previously thought. For Jimmy, the academic planning portions of ACA 122 helped him find his direction. When asked about this he said, “the assignment that had us select [4-year] institutions that we would like to go and for the degree that we wanted definitely pointed me where I needed to go and was easier than I thought it would be.”

In addition to the academic planning portions of the course, several participants also praised the usefulness of the student support services portion included in the current iteration of ACA 122. Currently, the student support services portion of the course is covered in the second week of the semester. The material introduces vertical transfer-track students to various services around campus that are intended to serve as support when students face difficulty, hardship, or other obstacles that may be a hindrance to their academic success. Examples of student support

services include the financial aid office, the tutoring center, counseling services, career services, and others.

As a continuation of his answer to the question regarding the usefulness of topics in the current iteration of ACA 122, Daniel shared that he “liked several other topics included in [ACA 122], particularly the [student] support services section [of the course] because many students just do not know what they are or what they can help with.” Another faculty participant, Maria, addressed the importance of providing student support services information to vertical transfer-track students by saying:

It’s good that students know about these services at WCC so that they can be successful here, but I also think it goes beyond where they are at now. There is always going to the academic level we tell them about...you are going to go to [a 4-year institution] and you are going to drop your jaw because there will be a different level there of [academic] expectations. If students have the skills, and they know where to get support, they can be prepared to work through those instances [at the 4-year institution].

In other words, Maria believes that by simply letting vertical transfer-track students know that these services exist, how to use them, and when to use them, students will naturally seek them out when they are faced with difficulty at the 4-year transfer institution. Although a vertical transfer-track student may not know where a service is located at the 4-year institution, they will assume that these services exist and will search for them if necessary.

Although student participants did not have as much to say regarding the student support services portion of ACA 122, one student participant, George, did share the following when asked about the usefulness of these services:

I would definitely say it told me a lot about the [community] college that I did not know as far as the learning centers and stuff like that...like the tutoring and different places you can go to get help...where you can go to [makeup] a test...those [types of] things. I had no idea those existed.

Although George was not currently facing any academic-related difficulties at the time of our interview, he did mention that he “feels good knowing that [these services] are out there because you never know when you might need them.”

As was expected prior to conducting interviews with students and faculty, there were some aspects of the current iteration of ACA 122 that participants found to be less than useful. For faculty participants, most of these aspects of the course have the potential to be useful but would need to be adjusted and changed in somewhat significant ways. Bob provided an example of this sentiment by saying:

I think some of the mundane things, like maybe the time management thing...I think that could have been shortened. Rather than filling out this time management sheet, I would have rather had a different assignment. I think time management is important, but I think they learn that experientially when they go to school...you know, having to be in class and having to get this done on time. I just did not find that one assignment to be as useful as the others.

Another faculty participant, Angela, also shared her thoughts on the time management aspect of the course, specifically the assignment used to reinforce those skills:

I see where students were kind of lost on the time diary [assignment]. I like [that section of the course] but I am not sure the students took it seriously. I think they might have just filled out something. I'm not sure if they took that very seriously.

Several faculty participants also mentioned that the financial aid literacy portion of the current iteration of ACA 122 needed to be adjusted. Currently, this portion of the course provides students with information about the various sources of student financial aid, the differences between those types of aid, how to create a budget, and suggestions for how to stick to a budget, specifically as a college student. Although faculty believe this type of information is useful and can serve as TSC for vertical transfer-track students, faculty also felt that it could be changed to increase its effectiveness. Nancy explained that some students simply do not understand how their financial aid works by saying:

Some students make disastrous choices to withdraw, not attend, or flunk without understanding the long-term consequences of their actions. They do not understand how these choices affect their financial aid or that they will have to pay back some portions [of their financial aid] before they can enroll again.

Student participants also shared their thoughts on some of the aspects of ACA 122 that they found to be less than useful. Like the faculty participants, some student participants mentioned the time management portion of the course as not being ideal. George had the most to share and was honest in his assessment of the assignment used for that portion of the course by saying:

We had a time management assignment...like where we planned out exactly what we would do for that week. Maybe I just did not do it like I was supposed to, but as far as just writing it out on the spreadsheet and stuff like that, I do not know. I just felt like I was just filling it in and not really looking at it or going by it. I was kind of like going with the flow and doing what I usually do each week and wrote it down.

George continued to discuss this matter again later in our interview by stating:

Well, I believe the time management piece could probably be taken out just because I do not see that helping many people. And if anybody is like me, they are going to see it as just another assignment to complete. It is just not something that [students] are going to keep doing for the rest of their life.

Other topics covered in the current iteration of ACA 122 that student participants found to be less than useful centered around the fact that some of the information covered was a repeat for them. One such topic that was brought up was the learning styles and preferences portion. In this part of the course, students complete two learning styles/preferences inventories, reflect on their results, and discuss ways in which they can use this information to improve or maintain their academic success. For students, this information was a repeat of what they already knew about themselves. To paraphrase Jimmy, he shared that due to his experience over many years of formal education, he has come to understand the ways in which he learns best and how to harness those insights to make him a better student. Along those same lines, Megan felt that taking most of a class session to cover how to use Moodle, the learning management system (LMS) used at WCC, was unnecessary. She felt that most students, herself included, already know how to use Moodle prior to taking ACA 122 and do not need a full tutorial on how to submit assignments, check grades, contact instructors, etc.

Apart from asking student and faculty participants about the usefulness of the topics covered in the current iteration of ACA 122, all interviewees were also asked about the extent to which they believe taking ACA 122 helped prepare vertical transfer-track students transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. As discussed in greater length in the baseline data analysis section of Chapter 4, faculty participants agreed that the course does help students prepare to transfer, but so much of that depends on the student themselves. Even student

participants confessed that the course will help vertical transfer-track students prepare to transfer to a 4-year institution, but only if they take the course seriously and effortfully. One faculty participant, Nancy, shared that while reading the student comments included in her student evaluations after having taught ACA 122, she realized that students thought the class was helpful, especially the students in her class that took the course their first semester. She also mentioned that she was surprised to see that even the few students who did not pass the class were honest in taking personal responsibility for not having done well. The analysis of guiding question #2 discusses potential strategies to be implemented in the redesigned ACA 122 course to address the behavioral and attitudinal barriers of vertical transfer-track students while taking ACA 122 and to enhance student perception of the course.

In conjunction with the question of whether or not the current iteration of ACA 122 prepares students to transfer to a 4-year institution, student participants were also asked if they felt that the course positively impacted their self-efficacy for transfer. In other words, students were asked if the course increased their confidence in their ability to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. All student participants agreed that taking the course did increase their self-efficacy for transfer. Unsurprisingly, however, all student participants included in this study also completed ACA 122 with the grade of a B or better. The inclusion of students who did not pass ACA 122 may have yielded different responses to the question of whether or not the course positively impacted student self-efficacy for transfer. Purposefully including these students may have also provided some interesting insights into how to change the course such that all vertical transfer-track students who take ACA 122 do so seriously and effortfully. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Analysis of Guiding Question #2

Guiding Question #2: How can the current ACA 122 course be changed to better provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?

Guiding question #2 helped identify how ACA 122 should be redesigned. The aim of this question was to determine how the course could be altered so that it better provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC. To answer guiding question #2, semi-structured interviews were conducted with vertical transfer-track students who have taken ACA 122 and faculty who have taught ACA 122 during Phase I. Additionally, the results of the inquiry partner consultation conducted in Phase II were also used. The specific semi-structured interview questions posed to student and faculty participants that were used to answer guiding question #2 are included in Table 12.

Collectively, the participants' answers to the interview questions in Table 11 and the results of the inquiry partner consultation provided several ways in which ACA 122 can be redesigned to better provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. According to the themes determined by conducting the baseline data analysis discussed earlier in Chapter 4, ACA 122 should be changed in four macro-level ways.

First, ACA 122 should be an 8-week course that meets in-person twice per week. Historically speaking, ACA 122 has been the natural landing place for any new initiative or policy addition aimed at impacting student success simply because it is a student success course. Because of this, ACA 122 tends to become somewhat oversaturated with various topics and information. After speaking with interview participants, it became apparent that some of the topics covered in the current iteration of ACA 122 are either not needed or can be condensed into

Table 12

Specific Interview Questions Used to Answer Guiding Question #2

Student Participant Interview Question	Faculty Participant Interview Question
If you could change ACA 122 to improve the course's ability to provide you with the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year intuition, how would you change it? If yes, how do you think this change would help?	If you could change ACA 122 to improve the course's ability to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year intuition, how would you change it? If yes, how do you think this change would help?

other topics. In other words, the course needs to be streamlined such that it provides the TSC that new vertical transfer-track students need without overwhelming them with information, skills, and concepts that can be acquired in other courses or elsewhere on campus. The inquiry partners who reviewed the baseline data analysis agreed with this participant sentiment. By condensing the course topics into what is essential for vertical transfer-track students, ACA 122 can be taught as an 8-week course. Furthermore, an 8-week format can help serve those new, incoming students who enrolled after a semester has started and missed the opportunity to take the course during the first eight weeks of the semester.

Second, new vertical transfer-track students should take ACA 122 during their first semester. When posed the question as to when students should take ACA 122, all participants and inquiry partners agreed that the course should be taken as soon as possible, preferably in the first semester. Currently, vertical transfer-track students are strongly encouraged to take ACA 122 their first semester, but no policy exists stating that they must. Because of this, some students do not take the course until their second year or last semester prior to graduating. To assist students with finding their path early in their academic career, it may be possible to create co-requisite requirements for ACA 122. Without attaching the course to other “entry-level courses” via co-requisites, some vertical transfer-track students will undoubtedly continue to take ACA 122 later in their academic journey and possibly not acquire the necessary TSC they need to help them achieve their goals.

Third, ACA 122 should incorporate and introduce students to 4-year college representatives and other academic programs on campus. Although not an official aspect of the current ACA 122 curriculum, it became known during the participant interviews conducted during Phase I that a few faculty members who have taught ACA 122 are already doing this to

some extent in their classes. The informal student feedback gathered by those faculty who are doing this has been positive. In some cases, as discussed in the baseline data analysis section of Chapter 4, some students have greatly benefited from this and are now happily pursuing an education about which they are excited. Familiarizing students with a wide array of 4-year institutions and the various academic programs available at WCC can serve as another form of TSC. By understanding their options, students can make a well-informed decision about the direction they choose to take to achieve their academic goals.

Last, and possibly most important, ACA 122 assignments should be application-based, vertical transfer process-oriented, reflective, and applicable to where students want to go. Throughout my many years of coordinating ACA 122, one of the biggest issues I have noticed has been the seriousness and effortfulness with which some students take the course. Therefore, it was no surprise to me that this issue was brought up by most of the participants interviewed. Although some student and faculty participants were unsure of how to remedy the issue, a few suggested that the root cause stemmed from the nature of the assignments used to reinforce some of the topics covered in the course. To them, these assignments were very generic and lacked certain aspects that could increase student effort by creating a more personal connection between the student, the topic, and the assignment. In effect, these deficits might lead to students not acquiring the TSC they need to be successful. Therefore, the assignments used to reinforce the topics covered in the redesigned ACA 122 course were constructed with this in mind. Individual descriptions of the assignments to be used in the redesigned ACA 122 course, as well as how each assignment may enhance student connectedness to the course material and in turn better provide TSC to students, are included in the last section of Chapter 4.

Analysis of Guiding Question #3

Guiding Question #3: How do the changes implemented in the ACA 122 course affect the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?

Guiding question #3 was intended to assess and understand the extent to which the changes made to ACA 122 may affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. As discussed previously, it was not possible to conduct Phase III of this study because of COVID-19 restrictions on course structure and an altered timeline. Therefore, it was not possible to answer guiding question #3 at this time. However, the data-informed intervention, the redesigned ACA 122 course, will be implemented during the fall semester of 2022 and assessed near the end of 2022. Similarly to how baseline data was collected in Phase I, semi-structured interviews will be conducted in Phase III with vertical transfer-track students who have taken the redesigned ACA 122 and the faculty members who have taught the redesigned ACA 122. The data collected will then be analyzed using the same methodology that was used to analyze the baseline data in Phase I. This data collection, and subsequent data analysis, will be used to continue adjusting and updating ACA 122 so that it is best able to provide vertical transfer-track students with the necessary TSC.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided the results of the study. Included in Chapter 4 was a description of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, demographic information of study participants in Phase I, a description of the study participants in Phase I, explanation of the data collection procedures and data analysis in Phase I, a description of the data inquiry partner consultation in Phase II, a description of the data-informed intervention created in Phase II, an explanation of the

implementation and assessment of the data-informed intervention in Phase III, and an analysis of the study's guiding questions.

In Chapter 5, a discussion of the results is provided. Included in Chapter 5 is a summary of the findings, an interpretation of the findings as they relate to previous research studies, how the findings relate to the theoretical foundation of the study, limitations and delimitations of the study, the implications of the findings for practice, the social justice impact of the study, recommendations for future research, and a reflection about my experience conducting the study.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of this inquiry was to understand how the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College provided Transfer Student Capital (TSC) to vertical transfer-track students, identify and implement changes to ACA 122 to improve the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students, and understand and assess how the changes made to ACA 122 may affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How does the current vertical transfer student success course (ACA 122) at Wayne Community College provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?
2. How can the current ACA 122 course be changed to better provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?
3. How do the changes implemented in the ACA 122 course affect the ability of the course to provide Transfer Student Capital to vertical transfer-track students?

To answer these guiding questions, an action-research inquiry design was used. In keeping with the tenets of action-research, the present study consisted of three phases.

The aim of Phase I was to understand how the current iteration of ACA 122 at WCC provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students and how the course can be improved to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. Guiding question #1 was answered during Phase I. To answer guiding question #1, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five students who have taken the current iteration of ACA 122 and nine faculty members who have taught the current iteration of ACA 122. The baseline qualitative data gathered through these interviews was analyzed using an inductive coding method. The data analysis methodology was completed

in three steps, which included a first cycle coding process, a first cycle to second cycle transitional analytic process, and a second cycle coding process called Pattern Coding. Through these processes, five themes emerged and were discussed at length in Chapter 4.

The aim of Phase II was to redesign the ACA 122 course so that it better provided TSC to vertical transfer-track students. Guiding question #2 was answered during Phase II. To answer guiding question #2, the analysis of the baseline qualitative data gathered in Phase I was used in conjunction with the inquiry partner consultation conducted in Phase II. The inquiry partner consultation involved first sharing the results of the baseline data analysis with the Phase I interview participants and the inquiry partners. After receiving feedback from this first step, a redesigned ACA 122 was created. This redesign was then shared with the interview participants and the inquiry partners for review and feedback. Based on this feedback, the initial redesigned ACA 122 course was adjusted. The final version of the redesigned ACA 122 course was outlined in Chapter 4.

The aim of Phase III was to implement and assess the redesigned ACA 122 course and to understand how the changes made to ACA 122 may affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students. According to the initial study design, guiding question #3 was to be answered during Phase III; however, as a result of COVID-19 restrictions on course structure and an altered timeline, I was not able to conduct Phase III as originally designed. Future plans to implement and assess Phase III of the study are discussed in a latter section of Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results of the study. Included in Chapter 5 is a brief summary of the findings, an interpretation of the findings as they are related to previous research studies, and how the findings relate to the theoretical foundation of the study.

Additionally, Chapter 5 includes the limitations and delimitations of the study, the implication of the findings for practice, the social justice impact of the study, recommendations for future research, and a reflection about my experience conducting the study.

Summary of the Findings

Through Phases I and II, a number of key findings emerged. After conducting the baseline qualitative data collection and completing the data analysis in Phase I, five themes were identified. The five themes derived from the data were as follows:

1. ACA 122 provides what students need to be successful, but only if students take the course seriously and effortfully.
2. ACA 122 should be an 8-week course that meets in-person twice per week.
3. ACA 122 should be taken during the first semester by new vertical transfer-track students.
4. ACA 122 should incorporate and introduce students to 4-year college representatives and other academic departments on campus.
5. ACA 122 content and content-reinforcing activities should be application-based, vertical transfer process-oriented, reflective, and applicable to where students want to go.

In addition to these themes, it was possible to provide answers to two of the guiding questions of the study. For guiding question #1, it was determined that the current iteration of ACA 122 provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students in several ways. Most notably, however, is the portion of the course that covers student support services and the portions of the course that cover academic planning. For guiding question #2, it was determined that the current iteration of ACA 122 should be changed from a 16-week format to an 8-week format. It should also be an

in-person course that meets twice per week focusing mostly on student support services and academic planning. Additionally, the redesigned course also incorporates the concept of financial literacy with a specific focus on paying for one's education.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this study are related to previous research discussed in Chapter 2 in numerous ways. The following sub-sections discuss how the findings of this study apply to previous research. These sections are organized by theme and the related guiding question that each theme serves to answer. Theme #1 served to answer guiding question #1. Theme #2, #3, #4, and #5 served to answer guiding question #2. As mentioned previously, it was not possible to answer guiding question #3 in the present study and therefore not included in the following sub-sections.

Theme #1 and Guiding Question #1

Based on the data analysis conducted in Phase I, the first theme identified was that ACA 122 provides what students need to be successful, but only if students take the course seriously and effortfully. Similar to the purpose of this study, several previous studies have focused on how community college students perceive student success courses, what community college students believe are the more useful components of such courses, and how the courses can be improved (Duggan & Williams, 2010; Nodine et al., 2012; O'Gara, et al., 2009). Overall, these studies found that while most community college students perceived student success courses to be useful and therefore aiding in their success, there were still aspects of these courses that were perceived as being less than useful or not useful at all. The vertical transfer-track student participants in this study echoed this sentiment. All five student participants stated that ACA 122 was useful and contributed to their academic success overall. At the same time, student

participants also made it obvious that the course was not perfect as it currently stands. In other words, the current iteration of ACA 122 is mostly sufficient at providing TSC to vertical transfer-track students but can be changed to better provide TSC to this population of students.

Nodine et al. (2012) found that some community college students who took a student success course perceived the course to be not beneficial because they felt the course information to be common knowledge, that the course was simply another hurdle to overcome, and in some cases that the course was a waste of time. None of the student participants in this study shared that they felt that taking ACA 122 was a waste of their time. They did feel, however, that some of the course material was common knowledge and not necessary to include in the course. For example, Patty, a student participant, shared that she “brought over from high school things like how to study based on learning styles.” To her, learning about the same things in ACA 122 was redundant and not a good use of her time. The Nodine et al. (2012) study also identified what students thought were the most impactful aspects of the college success course. Like their study, the student participants in the present study gained the most from discussing student support services and learning about the various programs of study available to them either at the community college or at 4-year institutions.

Along similar lines of inquiry, Duggan and Williams (2010) explored how community college students perceive student success courses, which teaching methods are the most helpful, the course topics that students found most useful, and how these courses can be altered to better serve the needs of students. One of the outcomes of their study was that many community college students felt that the student success course was beneficial because it helped make college seem less unnerving and less of a daunting task than they previously thought. Although the student participants in the current study did not use those exact words to describe their

experience, it was clear that most of them felt the same way about ACA 122. As a group, student participants shared that taking ACA 122 boosted their confidence in their ability to be a successful college student. By extension, they also felt more confident in their ability to successfully transfer to a 4-year institution (i.e., self-efficacy for transfer) after taking ACA 122 than they felt previously. The increase in student confidence in general and the increase in self-efficacy for transfer both serve as types of TSC for vertical transfer-track students.

Community college faculty, because of the amount of time they spend with students compared to other community college staff, are keenly aware of what students need to be successful. Currently, research focusing on community college faculty perceptions of student success courses is limited to doctoral dissertations (Ellison, 2010; McLeod, 2018). The outcomes of the studies that have been conducted, however, mostly align with the findings of the present study. Taken together, these previous studies determined that community college instructors believe that student success courses should include content about the college experience versus the high school experience, academic skill development, academic and career planning, life management (Ellison, 2010), time management, and financial aid (McLeod, 2018). For the most part, faculty participants in the present study shared similar sentiments about what should be included in ACA 122, as well as the extent to which the current iteration of the course provides that content, or TSC.

As was the case with the student participants in the present study, faculty participants believed that the current iteration of ACA 122 does provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students sufficiently but does so mostly through the inclusion of student support services and academic planning. According to some faculty participants in the present study, incorporating the content that previous studies indicated should be included in student success courses should also

be included in ACA 122. These topics included such things as academic skill development, life/stress management, and time management. However, due to the finding of the importance of student effort in ACA 122, these topics should only be included if students are willing to approach those topics, and ACA 122 in general, seriously and effortfully.

Although student effort was not a focus of the present study, and therefore not included in Chapter 2, both student and faculty participants made mention of it during interviews. When asked about the extent to which they feel the current iteration of ACA 122 provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students, all participants felt that the course sufficiently provides TSC to students. However, this is only the case if students take the course seriously and effortfully. One faculty participant, Angela, shared that while teaching ACA 122 online, she had to withdraw several students simply because the students were not completing course assignments. Adding to this, she said, “It felt like, I felt like a failure because you’re just trying to retain [students], but you can’t because [students] aren’t excited [about the course].” While it was not surprising to hear this from faculty participants, it was interesting to learn that student participants felt the same way. In a sense, this demonstrates that students know they must put in the effort if they are to benefit from taking ACA 122. At the same time, according to faculty participants, many students simply do not put in the effort to gain the TSC they need to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. Therefore, recommendations for future studies focusing on the relationship between student success course design, student perception, student effort, and student success outcomes is included in a latter section of Chapter 5.

Theme #2 and Guiding Question #2

Based on the data analysis conducted in Phase I, the second theme identified is that ACA 122 should be an 8-week course that meets in-person twice per week. In a previous study which

compared various student success outcomes after completing either an 8-week or a 16-week version of ACA 122, Paul (2017) found little to no significant differences in grade point average (GPA) or students' level of self-confidence. In other words, the duration of the course made little difference in student success. Given the outcome of that previous study, and the data gathered by interviewing students and faculty in the present study, it stands that the redesigned ACA 122 course can be and should be an 8-week course.

While Paul (2017) did not differentiate between in-person and online modalities for ACA 122, Parker (2017) did. According to the researcher, faculty participants in this previous study indicated that teaching an online student success course was more difficult, took more work, and took more time than teaching a traditional face-to-face course. Nearly all of the faculty participants in the present study shared that they felt similarly. Beyond the increase in difficulty, work, and time that it takes to teach an online student success course, faculty participants also indicated anecdotally that students who take an online ACA 122 course seem to be less engaged and tend to perform worse than those students who take the course face-to-face. Daniel, a faculty participant, when asked about what he thought was the ideal course modality for ACA 122 said, "In my opinion, I think in-person [classes] would be ideal [for ACA 122] because that would probably best benefit the student...it's all about the students." In addition to making the redesigned ACA 122 an 8-week course, previous research and the findings of the present study support the decision to make ACA 122 an in-person course that meets twice per week.

Theme #3 and Guiding Question #2

Based on the data analysis conducted, the third theme identified is that ACA 122 should be taken during the first semester by new vertical transfer-track students. Community colleges are oftentimes looking for ways in which to increase the rate at which entering community

college students persist and make satisfactory progress towards degree completion and/or transfer (Bailey et al., 2005; Goldrick-Rab, 2010). In many cases, community colleges look to student success courses to assist with increasing student persistence and completion. Previous research indicates that when students take a student success course in general (i.e., not specifically vertical transfer-oriented courses), they are more likely to increase their connectedness to the institution and therefore more likely to persist (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Additionally, when students complete a student success course within their first semester, they are more likely to persist to their second academic year than students who take these types of courses in their second semester or beyond (Cho & Karp, 2013; Kimbark et al., 2016; Zeidenberd et al., 2007).

Given the nature and focus of most student success courses, students are typically encouraged to take these types of courses early in their higher education careers but are not always required to do so. In speaking with students, faculty, and some of the inquiry partners of the present study, it became obvious that they believe vertical transfer-track students should take ACA 122 during their first semester of college. Interestingly, participants did not specifically state that they believe students should take ACA 122 during their first semester because it helps increase student persistence and satisfactory progress. Instead, the general sentiment of student and faculty participants revolved around the idea that by taking ACA 122 during their first semester, new vertical transfer-track students can get a strong start to their educational journey. Therefore, making the course a first semester requirement for vertical transfer-track students could make a difference for many. Doing so would increase the timeliness of acquiring much needed TSC. In turn, the long-term impact of acquiring this TSC early may increase the

likelihood that these students achieve their goal of successfully transferring to and graduating from a 4-year institution.

Currently, WCC merely encourages new students to enroll in and complete ACA 122 during their first semester. Unfortunately, this policy has led to some students taking the course later than desired. In some cases, students do not complete ACA 122 until their last semester at WCC. Taking the course after the first semester may not inhibit the ability of the course to provide vertical transfer-track students with the TSC they need but doing so limits the utility and overall impact of the TSC acquired during the course.

To ensure as many vertical transfer-track students as possible take ACA 122 during their first semester, it may be conceivable to attach the course as a co-requisite to other entry-level college courses. Examples of entry-level courses to attach ACA 122 to include, but should not be limited to, English composition, mathematics, general psychology, or introductory sociology. In the interim, however, students will continue to be strongly encouraged to take the course during their first semester. Additionally, educating faculty and staff on the ways in which students benefit from taking ACA 122 during their first semester at WCC, and effectively communicating those benefits to entering students, may result in getting more students to take the course sooner rather than later.

Theme #4 and Guiding Question #2

Based on the data analysis conducted, the fourth theme identified was that ACA 122 should incorporate and introduce students to 4-year college representatives and other academic departments on campus. Being intentional about introducing students to these representatives is something that is missing from the current iteration of ACA 122 but appears to be something that students want and from which students can benefit. Although it is discussed very little in the

student success course literature, Nodine et al. (2012) found that students who had taken a student success course enjoyed and benefited from learning about their college's various programs of study. These same students also mentioned that being introduced to other programs of study on campus while taking a student success course was an efficient way for them to realize all of the options that they had available. In effect, exposing students to other academic areas on campus allows students to explore their options, but in a guided and focused manner.

Both student and faculty participants in the present study suggested increasing the extent to which representatives from 4-year institutions and representatives from other academic areas at WCC visit with and present to ACA 122 classes. Although this is not an official part of the current ACA 122 curriculum, some faculty have taken it upon themselves to bring in representatives to present to their students. Of the faculty who have independently incorporated this into their ACA 122 classes, all have had good experiences. In at least two cases, student participants mentioned that their instructor had invited representatives to speak to their class. Those student participants enjoyed hearing from these representatives, recognized the value of inviting such people to speak to the class, and suggested that the redesigned ACA 122 course officially incorporate it. Beyond the student and faculty participants, a couple of inquiry partners also agreed that incorporating guest speakers, either in-person or via recorded video clips, would enhance the ability of ACA 122 to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students.

With the duration of the redesigned ACA 122 course moving from a 16-week format to an 8-week format, physically inviting numerous representatives from 4-year institutions and other academic areas at WCC to each class section would be difficult. Even with the redesigned course meeting twice per week, there would simply not be enough class time to have every representative physically meet with and present to classes. Therefore, it is suggested that

representatives from other academic departments on campus record a short video clip explaining and/or showing students what their academic area does, the types of classes they offer, and the careers that match their academic programs. Inquiry partners agreed that this would be an acceptable alternative to inviting representatives to physically present to ACA 122 course sections. These video clips could easily be added to a course's learning management system (e.g., Moodle) for convenient viewing by students and would be most suited for Weeks 3 and 4 of the redesigned ACA 122 course.

Theme #5 and Guiding Question #2

Based on the data analysis conducted in Phase I, the fifth theme identified was that ACA 122 content and content-reinforcing activities should be application-based, vertical transfer process-oriented, reflective, and applicable to where students want to go. As discussed previously in Chapter 4, ACA 122 has had a tendency to become the landing place for student success initiatives and other student success related content. Because of this, the course content has become somewhat superfluous over the years. These additions to the course also take away from the core purpose of the course, which is to prepare vertical transfer-track students to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. Previous research has indicated that students who take a student success course are sometimes overwhelmed with the diverse amount of information they are presented with during the course (Duggan & Williams, 2010). In other studies focused on enhancing the long-term positive effects of student success courses (Karp et al., 2012; Karp et al., 2017), it was determined that narrowing course content helps to enhance the long-term benefits of such courses. By removing extraneous content from the current iteration of ACA 122, and focusing on vertical transfer-process oriented content,

instructors are afforded more time to incorporate reflective, application-based content-reinforcing activities.

Compared to student participants, faculty participants were more inclined to express what they thought should be included in or excluded from ACA 122 and therefore had much more to say about the subject. Even though some faculty participants felt that the course should include topics such as academic skill development and time management, these topics did not overlap with student responses and were therefore not included in the redesign of ACA 122 outlined in Chapter 4. Several faculty participants felt that certain topics in the current iteration of ACA 122 such as note taking skills, study skills, time management, and information literacy are things that students learn as they become more experienced college students. Spending time covering such topics in ACA 122 would therefore be unnecessary and be of little benefit and value to vertical transfer-track students. Some student participants believed similarly. Therefore, it stands that the redesigned ACA 122 course should focus on content and content-reinforcing activities that are application-based, vertical transfer process-oriented, reflective, and applicable to where students want to go. Keeping the content narrow in focus helps new students stay concentrated on understanding the vertical transfer process and what they need to complete in order to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution.

Theoretical Foundation

Initially developed by Laanan (1998, 2004, 2007) and explored further by several other researchers (Cepeda et al., 2021; Lanaan et al., 2010; Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020; Moser, 2012; Starobin et al., 2016), the concept of Transfer Student Capital (TSC) is used to understand the vertical transfer student experience and is the theoretical foundation of the present study. TSC refers to the skills, knowledge, and expertise that vertical transfer-track students

acquire during their time at the community college that helps them successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution (Laanan, 2004, 2007). Vertical transfer-track students can gather TSC either formally or informally from a variety of sources, which include peers, family members, high schools, and community college faculty and staff. Examples of TSC are vast but can include how credits transfer to 4-year institutions, articulation policies, GPA requirements for transfer, self-efficacy for transfer, and knowledge about financial aid (Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020). According to Laanan (2007), as the amount of TSC acquired by a vertical transfer-track student increases, so does that student's probability of vertical transfer success.

Although TSC can refer to anything that serves to assist vertical transfer-track students with navigating the vertical transfer process, the student participants in the present study focused mostly on the student support services and academic planning aspects of ACA 122. To them, these were the two most TSC-valuable aspects of the current iteration of ACA 122. As it applies to the previous research surrounding TSC, this finding is interesting for a couple of reasons.

First, given the wide array of TSC that exists, one would imagine that student participants would have included more than they did when asked about the usefulness of the topics covered in the current iteration of ACA 122. Of course, this could be explained by the fact that the students who participated are simply unaware of the various types of TSC that exist. In any case, this finding suggests that although there exists a plethora of TSC, there may be a hierarchy of practical usefulness with student support services and academic planning being near the top of that hierarchy. In other words, some TSC may be more valuable to students from a utility standpoint. By mostly mentioning student support services and academic planning, the students who participated in this study have possibly identified two of the most impactful types of TSC available to vertical transfer-track students.

Second, student participants, when asked about how taking ACA 122 has impacted their self-efficacy for transfer, stated that the course did increase their confidence in their ability to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. This finding is interesting as it applies to the concept of TSC, specifically with regard to how certain types of TSC may provide benefits beyond being merely informational in value. Besides the informational value of student support services and academic planning, it could also be the case that these two types of TSC are also strongly associated with changing the beliefs that students hold of themselves. In other words, these types of TSC may alter the perception that students have of themselves and their abilities to help increase their confidence about navigating the complex vertical transfer process. By knowing there are support services that they can rely on during challenging times and having an academic plan to follow to get where they want to go, vertical transfer-track students may start to realize that the task of vertical transfer is not as daunting as it first seemed.

As has been mentioned previously, faculty participants were quick to point out that student effort seems to be an ongoing issue when it comes to ACA 122. The main cause for concern is that if students are not putting in the effort that is required of them, they will not fully benefit from taking ACA 122 because they are not acquiring the TSC that the course has to offer. It could be possible that the root of this student effort issue is actually a lack of student motivation. In other words, if a student is not adequately motivated, this lack of motivation may be manifested as a reduction in student effort.

This finding is interesting as it applies to the concept of TSC, specifically to what influences how eagerly vertical transfer-track students acquire TSC. While it is easy to pack any student success course with lots of content, and therefore numerous types of TSC, doing so does not seem to yield the desired outcome of students actually acquiring all of the TSC provided.

This is evident in the current iteration of ACA 122. The current curriculum covers a wide array of topics, all of which could be considered types of TSC. However, for one reason or another, many past ACA 122 students seemed disconnected and disengaged with the course content. Therefore, when applying the concept of TSC to the design of student success courses, it stands that incorporating as many types of TSC as one can is not always the most fitting approach. Instead, those responsible for designing vertical transfer-track student success courses should take into consideration the unique needs and interests of the particular student population whom the course is serving. By doing so, these types of courses can incorporate the types of TSC that their vertical transfer-track students want to learn and are motivated to learn. In turn, this may help to alleviate any student effort issues present in other vertical transfer-track student success courses at other community colleges.

Limitations/Delimitations of the Study

Although I was able to collect appropriate data to analyze and provide responses to two of the three guiding questions, limitations and delimitations of the study can be identified. The nature of qualitative research created several limitations for the present study. One of the major limitations was time. Qualitative research and conducting interviews with participants are time-consuming processes. Analyzing qualitative data is also time-consuming. The number of participants that could be included in this type of study was limited by the designated amount of time dedicated to data collection opportunities. Because of this typical limitation of qualitative studies, the present study was intended to include 10-12 student participants and 10-12 faculty participants. Unfortunately, obtaining this many participants proved to be more difficult than anticipated. The relatively small sample size certainly limited the amount of data that could be

collected, which may have influenced the particular themes identified as a result of the data analysis conducted.

Other limitations of the present study are the transferability and dependability of the study. Transferability is the extent to which the study's findings can be applied in other contexts. To increase transferability of the study, the use of thick description was used to present the findings (Lincoln et al., 2018). Dependability is the extent to which the study can be repeated by others and that the findings of such studies would be consistent with the findings of the present study. To increase dependability of the study, the methods and inquiry procedures used were described in as much detail as possible (Yin, 2014). Additionally, explanations are given as to why some procedures outlined in Chapter 3 were not able to be utilized as planned.

The use of action-research (AR) methodology was appropriate for this qualitative study; however, several inquiry technique limitations may have impacted the results. The uncontrollable nature of the environment in which the study takes place was one such limitation, particularly regarding the restrictions put in place due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The most notable of these restrictions was the fact that during most of 2020 and 2021, face-to-face classes were offered on a limited basis at WCC. Although I personally felt comfortable offering and holding face-to-face psychology courses when I was allowed to, I knew that not everyone felt comfortable teaching in-person. Attempting to schedule face-to-face ACA 122 course sections during this time, and asking other faculty members to teach them, seemed imprudent and unwise. Furthermore, deciding to implement the redesigned ACA 122 course in an online modality during the fall semester of 2021 prior to the lifting of most COVID-19 restrictions would not have allowed for the new curriculum to be implemented with full fidelity and dependability. Additionally, collaboration, which is a hallmark characteristic of AR methodology, was limited

by the amount of control that I had over the actions of the participants involved. This was particularly relevant to gathering feedback from the inquiry partners of the study. Although some feedback was provided, the minimal feedback from inquiry partners certainly limited the collaborative nature of this study.

Acting as a delimitation, the present study was conducted within predetermined boundaries to manage the size and scope of the study. This decision was intentional and intended to make the study more focused and feasible to conduct. Improving or increasing vertical transfer success is a complex and complicated endeavor. The research focused on this topic varies widely and the practical approaches used to help vertical transfer students achieve their academic goals are plentiful. Therefore, I purposely decided to focus the present study on ensuring that ACA 122 provides the necessary TSC to vertical transfer-track students at WCC. Other factors that influence vertical transfer success but are not directly related to increasing the amount of TSC provided by ACA 122 were not included in the present study. It also stands that this study was intended to focus specifically on vertical transfer-track students at WCC. Therefore, the findings of the inquiry are not intended to be generalizable outside of the context of the study but may have several implications for practice at other vertical transfer-track student serving institutions.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

The results of the study may have practical implications for higher education practitioners who work with vertical transfer-track students at community colleges or when they become vertical transfer students once they transition to the 4-year institution. Without a doubt, the student population at most community colleges is highly diverse. This diversity, although beneficial to the student and the institution, can also make it difficult to adequately serve all students. Those individuals who work with vertical transfer-track students are all too familiar

with the complexities of serving a diverse student population. It is therefore difficult to know exactly what each individual student needs to be successful.

The findings of this study, however, may help provide practitioners with a starting point in which to begin assisting vertical transfer-track students with achieving their goal of attaining a baccalaureate education. Regardless of background, vertical transfer-track students appear to benefit in several ways from understanding the student support services that are available to them and the process of building an academic plan to follow. Additionally, these students, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, may benefit greatly from understanding how financial aid works and how to obtain the financial support they may require. Effectively, this understanding of student support services, creating an academic plan, and knowledge of financial aid can serve as the foundation upon which practitioners can then build the unique structure that meets the individual needs of students.

The findings may also have implications for practice for those who work with vertical transfer students at 4-year institutions. Many 4-year institutions have a substantial population of vertical transfer students (i.e., vertical transfer-track students who successfully transferred to a 4-year institution). These students, unlike the students who entered the 4-year institution directly from high school, must quickly acclimate to a new learning environment while simultaneously fulfilling the academic expectations of upper-level courses. In some cases, this new environment is vastly different from the one in which they came. The findings of this study suggest that student success-related individuals at 4-year institutions, like their community college counterparts, could help new vertical transfer students acclimate by initially focusing on student support services, academic planning, and financial aid. Their efforts will ensure that new vertical transfer students, at a minimum, understand the student support services unique to that

institution, are able to connect their previously constructed academic plan with their new curriculum, and understand the financial aid resources available and/or specific to that 4-year institution.

Regardless of the impact that the findings of this study may have on practice, it will have been for naught if the findings are not shared with those whose responsibility it is to help vertical transfer-track students be successful. To disseminate the findings of this study, several avenues may be available. First, because of my role as the current ACA 122 coordinator at WCC, I am in a unique position to share the findings with faculty and staff who interact directly with vertical transfer-track students. In fact, one might say I have a responsibility to do so. To accomplish this, I plan to share what has been learned by both formal and informal means. Formally providing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff can be an effective dissemination strategy but may be limited to the number of individuals who decide to participate in such events. Informally discussing the findings with colleagues, therefore, may be just as or more of an effective way to spread this type of information.

Beyond WCC, the findings of this study may be shared with colleagues from other institutions via workshops and conferences locally, in the region, and possibly nationwide. Of particular local interest is the yearly North Carolina ACA 122 Conference, which provides individuals working directly with ACA 122 to network with colleagues, learn about what other institutions are doing with their ACA 122 courses, and receive vital information pertaining to vertical transfer trends and policies in the state. Additionally, presentations could be given at the yearly NCCCS (North Carolina Community College System) Conference, as well as the SACSCOC (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges) Annual Meeting held at various locations throughout the region. Additionally, the findings of this study

could be disseminated to a larger audience via published journal articles in vertical transfer-related academic journals.

Social Justice, Diversity, Access, and Equity Implications

The educational attainment gap between low-income and high-income students is a persistent problem area in the field of higher education. The participants of this study, vertical transfer-track students from a community college situated in a rural, low-income area of North Carolina, were selected purposefully with the intention that the information and insights gathered will be able to help in shrinking the educational attainment gap. It is important to note that the study did aim to help all vertical transfer-track students at WCC, regardless of background, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or age, achieve their goal of transferring to and graduating from a 4-year institution. Although this is the case, the findings of this study can improve the likelihood that vertical transfer-track students at WCC who do come from low-income families, are first-generation college students, or are otherwise underrepresented receive the necessary skills, knowledge, and expertise that they need to earn a baccalaureate education. By assisting this population of students in their pursuit to earn a bachelor's degree, this study can increase underrepresented students' ability to enhance their own social and economic mobility, as well as the social and economic mobility of their families and communities for decades to come.

In addition to the social justice implications, the findings of this study may also positively impact the informational and institutional access of vertical transfer-track students. This is especially true for first-generation college students who, unlike other college students, are unable to rely on the support of other family members who have experience navigating higher education. Without this sort of generational knowledge, these students must rely on themselves when traversing the sometimes confusing and oftentimes complicated bureaucracy of higher

education. In too many cases, the complexity of higher education combined with the lack of familial knowledge leads to vertical transfer-track students abandoning their goal of earning a baccalaureate education. Although earning a certificate, diploma, or associate's degree is an achievement in and of itself, if students decide to temper their educational aspirations, they may be doing themselves a disservice by not realizing their full potential. Therefore, the findings of this study are important because they may assist community colleges in better serving their first-generation vertical transfer-track students by providing them with the skills, knowledge, and expertise to which they otherwise would not be privy. In turn, the increase in access to information may also increase access to 4-year institutions by first-generation college students.

Recommendations for Future Studies/Research

The present study is just one of a few that have focused on ACA 122. It is the first to apply the concept of TSC to ACA 122 to ensure that the course is providing vertical transfer-track students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise needed to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. Without a doubt, more work and research can be done to improve ACA 122, the experience of vertical transfer-track students, and the likelihood that these students will be able to achieve their goal of attaining a baccalaureate education or beyond. Apart from the continuation of this study via the implementation and assessment of the redesigned ACA 122 course, there exist several other avenues for future studies and research.

The NCCCS is comprised of 58 institutions, all of which are unique in location and the student population they serve. Because of this uniqueness, it would be unwise to simply apply the findings of this study to the other 57 community colleges in the state. Since ACA 122 is a required course taught at every community college in the NCCCS, it is first suggested that other institutions within the state conduct a study similar to this one. Doing so will give each

community college an opportunity to delve into what it is that the vertical transfer-track students at their institution need to be successful. These studies could be conducted independently or in conjunction with and supported by the resources of the NCCCS. In addition to including current vertical transfer-track students in these studies, institutions may also wish to identify and include previous students who have since transferred to a 4-year institution. Also, given the fact that community colleges are rewarded with performance measure funds when their students are successful after vertical transfer, there exists plenty of motivation for these institutions to spend the time and energy conducting this type of research.

One of the most interesting findings of the present study that could be expanded upon is the issue of student seriousness and effort when it comes to taking ACA 122. Although this appears to be a complex issue with a complex solution, the area of research focused on how course design can influence student perception and student effort seems promising. Using the MUSIC (eMpowerment, Usefulness, Success, Interest, and Caring) Model of Motivation, Jones et al. (2021) recently published a study which found that students' perceptions of a course predicted their effort in the course, which then predicted their final grade in the course. Students in the study reported that they decreased their effort when they perceived a course to be easy, as well as when they perceived a course to be difficult and time-consuming. Overall, the researchers found that when designing courses, one should focus on (a) creating course activities that interest students, (b) increasing student perceptions of caring between the instructor and students, (c) ensuring that level of difficulty is appropriate, and (d) making the workload manageable and reasonable. Therefore, it would be plausible to apply the MUSIC Model of Motivation as the theoretical foundation of future studies focused on ACA 122 course design.

Another recommendation for future research centers around the concept of self-efficacy for transfer, which is a type of TSC. According to Moser (2012), self-efficacy for transfer is the degree to which a student feels capable of successfully transferring to a 4-year institution. The present study addressed this concept, but only did so by asking students whether or not the current iteration of ACA 122 helped to increase students' self-efficacy for transfer. Nevertheless, it is clear that self-efficacy for transfer is an important aspect to consider when attempting to help vertical transfer-track students find success. Future studies could continue this line of inquiry by focusing on the mechanisms behind the development of self-efficacy for transfer, such as how it is developed, when it is developed, and how it can be practically increased.

Role of the Scholar-Practitioner

Defined by McClintock (2004), the term scholar-practitioner refers to "an ideal of professional excellence grounded in theory and research, informed by experiential knowledge, and motivated by personal values, political commitments, and ethical conduct" (p. 393). Although this definition of a scholar-practitioner can be applied to numerous fields and disciplines, it is especially pertinent to the field of higher education and higher education leadership. For those who work within the higher education context, it is important to analyze and review the results of studies such as this one. Doing so can help leaders in their efforts to better provide educational opportunities for current students within their respective contexts. As a result of utilizing the action-research method to conduct this study, my experience as the scholar-practitioner is relevant and should be considered when reviewing the overarching impacts of the study. This section provides me with a place to include those relevant reflective details, contextual information, and lessons learned as a result of conducting the study.

Prior to beginning the doctoral/dissertation journey, my work as the ACA 122 coordinator was largely influenced by what I felt was the correct course of action. In other words, I would simply try to intuit my way through creating and revising the ACA 122 curriculum. While I sometimes would refer to research on best practices for student success courses to help guide my work, doing so was not a key component influencing course design. In addition to underutilizing past research on the subject, I certainly did not attempt to gather and analyze data. A part of me always knew that I should be relying more on research and context-specific data to make informed decisions regarding ACA 122, but it never really materialized. Fortunately, through my experiences over the past three years, I have come to recognize and appreciate the importance of making research- and data-informed decisions. Because of my experiences, I have shifted from relying less on my intuition to relying more on scholarship. As a result, I consider myself to be a scholar-practitioner and plan to continue working within my context as such. My goal, therefore, is to do what I can, given skills, knowledge, and expertise I have obtained, to create and sustain positive change for my institution.

Aside from implementing and assessing the redesigned ACA 122 course, my plans are to utilize the action-research method to regularly evaluate the course such that it continues to improve and continues to meet the needs of the vertical transfer-track students at WCC. Adhering to the ideals of the scholar-practitioner, I intend to apply the concept of strategic planning, or a strategic planning process, to ACA 122. Typically, strategic planning is used to make deliberate strategy changes to academic programs and student services. These changes tend to take a global or macro view of the campus's ecosystem. Accordingly, these strategy changes tend to focus on large-scale aspects of the program or service. Attention is usually not paid to smaller aspects of the program or service that could have a major impact on the students'

educational experience and success. Therefore, I believe that applying the strategic planning process to ACA 122 will assist me in ensuring that the course makes continuous improvement over time. Additionally, I believe that by applying the strategic planning process to ACA 122, I can help establish a culture of assessment that can persist regardless of who is responsible for coordinating the course in the future.

Being a scholar-practitioner is without a doubt an excellent way in which to approach one's work in higher education, especially for those whose responsibility it is to actively educate students in the classroom. Continually evaluating one's practices, addressing concerns and issues by applying research, making research- and data-informed decisions, and starting the process over again through the assessment of an intervention helps to ensure that students are getting the most beneficial education possible. Just as the ideals of a scholar-practitioner can be utilized in the classroom, so too can they be applied to higher education leadership in the form of the scholar-practitioner leader.

As an aspiring scholar-practitioner leader, my goal, like that of any other higher education leader, is to help create, maintain, and enhance the environment such that students have the best higher education experience possible, and that staff are motivated to share participation in achieving this goal. The difference between the scholar-practitioner leader and other higher education leadership paradigms is the approach or perspective taken to achieve this goal. While other leadership paradigms might approach achieving this goal through a one-size-fits-all recipe based on the tenets of the specific paradigm adopted, the scholar-practitioner leader is equipped to address issues hindering this goal in a very context-specific manner. With all due respect to research and study findings that can be easily generalizable to diverse contexts, the scholar-practitioner leader knows that the uniqueness of their context, as well as the uniqueness

of the individuals who operate within that context, should be taken into consideration first and foremost. With this idea in mind, I am prepared to move beyond being a scholar-practitioner by extending the ideals of simultaneously being both a scholar and a practitioner to that of being a scholar-practitioner leader at my institution and potentially elsewhere.

Conclusions

The aim of the present study was three-fold. First, I was able to assess the extent to which the current iteration of ACA 122 at WCC provides TSC to vertical transfer-track students by conducting semi-structured interviews with students and faculty. Second, I was able to create a redesigned ACA 122 course based on the qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews and feedback given by inquiry partners of the study. The third aim of the study, to implement and assess the redesigned ACA 122 course, is ongoing and will be completed by the end of the fall semester of 2022.

By completing the first two Phases of the study, I was able to answer the first two guiding questions. For the first guiding question, “how does the current ACA 122 course at Wayne Community College provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students?”, it was determined that the current iteration of the course does provide TSC, but only if students take the course seriously and effortfully. According to both student and faculty participants, the most useful types of TSC that the course currently provides includes information about student support services and creation of an academic plan. Understanding aspects of student financial aid was also mentioned as a useful type of TSC.

For the second guiding question, “how can the current ACA 122 course be changed to better provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students?”, several themes were identified. First, ACA 122 should be an 8-week course that meets in-person twice per week. Second, ACA 122

should be taken during the first semester by new vertical transfer-track students. Third, ACA 122 should incorporate and introduce students to 4-year college representatives and other academic departments on campus. Fourth, ACA 122 content and content-reinforcing activities should be application-based, vertical transfer process-oriented, reflective, and applicable to where students want to go. Based on these themes, ACA 122 was redesigned to enhance the ability of the course to provide vertical transfer-track students with the TSC they need to transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution.

The third guiding question, “how do the changes implemented in the ACA 122 course affect the ability of the course to provide TSC to vertical transfer-track students?”, will be answered near the end of the fall semester of 2022. To answer this guiding question, the data collection and data analysis procedures used to answer the first guiding question will be employed to assess the redesigned ACA 122 course to be implemented. In true action-research fashion, answering the third guiding question will mark the end of one action-reflection cycle and the beginning of the next. It is my intention to continue utilizing the action-research methodology, in conjunction with an ACA 122-specific strategic planning process (see Appendix Q), within my context to ensure that ACA 122 continues to meet the needs of the vertical transfer-track students at WCC.

Even though I was only able to answer two of the three guiding questions of the study, several conclusions can still be made. First, the design of ACA 122 seems to be a main factor in determining whether or not vertical transfer-track students benefit fully from what the course has to offer. During my many years as the ACA 122 coordinator, and as someone who teaches the course every semester, I know first-hand how difficult it can be to motivate students to the point where they take ownership of their experience and put in the effort that is required. Because I

teach ACA 122 on a regular basis, I have been able to come up with my own ways in which to motivate students to take the course seriously. These methods typically revolve around describing my own personal experiences and anecdotes from my educational journey to explain why what we are covering in the course is so important. Unfortunately, most other faculty members are not as adept at doing this simply because they only teach the course every three to four semesters. Until such a time comes when there exists a cadre of faculty members whose responsibility it is to teach ACA 122 every semester, I believe that the design of ACA 122 is the best way to encourage students to take the course seriously and effortfully. Therefore, ongoing efforts must be made to assess and reassess the design of ACA 122 and to compare the data gathered to relevant student success course design literature as it relates to student motivation and effort.

Second, qualitative studies like this one seem to be increasingly valuable and necessary. Although qualitative research may be more time-consuming, cumbersome, and reliant on the behaviors of others than quantitative research, these types of studies gather data that cannot be captured by quantitative studies. Studies like this one give students and faculty alike an opportunity to share their thoughts, voice their opinions, and become personally involved in the decisions made at their institution. Therefore, the participatory nature of qualitatively studying vertical transfer-track student success courses may help create an institutional culture that values what others believe, how others feel, and what others have to contribute. Furthermore, by inviting students and faculty to participate in research, these individuals may develop a greater sense of commitment and connection to the institution. Increasing their sense of commitment and connection to the institution can serve to positively influence the decisions they make and the behaviors they exhibit. In other words, prior to deciding on a course of action, these individuals

may stop to think “does this help my institution or does this harm my institution?” The decision may be something relatively minuscule and seemingly insignificant, such as picking up a piece of trash on the floor. Nevertheless, when actions are guided by this way of thinking, both the institution and those who comprise the institution benefit greatly.

Lastly, given the events that have transpired due to the COVID-19 pandemic, studies like this one will become increasingly important to understanding the unique needs of future vertical transfer-track students. Without a doubt, the past two years have been a difficult time for all. Perhaps the ones that have been most negatively impacted have been the students. Both K12 and college students have been made to continue their education virtually and at a distance. While participating in virtual classes may be better than no classes at all, it is not a perfect substitute for in-person education. Although the long-term effects of shifting to virtual learning are still to be seen, it is plausible to surmise that these students will be significantly unlike the students that came before them. Inevitably, some of these students impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic will decide to enroll at their local community college after high school. A subset of these students will do so with the intention of transferring to a 4-year institution. Therefore, it is imperative that institutions who serve vertical transfer-track students understand the needs of these students as they relate to TSC. By conducting studies similar to this one within their own contexts, it may be possible for community colleges to ensure that they are providing their vertical transfer-track student population with the skills, knowledge, and expertise they need to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Mose Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Charles Gilmore](#)
CC: [Heidi Puckett](#)
Date: 3/19/2021
Re: [UMCIRB 20-002791](#)
Providing Transfer Student Capital

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 3/18/2021. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2b.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Faculty Participant Informed Consent Form(0.06)	Consent Forms
PROVIDING TRANSFER STUDENT CAPITAL TO VERTICAL TRANSFER-TRACK STUDENTS IN A VERTICAL TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS COURSE: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY (0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Recruitment Email Script for Faculty(0.02)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Recruitment Email Script for Students(0.02)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Semi-Structured Interview Questions(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Student Participant Informed Consent Form(0.04)	Consent Forms

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

Student Participant Informed Consent Form



Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: PROVIDING TRANSFER STUDENT CAPITAL TO VERTICAL TRANSFER-TRACK STUDENTS IN A VERTICAL TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS COURSE: AN ACTION-RESEARCH STUDY

Principal Investigator: Charles Raymond Gilmore III, MEd

Institution, Department or Division: ECU Department of Educational Leadership

Address: 100 Hampton Lane, Princeton, NC 27569

Telephone #: (910) 257-5853

Study Coordinator: Heidi Puckett, EdD

Telephone #: (252) 328-6444

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to increase the skills, knowledge, and expertise related to the process of transferring from a community college to a 4-year institution for students who begin their postsecondary education at a community college with the intention of transferring to a 4-year college to earn a bachelor's degree (vertical transfer-track students). The aim is to increase this transfer-related information by making changes to the student success course, ACA 122. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a vertical transfer-track student who has taken ACA 122. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn how to best provide the transfer-related information that vertical transfer-track students need to successfully transfer to and graduate from the 4-year institution.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 36-48 people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

There are no known reasons as to why you should not take part in this research.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at Wayne Community College. You will need to come to Wayne Community College one time during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately one hour over the next month.

What will I be asked to do?

For strictly research purposes, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately one hour. During this interview, you will be asked questions pertaining to your experiences while taking ACA 122. You will also be asked questions pertaining to how ACA 122 can be changed to affect the extent to which the course provides transfer-related skills, knowledge, and expertise to students who begin their postsecondary career at a community college with the intention to transfer to a 4-year institution. The audio of the interview will be recorded. These audio recordings will be used to make a transcription of the interview and ensure data analysis is accurate. Audio recordings will not include any identifying information. Audio recordings will be kept by the principal investigator until the conclusion of the study in July 2021.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

The only cost for you to participate in this research is one hour of your time. It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

The only individual who will know that you took part in this research is the principal investigator, Charles Raymond Gilmore III. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms will be used when discussing or writing about research data or findings.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

All information collected for this research will be kept electronically. Audio recordings will be collected using the principal investigator's cell phone, which is secured via a passcode and only accessible to the principal investigator. Once the interview is completed, the interview audio recording will be moved to a departmental PirateDrive, which is secured via a passcode and only accessible to the principle investigator. The interview audio recording will then be deleted from the principal investigator's cell phone. File names for interview audio recordings securely in a departmental PirateDrive will not include any personal identifying informant. Pseudonyms will be used in all file names. Once the interview audio recording has been transcribed, the audio recording will be deleted from the departmental PirateDrive. Interview transcripts and data analyses will be kept securely in a departmental PirateDrive for 3 years after the conclusion of the study in May 2022.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at (910) 257-5853 Monday-Friday between 9am and 5pm.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)	Signature	Date
---	------------------	-------------

Faculty Participant Informed Consent Form



Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: PROVIDING TRANSFER STUDENT CAPITAL TO VERTICAL TRANSFER-TRACK STUDENTS IN A VERTICAL TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS COURSE: AN ACTION-RESEARCH STUDY

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Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to increase the skills, knowledge, and expertise related to the process of transferring from a community college to a 4-year institution for students who begin their postsecondary education at a community college with the intention of transferring to a 4-year college to earn a bachelor's degree (vertical transfer-track students). The aim is to increase this transfer-related information by making changes to the student success course, ACA 122. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a faculty member who has taught ACA 122. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn how to best provide the transfer-related information that vertical transfer-track students need to successfully transfer to and graduate from the 4-year institution.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 36-48 people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

There are no known reasons as to why you should not take part in this research.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at Wayne Community College. You will need to come to Wayne Community College one time during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately one hour over the next month.

What will I be asked to do?

For strictly research purposes, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately one hour. During this interview, you will be asked questions pertaining to your experiences while teaching ACA 122. You will also be asked questions pertaining to how ACA 122 can be changed to affect the extent to which the course provides transfer-related skills, knowledge, and expertise to students who begin their postsecondary career at a community college with the intention to transfer to a 4-year institution. The audio of the interview will be recorded. These audio recordings will be used to make a transcription of the interview and ensure data analysis is accurate. Audio recordings will not include any identifying information. Audio recordings will be kept by the principal investigator until the conclusion of the study in July 2021.

You will also be asked to participate in a committee (ACA 122 Redesign Committee) created to help with the redesign of ACA 122. Participation in the interview does not require participation in the committee.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

The minimum cost for you to participate in this research is one hour of your time. If you decided to be a member of the ACA 122 Redesign Committee, an additional cost of 5-8 hours of your time will be incurred. It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

The only individual who will know that you took part in this research is the principal investigator, Charles Raymond Gilmore III. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms will be used when discussing or writing about research data or findings.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

All information collected for this research will be kept electronically. Audio recordings will be collected using the principal investigator's cell phone, which is secured via a passcode and only accessible to the principal investigator. Once the interview is completed, the interview audio recording will be moved to a departmental PirateDrive, which is secured via a passcode and only accessible to the principle investigator. The interview audio recording will then be deleted from the principal investigator's cell phone. File names for interview audio recordings securely in a departmental PirateDrive will not include any personal identifying informant. Pseudonyms will be used in all file names. Once the interview audio recording has been transcribed, the audio recording will be deleted from the departmental PirateDrive. Interview transcripts and data analyses will be kept securely in a departmental PirateDrive for 3 years after the conclusion of the study in May 2022.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at (910) 257-5853 Monday-Friday between 9am and 5pm.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)**Signature****Date**

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)**Signature****Date**

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Phase I Student Interview Protocol

Demographic Information

Student Age:

Current Academic Program(s):

Possible Transfer Major(s):

First-Generation College Student: YES/NO

Race:

Ethnicity:

Interview Questions

1. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not likely at all and 5 being highly likely, what is the likelihood that you will transfer to a 4-year institution to earn a bachelor's degree?
2. Prior to taking ACA 122, what were your expectations of what the course would be like?
3. While taking ACA 122, were your expectations confirmed? If not, please explain why.
4. Think back to the topics and information covered in ACA 122. Overall, did you find any of the topics to be useful? If so, which ones were the most useful and why?
5. Overall, did you find any of the topics to be not useful? If so, which ones were the least useful and why?
6. Do you feel that taking ACA 122 has helped you prepare to transfer to a 4-year institution? In other words, do you think that ACA 122 has provided you with the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution? If yes, please explain how the course did this. If no, please explain how the course did not do this.

7. Do you feel that taking ACA 122 has positively impacted your confidence in your ability to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution? If yes, please explain how the course did this. If no, please explain how the course did not do this.
8. If you could change ACA 122 to improve the course's ability to provide you with the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year intuition, how would you change it? If yes, how do you think this change would help?

Phase I Faculty Interview Protocol

1. How many years have you been a community college instructor?
2. Prior to teaching ACA 122, what were your expectations of what the course would be like?
3. While teaching ACA 122, were your expectations confirmed? If not, please explain why.
4. Think back to the topics and information covered in ACA 122. Overall, did you find any of the topics to be useful to your students? If so, which ones were the most useful and why?
5. Overall, did you find any of the topics to be not useful to your students? If so, which ones were the least useful and why?
6. Do you feel that taking ACA 122 prepared your students to transfer to a 4-year institution? In other words, do you think that ACA 122 has provided your students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution? If yes, please explain how the course did this. If no, please explain how the course did not do this.
7. If you could change ACA 122 to improve the course's ability to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution, how would you change it? If yes, how do you think this change would help?

Phase III Student Interview Protocol

Demographic Information

Student Age:

Current Academic Program(s):

Possible Transfer Major(s):

First-Generation College Student: YES/NO

Race:

Ethnicity:

Interview Questions

1. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not likely at all and 5 being highly likely, what is the likelihood that you will transfer to a 4-year institution to earn a bachelor's degree?
2. Prior to taking ACA 122, what were your expectations of what the course would be like?
3. While taking ACA 122, were your expectations confirmed? If not, please explain why.
4. Think back to the topics and information covered in ACA 122. Overall, did you find any of the topics to be useful? If so, which ones were the most useful and why?
5. Overall, did you find any of the topics to be not useful? If so, which ones were the least useful and why?
6. Do you feel that taking ACA 122 has helped you prepare to transfer to a 4-year institution? In other words, do you think that ACA 122 has provided you with the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution? If yes, please explain how the course did this. If no, please explain how the course did not do this.

7. Do you feel that taking ACA 122 has positively impacted your confidence in your ability to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution? If yes, please explain how the course did this. If no, please explain how the course did not do this.
8. If you could change ACA 122 to improve the course's ability to provide you with the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year intuition, how would you change it? If yes, how do you think this change would help?

Phase III Faculty Interview Protocol

1. How many years have you been a community college instructor?
2. Prior to teaching the redesigned ACA 122, what were your expectations of what the course would be like?
3. While teaching the redesigned ACA 122, were your expectations confirmed? If not, please explain why.
4. Think back to the topics and information covered in redesigned ACA 122. Overall, did you find any of the topics to be useful to your students? If so, which ones were the most useful and why?
5. Overall, did you find any of the topics to be not useful to your students? If so, which ones were the least useful and why?
6. Do you feel that taking the redesigned ACA 122 prepared your students to transfer to a 4-year institution? In other words, do you think that ACA 122 has provided your students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year intuition? If yes, please explain how the course did this. If no, please explain how the course did not do this.
7. If you could change the redesigned ACA 122 to improve the course's ability to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are necessary to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year intuition, how would you change it? If yes, how do you think this change would help?

APPENDIX D: ACA 122 SYLLABUS

WAYNE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ACA 122 – [Insert Section #] College Transfer Success
Fall 2020
August 17 – December 15
Meeting Days and Time

Instructor Information

Instructor:
Office Location:
Telephone Numbers:
Office Hours:
E-Mail Address:

Course Description (CCL)

Class 0 Lab 2 Clinical 0 Work 0 Credit 1

This course provides information and strategies necessary to develop clear academic and professional goals beyond the community college experience. Topics include the CAA, college culture, career exploration, gathering information on senior institutions, strategic planning, critical-thinking, and communications skills for a successful academic transition. Upon completion, students should be able to develop an academic plan to transition successfully to senior institutions.

Prerequisite(s)

None

Co-requisite(s)

None

College Institutional Learning Outcomes

A graduate of Wayne Community College should be able to:

1. Make effective oral presentations.
2. Compose effective written documents.
3. Analyze aspects of human culture, such as creative expressions or diverse social structures.
4. Apply appropriate mathematics to solve real-world problems
5. Interpret or analyze natural phenomena using concepts and principles of the natural sciences.
6. Explain social phenomena or behaviors by applying concepts and principles of the social or behavioral sciences.

Program Learning Outcomes

The Associate Degree Programs in arts, science, and engineering prepare students to transfer to a 4-year college for a baccalaureate degree (B.A. or B.S.). Graduates of these two-year programs complete the academic requirements and develop the skills in analysis, interpretation, and communication necessary for transfer to a 4-year institution.

Upon completion of the AA program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.
2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.
3. Apply appropriate mathematics to solve real world problems.

Upon completion of the AS program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.
2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.
3. Apply appropriate mathematics to solve real world problems.
4. Analyze a problem or question using the scientific method.

Upon completion of the AGE program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.
2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.

Upon completion of the AGE-N program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.
2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.

Upon completion of the AE program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.
2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.
3. Apply appropriate mathematics to solve real world problems.
4. Analyze and derive solutions to engineering problems using appropriate techniques and formulae.

Upon completion of the AATP program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.
2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.
3. Apply appropriate mathematics to solve real world problems.
4. Create learning environments that are healthy, respectful, supportive and challenging for all children.
5. Demonstrate accurate knowledge of content as related to the stated curriculum goals within required education courses.

Upon completion of the ASTP program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.
2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.
3. Apply appropriate mathematics to solve real world problems.
4. Analyze a problem or question using the scientific method.
5. Create learning environments that are healthy, respectful, supportive and challenging for all children.
6. Demonstrate accurate knowledge of content as related to the stated curriculum goals within required education courses.

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of ACA 122, a student should be able to:

1. Develop a strategic plan to accomplish their academic goals.
2. Identify the rights and responsibilities of transfer students under the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA), including the Universal General Education Transfer Component (UGETC) designated courses, the Transfer Assured Admissions Policy (TAAP), the CAA appeals process, and university tuition surcharge.
3. Evaluate learning strategies, including reading, studying, note-taking, test-taking, information processing, information literacy, time management, memorization techniques, and identify strategies for improvement.
4. Identify essential college resources designed to increase their ability to attain academic success.
5. Identify essential college policies and procedures, including academic integrity such as avoiding plagiarism; calculating GPA, and maintaining satisfactory academic progress for financial aid eligibility and/or good academic standing.

Required Textbook(s)

NC Community College Success and Beyond, Custom Edition, by C. Staley and L. Criswell, published by Cengage Learning

The text-book is available in the WCC Bookstore and is also included with the purchase of the Cengage Unlimited product.

Other Required Materials/Software

Access to Moodle, Web Advisor, Campus Email, Adobe Reader XI, MS Word, MS Excel, and MS Power Point is required.

Learning/Teaching Methods

Learning and teaching methods to be utilized include, but are not limited to assigned readings, lectures, student discussions, case materials, and presentation of supplemental information, and Internet assignments.

Course Requirements/Methods of Evaluation

To demonstrate attainment of all learning outcomes for ACA 122, the student must achieve an overall average of 70%. **ACA 122 is comprised of 1000 points. You must earn 695 points at a minimum to earn a grade of 70%.** See the ACA 122 Moodle site and Module Schedule below for more details on course assignments, due dates, and point values.

Grading Policy/Criteria

The following ten-point grading scale will be used by the department.

100-90=A
89-80=B
79-70=C
69-60=D
Below 60=F

Late assignments will not be accepted.

Academic Integrity/Student Rights and Responsibilities

See following link for the [Academic Integrity Policy](#):

<https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/> Any student caught violating the WCC Code of

Student Academic Integrity Policy, (i.e., cheating, plagiarizing, or other dishonorable acts), in academic work is subject to disciplinary action.

Wayne Community College has a subscription to Urkund, an online plagiarism/originality detection service. At your instructor's discretion, any submitted assignment or discussion post can be submitted to Urkund for evaluation. If your work is submitted to Urkund, it will be stored in the Urkund database for future comparisons; however, no personally identifiable information is available to anyone outside of WCC.

The Social Science Department has agreed on an Academic Honesty Policy:

- 1) Cheating on a test will be an automatic F in the course
- 2) Plagiarism on an assignment:
 - * First offense - Zero on the assignment
 - * Second offense - Automatic F in the course

COVID-19

Wayne Community College continues to monitor the COVID-19 situation and align our college planning with guidance from the local and state health officials. Our primary goal is to protect the health and safety of our students, faculty, staff, and our community, while delivering quality education. We will continue to communicate as more information becomes available.

COVID-19 Safety Protocol

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, as a reminder, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including:

- Wearing a face covering/mask while on campus is mandatory
- Practice social distancing
- Wash your hands or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer often
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Cover your cough or sneeze
- Avoid close contact with people that are sick
- Monitor your health daily
- Stay home if you are sick

Information about COVID-19 can be found on the Wayne Community College website at:
<https://www.waynecc.edu/safe-wayne/current-health-threats/>

Failure to comply with campus regulations related to COVID-19 will be considered violations of the Student Code of Conduct.

Students with Disabilities

WCC is committed to ensuring that students with disabilities have equal access to and participation in all programs of study. For further explanation, please note the Students with Disabilities policy in the [WCC catalog](https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/) <https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/> or in the [Student handbook](https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/) <https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/>. Students with disabilities can visit the Disabilities Services Counselor in Counseling Services, WLC 182, or call 919-735-5151, ext. 6729.

Non-Discriminatory Statement

Wayne Community College is committed to a policy of providing educational opportunities to all students regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, or disability. WCC's

non-discriminatory statement can be found in the [College catalog](https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/)<https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/>.

Audio & Visual Recordings and Student Privacy

An instructor has the final decision on the recording of lectures. If allowed to record, a student may only use the recording for personal study. The College may record courses. A student can choose to sign an Opt Out form in Admissions & Records, which will be filed within the student's electronic record. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with the student to inform the instructor of their privacy needs.

Student Attendance Policy

[Attendance policy https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/](https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/) and here [Student handbook https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/](https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/).

Online Classes:

For all online classes, Wayne Community College has determined that a student's regular participation in the online classroom is key to attendance. A student will be dropped if any of the following criteria are met:

- Online students will be required to complete the Online Enrollment Verification Quiz within the first ten percent (10%) of class for each online class during a semester. Failure to complete this assignment in the determined time frame will result in the student being dropped from the class. For this course, you must complete and submit the Online Verification Quiz no later than **Wednesday, August 26 by 11:59pm**.
- Any student who fails to sign in or submit any assigned class work for a period of fourteen (14) days or more will be dropped from the class.
- Any student who misses more than 20% of the required activities and assignments.

The last day to drop this course with a "W" is October 30.

Campus Safety

Wayne Community College is committed to providing a safe environment for all students and employees. Students need to be familiar with the emergency information published on the red and white cards throughout campus and fire alarm locations, along with the safety topics found in the *WCC General Catalog/Student Handbook*, including crime reporting and prevention. In addition, instructors will provide information on any safety issues applicable to their specific courses, such as bloodborne pathogen and bodily fluid cleanup/reporting, Chemical Safety/Safety Data Sheets, and personal protective equipment.

WCC Alerts for emergencies and inclement weather situations are sent to all employees and students using e-mail, text, and phone. More information regarding WCC Alerts may be found on the WCC website.

Additional Information from the Instructor/Miscellaneous

1. Cell phones and other electronic devices cause unnecessary disruption to the learning/teaching process in the classroom, lab, or library setting. Out of courtesy to others, all systems of communication should be in quiet position during instructional, lab, or library time.
2. Wayne Community College is a tobacco-free and drug-free institution. Tobacco products and drugs are not to be utilized at any time while on any part of the college campus including but not limited to parking lots, walkways, stairwells, or inside buildings.

Fall 2020 ACA 122 16-Week Course Outline and Calendar

Module	Topic(s)	Activities Due	Point Value
1 Aug 17	Breaking the Ice Key Aspects of ACA 122 WCC OnPoint Initiative (QEP sections)	What Will Be Your Legacy? Forum Post Get Your Library Barcode Number	20 20
2 Aug 24	WCC Student Support Services and WCC Student Handbook	WCC Student Support Services Academic Integrity and Student Code of Conduct Quiz	100 20
3 Aug 31	Understand How YOU Learn	Multiple Intelligences Self-Assessment The Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire	25 25
4 Sept 7	Managing Your Time Wisely and Effective Online Learning	Creating A Time Diary	30
5 Sept 14	Note-Taking, Reading In College, and Taking Tests	Chapters 6-10 Quiz	90
6 Sept 21	Assessing Your Career Interests and Work Values	CFNC Career Interest Inventories Part I (Interest Profiler and Work Values Sorter)	75
7 Sept 28	Exploring Career Options and Potential Transfer Institutions	CFNC Career Interest Inventories Part II What Are My Possible Transfer Institutions?	75 75
8 Oct 5	Finding and Understanding Your Baccalaureate Degree Plans	My College Transfer Plan Part I	100
9 Oct 12	How Do I Get From WCC to My Transfer Institution?	My College Transfer Plan Part II	100
10 Oct 26	Using Self-Service to Register for Classes	Plan Your Courses In Self-Service	25
11 Nov 2	What Can I Expect At My Transfer Institutions?	My College Transfer Plan Part III	100
12 Nov 9	The College Transfer Process In North Carolina	Module 11 Quiz Register for Spring 2020 Courses	30 0
13 Nov 16	Information Literacy	Practicing Information Literacy	30
14 Nov 23	Financial Literacy	Create Your Personal Budget	20
15 Nov 30	Stress Management and Wellness	Health Habits Forum	20
16 Dec 7	Soft Skills	Soft Skills Quiz	20

APPENDIX E: RECRUITMENT EMAIL SCRIPT SENT TO STUDENTS

Dear [participant name],

My name is Charles Gilmore and I am an instructor at Wayne Community College. I am conducting a study for my doctoral dissertation at East Carolina University and am writing to invite you to participate in my research study. The study is about how we at Wayne Community College can improve ACA 122-College Transfer Success so that the course is better able to provide the necessary skills, knowledge, and expertise related to the process of transferring from a community college to a 4-year institution for students who begin their postsecondary education at a community college with the intention of transferring to a 4-year college to earn a bachelor's degree. You're eligible to be in this study because you have taken ACA 122 in the past. I obtained your contact information from the Wayne Community College Admissions and Records Office.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview asking about your experiences with ACA 122 and your thoughts on how the course can be improved. The interview audio will be recorded and then transcribed. The interview transcription will be used to determine what change can be made to ACA 122. The interview will take 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email me at crgilmore@waynecc.edu or call me at (910) 257-5853 or (919) 739-6927.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX F: RECRUITMENT EMAIL SCRIPT SENT TO FACULTY

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Charles Gilmore, and I am an instructor at Wayne Community College. I am conducting a study for my doctoral dissertation at East Carolina University and am writing to invite you to participate in my research study. The study is about how we at Wayne Community College can improve ACA 122-College Transfer Success so that the course is better able to provide the necessary skills, knowledge, and expertise related to the process of transferring from a community college to a 4-year institution for students who begin their postsecondary education at a community college with the intention of transferring to a 4-year college to earn a bachelor's degree. You're eligible to be in this study because you have taught ACA 122 in the past. I obtained your contact information from the Wayne Community College Admissions and Records Office.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview asking about your experiences with teaching ACA 122 and your thoughts on how the course can be improved. The interview audio will be recorded and then transcribed. The interview transcription will be used to determine what changes can be made to ACA 122. The interview will take 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email me at crgilmore@waynecc.edu or call me at (910) 257-5853 or (919) 739-6927.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX G: DISSERTATION STUDY DATA ANALYSIS FOR REVIEW EMAIL

SCRIPT

Hi,

As you may know, I am in the midst of finishing up my dissertation and would like to share with you the data analysis I put together based on the interviews I had with students and faculty. Basically, I am interested in hearing what you think of the 5 themes that I have derived from the data. Do you agree with the results? Disagree? And why?

My study is focused on revising ACA 122 to make sure that the course is providing vertical transfer-track students with the transfer student capital they need to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution. So, anything you wish to provide that you think will help with that endeavor is greatly appreciated.

Here are the 5 themes of my data analysis:

1. ACA 122 provides what students need to be successful, but only if students take the course seriously and effortfully.
2. ACA 122 should be an 8-week course that meets in person twice per week.
3. ACA 122 should be taken during the first semester by new vertical transfer-track students.
4. ACA 122 should incorporate and introduce students to 4-year college representatives and other academic programs on campus.
5. ACA 122 assignments should be application-based, vertical transfer process-oriented, reflective, and applicable to where students want to go.

I have also attached the full draft version of the data analysis write-up if you care to take a look. It's just a draft, so please excuse any typos or grammatical errors.

Thank you for any help you are willing to provide!

APPENDIX H: REDESIGNED ACA 122 COURSE FOR REVIEW EMAIL SCRIPT

Hi,

As you know, I am working on finishing up my dissertation at ECU and would like to share with you a redesigned ACA 122 course. This redesign was based on student feedback, faculty feedback, and input from several other members of the WCC community.

To provide some context, my study is focused on revising ACA 122 to make sure that the course is providing vertical transfer-track students with the transfer student capital they need to successfully transfer to and graduate from a 4-year institution.

Also, in case you are interested, here are the 5 themes that I derived from the data analysis I conducted after interviewing students and faculty:

1. ACA 122 provides what students need to be successful, but only if students take the course seriously and effortfully.
2. ACA 122 should be an 8-week course that meets in person twice per week.
3. ACA 122 should be taken during the first semester by new vertical transfer-track students.
4. ACA 122 should incorporate and introduce students to 4-year college representatives and other academic programs on campus.
5. ACA 122 assignments should be application-based, vertical transfer process-oriented, reflective, and applicable to where students want to go.

Attached, you will find two documents. One is a full write-up of the data analysis I conducted. The other is an outline of the redesigned ACA 122 course along with the weekly activities used to reinforce the topics covered. Keep in mind that these are drafts and will probably include some grammar and other issues.

If you have time to review only one of the attached documents, please take a look at the Redesigned ACA 122 Course for Review document. I am looking to get some feedback on this redesign and make improvements where necessary. Your input is greatly appreciated!

Thank you for your time and energy!

APPENDIX I: REDESIGNED ACA 122 COURSE SAMPLE SYLLABUS

WAYNE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ACA 122-[Insert Section], College Transfer Success
Fall 2022—[Insert Date Range]
[Insert Meeting Day(s) and Time(s)]
(All hyperlinks open in a new window)

Instructor Information

Instructor:
Office Location:
Telephone Numbers:
Student Hours:
E-Mail Address:

Course Description (CCL)

Class 0 Lab 2 Clinical 0 Work 0 Credit 1

This course provides information and strategies necessary to develop clear academic and professional goals beyond the community college experience. Topics include the CAA, college policies and culture, career exploration, gathering information on senior institutions, strategic planning, critical thinking, and communications skills for a successful academic transition. Upon completion, students should be able to develop an academic plan to transition successfully to senior institutions.

Prerequisite(s)

NONE

Co-requisite(s)

NONE

College Institutional Learning Outcomes

A graduate of Wayne Community College should be able to:

1. Make effective oral presentations.
2. Compose effective written documents.
3. Analyze aspects of human culture, such as creative expressions or diverse social structures.
4. Apply appropriate mathematics to solve real-world problems
5. Interpret or analyze natural phenomena using concepts and principles of the natural sciences.
6. Explain social phenomena or behaviors by applying concepts and principles of the social or behavioral sciences.

Program Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the AA program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.
2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.
3. Apply appropriate mathematics to solve real world problems.

Upon completion of the AATP program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.

2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.
3. Apply appropriate mathematics to solve real world problems.
4. Create learning environments that are healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging for all children.
5. Demonstrate accurate knowledge of content as related to the stated curriculum goals within required education courses.

Upon completion of the AS program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.
2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.
3. Apply appropriate mathematics to solve real world problems.
4. Analyze a problem or question using the scientific method.

Upon completion of the ASTP program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.
2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.
3. Apply appropriate mathematics to solve real world problems.
4. Analyze a problem or question using the scientific method.
5. Create learning environments that are healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging for all children.
6. Demonstrate accurate knowledge of content as related to the stated curriculum goals within required education courses.

Upon completion of the AGE program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.
2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.

Upon completion of the AGE-N program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.
2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.

Upon completion of the AE program, a graduate should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the source, context, and credibility of information.
2. Communicate information to a variety of audiences using appropriate written methods.
3. Apply appropriate mathematics to solve real world problems.
4. Analyze and derive solutions to engineering problems using appropriate techniques and formulas.

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of ACA 122, a student should be able to:

1. Develop a strategic plan for completing community college academic goals, including certificates, diplomas, and/or associate degrees.
2. Develop a strategic plan for transferring to a university and preparing for a new career.
3. Identify the rights and responsibilities of transfer students under the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA), including Universal General Education Transfer Component (UGETC) designated courses, the Transfer Assured Admissions Policy (TAAP), and the CAA appeals process.
4. Evaluate learning strategies, including notetaking, test-taking, information processing, time management, and memorization techniques, and identify strategies for improvement.
5. Identify essential college resources, including financial aid, advising, registration, tutoring, library services, computer labs, and counseling services and recognize the importance of these resources on student success.
6. Identify essential college policies and procedures, including academic integrity such as avoiding

plagiarism, calculating a GPA, and maintaining satisfactory academic progress for financial aid eligibility and/or good academic standing.

Required Textbook(s)

NC Community College Success and Beyond, Custom Edition, by C. Staley and L. Criswell, published by Cengage Learning

The textbook is available in the WCC Bookstore and is also included with the purchase of the Cengage Unlimited product.

Other Required Materials/Software

Access to Moodle, Self-Service, Campus Email, Adobe Reader, MS Word, MS Excel, and MS Power Point is required.

Learning/Teaching Methods

Learning and teaching methods to be utilized include, but are not limited to assigned readings, lectures, student discussions, case materials, and presentation of supplemental information, and Internet assignments.

Course Requirements/Methods of Evaluation

To demonstrate attainment of all learning outcomes for ACA 122, the student must achieve an overall average of 70%. **ACA 122 is comprised of 1000 points. You must earn 695 points at a minimum to earn a grade of 70%.** See the ACA 122 Moodle site for more details on course assignments, due dates, and point values.

Grading Policy/Criteria

The following ten-point grading scale will be used by the department.

100-90=A
89-80=B
79-70=C
69-60=D
Below 60=F

Late assignments will not be accepted.

Academic Integrity/Student Rights and Responsibilities

See following link for the [Academic Integrity Policy:https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/](https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/). Any student caught violating the WCC Code of Student Academic Integrity Policy, (i.e., cheating, plagiarizing, or other dishonorable acts), in academic work is subject to disciplinary action.

The Social Science Department has agreed on an Academic Honesty Policy:

- 1) Cheating on a test will be an automatic F in the course
- 2) Plagiarism on an assignment:
 - * First offense - Zero on the assignment
 - * Second offense - Automatic F in the course

Wayne Community College has a subscription to Ouriginal, an online plagiarism/originality detection service. At your instructor's discretion, any submitted assignment or discussion post can be submitted to Ouriginal for evaluation. If your work is submitted to Ouriginal, it will be stored in the Ouriginal database for future comparisons; however, no personally identifiable information is available to anyone outside of WCC.

COVID-19

Wayne Community College continues to monitor the COVID-19 situation and align our college planning with guidance from the local and state health officials. Our primary goal is to protect the health and safety of our students, faculty, staff, and our community, while delivering quality education. We will continue to communicate as more information becomes available.

COVID-19 Safety Protocol

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, as a reminder, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including:

- Wearing a face covering/mask while on campus is mandatory
- Practice social distancing
- Wash your hands or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer often
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Cover your cough or sneeze
- Avoid close contact with people that are sick
- Monitor your health daily
- Stay home if you are sick

Information about COVID-19 can be found on the Wayne Community College website at:

<https://www.waynecc.edu/safe-wayne/current-health-threats/>

Failure to comply with campus regulations related to COVID-19 will be considered violations of the Student Code of Conduct.

Students with Disabilities

WCC is committed to ensuring that students with disabilities have equal access to and participation in all programs of study. For further explanation, please note the Students with Disabilities policy in the [WCC catalog https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/](https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/) or in the [Student handbook https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/](https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/). Students with disabilities can visit the Disabilities Services Counselor in Counseling Services, WLC 182, or call 919-735-5151, ext. 6729.

Non-Discriminatory Statement

Wayne Community College is committed to a policy of providing educational opportunities to all students regardless of economic or social status, beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, or physical or mental disability. WCC's non-discriminatory statement can be found in the [College cataloghttps://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/](https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/).

Audio & Visual Recordings and Student Privacy

An instructor has the final decision on the recording of lectures. If allowed to record, a student may only use the recording for personal study. The College may record courses. A student can choose to sign an Opt Out form in Admissions & Records, which will be filed within the student's electronic record. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with the student to inform the instructor of their privacy needs.

Student Attendance Policy

[Attendance policy https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/](https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/) and here [Student handbook https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/](https://www.waynecc.edu/academics/catalog/).

NOTE: In addition to the attendance policy, any student who is absent for more than 14 consecutive days will be withdrawn from the course.

Seated/Hybrid/Web-Based Classes:

The College believes students demonstrate responsibility for and commitment to their educational goals through regular attendance; therefore, students must attend eighty percent (80%) of the total hours of any class to receive a passing grade. Instructors will excuse no absences under this policy. Students must be present in at least one (1) class during the first ten percent (10%) of the class to be considered enrolled in the class.

Hybrid classes require that a student complete the Online Enrollment Verification Quiz within the first ten percent (10%) of the class for each hybrid class during a semester. Failure to complete this assignment in the determined time frame will result in the student being dropped from the class.

A total of 3 class meeting days can be missed. If a student misses more than 3 days, the student will be withdrawn from the course.

The last day to drop this course with a grade of "W" is [Insert Date Here].

Campus Safety

Wayne Community College is committed to providing a safe environment for all students and employees. Students need to be familiar with the emergency information published on the red and white cards throughout campus and fire alarm locations, along with the safety topics found in the *WCC General Catalog/Student Handbook*, including crime reporting and prevention. In addition, instructors will provide information on any safety issues applicable to their specific courses, such as bloodborne pathogen and bodily fluid cleanup/reporting, Chemical Safety/Safety Data Sheets, and personal protective equipment.

WCC Alerts for emergencies and inclement weather situations are sent to all employees and students using e-mail, text, and phone. More information regarding WCC Alerts may be found on the WCC website.

Additional Information from the Instructor/Miscellaneous

1. Cell phones and other electronic devices cause unnecessary disruption to the learning/teaching process in the classroom, lab, or library setting. Out of courtesy to others, all systems of communication should be in quiet position during instructional, lab, or library time.
2. Wayne Community College is a tobacco-free and drug-free institution. Tobacco products and drugs are not to be utilized at any time while on any part of the college campus including but not limited to parking lots, walkways, stairwells, or inside buildings.

Online/Hybrid Course Requirements

As an online student, it is your responsibility to maintain adequate internet and computer sources. In most cases, cell phones and mobile devices are not sufficient. It is recommended that you have another option for yourself in the event that you lose internet, your computer crashes, etc. You are still responsible for logging into your courses and completing required assignments, projects, and tests.

Currently, these resources are available to you:

- [Library Open Computers](https://www.waynecc.edu/library/); <https://www.waynecc.edu/library/>
- Wi-Fi on campus
- Park and Learn- Wi-Fi availability in parking lots on campus for after-hours use
- Laptop loan program (reach out to advisor or instructor for referral)

Week By Week Course Schedule

Week	Topic Covered	Content-Reinforcing Activity Description
<i>Week 1</i>	Establishing Your Vision, Mission, and Core Values	Students will create their personal vision, mission, and core values
<i>Week 2</i>	Understanding Your WCC Student Support Services	Students will describe the resources of 10 different support services, how they can utilize these services, and where they are located on campus
<i>Week 3</i>	Assessing Your Career Interests and Work Values	Students will complete two inventories to define their career interest and work values and find careers that match their results
<i>Week 4</i>	Exploring Your Career Options and Identifying Potential Transfer Institutions	Students will further investigate three careers that they have selected based on the outcome of Week 3 Students will match those careers with specific academic programs at various 4-year institutions
<i>Week 5</i>	Finding, Understanding, and Using Your Baccalaureate Degree Plans	Students will find the baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs) for the academic programs they identified in Week 4 Students will use these BDPs to create academic plans
<i>Week 6</i>	What to Expect at Your Potential Transfer Institutions	Students will further investigate several characteristics and requirements of three potential transfer institutions
<i>Week 7</i>	Paying for Your Education	Students will research the financial aid resources that are available at the three 4-year institutions they identified previously
<i>Week 8</i>	Revisiting Your Vision, Mission, and Core Values	N/A

APPENDIX J: WEEK 1: ESTABLISHING YOUR VISION, MISSION, AND CORE VALUES

Purpose: To create your personal vision, mission, and core values. Establishing these things for yourself can help you determine where you want to go, how to get there, and the behaviors you should exhibit that will aid you in achieving your goals.

Directions: To complete this activity, please do the following:

1. Write your personal vision statement. A personal vision statement is a declaration of what you want to accomplish in your personal life and professional life and at a minimum should include your long-term goals. You can also choose to include in your vision statement things like your short-term goals, your strengths, your skills, your abilities, your passions, and/or your ultimate career goal(s). Typically, a personal vision statement is 40 to 60 words in length but can be shorter or longer. Although it is an educational organization and not an individual person, the vision statement for WCC is “Wayne Community College will be the preferred choice for quality education and training in the communities it serves.” Feel free to peruse online for more examples of what a personal vision statement looks like.
2. Write your personal mission statement. A personal mission statement is a declaration of how you will achieve your vision and at a minimum should include the actionable steps you will take to achieve your long-term goals. The mission statement for WCC is “To meet the educational, training, and cultural needs of the communities it serves.” Feel free to peruse online for more examples of what a personal mission statement looks like.
3. Define your core values. Core values are foundational beliefs that you have about yourself that should guide your behavior and will assist you in fulfilling your vision and

mission. Examples of core values of WCC include “Communication: Encouraging open dialogue at all levels”, “Excellence: Setting and meeting high standards”, and “Service: Holding ourselves accountable for the efficient and effective use of the resources entrusted to us.” Feel free to peruse online for more examples of core values and/or how to define your own.

APPENDIX K: YOUR WCC STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Purpose: To introduce you to the various student support services available at WCC, the resources that these support services can provide, and where these support services are located on campus.

Directions: Using the WCC website (waynecc.edu), you will locate the answers to the following questions for each of the student support services listed below:

1. Describe all the resources that the student support service offers to students.
2. At a personal level, how can the student support service help you in achieving your academic and/or career goals?
3. Where on the WCC campus (building and room number) is the student support service located? List all relevant locations on campus.

Please answer the above questions for the following student support services:

Academic Skills Center

Academic Testing Center

Writing Center

Career Services

Bison Pantry

Counseling Services

Disability Services

Financial Aid Office

Clyde A. Erwin, Jr. Library

Your Achievement Coach

APPENDIX L: CFNC CAREER INTEREST INVENTORIES PART I

Purpose: To define your career interests and work values and determine several potential career options based on those interests and work values.

Directions: To complete this activity, please do the following:

1. Create a College Foundation of North Carolina (CFNC) student account using your WCC student email address.
2. Once you have created your CFNC account, complete the Interest Profiler and Work Values Sorter by clicking on Plan Your Future near the top of the page then clicking on Learn About Yourself near the bottom of the following page. On the Learn About Yourself page, you will see several assessments. You are only required to complete the Interest Profiler and Work Values Sorter but may complete the other assessments if you choose to do so.
3. After completing the Interest Profiler, answer the following questions:
 - a. What are your top two interest areas and what does each mean?
 - b. Do these interest areas accurately reflect your true interests? Do you agree with your results? Why or why not?
 - c. After clicking on EXPLORE MATCHING OCCUPATIONS and reviewing those results, what 3 suggested careers seem to be the most appealing to you and why?
4. After completing the Work Values Sorter, answer the following questions:
 - a. What are your top two work values and what does each one mean?
 - b. Do these work values accurately reflect your own values? Do you agree with your results? Why or why not?

- c. After clicking on EXPLORE MATCHING OCCUPATIONS and reviewing those results, what 3 suggested careers seem to be the most appealing to you and why?

APPENDIX M: CFNC CAREER INTEREST INVENTORIES PART II

Purpose: To explore your career options further and begin identifying related academic programs at potential 4-year transfer institutions.

Directions: After completing last week's activity, the CFNC Career Interest Inventories Part I, you should have a good understanding of the careers that match your interests and work values. The next step in this process is to explore some of those career options further and begin looking for academic programs that align with those career options. To complete this activity, please do the following:

1. Based on your results from the CFNC Career Interest Inventories Part I, choose at least three careers that are the most appealing to you. Then respond to the following questions for each career:
 2. What do people in this career typically do? Where do people in this career work? With whom do they work? What does a typical day look like for a person in this career?
 3. What is the Average Annual Wage and the Average Starting Wage for people in this career?
 4. What is the outlook for this career? In other words, is the demand for this career growing, staying the same, or shrinking?
 5. What is the level of education you will need to complete to gain employment within this career field? Do you need a bachelor's degree? Or do you need an advanced or professional degree beyond a bachelor's degree? Specifically, what type of academic program or degree do you need to complete to enter into this career? For example, if you wish to be an electrical engineer, you will need to complete a Bachelor's of Science in Electrical Engineering. If you wish to be a physician, you will need to complete a

medical-related bachelor's degree and graduate from a licensed medical school to earn a medical degree.

6. Search for and list at least three potential 4-year transfer institutions that have academic program(s) that align with this career. In other words, find out where you could potentially continue your education after your time at WCC and list those options.

Answers to these questions can be found by using the CFNC website and/or web searches.

APPENDIX N: CREATING YOUR ACADEMIC PLAN

Purpose: To find the baccalaureate degree plan (BDP) for the academic programs at three of the potential 4-year transfer institutions you identified during Week 4, learn how to understand those BDPs, and create a 3-semester academic plan based on your BDPs.

Directions: To complete this activity, please do the following:

1. Using the Baccalaureate Degree Plan Websites link in your ACA 122 Moodle course, find the BDPS for the academic program(s) you are interested in pursuing. Download each BDP and upload them to Moodle using the appropriate activity submission link.
2. Read over each BDP to get an understanding of what courses you should plan to take while you are at WCC that will help you transfer to a 4-year institution seamlessly.
3. Create an academic plan using each of the 3 BDPS you found. The formatting of these academic plans is up to you, but they should be organized by semester and include the courses you need to complete during your next 3 semesters at WCC. You can choose to put all 3 plans on one document/file, or you can create 3 different documents/files.
4. Upload each academic plan to Moodle using the appropriate activity submission link.

APPENDIX O: WHAT TO EXPECT AT YOUR TRANSFER INSTITUTION

Purpose: To allow you to fully understand the transfer requirements of the three 4-year institutions that you identified previously and to get an idea of what you can expect if you were to actually transfer to these institutions.

Directions: To complete this activity, please answer the following questions for each of the three 4-year transfer institutions you have identified:

1. What is your desired academic program (major) at this institution?
2. Why did you select this institution and academic program?
3. What is the minimum GPA required to transfer to this institution? Is there a separate GPA requirement to transfer into the academic program you are interested in? If so, what is it?
4. Looking back at your academic plan you made for this institution, list some of the courses you should take at WCC before transferring to this institution.
5. When is the application due date for transfer students at this institution?
6. Does this institution accept transfer students all year long? Or does it only accept transfer students once a year in the fall?
7. What materials do you need to apply to this institution? Do you have to write an essay? Do you need letters of recommendation? Is there a cost associated with applying?
8. What is the yearly cost of attendance for in-state students at this institution? Keep in mind that cost of attendance is more than tuition. Cost of attendance usually involves tuition, living expenses (dorm, apartment, food costs, etc.), fees, books, and travel expenses.

9. Does this institution offer financial aid/scholarships specifically for transfer students? If so, what is available?
10. Does this institution offer a transfer student orientation? If so, is it mandatory?
11. What is the average class size of student-faculty ratio at this institution? Does this matter to you? Why or why not?
12. What sort of tutoring resources are available to students at this institution?
13. What kinds of student clubs/organizations are available to students at this institution? List 3 student clubs/organizations that seem interesting to you.
14. Have you visited this institution? If so, what were your impressions? If not, do you plan on visiting before making a decision?
15. Do you know anyone who is attending or has attended this institution? If so, talk to them about campus life. What did they tell you? Has this information changed your impression of the institution?

APPENDIX P: PAYING FOR YOUR EDUCATION

Purpose: To provide an opportunity for you to begin thinking about how you will pay for your education once you have transferred to your 4-year institution.

Directions: To complete this activity, please do the following:

1. Locate the website for the financial aid office at each of the three 4-year institutions you have identified previously. Copy and paste the link for each website below:

1. 4-Year Institution #1 Website Link:

2. 4-Year Institution #2 Website Link:

3. 4-Year Institution #3 Website Link:

2. Using the financial aid website for each 4-year institution, answer the following questions:

1. What is the estimated yearly cost of attendance for undergraduate, in-state students at this institution?

2. Typically, cost of attendance is broken down into tuition and fees, books and supplies, housing costs, food/meal costs, personal expenses, transportation costs, and other miscellaneous costs. In addition to the total amount, please provide an itemized list of the expenses used in calculating the estimated yearly cost of attendance for each 4-year institution.

3. Now that you understand what it will cost to attend a 4-year institution, it's time to start thinking about how you will pay for it all! Using the financial aid office websites you found previously, answer the following questions:

1. What sources of financial aid are available to you at each 4-year institution that do not have to be repaid such as scholarships and grants? If so, what is available? How much of

your yearly cost of attendance could potentially be paid for by applying for and using scholarships and grants?

2. Are there opportunities at each 4-year institution to work as a student employee on campus (i.e., work-study programs)? If so, how do you qualify and/or apply for this type of financial aid? How much can you reasonably expect to earn in a work-study program?
3. In some cases, scholarships, grants, and work-study programs will not fully cover the cost of attendance. Student loans can help fill in the gaps but should be considered a last resort and should be used mindfully since these have to be repaid upon graduation. How do you apply for a student loan at each 4-year institution? What are the steps you need to take to apply? Are there application deadlines?
4. If it is necessary to utilize student loans to pay for your education, you should only borrow what you need and nothing more. Eventually, all student loans will have to be repaid. Use this Loan Payment Calculator to estimate your minimum monthly student loan payment after graduating from a 4-year institution:
<http://mappingyourfuture.org/paying/standardcalculator.cfm>. To use this calculator, you will need to know the total projected amount of your student loans, the amount of time you will need to pay it back, and the loan interest rate (average student loan interest rate is 6.8). Based on this calculator, what is your estimated monthly payment, the total amount of interest you will pay, and the minimum annual salary needed to handle these payments?
4. Lastly, what are the minimum requirements at each 4-year institution to stay eligible for financial aid? Do you need to keep a certain GPA? Do you need to maintain satisfactory academic progress (SAP) (i.e., not withdrawing or failing courses)? Are there any other

requirements? Be sure to include minimum requirements for the various sources of financial aid available to you at each 4-year institution. For example, a scholarship may have a GPA requirement of 3.0, but a student loan may only have a GPA requirement of 2.0.

