

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Christine Knighton for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Adult and Higher Education presented on April 15, 2020.

Title: An Exploration on How Institutional Practices and Support Systems Support or Hinder Community College Basic Skills Students Transitioning to Postsecondary Education: A Case Study

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Many jobs in the United States have shifted to requiring education beyond high school credentials. Many potential workers are enrolled in pre-postsecondary education, or basic skills. A small percentage of students transition from basic skills to postsecondary education. Research identifies key institutional practices and supports have shown to increase transitions, but most prior research only looks at one or two practices. This single case study used an equity lens to explore how institutional practices and support systems supported or hindered student transitions from basic skills to postsecondary coursework in a comprehensive community college.

An explanatory case study was used to begin to explain how and why institutional practice and support systems in place either support or hinder student transitions. Five propositions were identified and used to narrow the scope of the study and acted like a blueprint during the data collection and analysis. Sub questions were included for each study proposition to surface institutional racism and inequality regimes at the institution. Data from interviews, observations, and document analysis were used in this study. A transition receptive culture is

presented that may be used by practitioners and college administrators in developing practices and policies that support students in transitioning from basic skills to postsecondary coursework.

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An Exploration on How Institutional Practices and Support Systems Support or Hinder
Community College Basic Skills Students Transitioning to Postsecondary Education: A Case
Study

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Christine Knighton

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Dean of the College of Education

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Christine Knighton, Author

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Chapter 1: Purpose and Significance.....	1
1.1 Low Completion Rates - An Overview	2
1.2 Need to Increase Completion Rates	4
1.3 Adult Education.....	6
1.4 Gaps in Existing Knowledge and Theory: Significance of the Study	12
1.5 Study Purpose and Propositions	17
1.6 Challenges to Studying Non-Credit Education and Transitions.....	15
1.7 Definitions of Key Terms	18
2 Chapter 2: Literature Review	20
2.1 Review Criteria.....	20
2.2 Synthesis of Empirical Findings.....	22
2.3 Theoretical Framework	43
2.4 Conclusion.....	51
3 Chapter 3: Methods and Design	52
3.1 Positionality Statement.....	52
3.2 Case Study Research Design	56
3.3 Pilot Study	58
3.4 Theory in Case Studies	61
3.5 Theoretical Propositions	62
3.6 Logic Linking Propositions to Design/Data	66
3.7 Defining and Bounding the Case – Riverview College.....	66
3.8 Data Collection Plan.....	67
3.9 Data Analysis.....	79
3.10 Analytic Techniques	80
3.11 Criteria for Interpreting the Findings	81
3.12 Limitations.....	83
3.13 Protection of Human Subjects	84
3.14 Summary.....	84
4 Chapter 4: Case Description	86
4.1 Transitional Studies Department Pathways and Offerings.....	86
4.2 Transitional Studies Faculty and Staff	90

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

4.3 Transitional Studies Students	92
4.4 Teaching Practices and Andragogy	94
4.5 Curriculum and Outcomes.....	97
4.6 Student Supports Related to Transfer	104
4.7 Chapter Summary	114
5 Chapter 5: Findings	116
5.1 Proposition 1: Andragogy and Relevant Curriculum Promotes Successful Transitions to Postsecondary Courses	117
5.2 Proposition 2: Advising and Career-Development Services Play an Important Role in Transitioning Students to Postsecondary Courses	126
5.3 Proposition 3: Students Need Financial and Ancillary Support in Order to Successfully Transition to Postsecondary Courses	134
5.4 Proposition 4: Academic and Systems Support are Important When Transitioning to Postsecondary Courses	140
5.5 Proposition 5: A Transition Receptive Culture Matters When Transitioning Students to Postsecondary Courses	147
5.6 Chapter Summary	156
6 Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions	157
6.1 Contributions and Connections to Research and Theory	157
6.2 Discussion and Interpretation of Key Findings	163
6.3 Implications of Findings for Practice and Policy	169
6.4 Recommendations for Practice and Policy for Riverview	182
6.5 Recommendations for Future Research.....	182
References	185

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Conceptual Framework	65
2. The Context and the Case	67
3. Chain of Evidence	78
4. Students of Color and White Students at Riverview	103
5. Students of Color and White Students Statewide	104

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Participants	92
2. Comparison of Age Demographics	93
3. Comparison of Intended Learning Outcomes: Math	98
4. Comparison of Intended Learning Outcomes: English	100
5. Percentage of Students Statewide.....	101
6. Percentage of Students at Riverview	102

LIST OF APPENDICES

<u>Appendix</u>	<u>Page</u>
A. Interview Questions	202
B. Scripts for Process	207
C. Consent Form.....	210
D. IRB Approval Letter	212
E. Pictures of Physical Space at Riverview	214

Chapter 1: Purpose and Significance

Ninety-nine percent of all jobs in the United States that have been added post-Great Recession in 2008 have gone to people with at least some college education (Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Gulish, 2016). By 2020, the United States will need five million workers who have postsecondary credentials to fill job market needs (Georgetown University Center, 2013). Many manufacturing jobs have shifted from workers that have education beyond a high school credential (Carnevale, Ridley, Chiah, Strohl, and Campbell, 2019). Should this trend continue, without postsecondary training, many adults may not be able to secure living-wage jobs. Where are all the workers? Many potential workers are enrolled in pre-postsecondary education, or adult education courses. In 2011-12, there were more than 1.8 million students in federally funded adult education programs who lacked basic skills or English language skills and enrolled in noncredit coursework to improve these skills (Hector-Mason, Narlock, Muhisani, & Bhatt, 2017). The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) estimated there were five million students enrolled in noncredit courses in the fall of 2011 (Sykes, Szuplat, & Decker, 2014). Although the data were inconsistent due to shifting definitions of noncredit education (Becker, 2011; D'Amico, Morgan, Katrina's, Adair, & Miller, 2017; Grubb, Badway, & Bell, 2003; Sykes et al., 2014), the discouraging fact was that only three percent of noncredit students transitioned to postsecondary education¹ within the program year (Hector-Mason et al., 2017).

In 2009, former President Obama reinforced the importance of degree completion and linked this to community colleges through the Completion Initiative, which required community colleges to increase degree completion to 50% by the year 2020 (AACC, 2012). In order to achieve the 50%-degree completion challenge, colleges need to increase the number of students

¹ Postsecondary education includes developmental education, short- and long-term certificate programs, and associate degree coursework.

who attain a certificate or degree. Reaching this goal requires improvements to both access to college, and improvements in completions of degrees or certificates (Washington State Board, 2017).

The significance of this study has impacts beyond the institutions. One impact is on low-skilled adults. The AACU (2012) found that many low-skilled adults cannot move out of low-wage jobs and struggle to provide for their families. The first step for students to move from low-wage jobs to living wage jobs is to transition out of noncredit education and into credit-bearing courses. Findings from this study help describe for policy makers and community college leaders factors involved with students' ability to transition out of noncredit into postsecondary certificates and degrees.

This chapter focuses on the overall goal of increasing the number of associates and bachelor's degrees earned by students who first enroll in noncredit courses, with a specific focus on improving transition rates from noncredit to college credit coursework. This chapter also discusses the benefits of degree and certification attainment and the overall impact of completion on society. The chapter concludes with how this dissertation study addresses the problem of low transition rates from noncredit to postsecondary education.

Low Completion Rates - An Overview

According to a National Clearinghouse Signature Report, in 2012 only 39.4% of all college students at two-year colleges earn a degree, and only three out of 10 full-time students who started at a two-year college graduate with a degree in six years (Shapiro et al., 2018). The majority of students complete their degree at the institution they began at (27.9%), but 8.1% complete at a different, four-year institution and 3.3% complete at another two-year institution. Full time and part time students are included in this percentage. Data disaggregated by race show

Asian American students have the highest degree attainment rates, with 49.1% completing a degree, followed closely by White students (48.1%). The next highest group are Latinx or Latinx students at 35.7%, followed by 27.6% of African American students. To address racial/ethnic disparities in degree attainment, the AACC and other leaders signed an agreement in 2010 to reach for the completion goal that President Obama set in 2009. This agreement began the official work towards the College Completion Challenge, and community colleges are still grappling with this agenda today. In the State of Washington in 2018, the overall educational attainment of a certificate or beyond was at 56.2%, which is above the national average of 48.4%. (Lumina Foundation, 2020). Looking at data disaggregated by race shows Asian American and Pacific Islander students have the highest attainment rate at more than 60%, and White students have the next highest rate at just under 50%. African American students have less than a 30% attainment rate, and Latinx students have less than a 25% attainment rate. According to the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), the average eight-year completion rate for a certificate or degree at community colleges in 2012 in Washington was 43% (Long, 2017).

Student completion is an outcome commonly measured as success for various programs and when colleges have low completion rates, this is often viewed as unsuccessful. One example of these metrics includes Washington State's Student Achievement Initiative (SAI) (Washington State Board, 2015). SAI financially rewards colleges when students reach key academic milestones (Washington State Board, 2015). One of the key academic milestones with the SAI is the completion of a certificate, degree, or apprenticeship.

Need to Increase Completion Rates

Employer demand and living wage. Employers currently cannot find enough skilled workers for specific fields, and unless college completion rates increase, employers will be short five million workers by 2020 (Georgetown University Center, 2013). To keep up with the demand from employers, community colleges will need to increase the number of degrees and certificates awarded. Although enough students are in the pipeline, completion rates for certificates and degrees are currently too low (Hector-Mason et al., 2017).

Low completion rates impact the student, our society, and employers (AACC, 2012; Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Students who attempt a degree or certification and do not complete often feel like failures, and many do not return to campus in the future (AACC, 2012). Even worse, low-skilled adults are often stuck in low-wage jobs, and they struggle to provide for themselves and/or their families. For example, in 2018, the median annual income for a worker with a bachelor's degree was \$93,553, which was more than double the median annual income of \$46,073 for someone with only a high school diploma (Statista, 2019). This income difference is similar for those with some college as well. In 2018, the median weekly pay for someone without a high school diploma was \$553, compared to \$802 for someone with some college (but no degree), and \$1198 for someone with a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

Overall productivity and healthier lifestyle. Benefits of transitioning basic skills students to postsecondary education go beyond living wage job attainment. Postsecondary education includes courses students take for credit that lead to either a degree and/or certificate. Human capital is at stake, and this capital impacts all of society. Goldin (2014) stated that human capital is an "investment in people...and that these investments increase an individual's

productivity” (p. 1). Increasing the overall educational attainment of society will therefore increase worker’s overall productivity. Another benefit of postsecondary certificate or degree attainment was highlighted by Baum et al. (2010). This study found that four-year college graduates are more likely to have employer-based health care. In addition, this study found that individuals with at least some college are less likely to smoke, exercise more, and have lower obesity rates. Smoking rates declined five times more for college educated adults compared to high school graduates. These lifestyle choices not only impact longevity, but they also reduce the overall medical costs to society. Additionally, people with higher levels of education are overall more satisfied with their jobs. Baum et al. (2010) stated that individuals with postsecondary certification are more likely to be active members of their community and live a healthier lifestyle. Adults with higher levels of education volunteer more hours for organizations. This overall healthier lifestyle reduced the medical costs to society.

Participation in higher education is not the same for all groups and therefore not all groups are able to reap the benefits of a healthier lifestyle (Baum et al., 2010). Overall, the percentage of young adults (ages 18-24) who attend postsecondary institutions was at 40% in 2017, which is up from 35% in 2000 (McFarland et al., 2019). There are differences based on race/ethnicity. Black and Latinx students enrolled at a 36% rate, whereas White students enrolled at 41% and Asian students enrolled at a 66% rate. Research needs to be conducted to look at these disparities and determine the factors leading to these gaps in participation so that systemic changes can work towards equality in higher education enrollment and attainment.

By increasing the number of certificates awarded, higher education can open up more opportunities for more people while also increasing the supply of skilled workers available. Students can enter the educational pipeline through various ways to work towards a certificate or

degree. One way students enter college is through adult education. This doorway to degree and certificate programs is described next.

Adult Education

The focus of this dissertation is on noncredit education specific to Adult Basic Education (ABE), English as a Second Language (ESL) and General Education Development (GED). Noncredit ABE and ESL courses are also referred to as basic skills courses. Basic skills students, according to the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998, are defined as individuals who are at least 16 years old and who are not enrolled (or required to be enrolled in) in secondary school or have not obtained a secondary school diploma, who are not functioning in society because of a lack of basic skills, or who are not able to speak, read or write English effectively enough to be productive in society (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Adult education includes noncredit basic skills courses and noncredit vocational and workforce education; however, the focus of this dissertation is on noncredit basic skills education.

Funding noncredit education comes from federal, state, and local initiatives, and many of these initiatives have expectations that institutions will help students increase their skills to secure employment. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) emphasizes the importance of gaining skills for employment (Center for Law and Social Policy, n.d.).

Specifically, Title II of WIOA requires states to develop programs that provide:

- 1) adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with
- 2) workforce preparation activities and
- 3) workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement. (WIOA, 2014, Section 243).

WIOA is a major funding source for adult education programs, and the emphasis is on career advancement. However, measures of success in most noncredit education programs lie in the traditional measures of increased reading, writing, or math skills (Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008). This traditional assessment does not line up with WIOA, but yet adult education programs rely on WIOA funding for their programs (Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008). The disconnection with assessment causes tension because many institutions focus on increasing students' basic skills and not necessarily on skills needed to transition to postsecondary coursework.

The percentage of students enrolled in noncredit courses has been growing rapidly in the United States (Xu & Ran, 2015). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) showed that noncredit students grew "from 90% of for-credit students in 1995 to 108% by 1999" (Xu & Ran, 2015, p. 1). This growth is attributed to an increase of noncredit vocational and workforce training in two-year community colleges. Some, but not all, states offer noncredit vocational and workforce training. According to Bellis (2004), 61% of schools receiving Title IV monies offer noncredit vocational and workforce programs. Even though there has been a significant increase of noncredit offerings, data are sparse about noncredit programs, both basic skills courses and vocational/workforce training programs (Xu & Ran, 2015). There is no national standard for collecting data for noncredit programs, and because of this, there is not a systematic understanding of potential factors that impact the transition of noncredit students to credit (Xu & Ran, 2015). One benefit of noncredit coursework is the ability for these courses to be a bridge to credit classes, which should lead to degree completion and higher wages. However, as stated earlier, data are largely unavailable, and therefore one is challenged to begin to understand this population and their experiences.

Despite the benefits that come with degree and certificate attainment described earlier in this chapter, a disproportionate number of adult education students do not make it out of basic skills courses and enroll in college level courses. Further, although specific statistics are not available, there is evidence to suggest that there are inequities across groups in terms of successfully transitioning out of basic skills. For example, Xu and Ran (2015) noted that non-credit students are more likely to be students of color and/or from lower socio-economic backgrounds. A study by Hector-Mason et al. (2017) indicated that federally funded adult education programs served more than 1.8 million students in 2011-2012. Of these students, less than three percent began postsecondary coursework in that same year. In this exploratory study, researchers looked closely at six Midwestern states to see how states were supporting the transition of adult learners from noncredit to credit. Utilizing the findings from Zafft, Kallenbach, and Spohn (2006), Hector-Mason et al. (2017) interviewed state- and local-level directors to explore how states supported students transitioning from adult education to postsecondary coursework, focusing on these five specific areas. The five areas Zafft et al. (2006) identified were advising, General Education Development-plus (GED-plus), English as a second language, career pathways, and college preparatory (Zafft et al., 2006). Hector-Mason et al. (2017) found that four of the six states that utilized these strategies reported increases in the percentage of students that transitioned. This can be useful as a possible future study to evaluate the effectiveness of the identified strategies. Grubb et al. (2003) found similar effective mechanisms: "student awareness of credit opportunities, articulation agreements, faculty advice and advertising, guidance and counseling, individual education plans, and support for students in the application and transfer process" (p. 226), yet these mechanisms or strategies do not seem to

be widely used in postsecondary institutions that offer noncredit education (Grubb et al., 2003; Zafft et al., 2006).

One way to save costs and to potentially increase transition rates is to integrate adult education students into the college through formal transition programs. Transition programs specifically prepare students in basic skills to transition to credit-bearing courses. These programs often include explicit instruction around financial aid and study skills and include more academic advising (Hector-Mason et al., 2017; Zafft et al., 2006). Humphreys and Acker-Hocevar (2012) found two promising models: the college preparatory and career pathway models. The college preparatory model includes services and activities that already exist within a college, so systematic changes will allow these services to be available to adult education students. The career pathway model integrates adult education curriculum into technical or vocational programs, and colleges adopting this model most likely will only need to make minor adjustments to allow adult education students to have access to this integrated curriculum.

Adult education in the State of Washington. This study focuses on noncredit students in basic skills transitioning to credit bearing courses in the State of Washington. I have worked in academia in this state for almost 25 years, having spent more than 16 years working in adult education. Throughout my time in adult education, I felt compelled to dig deeper to investigate why so many students participate in adult education and yet so few students transition into postsecondary coursework.

The State of Washington has 34 community and technical institutions and in 2014-15 had an overall annual enrollment of 385,872 students with 181,451 full-time equivalencies (FTE) (Washington State Board, 2018a). Comprehensive institutions in Washington offer both transfer and professional-technical degrees, and technical colleges only offer professional-technical

degrees. Many colleges offer applied baccalaureate degrees (Washington State Board, 2018b). All 34 institutions offer noncredit basic skills courses, and no institutions offer noncredit professional-technical courses or certificates. Overall enrollment in Basic Education for Adults (BEaA) for 2014-15 was 55,531 producing 21,940 FTEs (Washington State Board, 2018a). Washington community and technical colleges serve a racially diverse student body. In 2014-15, the percentage of White students was 46% (Washington State Board, 2018a). BEaA programs serve a more racially diverse population. Latinx students counted for 32% of the overall populations, with White students at 26% of the total (Washington State Board, 2018a). Asian American students were at 14% and Black/African American were at 11% of the total. Other racial groups were less than 10%.

In Washington, 10% of students who started in basic skills in 2014-15 earned at least six college credits within one year (Washington State Board, 2018c). Inequities are included in this transition percentage. Five percent of Latinx students, six percent of Asian American students, and 10% of Black or African students earned at least six college credits during this same period, compared to 15% of White students. More research is needed to understand these inequities and to understand why White students make up the highest percentage of students completing at least six college credits when this group is not the highest percentage of students in BEaA.

To help increase transitions for students in basic skills to post-secondary coursework, in Washington, Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) programs were developed. I-BEST programs follow the program model of having two instructors in the same classroom – one faculty to teach professional-technical or academic-specific content, and one faculty to teach basic skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and/or math (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2012). The Washington State Board requires both teachers to be in the classroom at least 50% of the

time (Wachen et al., 2010). I-BEST programs contextualize basic skills instruction with different professional-technical programs and for prerequisite courses for required classes for both professional-technical and transfer degrees (Washington State Board, 2012). Institutions are “expected to maintain a strong commitment” to I-BEST programs (along with adult education), but institutions are not required to offer such programs (Washington State Board, n.d.). To encourage institutions to continue to offer and to expand I-BEST offerings, institutions receive 1.75 FTEs per student in I-BEST classes (Washington State Board, n.d.).

Students enrolled in I-BEST programs in the State of Washington have higher retention rates and accumulate more credits than students in traditional programs. However, inequities are present with I-BEST students as well (Washington State Board, 2018a). For example, overall for Washington in the 2014-15 academic year, the total enrollment for students in basic education was 47,542 (Washington State Board, 2018a). Latinx students made up the largest percentage of students at 32% (15,083 students), and White students made up the next largest percentage at 29% (13,879 students). Asian American students were at 13% (6,029 students) and Black students were at nine percent (4,481 students). Comparing the percentages of students enrolled in I-BEST showed that White students had the highest percentage of enrollment at 49% (1,876 students) with Latinx students at 23% of I-BEST enrollment (866 students). The percentages were even smaller for other groups: 10% for Black and eight percent for Asian American students. Research is needed to look into why the largest racial group in BEdA in Washington does not have the highest percentage enrollment in I-BEST, a successful transition program.

Enrollments at community colleges in the State of Washington have dropped drastically since the peak enrollment period during the Great Recession of 2008 (Washington State Board, 2017). This drop is due to steady increase in young adults attending public universities, and an

increase of people going to work instead of attending college. Focusing on retaining current students will be critical to reach the College Completion Challenge. In the State of Washington, the Washington State Community and Technical College Presidents Academy indicated that increasing headcount would not be needed as degree attainment increases (Washington State Board, 2017). For example, if the graduation rate for Washington State is at 30%, then to meet the completion challenge, the state will need to increase the annual headcount to 530,000 students. If the graduation rate doubles to 60%, the annual headcount only needs to increase by less than 100,000 students. To address the current needs, institutions need to focus on students who are currently attending the institution – including students enrolled in adult education.

Gaps in Existing Knowledge and Theory: Significance of the Study

Current literature analyzes the importance of individual areas that are beneficial in propelling students in transitioning (such as advising and relevant curriculum), but studies that look at the whole system are missing. For example, past research has shown that the career pathway model may be effective, but this model only looks at relevant curriculum and advising (Humphreys & Acker-Hocevar, 2012) and no other factors such as intentional academic support. This present study fills a gap in the research by taking a systemic approach to explore institutional practices and support systems that are successful in transitioning noncredit students to postsecondary coursework. Additionally, this study presents a transition receptive culture that may be used to help programs successfully transition students from noncredit to postsecondary coursework.

Noncredit curriculum that directly pertains to students' overall goals may help keep students from dropping out before transitioning to postsecondary coursework (Center for Student Success, 2009; Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008). Students need to see the pathway from

noncredit basic skills to a certificate or degree, but instead many noncredit programs use curriculum focuses on mastering one specific skill before moving on to the next (Grubb et al., 2003). Students who can see how their noncredit courses are connected to their goals may be more likely to persist and transition. In response, this study explores the extent to which noncredit coursework is aligned with postsecondary coursework.

A lack of consistent help with financial aid is a factor that may impact transitions (Humphreys, 2012; Xu & Ran, 2015), as most noncredit coursework is either low- or no-cost to students and noncredit students so not face funding issues until they transition to postsecondary courses. Financial aid requirements are exclusionary, and the policies and procedures can be intimidating and confusing (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulous, & Sanbonmatsu, 2009; Scott-Clayton, 2011). Students without prior college experience, or a network of family and friends who have attended college, do not always know how to access financial support (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). This study contributes by investigating how an institution with high transition rates provides funding support to students.

Noncredit students often have limited resources and a lack of knowledge and experience with higher education, and this leads to a lack of cultural capital needed to know how to navigate the higher education system (Becker, 2011; Karmelita, 2016). Creating academic and support services that meet the needs of noncredit students is essential to their success. This study explored how an institution with high transition rates supports students who have limited resources related to higher education.

Many noncredit programs operate in silos, without articulation between noncredit and credit programs (Humphreys, 2012; Gard, Paton, & Gosselin, 2012; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008; Hector-Mason et al., 2017; Scott-Clayton, 2011; Zafft et al., 2006).

These silos may prevent students from seeing the relevance in the curriculum, and without this relevance, knowledge and skills do not easily transfer to a different class or life situation (Grubb et al., 2011; Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008). Past studies do not include looking at entire institutions where noncredit basic skills systems operate. This study will help fill the gap as it will seek to understand both the system in the noncredit department and the larger campus.

The literature demonstrates best practices in the following four areas for noncredit basic skills programs and students: (a) relevant curriculum; (b) advising and career-development support; (c) financial and ancillary support; and (d) academic and system support (which includes non-traditional student barriers). Past studies have focused on some of these areas, but what is lacking are studies that have taken a systematic approach to investigating and explaining the role overall systems have on student transitions.

Past studies have not used an equity lens for the analysis and have not considered critical frameworks (e.g., Critical Race Theory). This study fills the gap in research by seeking to understand the complexities of the system in one institution's basic skills programs in the State of Washington. Throughout this study, I examined the data using Acker's (2006) inequality regimes to surface where inequities were present or being perpetuated or disrupted. Additionally, I analyzed the data using Clark's (1960) cooling out theory to surface any examples of noncredit students being advised towards different pathways than their desired goals, based on the advisor's perception of a students' ability. The way instruction was happening in the classroom was also examined, using Gay's (2000) culturally responsive pedagogy frame. Results of this study are expected to impact theory development as increased knowledge of the elements a successful program utilizes will define where further research should focus. A transition receptive framework is presented as a way for institutions to more effectively transition

noncredit students to postsecondary courses. More systematic information is needed about noncredit education programs to understand these programs before policy and curricular changes can happen (Arena, 2013; Pusser et al., 2007; Van Noy, Jacobs, Korey, Bailey & Hughes, 2008; Xu & Ran, 2015), and this study helps fill this gap. A deeper understanding of the role that relevant curriculum and different types of supports play in transitioning students to postsecondary coursework is also needed to guide further research, and program and policy development. This provides researchers with a better understanding of the complexities of a noncredit basic skills program in the State of Washington and will provide suggestions for further research. For policy makers, identifying barriers and supports in transitioning noncredit basic skills students to post-secondary coursework will help deepen the understanding of what is needed to increase transitions. Policies at the local and state level can be modified to help meet the needs of noncredit students. Understanding what systems in place in a highly successful program will inform programs and policy makers how to support students in transitioning from noncredit to postsecondary coursework to meet the College Completion Initiative and the demand for skilled workers. Practitioners, in particular in the State of Washington, can use findings from this study and enhance or modify existing programs to support students in their transition from basic skills to postsecondary coursework.

Challenges to Studying Non-Credit Education and Transitions

There are at least three unique challenges to studying noncredit education and transitions that need to be understood and as they impacted the design of my study. To begin with, even though there has been a significant increase of noncredit offerings, data are sparse regarding noncredit programs (D’Amico, Morgan, Robertson, & Houchins, 2014; Grubb et al., 2003; Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008; Perin, 2011; Pusser et al., 2007; Ryder & Hagedorn, 2012; Xu

& Ran, 2015; Zafft et al., 2006). Not only are data sparse, but also the data available are not standardized across studies or datasets. There are not consistent data sets that inform transitions. Unlike noncredit education, data for postsecondary students, including developmental education, are reported to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) (Integrated Postsecondary Education, 2014).

A second challenge to studying noncredit education and transitions is there is not a set definition for adult basic education students or data collection (Grubb et al., 2003; Ryder & Hagedorn, 2012; Sykes et al., 2014; Xu & Ran, 2015). Not having a standard definition may also impact the lack of consistency around data collection for noncredit students. Specific to noncredit workforce education, Sykes et al. (2014) found that states used different definitions to define noncredit workforce education, and therefore a comparison across states is challenging. Assessing the completion of noncredit workforce education is also challenging because there is not a national data system to track certificates awarded. Instead, state agencies who award the certification keep track of their own data.

A final challenge to data collection stems from the challenge institutions face funding noncredit education. Funding of community colleges comes mainly from state funding, as federal funds are less than 15% of community college revenue (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018; Goldrick-Rab, 2010). This dependence on state and local funds means community colleges are susceptible to changes in the local economy and state and local budgets, and this makes community colleges accountable to taxpayers and local businesses (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Funding for noncredit programs is even more limited, and also inconsistent from state to state, and this is one reason for the lack of attention to noncredit education (D'Amico et al., 2014).

Study Purpose and Propositions

The purpose of this case study was to explore how institutional practices and support systems in one comprehensive community college in the State of Washington support or hinder students in transitioning from noncredit to postsecondary coursework. This study looked at the basic skills department at one institution as well aspects of entire institution itself where basic skills students, faculty, and staff interact. Living systems are free-flowing systems (Wheatley, 2006) and it is challenging, if not impossible, to study one part of the system without considering the whole. Looking at a whole system requires studying the inside unit (basic skills department) along with the context of the unit (the institution). The following propositions were considered when investigating effective systems for noncredit basic skills programs and students:

Proposition 1: Andragogy and relevant curriculum promote successful transitions to postsecondary courses.

Proposition 2: Advising and career-development services play an important role in transitioning students to postsecondary courses

Proposition 3: Students need financial and ancillary support in order to successfully transition to postsecondary courses.

Proposition 4: Academic and systems support are important when transitioning to postsecondary courses.

Proposition 5: A transition receptive culture matters when transitioning students to postsecondary courses.

These propositions were chosen because foundational knowledge needs to be gathered to gain an understanding of systems that propel students from noncredit to postsecondary coursework. The research problem of low transition rates was explored through a qualitative

study that explores the systems in an institution with a high percentage of students that transition to postsecondary coursework. This use of qualitative method and design is consistent with expectations for identifying how educational systems impact learners (Creswell, 2014).

Definitions of Key Terms

Below are definitions of key terms used throughout this dissertation.

Adult education – adult basic education (ABE), General Education Development (GED), and English as a Second or Other Language (ESL) programs that are provide noncredit basic skills coursework at community colleges. Fees are low or nonexistent for these classes, and tuition is not charged. This does not include noncredit professional-technical/occupational training, or developmental, credit-bearing courses. These courses are considered below developmental/pre-college courses.

Adult education student – student who is enrolled in an adult education program. This study used adult education student and noncredit or basic skills student interchangeably.

Basic skills courses – ABE/GED and ESL courses that are tuition-free. These courses are considered below developmental/pre-college courses.

Basic skills student – students enrolled in noncredit ABE/GED/ESL courses. This study used adult education student and noncredit or basic skills student interchangeably.

Developmental education – classes students complete to prepare for college-level courses. These courses are below college level. Fees for these courses are based on tuition rates. This study used developmental education/pre-college coursework interchangeably.

General Education Development (GED) programs – tuition-free programs that provide classes for students seeking a GED. Earning a GED is considered a high school credential.

Noncredit coursework – classes students complete in an adult education program that do not count towards certificate or degree attainment. Fees are low or nonexistent for these programs, and tuition is not charged.

Noncredit student – a student who is enrolled in an adult education program. This study used adult education student and noncredit or basic skills student interchangeably.

Postsecondary coursework – classes students complete who are enrolled in a certificate or degree program, and/or remedial preparation for a certificate or degree. Fees for these courses are based on tuition rates. This study used postsecondary coursework/courses and credit coursework/courses interchangeably.

Postsecondary student – a student who is enrolled in postsecondary, credit-bearing courses at an institution of higher education.

Pre-college coursework – classes students complete to prepare for college-level courses. Fees for these courses are based on tuition rates. These courses are below college level. This study used pre-college coursework/ developmental education interchangeably.

Student completion – completion of a certificate or beyond at a higher education institution.

Transitions – ABE/ESL students moving from noncredit ABE/ESL courses into postsecondary certification or degree programs at a community college in the United States.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to give context to the national issue of low transition rates from noncredit to postsecondary coursework. This chapter reviews related theory and past studies that have identified key institutional practices and supports that have been shown to increase transitions. Since studies on noncredit education are sparse (Grubb et al., 2003, Xu & Ran, 2015), this chapter includes literature from different education systems that pertain to these non-credit education and college transitions. Note that literature from noncredit basic skills was chosen over noncredit workforce as much as possible since the current study takes place at a community college in the State of Washington that does not offer noncredit workforce education. The State of Washington was highlighted in this review because the case study took place at an institution in Washington that has exceeded the state and national averages for transitioning students from noncredit to postsecondary coursework.

Review Criteria

Articles were retrieved from available databases including Academic Search Premier, ERIC, Education Research Complete, Taylor & Francis Journals Complete, and Wiley Online Library. Dissertations were identified in the Proquest Dissertations & Theses Global database. Additionally, reports and other journals were searched from websites such as the Community College Research Center (CCRC), Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE), MDRC, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), and U.S. Department of Education (DOE). Literature from other countries was not excluded but also not found in searches. Search terms and phrases included combinations of terms including: noncredit, adult education, adult basic education, transitions, community college, ESL, ABE, GED, postsecondary, postsecondary transitions, and contextualization. Adult education is offered

in the K-12 and community college systems. Literature was analyzed from both systems even though this study explored a system at a community college. In addition to keyword searches, subject terms in article records and author links were followed in search of articles of relevance to the research. References were carefully searched for additional studies to support this research. No time limit was set during the search since studies specific to noncredit education in comprehensive community colleges are scarce. Textbooks and non-electronic articles were obtained through Oregon State's library system, including the Summit Library system. Literature was chosen for its appropriateness in supporting the goal of the review of noncredit transitions, focusing specifically on noncredit basic skills programs housed in community colleges when possible. Since studies are sparse for this population, literature was also chosen for its appropriateness in best practice for advising, curriculum development, funding, and institutional structure in other areas of transitions within academia, such as high school to college, and transitions from two-year to four-year institutions.

My synthesis is organized around the following five empirically based themes that arose from the review: (a) andragogy and relevant curriculum; (b) advising and career-development support; (c) financial and ancillary support; (d) academic and system support (which includes non-traditional student barriers); and (e) transition receptive culture within the institution. In sum, the reviewed work highlights a need for in-depth qualitative research focused on institutional practices and support systems in place for noncredit students at community colleges. I also provide a review of related, critically based theories which brings attention to inequalities in the everyday workings of organizations (Acker, 2006) and the particular need for uncovering previously ignored systemic inequities that may be hindering student's ability to successfully transition.

Synthesis of Empirical Findings

Andragogy and relevant curriculum in ABE/ESL. The first theme identified in the literature is andragogy and relevant curriculum which promoted successful transitions to postsecondary courses. High quality remedial² education is expensive, and most colleges are not able to adequately fund effective remediation (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Effective remedial education equips students to learn not only the content of the particular course but also how to succeed in college; however effective remedial education is rarely used. Instead, common practice in basic skills and developmental curriculum is sequential instruction where students need to first master one set of discrete skills before moving to the next, and this leads to many months (and possibly years) of preparatory classes before a student can transition to post-secondary coursework (Grubb et al., 2003; Foster, Strawn & Duke-Benfield, 2011; Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008; Scott-Clayton, 2011). This existing structure has been shown to constrain opportunities for students whose skills are not at college level, as without the contextualization of skills, students have a harder time creating and making meaning through this experience (Center for Student Success, 2009). In 2003, Grubb et al. found that teaching methods used in noncredit classrooms may utilize the pattern of skills and drills, meaning complex competencies are broken down into smaller parts, decontextualized, and then students are drilled on their abilities to master each discrete skill. Additionally, research has shown that instead of relying on skills and drills, curriculum needs to be contextualized (Center for Student Success, 2009; Grubb et al., 2003). Developmental programs that are effective may use a contextualized curriculum (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Contextualization is an instructional approach in which reading, writing or math skills are taught within the context of a discipline area (Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008;

² Remedial education occurs anytime remedial pedagogy is used. Remedial pedagogy is most pervasive in noncredit and developmental education (Grubb, 2011).

Perin, 2011). Contextualization of curriculum may support the transfer of knowledge and skill to a different situation and also may increase students' retention of information (Perin, 2011).

Another concern identified in my review with regard to curriculum in noncredit courses is that curriculum may not always be directly tied to postsecondary coursework. As a result, students may drop out of courses because they do not see the relationship to the curriculum in their noncredit courses and their overall goals of postsecondary work (Center for Student Success, 2009; Foster et al., 2011; Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008). Noncredit coursework is often siloed by itself, and students enrolled in noncredit courses may have a harder time seeing the pathway to a degree or certificate (Center for Student Success, 2009). Beam, Morris, Rodriguez-Kiino, and Tillery (2019) found noncredit coursework needs to be explicitly integrated with credit curriculum to ensure a smooth transition to postsecondary coursework. In sum, research would suggest that a lack of relevance in the curriculum for noncredit courses may have a negative impact on adult basic education programs, and possibly on transitions as a whole.

According to Humphreys (2012) and Ozmun (2012), colleges need to work towards aligning credit and noncredit workforce programs, as there is evidence that this may increase student transitions from noncredit workforce to credit workforce classes. Research by Ozmun (2012) looked specifically at noncredit workforce programs at single institution in Texas. It is not clear whether this principle may apply to noncredit ABE/GED/ESL student transitions. However, it is expected that transparency with curriculum and how it aligns to credit-bearing classes may help students see and understand the connection to their pathway. Humphreys (2012) employed a mixed methods study at one institution in Washington and considered the impact of relevant curriculum in noncredit basic skills courses. The institution for this study was

relatively small, serving about 1,600 students per year, and was classified as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). About half of students at this institution were enrolled in basic skills classes. A recommendation from this study was to more closely align noncredit curricula with adult education courses and post-secondary courses to increase transitions (Humphreys, 2012).

It is expected that noncredit curricula that are aligned to postsecondary courses may increase student transitions in all type of programs (Grubb et al., 2003; Ryder & Hagedorn, 2012), not just noncredit basic skills programs. Wachen, Jenkins, Belfield and Van Noy (2012) found that contextualizing basic skills benefited students, specifically students who entered with lower academic skills. This study was a multi-year evaluation of I-BEST programs in the State of Washington. Sixteen different I-BEST programs at eight different institutions were included in this evaluation. Findings indicated integrated instruction and contextualization of basic skills instruction was related to success for students in the I-BEST programs.

It should be noted that integrated instruction may be different than contextualized instruction in that it occurs when reading, writing, or math instruction is infused into the teaching of the professional-technical content (Perin, 2011). Wachen et al. (2012) found more instances of contextualization than integrated instruction in the researchers' study. Specifically, they found that programs with either of these instructional approaches were perceived as more effective by students. Similarly, Hector-Mason et al. (2017) explored how six states in the Midwest area of the United States supported students' transitions from noncredit to post-secondary coursework. Results from this study found that some programs have contextualized ABE or English language instruction in highly specialized courses, and this has led to work in high-demand fields (Hector-Mason et al., 2017). By contextualizing instruction, colleges can help students to continue to improve their basic skills at the same time as they are learning skills for a new or different career

(Center for Student Success, 2009; Foster et al., 2011; Hector-Mason et al., 2017). Both of these studies included basic skills programs at community colleges, but neither included demographics in their studies. Additionally, the Hector-Mason et al. (2017) study focused on state-wide policies and did not analyze specific institutions. The present findings helped to fill this gap by focusing on one high-performing noncredit basic skills program.

Another documented concern with noncredit curriculum is the lack of cognitive demand placed on students. Students in noncredit classes may receive high emotional support from their instructors but also may not have substantial cognitive demands placed on them for fear of hurting students' self-esteem (Grubb et al., 2003). However, Ozmun (2012) found that students enrolled in noncredit courses in workforce education were encouraged to continue in their goals of attaining higher education credentials, and these programs placed high cognitive demands on students. Even though Ozmun's (2012) findings were specific to noncredit workforce education, the same thing may apply to noncredit basic skills courses because most students benefit from programs that place a high cognitive demand. Ozmun's work also found that supportive teachers can impact students' preparation as much as family's support and expectations. Participating in noncredit programs that are supportive is thought to be critical to student success. However, research would suggest that programs also need to provide high expectations (Beam, et al., 2019; Grubb et al., 2003; Ozmun, 2012). This present study focused on curriculum in noncredit basic skills courses in a comprehensive community college. Findings helped to fill the gap for this particular group since the Ozmun (2012) study focused only on students enrolled in noncredit workforce education programs.

Existing findings would suggest that effective practice in noncredit curriculum should include providing relevant and meaningful curriculum and transparency for students to see how

the curriculum in their courses connects to their educational goals. Work by Jacobs and Tolbert-Bynum (2008) found that students enrolled in noncredit basic skills courses often did not find classes interesting. This report focused on barriers basic skills students face when trying to obtain post-secondary credentials. The researchers used three state-level policy initiatives for this report, and one finding was the importance of relevant and meaningful curriculum for basic skills students. A lack of interest was shown to lead to students dropping out, lowering the overall number of students in noncredit education which then impacts the percentage of students who transition out of noncredit. However, Jacobs and Tolbert-Bynum (2008) did not consider whether programs utilized culturally responsive pedagogy³. This study proposed that relevant curriculum promotes successful transitions to postsecondary courses and part of this relevance includes utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy.

My review also considered research guiding first year experiences (FYE) focused on high-impact pedagogy (Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013). First year experiences were historically developed for first-time freshmen in postsecondary education at four-year institutions in particular (Bers & Younger, 2014), but the effective practices that have emerged from FYE programs may be assumed to be beneficial for all students. High-impact pedagogy has been described as using “a variety of teaching methods, challenging assignments, productive use of class time, encouragement for students to speak in class and collaborate, [and] meaningful discussion and homework” (Greenfield et al., 2013, p. 44). It is not yet known whether noncredit programs that utilize high-impact pedagogy may see higher rates of retention and completion, which may lead to increased percentages of students who transition to postsecondary education.

³ Although andragogy is the appropriate term to use when describing teaching adult learners, authors’ terms such as “culturally responsive pedagogy” and “high impact pedagogy” are used in place of andragogy in this document to retain the original authors’ terms/language.

Greenfield et al. (2013) focused their research on how institutions can employ high-impact pedagogy, but the researchers did not specifically focus on noncredit students. As such, additional research is needed to explore the role of andragogy in a basic skills program with high rates of transitions to post-secondary coursework.

Findings from past studies suggest that contextualized, relevant curriculum is a factor in transitioning students from noncredit to post-secondary coursework (Center for Student Success, 2009; Foster et al., 2011; Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008; Perin, 2011). However, it should be noted that previous research has not explicitly used an equity lens when collecting or analyzing the data, and most research has not explored specific curriculum and andragogy that successful, noncredit basic skills programs are using. Additionally, none of the studies analyzed for my review considered the impact that culture has on curriculum and andragogy. Even though some studies described in this chapter include noncredit vocational programs, other studies showed the importance of contextualizing curricula and aligning noncredit curriculum to postsecondary coursework, regardless if the noncredit programs are vocational or basic skills. In turn, more research is needed to better understand what curricula and andragogy are used in programs that are successful in transitioning noncredit basic skills students to postsecondary coursework, in particular nontraditional students.

Advising and career-development support for ABE/ESL Students. The second theme identified by my review is advising and career-development services. This section briefly synthesizes past studies and reports that have considered the role of advising and career-development services as they relate to student transitions. According to Zafft et al. (2006), common goals of advising when working with noncredit students include: (a) guiding students toward an understanding of postsecondary options; (b) helping students access postsecondary

courses and; (c) assisting students in learning how to navigate the college culture. Zafft et al. identified and reviewed 23 transition programs currently in existence in the U.S. and developed a topology of transition programs specific to noncredit basic skills students. The researchers identified five college transition models. Advising was shown to be a consistent factor throughout all five models (Zafft, 2008; Zafft et al., 2006). The researchers argued that advising is “an area of great importance to a successful career outcome” (Zafft et al., 2006). Since the work of Zafft et al. was published, federal legislation has changed from the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) to the Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). This change directly impacted noncredit basic skills programs (National Skills Coalition, 2014).

More recently, Hector-Mason et al. (2017) found advising to be a strategy used at institutions across six Midwest region states. Findings showed that noncredit programs were able to support students in their completion of basic skills courses and transition into postsecondary courses. Institutions employed different advising techniques, but all of the six states utilized one-on-one advising to develop individual learning plans for students and to expose students to “help they can use throughout their educational careers” (Hector-Mason et al., 2017, p. 8). Four of the six states used a career navigator; however, the report does not include a discussion of the role of the navigator. The researchers specifically found advising to support students in transitioning to credit classes, but the study did not investigate what specifically about advising was effective or not effective in increasing the number of students that transition from basic skills to postsecondary coursework.

Gard et al. (2012) completed an exploratory study of 12 students who transferred from a community college to “an upper division, baccalaureate degree program of a major research university co-located on a community college campus” (p. 835). Findings revealed that advising

was a key component to help students navigate the higher education culture and for the process of transferring to a university. The results of this study showed that 11 of the 12 students felt they received poor advising at the community college and helpful advice once they transferred to the university. Students in this study perceived a “poor quality of advising” at the community college, but no specific details are included to help the reader determine what this means (p. 845). It is not clear if students received inaccurate information about what classes students needed to complete their degree at the community college, or if information regarding transferring to the university was inaccurate. The Gard et al. (2012) study provided evidence as to what happens when students do not receive quality advising; however, this study did not provide particular details of the poor advice. The small sample size makes it challenging to determine if the “poor quality of advising” was a systematic problem or specific to one or two advisors (p. 845).

Shifting Gears, an initiative sponsored by the Joyce Foundation in 2007, wanted to increase the number of low-skilled students in Illinois and Wisconsin who obtained college-level credentials (Bragg, Dresser, & Smith, 2012). One of the findings from this initiative in Illinois showed that “students who received advising at least once” was positively correlated with student success (p. 57). One goal for Shifting Gears in Wisconsin was to institutionalize career pathways, but they did not specifically focus on investigating the role of advising for basic skills students. While the results of this study indicated that advising is correlated with student success in Illinois, much more research is needed to better understand the role advising plays in transitioning students from basic skills to postsecondary coursework.

The Breaking Through initiative indicated that advising, along with other student services, was a critical component to increasing transitions for low-skilled adults (Duke &

Strawn, 2008). This multi-year initiative helped community colleges identify and develop effective institutional systems that supported low-skilled adults in transitioning to postsecondary courses (Duke & Strawn, 2008). Even though effective advising can help students navigate the college system, the authors found that advising services are usually greatly underfunded (Duke & Strawn, 2008; Strawn, 2007). Community colleges receive little or no funding for advising (or other student services) that support students in their academic goals (Strawn, 2007). Nine states participated in the Breaking Through initiative, yet the findings did not include much discussion about advising. This present study looked more in-depth at one successful institution and the role advising plays in transitioning students from basic skills to postsecondary coursework.

Lansangan-Sabangan (2018) found ESL students relied on faculty and their classmates to gather information about credit courses. This was a phenomenological study that identified critical components of persistence for ESL students at a mid-size community college. Lansangan-Sabangan chose this site because of the low transition rates from noncredit ESL to credit courses. Findings indicated students mainly relied on information their classmates provided along with what they learned from their ESL faculty. Only 15% of study participants stated they received information about credit programs from an advisor. This study did not provide a demographic breakdown of the findings.

A longitudinal study by Prince and Jenkins (2005) looked at the experiences and outcomes of students with low skills in community colleges. This study tracked two cohorts of students who were enrolled in adult basic skills programs or college credit courses in the State of Washington in 1996-1997 or 1997-1998. The results of this study showed that only 13% of students who started in ESL earned at least some college credit, and just under 30% of students who started in ABE/GED earned at least some college credit. Findings from this study indicated

that students with low-skills need more aggressive advising in order to learn about the college education opportunities. The authors stated that with an increase of advising efforts, more basic skills students may transition to postsecondary courses (Prince & Jenkins, 2005). However, this study did not focus specifically on what type of advising, or how frequently students received advising. The Prince and Jenkins study also did not attempt to uncover any inequities in advising that may have been present.

Scott-Clayton (2011) found that advising for community college students enrolled in postsecondary coursework was typically focused on the mechanics of registration or navigation of the college system and often not on discovering life goals or career choices. For students enrolled in postsecondary courses, the onus of advising was often shown to fall to the student (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Additionally, first generation students who did not have access to college networks, or “college knowledge” found the complexity of navigating a college system daunting. Foster et al. (2011) claimed that students with low basic skills may not see themselves earning a postsecondary credential or beyond. It is expected that the obstacle of not knowing how to navigate a system may be enough for students to simply drop out as many noncredit students do not have access to college networks (Scott-Clayton, 2011). More proactive advising may increase students’ exposure to postsecondary education (Foster et al., 2011; Prince & Jenkins, 2005) and may increase students’ skill and confidence (Foster et al., 2011). This may result in students beginning “to see themselves as college students” and may lead to increases in transitions from basic skills to postsecondary courses (p. 5). None of the above studies specifically sought out a high-performing institution. More research is needed to understand what high performing programs include in their advising specific to noncredit basic skills students.

Advising research outside of noncredit education is relatively well-developed and may be useful in uncovering how and why advising may be a necessary component to transitioning students from noncredit to postsecondary work. According to Goldrick-Rab (2010), community colleges do not typically provide systematic guidance to help students navigate the system. In fact, many noncredit students may not have access to support services on college campuses, because they are not considered to be a “regular” college student (Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008). This lack of guidance is particularly troublesome for noncredit students for whom advising may be less available (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). It is expected that colleges may offer a tremendous amount of information to students but at the same time provide insufficient guidance in navigating this information. Research findings suggest that students may often go down paths that are not helpful or productive when they do not have navigational help. Moore and Shulock (2011) found that institutions needed to increase professional development opportunities for academic advising staff to make sure they are familiar with the variety of options available to students. When advising staff offer “better guidance...more students could find their way into and through certificate programs” (p. 13).

In summary, the present review uncovered very little empirical work that documents how and why advising may serve to support or hinder students’ transitions from noncredit to postsecondary courses. Moreover, it should be noted that prior research has not yet given focus to uncovering possible inequities within advising. Specifically, research has not disaggregated data by race, class, gender, sexuality, disability etc. As such, it is not clear to what extent students’ advising experiences may be similar or different across groups. Additional research specific to the role of advising in transitioning students to postsecondary coursework is needed.

Financial and ancillary support for ABE/ESL students. The third theme identified by my literature review is financial and ancillary support. This section briefly analyzes past studies focused on financial and ancillary support as it relates to non-credit coursework. Students enrolled in noncredit programs may face severe financial and funding problems before, during, and after transitioning from noncredit to credit-bearing courses. Not only are financial aid requirements exclusionary, policies and procedures can be intimidating and confusing (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2009). Receiving and maintaining adequate funding for college has been repeatedly shown to be related to various measures of success, including but not limited to persistence (Humphreys, 2012). In a longitudinal study that looked at experiences and outcomes of low-skilled adults found that only 18% of students who transitioned from ESL to postsecondary courses received financial aid, and only 28% of students who transitioned from ABE received aid (Prince & Jenkins, 2005). Students who receive financial aid are associated with a higher chance of being successful, yet so few basic skills students receive this aid.

Students need to know how to access funding for school. Research suggests that first-generation students may need additional support as they may be less likely to know where to go to secure funding (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). This is important as the majority of noncredit students are classified as first-generation students (Rendon, 2002). The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) can be very intimidating and confusing for students (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Often students are not able to get help with the FAFSA, and in many instances run into unpleasant and unhelpful staff in the financial aid office (Gard et al., 2012; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006).

Additionally, trends in financial aid are moving towards merit-based aid and not needs-based aid (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Against this trend, colleges that offer noncredit programs need

to provide support for students around funding, especially since economically disadvantaged students often do not have a social network to help guide them through this process (Karp, 2011; Rosenbaum et al., 2006). Noncredit students who are able to successfully transition to postsecondary coursework can also be disadvantaged due to more restricted access to federal financial aid (Kazis et al., 2007). Federal education loans and grants are available for students who attend half time or more; however, many noncredit students are working adults and seldom attend school even half-time, and therefore are excluded from federal loans. This present study explored how a successful program supports noncredit students in securing funding for college classes and other financial needs.

Challenges with unhelpful or unpleasant staff require students to be persistent to get anything accomplished (Rosenbaum et al., 2006). This cumbersome and bureaucratic process may deter even the most persistent student. Bettinger et al. (2009) conducted a study and found that college enrollments increased when students received assistance with FAFSA. This study was an experiment done as a partnership with H&R Block. After filing federal taxes with H&R Block, families were instantly screened to see if they qualified for FAFSA assistance. Families that made \$45,000 or less and had at least one person in the household that did not have a baccalaureate degree qualified for the assistance. This study did not focus exclusively on noncredit basic skills students, but the results may be transferable to noncredit students.

Many students with low skills need to work full time to make ends meet, and this has a negative impact for students trying to successfully complete postsecondary courses and programs (Strawn, 2007). In addition to financial aid, Strawn posited that more employers need to be offering “tuition reimbursement or paid release time for class,” especially for workers with low skills (pp. 8-9). Strawn noted, however, that the strongest predictors whether a worker will

receive such a benefit are higher initial education attainment, and therefore typically excludes the very population being discussed.

Most of the studies described above failed to focus specifically on noncredit students. Past studies also did not explore what role systemic racism in institutions played in students' ability to access financial support. More research specific to the barriers noncredit students face when applying for FAFSA is needed, and this study looked at how one successful institution supports noncredit students regarding FAFSA and other financial support opportunities. This study also explored the role inequality regimes play in noncredit students' access to financial opportunities.

Academic and system support. The fourth theme identified in the present review is academic and systems support. This section will briefly summarize the dearth of studies to date that have in some way connected to academic and systems support for noncredit students. Community colleges serve a diverse student body (AACC, 2018). Noncredit students are equally, if not more, racially diverse than postsecondary students (Washington State Board, 2018a; Xu & Ran, 2015). For example, in academic year 2014-15 in the State of Washington, overall enrollment for the state in all programs in community colleges included 46% White students (Washington State Board, 2018a). In comparison, the overall enrollment specific to noncredit students during this same time period was at 29% for White students. This diversity is often used to explain the lack of robust student achievement, as programs often describe the social and economic characteristics of students as demographic, implying these characteristics are hereditary, instead of “reflect[ing] positions in a stratification system” (Goldrick-Rab, 2010, p. 451). The remainder of this section moves beyond the demographics of noncredit students and discusses some of the possible underlying inequalities and justify the need for programs with

high support. These include: (a) cultural capital, (b) pathways and milestones, and (c) disconnection from the campus.

Cultural capital. Cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1977), is the exposure to and level of educational and socioeconomic background of the students. Adult learners in noncredit programs have unique issues that more traditional students do not face, such as a lack of cultural capital. Adult students often do not have access to the same resources on campus as students enrolled in traditional postsecondary courses, and they often do not have a network of people off-campus that can support them as they transition to postsecondary programs (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Zafft et al., 2006). Limited resources combined with a lack of knowledge about higher education indicates a lack of cultural capital (Becker, 2011; Karmelita, 2016).

Becker (2011) conducted a phenomenological study to look at how ESL student's level of educational background and socioeconomic status in their home country transferred to their lives in the United States. This study was conducted at one large, suburban community college in the U.S. The results of this study indicated that ESL students who were marginalized in their home country often ran into difficulty in pursuing higher education in the United States. ESL students expressed feeling marginalized in an academic setting. Adult students who have low cultural capital are at higher risk of dropping out. The Becker study did not include any demographic information about the students in the study or the ways in which power and privilege impact students' abilities to receive needed support, and Becker did not consider more recent views of Bourdieu's cultural capital.

Neither Becker (2011) nor Bourdieu (1977) considered how cultural capital was measured. Yosso (2005) noted that historically, cultural capital has been measured against White, upper- and middle-class norms. Noncredit students are most often more diverse than

students in traditional institutions (Washington State Board, 2018a; Xu & Ran, 2015), and it is expected that this diversity may bring what Yosso (2005) calls community cultural wealth. Additionally, research has shown that having diverse perspectives in a classroom can “foster[s] active thinking, intellectual engagement and participation” (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002, p. 362). More studies need to explore how the cultural capital that basic skills students bring to the classroom can be built upon to support students’ academic success.

Pathways and milestones. Colleges in the United States offer many postsecondary options for students; however, a systematic approach to these offerings has been missing for many years (Karp, 2015). Without a systematic approach, the myriad of options can be overwhelming for students (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Karp, 2011). It is expected that too many options may be especially overwhelming for noncredit students. Students in basic skills need a clear picture of how the classes they are taking connect and relate to their career goals (Zafft, 2008). In response, colleges have started offering College Pathway models, which help students select and stay focused on a particular path that will lead them to their end goal (Foster et al., 2011; Jenkins, Lahr, & Fink, 2017).

Earning a certificate or degree includes more than just earning the certificate or degree; it includes progress through smaller outcomes along the way (Leinbach & Jenkins, 2008). Milestones are “measurable educational achievements that include both conventional terminal completions...and intermediate outcomes” (p. 2). Tracking milestone events along the way help both the students to mark their progress and policy makers to know possible barriers to success (Duke & Strawn, 2008; Leinbach & Jenkins, 2008). Even with known benefits of marking student progress, most noncredit programs do not offer milestones.

Moore and Shulock (2011) described an emerging strategy of “measuring the patterns by which students reach and move through intermediate milestones on the pathway to completion” (p. 1). By tracking these data, institutions can better understand where barriers exist for students and then make changes to lessen these barriers. This study looked at patterns of entry (or non-entry) into a program of study for first-time community college students in California. Noncredit students were excluded from this study. The study focused on the milestone of entering a program of study, and the results showed “just under half of incoming students *successfully entered* a program of study” (p. 2). This study also considered race/ethnicity, age, and full-time/part-time status. The results of the Moore and Shulock study can provide institutions with data regarding the importance of this milestone, and institutions may choose to make policy or structural changes based on these data. However, since this study did not include noncredit/basic skills students, the results are not helpful for this specific group of students.

Calcagno et al. (2007) completed a study to compare the impact of pathways and milestones on educational outcomes for traditional age and older, nontraditional age students. This study utilized administrative data from Florida and included data from all 28 community colleges. The focus of this study was on students enrolled in postsecondary courses, but these findings may be applicable to noncredit students as well. Since noncredit students tend to be older, only the findings for older, nontraditional students from this study will be discussed. The researchers found that non-traditional students were more negatively impacted by environmental factors and less likely to be positively impacted by social and academic integration. To increase retention with older students, studies have suggested offering flexible scheduling, such as evening and weekend courses and distance learning to help mitigate the effects of external pressures older students face when in school (Calcagno et al., 2007; Gard et al., 2012).

Foster et al. (2011) described state policies that may support more basic skills students transitioning to postsecondary coursework. One of these policies involved developing pathways for lower-skilled adults that include achievable milestones. Within career pathways, Foster et al. posited that achievable milestones need to be included not only for benchmarks for students but also for students to be able to “stop in and stop out” of their educational pathway. This report did not include specific milestones or even a guideline for developing milestones but did acknowledge the importance of including achievable milestones for basic skills students.

Numerous studies have examined student pathways through higher education (Calcagno et al., 2007; Foster et al., 2011; Moore & Shulock, 2011). All of these studies tracked students over time and identified critical points where students drop out. Knowledge of critical drop-out points could help guide policy and curriculum development to meet the needs of students and to increase retention and completion. A similar depth of research is needed for tracking noncredit students and their pathways to postsecondary coursework. Policy makers and educators need to know the critical points where noncredit students drop out, so changes can be made to increase student transition, retention, and completion.

Disconnection from campus. Another challenge noncredit students face is programs are often disconnected from the rest of the college and operate in a “silo” (Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008). Sometimes this disconnection is physical – noncredit programs operate in a remote part of the campus, or even off-campus. Furthermore, noncredit programs are often not provided the same resources or esteem as credit-bearing programs. However, very little is currently known about the role of disconnection or place in understanding students’ transitions from noncredit to postsecondary courses.

Disconnection is not always physical. Prince and Jenkins (2005) found in their longitudinal study that only one-third of students who transition from basic skills to postsecondary coursework receive support services, and part of the low number of students served may be due to a disconnection between supports. The authors posited that if basic skills faculty worked with counseling and support services then more students would be more likely to take advantage of these services. Strawn (2007) described the services students needed to obtain living-wage employment are often housed in different programs. Strawn stated that “each of these programs is focused typically only on its own internal goals and outcomes, not on outcomes across services” (p. 5). These studies did not state if basic skills departments were physically separated on campus from other services, but both described the lack of collaboration between the basic skills department and other campus services.

Foster et al. (2011) also found that often times the education system where basic skills students start their education career are separate from postsecondary and training systems. Most basic skills students do not earn a GED, even though “earning a GED increases a student’s chances of entering college, few GED graduates actually do” (p. 11). For students who do earn their GED and enroll in postsecondary courses, 77% of these students only attended for one term. The Foster et al. study did not provide conclusive evidence that these dismal rates are due to systems that are disconnected from each other; however, the disconnections between systems is something to consider when looking at the overall picture of transitions from basic skills to postsecondary courses.

In a literature review that referenced more than 250 sources, Boroch et al. (2007) captured elements that were present in effective developmental education programs. One of the elements the authors found was that “developmental education program is centralized or highly

coordinated” in addition to having integrated student support services (p. 83). While this study did not include prior literature focused on basic skills students, the implications include the importance of integration between programs and this may be transferable to basic skills students. Findings from the Breaking Through initiative confirmed the importance of integrating institutional services for students (Duke & Strawn, 2008). When basic skills programs are integrated with workforce education and developmental education, multiple pathways can be created for students to transition to postsecondary coursework.

Disconnection from campus and from services need to be considered when looking systematically at institutions who are wanting to employ effective strategies to increase students transitioning from basic skills to postsecondary courses. Many of the studies described in this section did not focus specifically on basic skills programs, but the ideas will likely transfer to basic skills programs. More research is needed to explore the roles both physical disconnection and a lack of collaboration between programs and services play in transitioning students out of basic skills. The present study considered how basic skills programs are integrated, or not, with other programs on campus that serve students.

Transition receptive culture within the institution. The final theme identified by the review of literature is the role of culture as related to transfer and college transitions. Although no studies to date are specific to the role of campus or program culture in transitioning noncredit students to postsecondary courses, community college scholars have addressed a similar and potentially relatable concept, termed transfer receptive culture (Jain, Herrera, Bernal & Solórzano, 2011). The transfer receptive culture model looks at the programs within a system (Jain et al., 2011) which are necessary to include when investigating an educational system. Jain and colleagues suggested building a transfer receptive model to increase the number of students

who transfer from a community college to a university. This research was grounded by transfer data from California, where students of color make up the majority of students at community colleges, yet they have the lowest transfer rate to four-year institutions. The researchers posited that changing the perception of transfer students at four-year institutions would increase the rate of success for students who transfer. The scholars suggested developing a transfer receptive culture where four-year institutions, on the receiving end of the transfer, develop “an institutional commitment...to provide the support needed for students to transfer successfully” (p. 257). This commitment included validating transfer students and offering support needed, especially for first-generation and historically underrepresented students. This model included elements for both pre- and post-transfer:

Pre-transfer:

1. Establish the transfer of students, especially nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students, as a high institutional priority that ensures stable accessibility, retention, and graduation.
2. Provide outreach and resources that focus on the specific needs of transfer students while complimenting the community college mission of transfer.

Post-transfer:

3. Offer financial and academic support through distinct opportunities for nontraditional/reentry transfer students.
4. Acknowledge the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family.
5. Create an appropriate and organic framework from which to assess, evaluate, and enhance transfer receptive programs (Jain et al., 2011, p. 258).

This type of model encourages a collaborative relationship between community colleges and four-year institutions and includes support at both campuses for students.

I posit that a *transition* receptive model may be useful for students in transitioning from basic skills to postsecondary coursework. Basic skills students tend to be some of the most diverse students in higher education (Washington State Board, 2018a). To develop a transition receptive culture, institutions need to acknowledge and embrace the “lived experiences that

students bring to campus and recognize the intersection between community and family” (Jain et al., 2011, p. 260). Students have cultural wealth that institutions need to acknowledge and embrace. Relatedly, previous studies highlight the importance of financial and academic support, but most institutions do not regularly offer holistic support for students (Gard et al., 2012). This lack of support may be related to low transition rates. Collaboration between noncredit and credit programs within an institution need to be developed in order to provide outreach and other resources needed for basic skills students to transition to credit courses. The “pre-transfer” elements described in the transfer receptive culture are expected to pertain to the system in basic skills programs, and the “post-transfer” elements would pertain to the credit-bearing system of the college. This study examined whether a transition receptive culture has been enacted at the case study site and if so, whether this framework impacted the overall culture of the college in regard to transitioning students from basic skills to postsecondary coursework.

Theoretical Framework

Numerous theories and frameworks have been developed to explain students’ success or failure in college (e.g., Astin, 1993; Nora, 2005; Tinto, 1975). Surprisingly however, there is a lack of theory to describe how and why noncredit students transition to postsecondary courses. Existing work has drawn from a variety of related models and frameworks including integration models (e.g., Calcagno et al., 2007), traditional retention models (e.g., Humphreys, 2012; Scott-Clayton, 2011), student involvement (e.g., Onwona-Agyeman, 2017), self-efficacy (e.g., Ozmun, 2012), and assets and supports (Reynolds & Johnson, 2014). However, it should be noted that many of the existing studies specific to noncredit students have been largely atheoretical (i.e., D’Amico et al., 2014; Gard et al., 2012; Grubb et al., 2003; Jacobs, & Tolbert-Bynum, 2013; Perin, 2011; Pusser et al., 2007). Moreover, after an extensive search, I did not find any studies

that have applied a systems approach/theory when studying noncredit education and/or transitions.

The following section provides an overview of theory that I believe to be in some way related and potentially important to studying systems involved in transitioning noncredit students to postsecondary courses. Particular attention and space is given to theories that in some way are related to the five themes identified by the literature review. Further, I considered theoretical models that employ a systems approach and/or that may be useful in studying systemic inequities impacting noncredit programs.

Culturally responsive pedagogy. The limited amount of existing research focused on noncredit programs and students suggests that curriculum and andragogy play an important role in students' transitioning from noncredit to postsecondary courses. However, higher education curriculum is still predominately Euro-centered with more focus on competition rather than collaboration, among other factors, despite results from past studies that show how this negatively impacts students (Rendon, 1994). "Teachers carry into the classroom their personal cultural background. They perceive students...with inevitable prejudice and preconception" (Spindler & Spindler, 1994, p. xii). Culture is at the heart of all behavior, it determines how we think and behave, and for educators, this also impacts teaching (Gay, 2000). Culture determines how students engage in the learning process, and if this engagement looks different than the accepted, or "normal" way of engagement, educators need to work to reduce this tension. If this tension is not reduced, miscommunications, hostility, alienation, and diminished self-esteem may occur (Gay, 2000). One avenue to reduce this tension is by using culturally responsive pedagogy to validate students' cultural knowledge and prior experiences. Culturally responsive teaching includes these characteristics:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups...;
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences...;
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles;
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's cultural heritages;
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools (Gay, 2000, p. 29).

When educators employ culturally responsive teaching, academic achievement will increase for students of color, along with helping students “maintain identity and connections with their ethnic groups and communities” (Gay, 2000, p. 30) and become better human beings. Culturally responsive pedagogy encourages a communal learning environment, and this collectivist approach aligns well with students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (Hammond, 2015). Research is needed that explores the particular ways in which culturally responsive pedagogy may serve to support students' transition from noncredit to postsecondary education.

The Center for Student Success (2009), Grubb et al. (2003), Jacobs and Tolbert-Bynum (2008), Perin (2011), and Scott-Clayton (2011) discussed the importance of relevant curriculum for basic skills students, but none of these studies looked at the impact of contextualization and relevance through a critical lens and none considered the andragogy that is used to deliver the instruction.

Cooling out. Clark's (1960) seminal “cooling out” concept is also relevant to studying programs that seek to transition students from noncredit to postsecondary courses. According to Clark, not all advisors and faculty believe community college students have the academic ability to succeed in a transfer degree, and therefore feel these students need to be cooled out and redirected to a professional-technical degree or short certificate program. “Academic ability and cumulative record determine who will and will not be cooled out” (Hellmich, 1993, p. 17).

Critical theorists disagree that community colleges serve to “cool out” students, as the cooling

out concept draws on meritocratic principles and is therefore not equitable. Merit is determined “by an individual’s test scores and grades” (Guinier, 2015, p. 2), and students who benefit from White habitus – those who have social privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) - tend to score higher on tests and earn higher overall grades (Hellmich, 1993).

Previous studies that have investigated advising have not looked at *how* students were advised, or whether students’ academic record, or race, impacts advice given. The studies by Zafft et al. (2006) and Hector-Mason et al. (2017) concluded that the presence of advising increased transitions from basic skills to postsecondary coursework. However, neither of these studies looked at advising through the lens of the cooling out (Clark, 1960). Hector-Mason et al. (2017) and Zafft et al. (2006) both found that advising was consistent in college transition models, but neither study looked at how students were advised to determine if cooling out happened to students in basic skills programs. The study completed by Gard et al. (2012) indicated that advising was a key component for students transitioning from community colleges to universities, but again this study did not look at advising through the lens of cooling out. Scott-Clayton (2011) found that most of advising for community college students focused on the mechanics of registration or navigation instead of on life goals or career choices. The study by Scott-Clayton did not include the perspective of whether students were advised into shorter programs due to students’ background.

Inequality regimes. Social and economic inequalities are prevalent throughout daily activities in US organizations (Acker, 2006). Prior research has considered various forms of inequity including but not limited to class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and/or racial/ethnic identity. Acker (2006) argued that focusing on just one category “obscures and oversimplifies other interpenetrating realities” (p. 442). Inequality regimes in organizations are defined as

“systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes” (p. 443). Acker further isolated six interacting components of inequality regimes: (a) the bases of inequality; (b) the shape and degree of inequality; (c) the organizing processes that create inequality; (d) the visibility of inequalities; (e) the legitimacy of inequalities; and (6) control and compliance. The basis of the inequality, and the degree to which the inequality is present were considered throughout this present study. Additionally, my study looked for the root of the organizing processes that create inequality, along with the visibility of inequalities. The following paragraphs will define these four components of inequality regimes that were pertinent to the current study, as the remaining two components were not as relevant and were not included in my study.

The basis of inequality varies from organization to organization, but Acker (2006) stated that most will have “class, gender, and race processes” in their systems (p. 444). Class, in this situation, is defined as who has access and control over resources. Resources usually are monetary, as opposed to time or physical space. However, in many institutions of higher education, time and physical space are equally as valuable. For the present study, I explored who has access and control over resources, including the time of day of classes/workshops and where the events take place. This exploration helped to illuminate how or if there was a basis of inequality present at the institution in regard to class.

Regarding the shape and degree of inequality, organizations that are structured like a traditional bureaucracy usually create a higher degree of inequality as compared to a flatter organization that relies more on teams to make decisions (Acker, 2006). Acker stated that “hierarchies are usually gendered and racialized, especially at the top” (p. 445). In this present

study, I looked to see if the basic skills department had more of a traditional bureaucratic design, or a flat design, and was aware of what degree inequality regimes were present.

How organizations develop and implement their practices and processes vary but will “produce class, gender, and racial inequalities” (Acker, 2006, p. 447). Generally speaking, work schedules are set up based on the traditional White male worker who does not have any responsibilities for children, as he would have a wife at home to take care of any family business (Acker, 2006). Acker noted that workers that do have more flexibility in their schedules are usually high-level managers who are predominately men. Workers in lower-level jobs generally have little to no flexibility. The present study considered how work schedules are set up and how or if they produce inequalities.

Another component of practices and processes relates to “informal interactions while ‘doing the work’” (Acker, 2006, p. 451). Acker noted that not many research studies have documented racial inequities in informal workplace interactions, but she stated practices where class, race, and gender inequalities are implicit throughout the workday. An example of an inequality at a higher education institution is if a full-time faculty expects deference from an adjunct faculty regarding teaching practices. Another example is if women are expected to be at the information desk because this job entails a lot of nurturing of prospective new students, and men are expected to be in charge of recruitment because this job entails more aggressive tactics. The present study looked for any inequities during informal work activities.

The final component of inequality regimes to be considered is the visibility of inequalities. This component is defined “as the degree of awareness of inequalities” (Acker, 2006, p. 452). Many higher education institutions are developing diversity, equity, and inclusion plans; however, this does not automatically mean that there is awareness of inequalities on

campuses. Acker (2006) stated that “visibility varies with the position of the beholder” (p. 452). People in the dominant culture tend not to see their privilege. Class and gender tend not to be discussed by those in power, although workers in lower-level positions often have a differing view. Throughout this study, I looked to see how aware workers were of inequalities and whether this was something explicitly discussed by all.

Past studies looking at the low transition rates have not considered the presence of inequality regimes and the role this plays on transitioning students from noncredit to postsecondary courses. This framework was used as a way to view data collected from institutional practices and systems throughout this study.

Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory (CRT) recognizes that racism is normalized and systemic throughout society including within institutions of higher education (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Institutions and the students within them are impacted by racism. Critical Race Theory pushes against the view that the White, middle class needs to be what all others are measured against. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) described

four basic tenets of CRT: (1) “racism is ordinary...the common, everyday experience of most people of color; (2) ...white-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes...for the dominant group; (3) race and races are products of social thought and relations; (4) ...ways the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times” (pp. 8-10).

Solórzano (1998) expanded this definition to five tenets: “(1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (2) the challenges to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; (5) the interdisciplinary perspective” (pp. 122-123). This first theme states that race and racism are in every part of students of color’s lives

– most likely as much a part of their lives as race and racism are not a part of the dominant society’s lives. When all cultures are measured against the dominant culture and fall short, often times this is seen as failure for the student or faculty member and not failure of the system. The second theme of CRT challenges the dominant ideology. To reach equity for all, the historic ideology needs to be challenged.

Students of color often find themselves having to assimilate into the dominant, White middle-class culture when transitioning to college. Bonilla-Silva (2012) calls this ‘racial grammar’ that “helps reproduce racial order as just the way things are” (p. 174). Racial grammar is so deeply embedded in our culture that it can be challenging to even see or acknowledge how this racial grammar is the foundation for all interactions. Gay (2000) stated that “even without our being consciously aware of it, culture determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we...learn” (p. 9). Bonilla-Silva (2012) wrote that “the demography and symbols in HWCUs [Historically White Colleges and Universities] create an oppressive racial ecology where just walking on campus is unhealthy” (p. 184). Culture is embedded in school and this culture sets the “normal” way to learn (Boykin, 1994). Boykin stated the “cultural fabric” is primarily influenced by European and middle-class groups and has become ingrained in all of the structures and ethos of education.

Historically, Bourdieu’s cultural capital framework has been used to explain why students of color do not do as well as White students in education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu’s work suggests that students need various forms of capital (e.g., cultural, social, economic) and habitus in order to be successful in college. Forms of capital are typically present among and are grounded by White, middle to upper class students who have family members who have graduated from college. The term habitus is “an enigmatic concept” and one that is

often misunderstood (Grenfell, 2014, p. 48). Habitus is our deeply ingrained habits and dispositions that come from our life experiences, and this includes our cultural capital (Grenfell, 2014). The habitus we all embody allow us to navigate different environments (Grenfell, 2014). Bonilla-Silva (2014) extended Bourdieu's cultural capital to highlight the racial aspects of capital, terming the concept, *White habitus*. White habitus is defined as a "racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that *conditions* and *creates* whites' racial tastes, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters" (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 152). Racism is often disguised in education, partly because of how invasive the dominant culture is throughout all of education (curriculum, assessment, teaching, etc.). Deficit thinking tends to dominate education, and this language perpetuates the idea that students and families are lacking, or less than, or "at fault for poor academic performance" simply because their knowledge does not measure up to the cultural norms of society (Yosso, 2005, p.75), hence White habitus is at play. Race and racism may help explain why racially minoritized students are overrepresented in basic skills education and Critical Race Theory (CRT) may be a framework that will challenge the structures and practices of noncredit programs.

Conclusion

There is a gap in empirical evidence and theory to explain the ways in which institutional practices and support systems in community colleges support or hinder student's transitions from noncredit education to postsecondary coursework. This study will further the research by implementing a case study, through an equity lens, to investigate what an institution with high transition rates are doing to support students in this transition. Chapter 3 describes the case study used for this study and the rationale for this method.

Chapter 3: Methods and Design

This study explored how institutional practices and support systems in a comprehensive community college in the State of Washington support or hinder students in transitioning from noncredit to postsecondary coursework. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methods for the study and the study rationale. More specifically, this chapter provides details regarding the research design, data collection methods and analysis plan. The chapter concludes with study limitations and an overview of ethical considerations.

Positionality Statement

Before a methodological decision can be made, the researcher must consider her research paradigm (Stage & Manning, 2016). This paradigm choice dictates how the researcher will address the research question and methodological choice. Yin (2016) described four main paradigms: positivism (one reality or truth), constructivist (reality is socially constructed), pragmatist (reality is always being renegotiated), and middle ground (not an extreme view like the others, but instead a view more in the middle). Creswell (2014) also described four main paradigms but extended positivism into postpositivism, in which causes determine outcomes. Creswell also described philosophical approaches to include constructivism (individuals create their own meaning), transformative (politics need to be intertwined in research) and pragmatism (actions and situation instead of preceding conditions). Despite these different categorizations of worldviews, all these authors agree that there are differing philosophical approaches and that a researcher's philosophy impacts the study.

Newman (2011) added critical social science (CSS) to the discussion on paradigm. Before I describe the CSS perspective, more details need to be included about positivism and interpretivism. According to Neuman (2011), positivism in social science (PSS) is “an organized

method for combining deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behavior...to discover and confirm a set of probabilistic causal laws that can be used to predict general patterns of human activity” (p. 95). Positivist researchers believe that a cause will have the same effect on everyone regardless of their background; in addition, they believe we are able to learn about people by observing them interact in their external reality (Neuman, 2011). Positivists believe that the external reality is more important than the subjective, internal reality. Additionally, Neuman stated that positivist researchers remain neutral and detached throughout the research study. Evidence is observable and precise. PSS researchers collect and analyze data in a logical manner to allow for replication (Neuman, 2011).

In contrast to the positivist perspective, Neuman (2011) described the interpretive social science (ISS) to be a “systematic analysis of socially meaningful action” that is discovered through direct observation of people in their natural environment (pp. 101-102). The goal of an ISS researcher is to discover how people “create and maintain their social worlds” (p. 102). ISS researchers believe that a theory is true “if it makes sense to those being studied...[and] is accurate if the researcher conveys a deep understanding of the way others reason, feel, and see things” (p. 105). Evidence for ISS researchers cannot be separated from the context or from the meanings the participants assign to it. “Facts are fluid...and are embedded within the meaning of a system” (p. 106). ISS researchers strive to understand how participants in a study think, feel, and act in order to understand how they view the world.

A critical social science (CSS) perspective pulls from the criticisms of PSS and ISS. A CSS perspective believes the PSS view fails to consider that people are able to think and feel, yet the ISS perspective is too passive and fails to “help people see the false illusions

around them (Neuman, 2011, p. 108). CSS encompasses critical ontology which believes reality is made up of multiple layers. CSS researchers believe that evidence lies between the PSS and ISS perspectives. Evidence for a PSS researcher is neutral, theory free, and all people agree. ISS rejects this interpretation and believes that the world is created by meaning based on each person's experience and beliefs. A CSS researcher believes that facts do exist independently of people's interpretations, but yet facts are not theory neutral. A CSS researcher may question the interpretation the institution made. As an example, a campus may state that basic skills student transitions are low because students leave the program to go to work instead of transitioning to postsecondary coursework. A CSS researcher will interpret this fact by looking to see if there are explanations embedded in the system that play a role in this low transition rate instead of accepting this "fact" that students only want to increase their basic skills to get a job.

I have a CSS perspective and believe that we are able to observe the empirical, but our experience of an event is what becomes the reality for us. This interpretation is based on people's experiences and cultural beliefs, and this becomes their reality. I believe that reality has multiple layers. I believe that my own experiences, knowledge, and cultural beliefs impact my own interpretations, and hence I continually took steps to be aware of my own biases throughout this study.

Because I believe social reality has multiple layers, this reality needs to be interpreted, and this can best be done in a qualitative study (Yin, 2016). Yin (2014) stated that case study research can accommodate and "acknowledge multiple realities having multiple meanings" (p. 17). Open-ended questions, in particular, will allow the researcher to better see and understand the meaning of the data collected (Creswell, 2014). In contrast, if I held a postpositivist view, I

might use closed-ended questions or surveys to collect data to test or verify a theory. Throughout this study, I will collect participant's interpretations of the event and will continually collaborate with participants to ensure the data and themes accurately represent their interpretations. These interpretations develop from working with underlying categories and themes that emerge during the research (Yin, 2016). While analyzing the data, I will employ an inductive approach to discover meaning.

Researcher bias is inherent in every research study (Creswell, 2014), regardless of the researcher's philosophical approach. However, this bias does not need to skew the results so badly as to make the results unusable. I remained aware of my bias and practiced reflexivity throughout. Reflexivity occurs when the researcher "reflects about how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences" have the potential to influence their interpretations (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). This continuous self-reflection and transparency helped ensure my bias did not have a negative impact on the overall findings. Additionally, cross-referencing documents and hearing multiple perspectives through interviews helped ensure that I had evidence for my interpretations and that my biases did not unduly influence the analysis.

For this study, I acknowledge several biases. First, I am a faculty member in a large adult education program in the State of Washington. My own prior experience in the field of this study may influence my interpretations of the data. I am an insider to the culture of basic skills in Washington, which means I will have the potential for interpreting data through my own experience and understanding. According to Rose (1985), it is not possible to have neutrality, but the researcher can be aware of one's own biases to reduce this impact. Even though I am an insider to adult education in Washington, I am not familiar with the subculture of the research site. All of these prior connections I need to constantly be aware of potential biases throughout

the study (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Additionally, I am a white, cis-gendered female from a middle-class privileged background. I need to be aware of my positionality throughout my study and in particular during the analysis. Throughout the study, I constantly examined my privilege and remained aware of the inherent privilege in our systems. Moreover, my prior experience has been tainted by working in a program that I believe is not effective in transitioning noncredit students to postsecondary education. Another bias I hold is my desire to see students succeed, and this bias has influenced my choice to study a program with high transition rates. My experience and deep knowledge of current research in the field may impact my interpretations, and this demands that I deeply explore and acknowledge biases throughout the study (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Case Study Research Design

A qualitative, explanatory case study design was conducted to better understand how institutional practices and support systems promote or hinder community college students' transition from noncredit to postsecondary coursework. Qualitative research is "a process of examining and interpreting data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 1). As there is a dearth of research to understand how and why particular institutional systems support and hinder transitions from noncredit to postsecondary coursework, a qualitative design is an appropriate method to use. The goal of this study was not to determine cause and effect or to predict possible transition rates based on a particular attribute of a program, and therefore a quantitative study was not employed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Yin (2014), a case study can be an appropriate research tool to use when studying organizational processes, when the focus is on a contemporary event, and when there is no control over behavior in that event. Yin (2014) suggested five components

of a research design are critical to conducting case study research including: (a) study questions, (b) propositions, (c) the case itself, (d) logic linking propositions to the data and (e) criteria for interpreting the findings.

A single case study was used for this study, as the goal was to have an in-depth understanding of how institutional practices and support systems in one comprehensive community college supported or hindered students in transitioning from noncredit to postsecondary education. This method was appropriate for this study because I did not have any control over the behaviors in the events (Yin, 2014), and I looked at the transitional studies department as a whole unit (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Additionally, the boundaries between the propositions to be studied are often blurred, and therefore the study needed to use multiple sources of evidence, which is possible when using a case study method (Schwandt, 1997). While classic case studies focus on one individual, case study research has evolved to include entities as well (Yin, 2014). Although consideration was given to a multi-case study design, a single case design allowed me to focus on one unusual or extreme case (Yin, 2014). Riverview⁴, the comprehensive community college that was used for the case study, has a high percentage of students who transition from noncredit to postsecondary education. In the 2014-15 academic year, the year for which the most recent data are available, 18% of noncredit students transitioned to postsecondary courses at Riverview (Washington State Board, 2018c). The state average for transitioning was at 10% in 2014-15.

An explanatory case study was used, as this specific type of case study helps to explain how the phenomena investigated came to be (Yin, 2014). Alternative case studies include descriptive (describing the phenomena) and exploratory (identify research questions for a future

⁴The name of the institution has been changed.

study). However the goal of this study was to begin to explain and describe how and why institutional practices and support systems in place support or hinder students transitioning, and therefore an explanatory case study was the best fit. When documenting an explanatory case study, the researcher starts with “an initial theoretical statement or an initial explanatory proposition[s]” (Yin, 2014, p. 149). During the analysis, I provided evidence to explain how or why something happened by comparing findings against the initial explanatory proposition(s). The next step was to revise the original proposition(s) and then compare data against the updated proposition(s). This process was repeated until no other revisions were necessary.

One potential problem of an explanatory case study is the researcher may slowly move away from the original topic (Yin, 2014). Another potential problem is “selective bias may creep into the process” which may lead to the researcher skipping over some key data (Yin, 2014, p. 150). To counter these possibilities, I continually checked back on the original purpose of the study while collecting and analyzing data. I reviewed the study propositions questions regularly to ensure I did not leave out any data and circled back to the Level 2 questions to determine what other data points needed to be analyzed. Additionally, I utilized “critical friends” to help me check my biases and ensure I maintained awareness of possible rival explanations. I had three critical friends who were used for this work. I provided my critical friends with the study propositions and Level 2 questions. I then explained how I analyzed the data and described my interpretations. Critical friends provided feedback to me regarding their view of my interpretations.

Pilot Study

A pilot case study at another college was conducted in the summer of 2018. This study was a single case study that explored how systems in place at another comprehensive community

college in the State of Washington successfully supported students in transitioning from basic skills courses to postsecondary coursework. IRB approval was granted before the study began. The college that I selected for the pilot has one of the highest transition rates in the state. Five phenomena were used to narrow the scope of the study:

1. Relevant curriculum in ABE/ESL
2. Advising and career-development support for ABE/ESL students
3. Financial and ancillary support available for ABE/ESL students
4. Academic and system support during ABE/ESL
5. Post-ABE/TESOL support for ABE/ESL students.

A total of nine interviews were completed, all with full-time faculty and staff. Although adjunct faculty also taught at this college, they had little or no influence on policies and procedures, so the decision was made to only interview full-time faculty and staff. Documentation was also collected and analyzed: new student intake materials, program information fliers, goal setting documents, course outcomes, and job descriptions for ABE/ESL faculty.

Findings from the interviews and documentation were synthesized into three themes: Curriculum, Advising, and Transitions. The findings of this pilot case study revealed the institution utilized many practices that the literature identifies as supportive of transitioning students to post-secondary coursework.

Curriculum. Faculty and staff who were interviewed indicated transparency with students in regard to the relevance of classroom lessons/activities. The conclusion drawn from this pilot study was that faculty believed they help students make the connection between the lesson/activity and their goals. This was not formalized, however, since the course outcomes

guide instruction and this relevance is not indicated in course outcomes. Because the course outcomes are quite typical for most basic skills programs in Washington, yet an analysis of the pilot study data suggested data from the interviews contained numerous statements regarding high academic rigor, the authors of the pilot case study concluded the culture of institution drove this high academic rigor.

Advising. High touch with students was shown in the pilot study to be a factor in the high transition rates. Students who enter into ABE/TESOL at this institution were known by faculty and staff, and informal goal setting may have started early because of this relationship building. However, the findings showed inconsistent knowledge of faculty and staff regarding workshops and other transition activities available to students which indicated that there were not department-wide expectations or standards around transition opportunities for students. Additionally, there was not consistent data collection around the effectiveness of transition workshops and activities to help the institution make decisions whether to keep offering the same options for students, or to expand/change opportunities. Financial support for credit-bearing classes started early in the goal-setting process at this institution, which means when students are academically ready to transition, funding is usually not a barrier.

Transitions. No evidence was found in the pilot study for structured, continued efforts specific to transitioning students within the basic skills department. Informal conversations happened among faculty, and also among basic skills faculty and faculty outside the department. However, there were no formal, on-going meetings around transitions. Multiple interviewees shared projects they were involved in previously (most were more than 10 years ago) that included co-planning curriculum with faculty outside of the basic skills department.

All of these factors together, along with the culture of high academic standards and rigor that appeared to have been developed many years ago at this institution, may be what led the institution to have a transition rate that is more than double the state's average (Washington State Board, 2018c). Evidence did not support any specific action in the system that may be transferable to other cases.

Pilot studies help the researcher to develop more relevant lines of data collection and can provide “conceptual clarification for the research design (Yin, 2014, p. 96). This pilot case study provided an opportunity to strengthen the study design, modify the interview questions, and narrow in on the necessary documentation to analyze during this case study. Additional propositions are included in this study to expand the data collection, in particular to address inequities in the system. Design changes include expanding interviews to include students, along with adding observations to help triangulate the data. The fine-tuning of the instrumentation tools, along with the comparative data from the pilot case study results in more reliable data for this study (Yin, 2014).

Theory in Case Studies

Theory is used to provide a lens, or a way of viewing and interpreting the phenomena in a case study in a new way (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006). Critical reflection is needed when interpreting the phenomena through the theoretical lens (Rule & John, 2015). Theory can also challenge the current ways a program operates. A sample question the researcher may ask is “why do you use this teaching method?” and if the answer is something like “because we’ve always done it this way,” the culturally responsive pedagogy framework may guide a teacher to reflect on his/her ways of teaching (Rule & John, 2015). On the other hand, as Rule and John argued “practice can challenge theory by questioning its relevance and usefulness to practice” (p.

2). When deciding on what theory to use, the researcher needs to consider how the theory will help practitioners and researchers view the phenomena in new and productive ways. Theoretical frameworks allow the researcher to relate theory to practice and vice versa.

When conducting a case study, theory can be used in different ways: either as a way to generate concepts from the data collected, or as a preliminary theory used as a basis for the study (Rule & John, 2015). This study will use theory in both ways. I was open to generating concepts based on the data collected throughout the study. However, as Yin (2014) stated, the researcher must have an understanding of the relevant field before conducting case study research. The theoretical framework was used as a blueprint to guide the study. Other methods, such as ethnography and grounded theory, often do not use theory in this way (Schwandt, 1997).

This study, like an experiment, strove to provide results that go beyond the specific case to be studied (Yin, 2014). The theory used in this study laid the groundwork for an analytic generalization of the results. Yin (2014) stated that this “generalization can take the form of a lesson learned, working hypothesis, or other principle that is believed to be applicable to other situations” (p. 68). A working hypothesis, with application to other cases, was developed from the lessons learned from this case study. Additionally, it is expected that lessons learned from this case study may apply to institutions with similar programs and demographics.

Theoretical Propositions

Theoretical study propositions were used to narrow the study scope by giving focus to particular practices and supports thought to influence students’ transition from noncredit ABE and ESL to postsecondary courses. Each of the study propositions were developed from the themes and theory that were presented in Chapter 2.

Proposition 1: Andragogy and relevant curriculum promotes successful transitions to postsecondary courses.

Proposition 2: Advising and career-development services play an important role in transitioning students to postsecondary courses

Proposition 3: Students need financial and ancillary support in order to successfully transition to postsecondary courses.

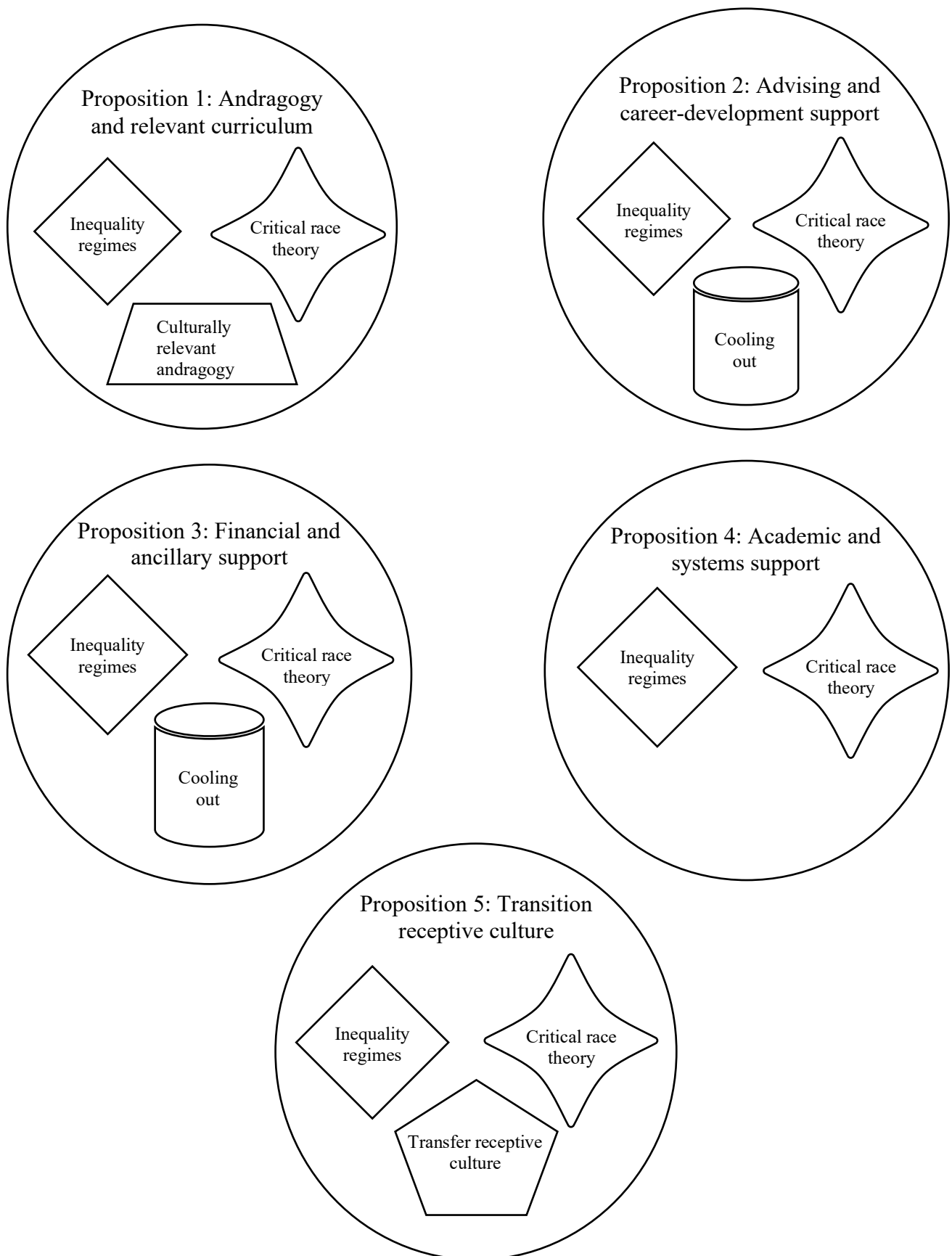
Proposition 4: Academic and systems support are important when transitioning to postsecondary courses.

Proposition 5: A transition receptive culture matters when transitioning students to postsecondary courses.

The above-stated propositions were used to develop the research design, including determining the data to collect and how to analyze the data (Yin, 2014). Figure 1 shows how each of the theories served as a lens for each of the propositions. Past studies that have explored the role of curriculum have not always considered inequalities imbedded in the curriculum or how instruction is delivered. The concepts of inequality regimes, CRT, and culturally relevant pedagogy were used during the analysis of this study to surface the role of inequality and culture in both the curriculum and how instruction is delivered. For the second and third propositions of advising and financial services, past studies have not considered the inequalities built into the system. By utilizing the inequality regimes and CRT frameworks, I explicitly searched for inequalities ingrained in the advising and financial services systems. Additionally, I looked to see if cooling out was happening for transitional studies students in either of these systems. For proposition four, academic and systems support, I utilized the inequality regimes and critical race theory to surface any ingrained inequalities in services for students. The last proposition,

transition receptive culture, I actively sought out evidence that the research site has developed a transition receptive culture, including institutional priorities for transitioning transitional studies students. As I looked for evidence for a transition receptive culture, I utilized the frameworks of inequality regimes and CRT to surface inequalities in the systems.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Logic Linking Propositions to Design/Data

The propositions provided a framework for this study and guided me throughout the data collection and analysis process (Yin, 2014). The case study design has already been influenced by the propositions and theories, as I used the multiple theories described earlier and the propositions when developing the interview questions. In addition, observations in the field and documents collected and analyzed were influenced by the propositions and the theoretical framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). These propositions continued to act like a blueprint during the data collection, analysis, and were used as criteria for the interpretation (Yin, 2014). This study utilized the five propositions throughout the analysis, of which the theoretical frameworks lent themselves well throughout these propositions. Additionally, this study followed Yin's (2014) steps for explanation building and compare "the findings of [the] initial case against [each]...proposition, [then revise] the...proposition [and compare] other details of the case against the revision" (p. 149). This process was repeated until no further revisions were needed. Because this is a single-case study, the results are not conclusive, but these results may be applied to future cases for a more compelling result (Yin, 2014).

Defining and Bounding the Case – Riverview College

The system of the transitional skills department of a comprehensive community college in the State of Washington was used for the single case for this study (Stake, 2005). The parameters of the case were faculty, staff, and students of the transitional studies department, along with supporting documentation and services produced or affiliated with the department. The rest of the institution was the context for the case (see Figure 2) (Yin, 2014).

Figure 2. The Context and the Case.

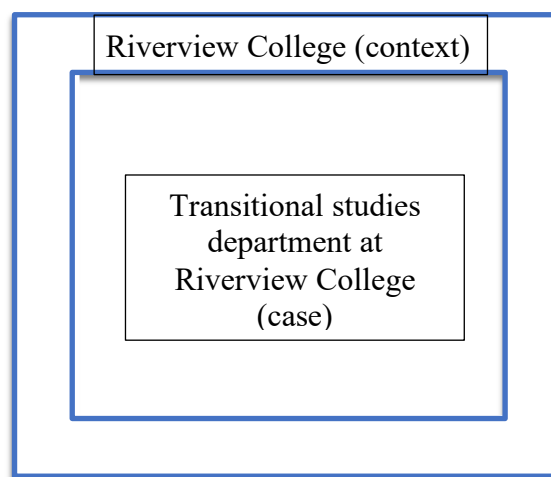


Figure 2. The transitional studies department at Riverview College is the case and the rest of the college is the context.

Riverview College was selected because of its high transition rates of ABE/ESL students. Riverview transitions more than half again as many students than the state average. Additionally, Riverview offers both transfer and professional degrees, which meets the criteria of a comprehensive college. This institution offers both noncredit ABE and ESL but no noncredit workforce education courses. The State of Washington does not offer noncredit workforce education, whereas 28 states offer both noncredit basic skills and workforce education (Van Noy, Jacobs, Korey, Bailey, & Hughes, 2008). The program itself is mid-size, compared to other noncredit programs in the state. The geographical area is suburban and rural, and Riverview is the only comprehensive community college within approximately 50 miles.

Data Collection Plan

Three principles of data collection were followed throughout this study: (a) utilize multiple sources of evidence; (b) create and utilize a case study database; and (c) maintain a

chain of evidence (Yin, 2014). Utilizing these principles increased both the “construct validity and reliability of the evidence” (p. 118).

Multiple sources of evidence. To gain in-depth understanding about how institutional practices and support systems at Riverview College support or hinder students transitioning from noncredit to postsecondary education, case study evidence was collected from interviews, documents, and direct observations. This triangulation allowed for corroboration between findings and supported the propositions in this study (Creswell, 2014). This triangulation follows Yin’s (2014) principle of utilizing multiple sources of evidence. Throughout the data collection, I constantly checked and re-checked the consistency of the data from the different sources described in this section as a way to triangulate the data (Yin, 2012).

Yin (2014) described different levels of questions for data collection protocol. He stated that questions reflecting the “actual line of inquiry” are considered Level 2 questions (p. 89). Level 2 questions form the “structure of the inquiry” and helped remind me what needed to be collected and why. This type of question is meant for the researcher and not to be asked directly to the participant. Data from the pilot study and results from the literature review suggested the five propositions may support or hinder student transitions. Below are Level 2 questions for each proposition:

Proposition 1: Andragogy and relevant curriculum promotes successful transitions to postsecondary courses.

What aspects of the curriculum support or hinder student transitions? How is culturally relevant pedagogy used to support or hinder student transitions? How does institutional racism show up in curriculum and how does this support or hinder student transitions?

Proposition 2: Advising and career-development services play an important role in transitioning students to postsecondary courses.

What aspects of advising and career-development services support or hinder student transition? What role does cooling out play in advising or career-development services, and how does this support or hinder student transitions? How does institutional racism show up in advising and career-development services and how does this support or hinder student transitions?

Proposition 3: Students need financial and ancillary support in order to successfully transition to postsecondary courses.

What aspects of financial and ancillary support services support or hinder student transitions? What role does cooling out play in financial and/or ancillary support services, and how does this support or hinder student transitions? How does institutional racism show up in financial and ancillary support and how does this support or hinder student transitions?

Proposition 4: Academic and systems support are important when transitioning to postsecondary courses.

What academic and systems support are available to students and how do they support or hinder student transitions? What inequality regimes are present in academic and systems support and how does this support or hinder student transitions?

Proposition 5: A transition receptive culture matters when transitioning students to postsecondary courses.

What aspects of a transition receptive culture are active at the institution and how does this support or hinder student transitions? If a transition receptive culture is present, what inequality regimes are present in the transition receptive culture and how does this support or hinder student transitions?

All evidence gathered throughout this case study was in support of the Level 2 questions. The next sections describe the evidence to be collected.

Interviews. Interviews were conducted with faculty, staff, and students. Interviews are often “the most important sources of case study evidence” (Yin, 2014, p. 110). The number of interviews were somewhat fluid, as the researcher interviewed faculty, staff, and students until saturation is reached (Creswell, 2014). Charmaz (2006) stated that saturation occurs when the data collected do not bring new insights or revelations. The interviews ranged from three to five in each group (faculty, staff, and students).

Level 1 questions supported the Level 2 protocol and were asked directly to the participants (Yin, 2014). Qualitative interviews include open-ended questions and addressed each of the study propositions: (a) relevant curriculum; (b) advising and career-development support; (c) financial and ancillary support; (d) academic and systems support; and (e) transition receptive culture. An interview guide approach was used which means the interviewer has determined the specific topics to explore with the interviewee. However, the interviewer decides the sequence of the questions during the interview (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). One disadvantage of this approach is there is a risk that important topics may be inadvertently left out during an interview. To counter this disadvantage, I made field notes at the end of each day and made note if any topics were left out.

After the initial interview questions were developed, they were reviewed by four faculty for their expert feedback (see Appendix A for the interview questions for participants). The faculty reviewers all had more than 10 years of experience teaching, and two faculty were experts in ABE/ESL. The faculty reviewers were at different institutions which brought different perspectives to their reviews. Having the questions reviewed by experts in the field helps to eliminate any bias the researcher brings to the questions (Yin, 2014).

Faculty and staff interviews. Slightly different questions were asked of faculty and staff as it was important to record each person's perceptions regarding the direct experience they have with their roles. For example, faculty were asked about how workshops and activities are measured for success, and staff were not asked how the in-class curriculum relates to transitions. Some questions were the same, even if participants do not have hands-on experience with a particular topic. For example, all faculty may not advise students, but all faculty were asked about advising to learn whether all faculty have the same understanding and perception of advising policies. The interview questions covered different topics, ranging from curriculum: "What supports, or hindrances does the curriculum provide for students transitioning out of ABE/ESL to postsecondary coursework?" to advising: "What is your advising support from intake through transitions?" to academic and systems support: "What supports outside the classroom help students while they are in basic skills? This can be both academic and other programs (such as food bank)." The full list of questions is in Appendix A.

When selecting which faculty and staff to interview, I wanted to gather data from participants with different perspectives. This provided opportunity to consider rival explanations throughout the data collection and analysis. I worked with the vice president of instruction and dean of transitional studies to identify the best subjects for the interviews. These interviews were

one-on-one with faculty and staff and lasted between 30-60 minutes. Interviews took place in person on campus in a private office or meeting room. All interviews were recorded with the participants' permission.

Student interviews. Students were interviewed, but a different set of questions was developed because their roles are different than faculty and staff. Questions for students ranged from curriculum: "In class, how do you show your teacher what you have learned? Are there multiple ways of showing this, or just one?" to academic support: "If you need help with your classwork, what do you do?" to transitions: "What do you need to do to take credit courses? How do you know this?" The full list of questions is in Appendix A.

I purposefully selected students by asking faculty to nominate participants who could speak to their experiences in transitional studies classes and to their plans to transition to postsecondary classes. I asked faculty to nominate students from all ABE levels and from students in ELA levels 4, 5 and 6 to participate. Classes below these ESL levels often have language barriers, and the intent of this study was not to look at issues arising from low-English proficiency levels.

Student interviews were held just before or after class at a location on campus in a private office or meeting room. The location needed to be private, so information shared with the researcher was protected. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. I listened intently and jotted a few notes as the interviewee was speaking. I referred back to the research questions regularly to keep focused on what to record (Yin, 2016). Each note included the date, time, and name of interviewee, along with pertinent information shared. At the end of the day, these field notes were converted into fuller notes, so I had a thicker description of the interviews. This also allowed me to see if any information learned from the day's interviews needed to be verified.

Interviews were transcribed after most interviews are completed, and I re-read and re-listened to the interviews as needed to develop themes and categories. As themes, categories or tentative ideas emerged, this was noted and coded for future analysis by comparing these themes against each proposition (Yin, 2014).

One consideration of interviews was that the information shared by the participants was filtered from their perspectives (Creswell, 2014). Data was collected through documentation and observations to discover what interview data were corroborated. Creswell stated that a disadvantage of an interview is that participants may be biased by the presence of the researcher. To try to counter this possibility, I tried to build trust before the interview began by reminding participants that their responses were confidential, and no identifying data would be included in the final report (Johnson & Christensen, 2017).

Direct observations. Direct observation is useful in providing additional information about a case (Yin, 2014). For this study, I took on the “observer-as-participant” role which means participants knew they were being observed, and during the observations, I had limited interactions with participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2017, p. 243). I observed both ABE and ELA classes and new student orientations. Additionally, I visited the career services office and advising services to gather data from the surrounding physical environment. All data collected from direct observations was in support of the Level 2 questions. Below is a list of events and places to observe for each of the propositions.

Proposition 1: Andragogy and relevant curriculum promotes successful transitions to postsecondary courses.

Classroom observations – look for culturally responsive pedagogy; look for possibly gender/racial bias in classroom; look for inappropriate power inequalities between teacher and students

Proposition 2: Advising and career-development services play an important role in transitioning students to postsecondary courses.

Advising and/or career development services – look to see whose role it is to advise and see if there are inequities with this assignment; location of space – is there a separate space for noncredit students, and if so, how does this compare to postsecondary students; look for any cooling out that may be occurring; listen for what language is used around financial opportunities

Proposition 3: Students need financial and ancillary support in order to successfully transition to postsecondary courses.

Look for workshops or other services available to noncredit students for financial and ancillary support; look for what resources are provided for these workshops or other services; look to see whose role it is to offer this support to see if there are inequities with this assignment; listen for what language is used around financial opportunities

Proposition 4: Academic and systems support are important when transitioning to postsecondary courses.

Look for what services are available for students and if noncredit students take advantage of the services; look for whose role it is to provide these services and if there are inequities with this assignment; location of space – is there a separate

space for noncredit students, and if so, how does this compare to postsecondary students; listen for what language is used around academic and system support

Proposition 5: A transition receptive culture matters when transitioning students to postsecondary courses.

Look for transition practices throughout the department

Observation sessions and note-taking will follow the guidelines offered by LeCompte and Preissle (1993). A partial list of guidelines is listed below:

1. Who is in the group scene?
2. What is happening here?
 - a. What behaviors are repetitive, and which occur irregularly?
 - b. How do the people in the group behave toward one another?
 - c. What is the content of the participants' conversations?
3. Where is the group or scene located?
4. When does the group meet and interact?
5. How are the identified elements connected or interrelated, either from the participants' point of view or from the researcher's perspective?
6. Why does the group operate as it does? What meanings do participants attribute to what they do (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 199)?

Observations are a way to focus on both human interactions and the physical environment in a real-life setting for the participants (Yin, 2012). Field notes were taken during each observation and included what was observed, heard, and sensed (Yin, 2012). Pictures were taken for evidence from the different observations of the physical environment, and no picture included a person.

One main disadvantage of observations is that the researcher may be intrusive to the situation (Creswell, 2014). Creswell also stated that private information may be heard during the observation and this cannot be included in the report. Additionally, people may act different when they know they are being observed (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). To counter these disadvantages, I observed participants in their natural environment and did my best to be

unobtrusive. I built trust and rapport with participants throughout the study, which was essential if valid data were to be collected through observations (Johnson & Christensen, 2017).

Documentation. I also examined several forms of documentary information from the different propositions. Below is a list of documents that was collected for each of the propositions.

Proposition 1: Andragogy and relevant curriculum promotes successful transitions to postsecondary courses.

Syllabi from a variety of classes; assignments or classroom activities; program outcomes

Proposition 2: Advising and career-development services play an important role in transitioning students to postsecondary courses.

Documents provided to students in regard to advising and career-development services; information available to students on the institution's website for advising; other materials available for students

Proposition 3: Students need financial and ancillary support in order to successfully transition to postsecondary courses.

Documents provided to students in regard to financial and ancillary support; information available to students on the institution's website for financial support; scholarship information available to basic skills students

Proposition 4: Academic and systems support are important when transitioning to postsecondary courses.

Degree plans and documents; information available to students on the institution's website for academic support (such as tutoring center, TRiO)

Proposition 5: A transition receptive culture matters when transitioning students to postsecondary courses.

*Documents available to basic skills students that focus on their specific needs;
documentation of assessment and evaluation procedures for systems in place*

Documentation was used to support data gathered from interviews and observations and to look for any discrepancies. Documentation can provide corroboration with data collected from interviews (Yin, 2014) and also verifies that data collected in the interviews are not just perceptions about the program. Documentation also indicates where the institution is putting its attention (Creswell, 2014). The disadvantage of analyzing documentation is that the researcher will possibly need to research in “hard-to-find places” (Creswell, 2014, p. 192). Creswell stated that another concern is with authenticity and accuracy. However, this documentation was used to corroborate what was discovered from interviews and observations and I noted any discrepancies found.

Study database. A database was created, using NVivo software. This software allowed for data to be stored and coded and for a separate notes section to be included. By making notes based on the data collected throughout the analysis, I had both the raw data and my notes accessible in one place (Yin, 2014).

Chain of evidence. Yin (2014) stated that case studies must maintain a chain of evidence “to increase the *reliability* of the information” (p. 127). Here is the chain of evidence used for this case study: the five propositions narrowed the scope of this study; the protocol for the case study that linked to the propositions was stated in the Level 2 questions; all evidentiary sources collected in the database were organized based on this protocol; analysis begun by comparing

data to the five propositions and revisions were made as needed; this process continued until no additional revisions were needed; evidence was cited throughout the case study report (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Chain of Evidence

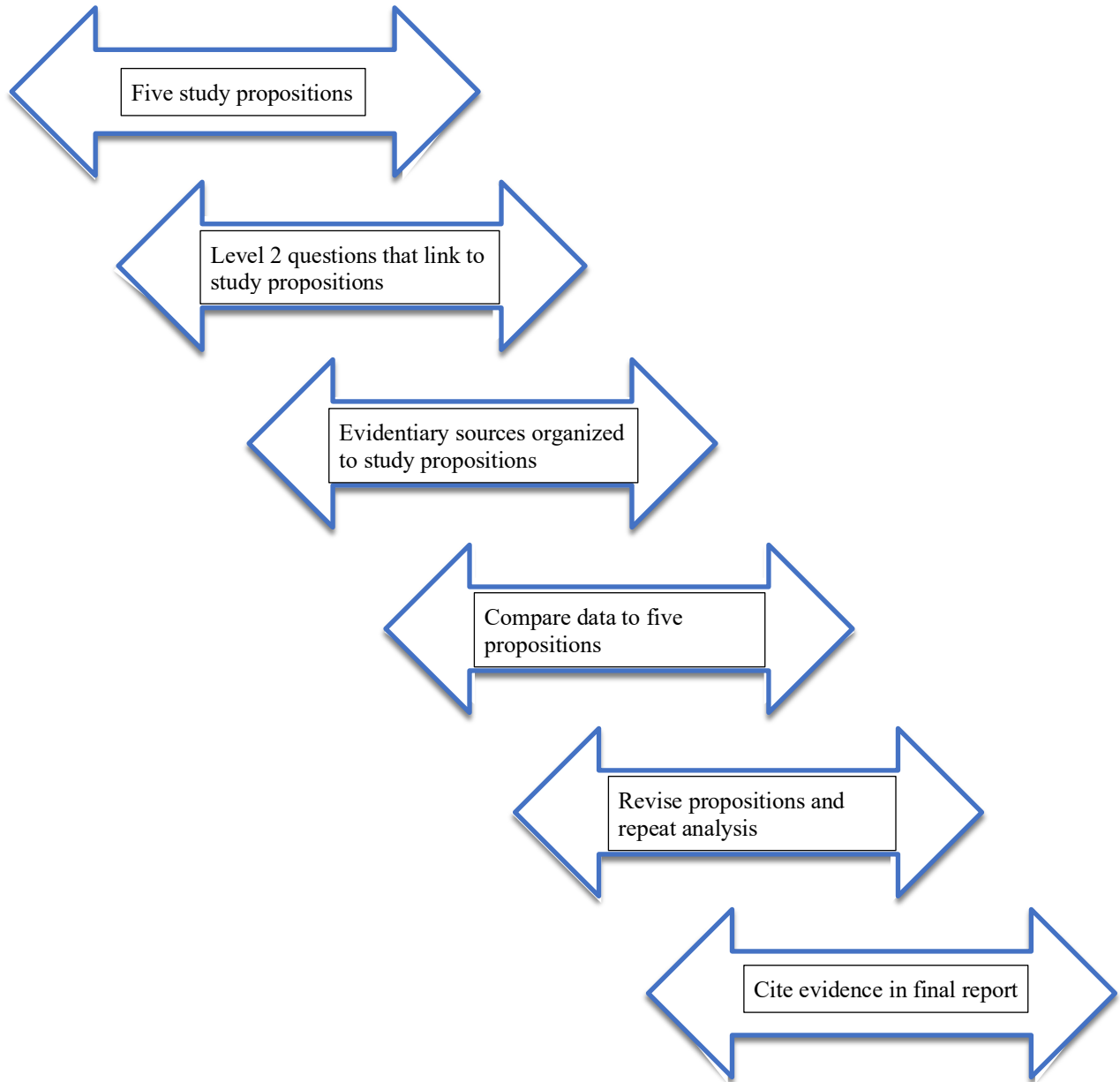


Figure 3. The chain of evidence for this study includes the five study propositions, Level 2 questions that link to the five study propositions, evidentiary sources organized to the five study propositions, data compared to the five study propositions and revised as needed (Yin, 2014). This process was continued until no additional revisions were needed.

Data Analysis

The complexity of this case study lends itself to an explanatory approach for data analysis, as during the analysis the researcher explained the findings regarding the five propositions (Yin, 2014). Throughout the analysis of the interviews, observations, and documentation, I kept the following four principles in mind: (a) attend to all the evidence collected in the study; (b) consider all possible rival explanations; (c) ensure the most significant portion of the case study is addressed; and (d) use own expertise in the subject matter, along with the theoretical framework, in the analysis (Yin, 2014).

I followed Yin's (2014) steps for explanation building and compare "the findings of [the] initial case against [each]...proposition, [then revise] the...proposition [and compare] other details of the case against the revision" (p. 149). This process was repeated until no further revisions were needed. All data collected was categorized and organized against these five propositions. This strategy was used to develop internal and external validity (Yin, 2014). Analyzing data in this iterative process allowed me to consider rival explanations. If rival explanations cannot be supported, this increases the validity of the findings (Yin, 2014). Yin broke down different types of rival explanations into two categories: craft and real-world. Craft rivals include investigator bias, and I continuously was aware of my own biases as described earlier in this chapter to counter this possibility. Real-world rivals may not surface until the data collection process, so throughout the data collection process I vigorously pursued possible rival explanations as they arose.

Field notes were handwritten notes taken during interviews, observations, and document analysis (Yin, 2014). These notes were converted to more formal notes each night and were transcribed and uploaded into the NVivo database on a weekly basis. As field notes were

uploaded into NVivo they were organized according to the five propositions. When field notes fell into more than one proposition, NVivo allowed for multiple categorization.

Documents analyzed in this case study also were uploaded to the NVivo database and organized according to the five propositions (Yin, 2014). Documents that were not received electronically were scanned using CamScanner software on my mobile phone and converted to a PDF file. When documents fell into more than one proposition, NVivo allowed for multiple categorization. I transcribed the interviews after most of the interviews were completed. These transcriptions were uploaded to the NVivo database (Yin, 2014) to prepare for coding. NVivo allows for a separate storage of transcripts which can be separate from documentation, and this was labeled accordingly.

Data coding. Throughout the coding process, I used Yin's (2014) explanation building strategy. When analyzing and coding interviews, observations, and documentation, I followed the chain of evidence described above. All evidentiary sources were input into a database (Yin, 2014) created in NVivo software and coded based on the original five study propositions. After the initial coding, I compared the findings against each study proposition. Based on these findings I revised the study proposition(s) as needed. After this revision, I again compared the findings against each revised study proposition. This iterative cycle continued until no additional revisions were needed.

Analytic Techniques

Yin (2014) suggested using the theoretical propositions in the study as analytic priorities. He also suggested writing memos about observations in the data. I employed both of these strategies and utilized the features of NVivo software and built a case study database. Additionally, I used Yin's (2014) explanation building strategy throughout the analysis. The

explanation building strategy was used to build an explanation about how and why Riverview is successful at transitioning transitional studies students to postsecondary coursework. Explanation building most often occurs in narrative form, which means precision cannot always be present. To off-set this lack of precision, this study used explanation building with the five theoretical propositions (Yin, 2014). As explained in the previous section, I compared the findings against each study proposition (Yin, 2014). Revisions were made to each proposition as needed, and a new comparison was made against the revised proposition. This process repeated until no more revisions were needed.

Throughout this iterative process the researcher runs the risk of moving away from the five theoretical propositions (Yin, 2014). To counter this possibility, I continuously referred back to the propositions and the Level 2 questions. Yin stated that unwanted bias may become part of the process as well and the researcher may not notice critical data. To off-set this possibility, I utilized “external colleagues as critical friends” to help keep the bias upfront, and to search for rival explanations (p. 150). Other safeguards that were utilized throughout the analysis was to follow the case study protocol to determine what data needs to be collected, and to follow the chain of evidence.

Criteria for Interpreting the Findings

Addressing rival explanations is a criterion for interpreting findings of this case study (Yin, 2014). This study has been designed to surface possible rival explanations. For example, I sought out faculty, staff, and students who have differing experiences and/or perspectives with the hopes that if a rival explanation is present it would surface. Additionally, I pursued rival explanations as they surfaced to determine the validity of possible different explanations. As Yin

(2014) stated, the findings will be stronger if more rival explanations have been considered and rejected.

Another criterion is using multiple sources of evidence to triangulate the data (Yin, 2014). Triangulation can occur in multiple ways, and this study will use data triangulation (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). Data triangulation occurs when multiple data sources are used to corroborate findings (Yin, 2014). When triangulation occurs, the findings of the study are supported by multiple sources of data. I interviewed faculty, students and staff until saturation occurred. In addition to the interviews, documentation was reviewed as a way to corroborate and re-check the data collected from interviews. Observations were another way to triangulate the data as I observed student-faculty and student-staff interactions. The data collected from these observations also corroborated the data received in the interviews. Both the analysis of documentation and observations were a way of checking to see if the perceptions shared in the interviews are supported (Yin, 2014). This triangulation strengthened the construct validity of the case.

A final criterion is being aware of researcher bias (Creswell, 2014). When potential rival explanations arose, I was sensitive and responsive to this contrary evidence and actively searched for corroborating evidence to support these alternative views. If no evidence was found to corroborate these alternative views, the original findings would be stronger (Yin, 2014). I practiced reflexivity throughout the study. Reflexivity is when “the inquirer reflects about how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences” may impact the analysis (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested asking oneself questions during the analysis to keep bias in check. Questions may be: “What might you be projecting onto the data based on your own beliefs and life experience?” and “How does your

positionality or social location affect what you see?” (p. 208). The narrative includes how my biases may have influenced the interpretations

Limitations

The following subsections describe the limitations of the present study. This bounds the study and the results. One delimitation of this study is it was conducted at a single institution that has a higher transition rate of transitional studies students to postsecondary courses than the State of Washington’s average. Additionally, this institution is a comprehensive community college which means both transfer and professional-technical courses are offered. Riverview College offers six levels of ELA, ranging from pre-literacy to high-advanced levels. This study did not investigate propositions relating to students with very low English proficiency skills and will only focus on ELA classes that are level three and higher. This single case study looked at an extreme case – in this case, extreme success – and results may differ when looking at an institution that is not as successful in transitioning ABE/ELA students to postsecondary coursework. The disadvantage of a single-case study versus a multi-case study is there may be “artifactual conditions surrounding the [single] case” which may result in skepticism about the researcher’s ability to complete empirical work (Yin, 2014, p. 64). If I had conducted a multi-case study, this skepticism may have dissipated (Yin, 2014). However, a multi-case study was outside of the scope of this study.

The results of this study may not be statistically generalizable (Yin, 2014). However, this case study may “shed empirical light about some theoretical concepts,” specifically regarding the five propositions in this study (p. 40). One goal of this study was to offer analytic generalizations that go beyond the specific case studied. These analytic generalizations were based on the corroborating evidence for the five propositions, or on the rejection of the propositions based on

the evidence. Additionally, generalizations have the potential to influence policy and future research.

Protection of Human Subjects

I obtained approval for conducting the study from Oregon State University's Institutional Research Board (IRB). Approval of the study required that I take the following steps to protect the participants: (a) explain to all participants the research study they are volunteering for, and informing participants they can withdraw at any time; (b) require all participants to sign a consent form (Appendix C); (c) keep interviews in a private location; (d) keep data confidential by storing electronic material in a cloud service that is password protected and locked up; (e) maintain data and the consent documents for three years post-study; and (f) keep data confidential by assigning pseudonyms to participants.

Summary

This qualitative, explanatory case study explored how a transitional studies department in a comprehensive community college in the State of Washington has been successful in transitioning students from their ABE/ESL programs into postsecondary coursework. The results of this case study have led to a better understanding of how institutional practices and support systems promote or hinder community college students' transition from basic skills to postsecondary coursework. Five propositions were identified and used to narrow the scope of the study. These propositions acted like a blueprint during the data collection and analysis and were used as criteria for the interpretation. This study employed the following principles of data collection: (1) collecting multiple sources of data; (2) creation of a study database; (3) maintain a chain of evidence. Multiple sources of data came in the form of interviews, document analysis, and observations. A study database was developed using NVivo software, and this database

contained both the raw data and researcher notes. Additionally, a chain of evidence was followed to increase the reliability of the results. Throughout the analysis, the data collected were compared to each proposition, and were revised as needed, then the data was compared against the revised propositions. This iterative process continued until no more revisions were needed. Throughout this process, I continuously looked for rival explanations and kept my own bias in check. Utilizing critical friends is one way I reduced the threat of unchecked biases.

I share findings from my study across the next two chapters.

Chapter 4: Case Description

This chapter provides a description of the transitional studies department at Riverview College as context for the analysis of my study propositions provided in Chapter 5. First, I discuss the structure of the department including aspects of broader institution where basic skills students, faculty, and staff interact. Next, I describe how the Transitional Studies classes are structured and examine course outcomes. Teaching practices and andragogy are then discussed including a brief explanation of the transition process from Transitional Studies to credit-level courses. In the final section, I describe the services and supports provided to students at Riverview College that are directly related to the study propositions (i.e., andragogy, curriculum, advising and career-services, financial support, academic supports, transfer culture).

Transitional Studies Department Pathways and Offerings

The goal of programs in the Transitional Studies (TS) Department at Riverside College is to help students develop a variety of skills related to writing, reading, technology, mathematics and critical thinking. Program offerings through the TS Department help students prepare for college level work in either a transfer degree, professional-technical degree or certificate, or for the workforce. The TS Department offers classes in the mornings and evenings on the main campus, and evening classes at different locations in the community. Riverview also has a satellite campus away from the main campus, but this satellite campus was not included in this study. Additionally, Riverview also serves incarcerated students, and those sites were also not included in this study.

Classes at Riverview are either continuous or closed enrollment. In classes that have closed enrollment students can only start during the first week of the term. Continuous enrolled classes mean that students can enter at any point during the term. Classes that are continuous

enrollment create its own set of challenges. James, ELA faculty, explained that students that enter late “often feel they never catch up...and feel disjointed.” This structure can sometimes “scare off” people if they come in a later week, especially in math. Bruce, CAP faculty, shared “in the past, continuous enrollment meant a new topic needed to start every week. This is when students would stay in Transitional Studies forever.” In response to this challenge, Bruce stated that the Transitional Studies department created some half-term classes so “students could start mid-way through.” Because the Transitional Studies department receives referrals (and funding) from outside agencies, and these agencies require that students begin classes immediately, the department still offers self-directed and self-paced classes (GED Preparation and Life Skills) to balance the need of immediate start versus effectively meeting the needs of students. The Transitional Studies Department includes a variety of programs and course offerings that in many cases have overlapping goals, students, and courses. The pathways and offerings are described below.

High School Diploma and GED Programs. The Transitional Studies Department at Riverside College offers several programs and supports to help students earn a high school diploma or GED. These programs include the Alternative Education Program⁵ (AEP), GED preparation courses, and the Adult High School Completion (HS+) Program. Students enrolled in AEP classes need to be between 16 and 21 years old and not enrolled in high school. Students are referred by their school district. The GED is a series of four tests that indicate a student has met high school academic levels, once they pass the tests (GED, 2019). High School + is a statewide, competency-based diploma program available to students who are 18 years or older (Washington State Board, 2018d). HS+ offers students an alternative instead of just working

⁵ The AEP program is not funded under Transitional Skills and was not included in this study.

towards their GED. Bruce believes that this alternative high school program has helped students reach their career and academic goals:

I think that if we wouldn't have been able to do what we've done [developing the HS21+ program], that we would have - I'd have just have classrooms of students that just were grinding, that were not making it anywhere. [Students would be saying] I'm just here to get my GED. That's kind of a depressing feeling rather than having all of these really wonderful choices [available for students like we do now].

Additionally, when students complete an AA, AS, AAS, or AAS-T degree, Riverview will issue a high school diploma to students who do not have a high school credential.

English Language Acquisition. The Transitional Studies Department also offers English Language Acquisition (ELA) courses for non-native English speakers to improve their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in English, along with learning technology skills while practicing English. Students must be an immigrant, refugee, permanent resident or U.S. citizen to take non-credit ELA classes. Non-native English speakers can take classes at Riverview for \$25.00 dollars per quarter. Non-native English students in Level 6 or higher can also enroll in pre-college classes.

There are two levels of ELA classes offered on campus: beginning and intermediate. ELA Beginning includes Levels 1, 2, 3; ELA Intermediate includes Levels 4, 5, 6. ELA classes are all continuous enrollment, meaning students can start at any time during the term. The beginning ELA classes utilize the Integrated Digital English Acceleration (I-DEA) framework, which is a flipped classroom. Students are expected to complete at least half of the work on their own before coming to class, following the flipped classroom design. Students are able to check out a computer for the term, as a computer is needed to complete the work. ELA classes that

meet in the evening and off-campus do not utilize this framework. Once students complete the ELA series of classes, students can continue to CAP classes to either work on a high school credential or prepare for college-level classes or the workforce.

Career and Academic Preparation. The third type of program offered by the Transitional Studies Department are Career and Academic Preparation (CAP) courses designed to help build students' skills in math, reading, writing and computers and to prepare them to transition to vocational or academic transfer programs. CAP classes include the following: HS+, Life Skills, Independent Study, GED Preparation. The Life Skills, Independent Study, and GED classes are continuous enrollment. The other offerings are either half-term (each course running for five weeks) or closed enrollment, meaning students must start the class at the beginning of the term. CAP classes are offered in the mornings and evenings on campus. CAP classes are utilized for students working on GED preparation, HS +, or planning on working towards a degree or certificate. Once students finish the CAP classes, and/or earn their high school credential, they can transition to college-level classes or Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) classes.

I-BEST. Unlike the other program offerings in the Transitional Studies Department, the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program is designed for students to develop skills while concurrently enrolled in college-level vocational or transfer degree programs. There are six non-credit professional-technical I-BEST offerings that are typical of most comprehensive colleges in the Pacific Northwest. These courses are team taught by a college-level course instructor and a transitional studies instructor. I-BEST programs are designed to serve students enrolled in pre-college or transitional studies courses, as the skills needed to be successful in the program are contextualized into the content of the particular

certificate. Currently at Riverview, students must complete the CAP classes before they enter into an I-BEST program. This requirement is not how a typical I-BEST program works, and at the time of this study, the dean was aware of this and planned to work toward changing this requirement.

Transitional Studies Faculty and Staff

The Transitional Studies Department at Riverview College employs seven full-time faculty and twenty-three adjunct faculty. Faculty teach a range of classes from English Language Acquisition (ELA) to GED and GED prep to high school completion. Most classes are offered on their main campus, but Riverview also has a branch campus in another town approximately one hundred miles away. This branch campus offers approximately 25 percent of the total course offerings each term. Most faculty teach at one location, but four of the adjunct faculty teach at both locations. This study only examined the main campus.

On Riverview's main campus, the Dean of Transitional Studies oversees the department and reports to the Executive Vice President. The Transitional Studies (TS) Department on the main campus is comprised of three full-time faculty members, one full-time navigator, four full-time support staff, and a number of adjunct faculty (the number of adjunct faculty vary from quarter to quarter, depending on enrollment and course offerings). The TS Department has space in one of the main buildings on Riverview's campus. This space includes dedicated classrooms for TS classes, a separate area for intake and advising, faculty and dean offices, and a shared faculty lounge and copy area.

The three full-time faculty in the Transitional Studies Department were participants in this study including a tenured faculty in ELA and two tenured faculty in CAP (Table 1). Pseudonyms were used for all participants to protect their identity. These faculty brought a

variety of experience to the department and were chosen for the study because of their availability and because they were the full-time faculty in the program with the most experience at the time of the study. Bruce, who teaches in the CAP program, has been teaching for about 15 years, with six years at Riverview. Shelly, also CAP faculty, has been teaching for more than 18 years, but only four years at Riverview. James has been teaching for 12 years, all for Riverview in the ELA program.

Kim represents a voice of the support staff in my study (Table 1). She has been at Riverview for 11 years and her role is assisting with intake for all new students (placement testing and paperwork) and data entry for the department. In the past year, a navigator position was added. The navigator, Maria, is the newest member of the TS Department. Maria started as an adjunct teacher in 2018 at Riverview and transitioned into a part-time navigator role in January of 2019. The role of the navigator is to help students navigate the system at Riverview, starting with the Transitional Studies Department. The navigator helps students develop an educational plan and connects students to resources to help them be successful with their education. This position is now full-time. Even though Maria's time at Riverview is short, she taught for many years at multiple different colleges in the state, all in high school completion and transitional studies. Beth, the dean, has been at Riverview for over 11 years. For about eight months prior to this study, Beth was the Interim Dean of Transitional Studies, and at the time of the study she was in her official capacity as dean for two months.

Table 1

Participants

Name	Role	Gender	Race
Bruce	CAP Faculty (full-time)	Male	Caucasian
Shelly	CAP Faculty (full-time)	Female	Caucasian
James	CAP Faculty (full-time)	Male	Caucasian
Kim	Support Staff (full-time)	Female	Latinx
Maria	Navigator (part-time)	Female	Caucasian
Beth	Dean of Transitional Studies	Female	Caucasian
Sofia	CAP Student	Female	Latinx
Adele	Past ELA Student and Current CAP Student	Female	Latinx

Transitional Studies Students

Riverside College served more than 8,300 students, with just under 2,000 students in Transitional Studies during the 2018-19 academic year (Washington State Board, *Enrollment Data*, 2019). The age demographic appears to be similar between transitional studies students and the rest of the college, with the largest differences in the less than 20 years and 30-39 categories (Table 2).

Table 2

Comparison of Age Demographics Between Entire College and Transitional Studies

Age range	Entire College	TS Students
< 20	18%	10%
20-24	18%	19%
25 – 29	13%	17%
30-39	22%	29%
> 40	24%	24%

The race/ethnicity of students is slightly different for transitional studies students than the entire campus and it is important to note that students of color are overrepresented in the Transitional Studies program. For the campus, the majority of students identify as White (52%), whereas students of Color represent 63 percent of the Transitional Studies population (Washington State Board, Enrollment Data, 2019). Sofia and Adele were the two student participants in this study (Table 1). Sofia began in the CAP program and was in her last quarter before transitioning into the criminal justice program. She earned her high school diploma at the end of spring quarter. Sofia shared that she identifies as Mexican. She had dropped out of high school. She has young children and wanted to wait until her children were all in school before going back to school for herself. Sofia's husband encouraged her to work towards her high school diploma at Riverview. Adele began her time at Riverview in the ELA program. She confessed when she first started her only goal was to learn enough English so she could help her children in school. Adele shared that her teachers at Riverview encouraged and motivated her to

continue towards her high school diploma through the HS+ program, and she was taking classes for her high school diploma at the time of the interview.

Teaching Practices and Andragogy

This section describes what I observed regarding teaching practices and andragogy in the Transitional Studies Department. I observed three classes: Bruce's CAP Contemporary World Problems, Shelly's CAP Math II, and James' beginning ELA class. Each teacher used different teaching practices and they each structured their class differently.

Eight students were in attendance in the Contemporary World Problems course that I observed. The class took place in a computer lab that is dedicated to the TS Department. During the first 15 minutes of class, anytime Bruce asked a question, the same four students responded. During the rest of the class, more students began to participate; all students appeared to be engaged in the lesson throughout the observation. During my interview with Sofia, a CAP student, she shared that if a student doesn't want to be called on in class, they can email their teachers and let them know this ahead of time.

The instructor appeared to use culturally responsive pedagogy, as discussed in Chapter 2, throughout the class. The topic of class that day was climate justice. Bruce asked students to discuss issues that students face that relate to climate justice. Students called out "wildfires", "plastic straws", and "plastic bags". One element of culturally responsive pedagogy is asking students to share what issues they face outside of class and is a way to "bridge...meaningfulness between home and school experiences" (Gay, p. 29, 2000). Additionally, Bruce started the discussion by asking students what "climate justice" means to them, and also shared a personal story related to the topic. He included a video on the topic and ensured the video had captions. This video was posted to the online classroom and Bruce reminded students they could re-watch

it if they wanted to. According to Gay (2000), culturally responsive pedagogy utilizes a variety of instructional strategies, which Bruce exhibited in his teaching.

I did not observe inequities of power or gender in the classroom. Bruce actively worked to lessen the dominate power of the teacher by continuously engaging students in the discussion on climate justice. He did not offer judgment in responses but instead answered with “hmm” or “sure” or repeated back what was shared. Bruce made time for all responses and did not appear to call on the one male student any more often than the female students (aside from the vast difference in the female to male student ratio). He also made sure students had the resources they needed to be successful with the task.

In Shelly’s CAP mathematics class that I observed there were seven students present. This class took place in a different computer lab dedicated space for the TS Department. Shelly started the class with a brief reminder of what they covered in the last class. She solved an equation on the board and then asked students why they should graph the results. No one answered, so she asked again. One student called out an answer. Shelly then asked how to find the x and the y intercept and again, no one answered. She reminded students this would definitely be on the test, and then one student answered. Shelly corrected that answer and then this same student said she had a question on the homework. Shelly copied the question on the board and proceeded to work out the answer. She would periodically ask a question, and when no one answered, she would answer it herself. This routine continued for the rest of the observation (ie., Shelly asking a question and usually answering it herself). There were limited interactions between students.

Throughout the observation, I did not notice Shelly making any attempts to connect the math topics to students’ lives, or to the next level of math. She did ask students how they could

get help at home. When no one answered, she reminded them of an online program that was available to them. I also did not observe much variety in instructional strategies. Shelly often asked why or how something was to be done, but usually no one answered except herself. I did not observe any culturally responsive pedagogy being used in this class.

The math class was teacher centered and students did not appear to be interested or engaged in the topic. There were no opportunities for students to engage with one another during the observation. Shelly did use language that indicated she was trying to develop a “team” effort with her and her students. Some phrases she said were: “it’s often easier on our brains to divide by 2 instead of 3” and “that was a good question – I’m glad you brought that up” and “remember our classroom definition is a little different than the book’s definition.” However, when Shelly did ask questions, she would wait one or two seconds and then answer the question herself.

James’ beginning ELA class includes students in ELA A and ELA B. ELA A includes students who are in Beginning Literacy, and may not have any skills in reading, writing, speaking, or listening in English. ELA B is the next level and considered Beginning Advanced. There were six students in class and took place in a dedicated ELA classroom. The classroom had six tables with students sitting at three tables, all in the front of the classroom. There were many resources posted around the room such as a poster (in English and Spanish) on the Keys to Success, all of the ELA outcomes (for both levels), and emergency procedures. There was also an area with drinks and snacks that students had brought to share which speaks to the climate of the class.

Students were preparing for their final presentation and the instructor, James, was reviewing expectations. When James would ask a question, many students called out answers. I did not observe any inequities in who was speaking, as students called out answers or asked

questions as they had them. There did not appear to only one or two students that dominated the call and response, as all students at one point called out an answer or asked a question. It appeared students listened to each other and to the teacher because as one person would speak, most students directed their gaze to that person. Students worked in pairs to finalize their presentations and to help each other when needed. James utilized a variety of instructional strategies during the observation, which is one element of culturally responsive pedagogy. Students chose their own topic for the presentation, which gives students more autonomy over their learning. James provided opportunity for students to be in charge of their learning as they each chose their topic for the presentation and determined what they needed to work on to prepare for the final presentation. James facilitated the learning so students could take ownership, which creates a more equitable balance in the class.

Curriculum and Outcomes

This section describes the course offerings and program outcomes for ELA and CAP programs and compares the alignment between ELA/CAP English and math outcomes to credit English and math outcomes. Published course outcomes and syllabi were used to develop this section. The stated outcomes of the Transitional Studies department are to prepare students for entry into college level coursework, including vocational-technical programs, or the workforce. Specifically, the CAP and ELA programs offer a variety of courses that are designed to increase basic skills (reading, writing, communication, critical thinking, mathematics, and technology) to prepare students to enter college-level programs or the workforce. There are three CAP mathematics (MATH) courses (i.e., basic math, applied math, and integrated Algebra and Geometry). In comparison, the developmental math sequence has four classes including Number Sense, Pre-Algebra, Elementary Algebra and Topics in Intermediate Algebra. These courses

make up the developmental education math sequence. The Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO) for mathematics in the CAP program for the most part align with the ILOs for pre-college mathematics up through MATH 071. Only one ILO from MATH 075 align, and no outcomes from MATH 078 align with CAP math classes. Sample outcomes from both programs are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Comparison of Intended Learning Outcomes Between Transitional Studies Mathematics Courses and Pre-College Mathematics Courses.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO): CAP Program	Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO): MATH Program
Read, write, and compare benchmark fractions. Use mixed, improper, and equivalent fractions. Add and subtract fractions with like and unlike denominators. Multiply and divide fractions. Apply these to real life applications (CAP 013). Read, write, and compare benchmark fractions. Add, subtract, multiply, and divide fractions, and apply to real life applications (CAP 014).	Students will be able to perform basic computations including order of operations exercises on whole numbers, integers, fractions and decimals without the use of a calculator (MATH 040).
Accurately measure using both the standard and metric systems and make simple conversion within and between systems as applicable to contextualized themes (CAP 013 and CAP 014).	Convert measurements from one set of units to another when given conversion factors (MATH 071).
Convert fractions to decimals and percentiles, and use percentiles in a contextualized setting including tax, tip, interest, banking, paychecks, commission, and percent change (CAP 014).	Convert between percentiles, decimals, and fractions (MATH 071).
Translate statements written in English into algebraic expressions or equations (CAP 017)	Translate between simple word phrases and mathematical notation (MATH 071).
Solve linear equations (single-step to four-step) and inequalities using a vertical format (CAP 017).	Solve one-variable linear equations. Use one-variable linear inequalities (MATH 071).

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO): CAP Program	Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO): MATH Program
Create linear graphs given an equation or data points (CAP 017).	Graph linear [and quadratic equations] (MATH 075)

The course syllabus for CAP 014, Math II, does not state the published ILOs for the course. What I found was a blend of ILOs from both the CAP and the developmental college math outcomes. There were 20 ILOs on the CAP 014 Math II class, but only two ILOs were from CAP 014. Five ILOs were from CAP 017, and the remaining 13 were directly from published developmental math ILOs. It appears that the TS Department has unofficially aligned their CAP 014 Math with the developmental math sequence but have not gone through the steps of getting the official ILOs changed.

The Transitional Studies Department also offers six classes in ELA and CAP that address communication, either reading, writing, or oral communication skills (e.g., Integrated Skills, Reading Improvement, Writing Essentials). In contrast, the pre-college English sequence has two classes (i.e., Writing Essentials and Basic Expository Writing). Outcomes for CAP Language Arts, ELA Writing, and pre-college English classes share some alignment. Since students complete ELA and CAP courses before enrolling in credit classes, I compared higher level ELA and CAP classes with pre-college and college-level English classes. Sample outcomes from these programs are listed in Table 4. All of the ILOs for ELA 088 were aligned with ENGL 087 and ENGL 097 only has one outcome that is not shared with ELA 088: analyze rhetorical structure in college-level texts. Some faculty teach in both Transitional Studies and credit English and this may explain the collaboration in aligning the course outcomes. English is the only discipline where faculty teach in both departments. The other observation to make regarding courses is that ELA 088 (Writing Essentials) is not offered every term. The last two times it was offered, the

published outcomes for ELA 088 were not listed on the syllabus; instead, the outcomes for ELA 087 (Reading Improvement) were listed. Additionally, the syllabus for ELA 087 listed the outcomes for ENGL 087. CAP 025 is offered each quarter but I only found outcomes on syllabi when a full-time faculty member taught the class over a year ago. The outcomes on this syllabus matched the ILOs of CAP 025.

Table 4

Comparison of Intended Learning Outcomes Between Transitional Studies ELA Writing and Reading Courses, and CAP Language Arts Courses and Pre-College English Courses.

Intended Learning Outcomes – ELA and CAP Program	Intended Learning Outcomes – ENGL Program
Deploy strategies to plan, organize, and structure complex ideas to produce a legible and comprehensible draft (CAP 025).	Apply writing process concepts (ENGL 087 and ENGL 097).
Create organized, unified, coherent and well-developed paragraphs and short essays (ELA 088).	Create organized, unified, coherent and well-developed paragraphs and short essays (ENGL 087 and ENGL 097).
Demonstrate clarity in writing through good grammar, punctuation, spelling, and manuscript skills in paragraphs (ELA 088).	Demonstrate clarity in writing through good grammar, punctuation, spelling, and manuscript skills in paragraphs (ENGL 087 and ENGL 097).
Use academic writing style in voice, wording, and sentence construction (ELA 088).	Use academic writing style in voice, wording, and sentence construction (ENGL 087 and ENGL 097).
Use basic information literacy skills, researching outside sources, and avoiding plagiarism (ELA 088).	Use information literacy skills, [including writing summaries], researching outside sources, and avoiding plagiarism (ENGL 087 and 097 – section in brackets only in ENGL 097).

In the 2017-2018 academic year, 26 percent of TS students completed at least six college credits, which is close to twice the state average of 14 percent (Washington State Board, Credentials Awarded, 2020). Typically, students who have completed at least six college credits have transitioned to postsecondary coursework. Looking at high school credentials earned, two percent of students completed a high school diploma or equivalent during the same academic

year at Riverview, compared to six percent statewide. Data disaggregated by race/ethnicity shows three percent of students of Color at Riverview earned high school credentials compared to one percent of White students. Statewide percentages show White students earn more high school credentials (nine percent) than students of Color (six percent).

Data disaggregated by gender surfaces some differences as well. At Riverview, one percent of male and four percent of female students earned high school credentials, compared to six percent of male and female students statewide. However, statewide there were a little more than 20% more female than male students (15,334 and 12,553 respectively) and one could expect more female students to earn credentials (see Table 5). Data disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender shows that at Riverview, one percent of male and four percent of female students of Color earned high school credentials compared to less than one percent of White males and two percent of White females. Statewide, five percent of male and four percent of female students of Color earned high school credentials, compared to 10% of White males and eight percent of White females (see Table 6). Overall, the programming at Riverview appears to be serving students of Color more effectively than the statewide average, though both the state and the college are less effective with students of Color than their White counterparts.

Table 5

Percentage of students statewide who began in transitional studies who are federally reportable and who earned a short certificate in the 2017-18 academic year.

	White students (n = 8901)	Students of color (n = 18,986)	Row Total
Female (n = 15,334)	5% (n = 249)	2% (n = 244)	3% (n = 493)
Male (n = 12,553)	5% (n = 203)	2% (n = 179)	3% (n = 382)
Column Total (n = 27,887)	5% (n = 452)	2% (n = 423)	3% (n = 875)

Table 6

Percentage of students at Riverview who began in transitional studies who are federally reportable who earned a certificate in the 2017-18 academic year.

	White students (<i>n</i> = 148)	Students of color (<i>n</i> = 337)	Row Total
Female (<i>n</i> = 234)	16% (<i>n</i> = 14)	9% (<i>n</i> = 13)	12% (<i>n</i> = 27)
Male (<i>n</i> = 251)	7% (<i>n</i> = 4)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	2% (<i>n</i> = 4)
Column Total (<i>n</i> = 485)	12% (<i>n</i> = 18)	4% (<i>n</i> = 13)	6% (<i>n</i> = 31)

Nine percent of students at Riverview who began in the CAP program completed a short certificate (45 credits or less) in 2017-18, as compared to six percent statewide. Students who began in ELA have slightly lower completion rates, with two percent of students completing a short certificate at Riverview, compared to one percent statewide. Breaking these data down by race/ethnicity shows the percentage of students of color are behind White students at Riverview: four percent of students of color completed a short certificate, compared to 12% of White students. Similar results statewide with two percent of students of color completed a short certificate, compared to five percent of White students. Disaggregating by gender reveals 12% of female and two percent of male students at Riverview completed a short-term certificate. Statewide, three percent of both males and females completed a short-term certificate.

Breaking gender down by race/ethnicity illuminates other differences. At Riverview 16% of White females and seven percent of white males completed a certificate, compared to nine percent of non-White women and less than one percent of non-White males. These statistics are similar when compared with the statewide data that show five percent of White females and males and two percent of females and non-White males earned a short certificate. What makes these numbers even more alarming is the proportional differences between these groups. At

Riverview, students of Color make up approximately 69% of the population, yet only four percent completed a short-term certificate (Figure 4). White students make up approximately 31% of the population and 12% of students completed a short-term certificate. Statewide data almost exactly match these figures with White students making up approximately 32% of the population and students of color are about 68% of the population (Figure 5). However, White students have a higher completion rate of short-term certificates.

Figure 4. Students of Color and White Students at Riverview

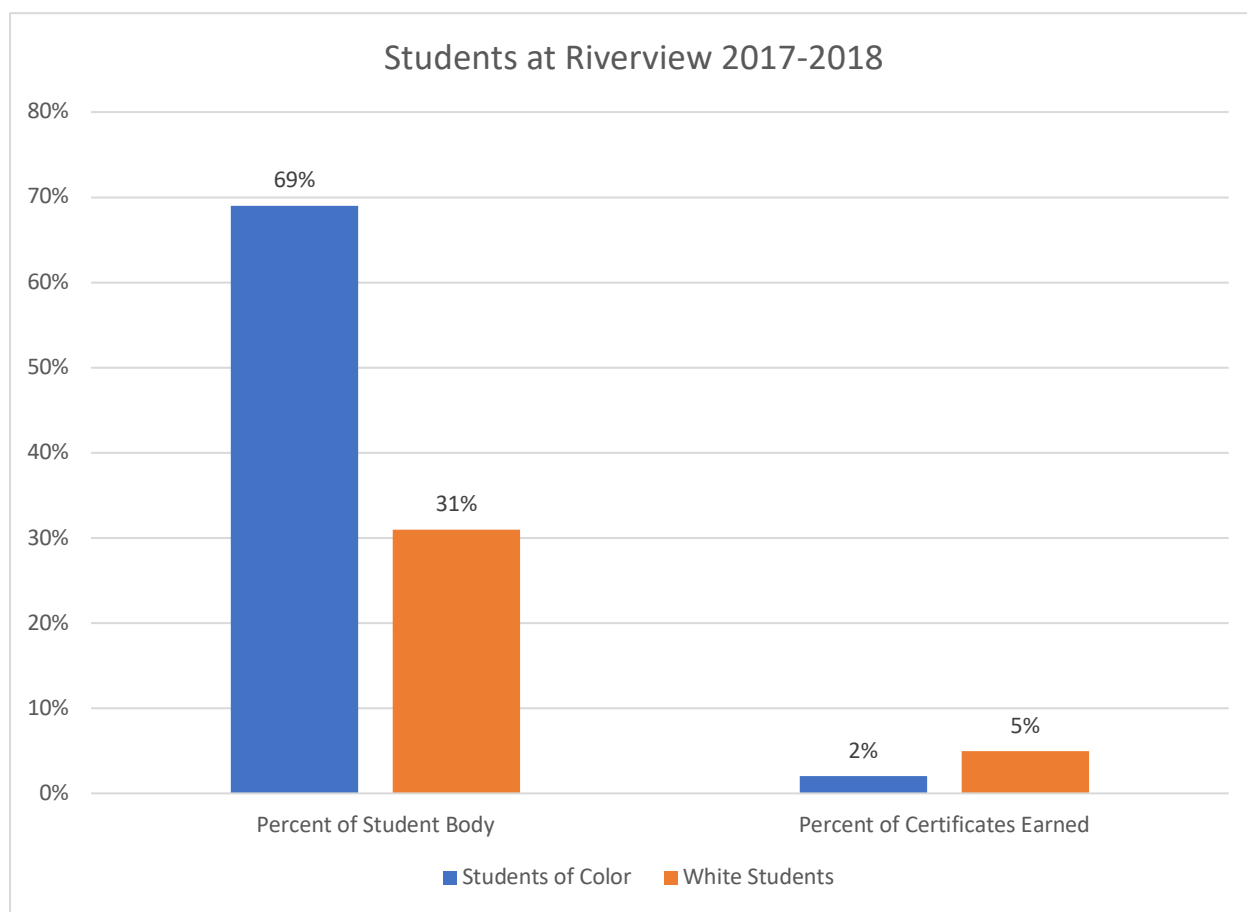
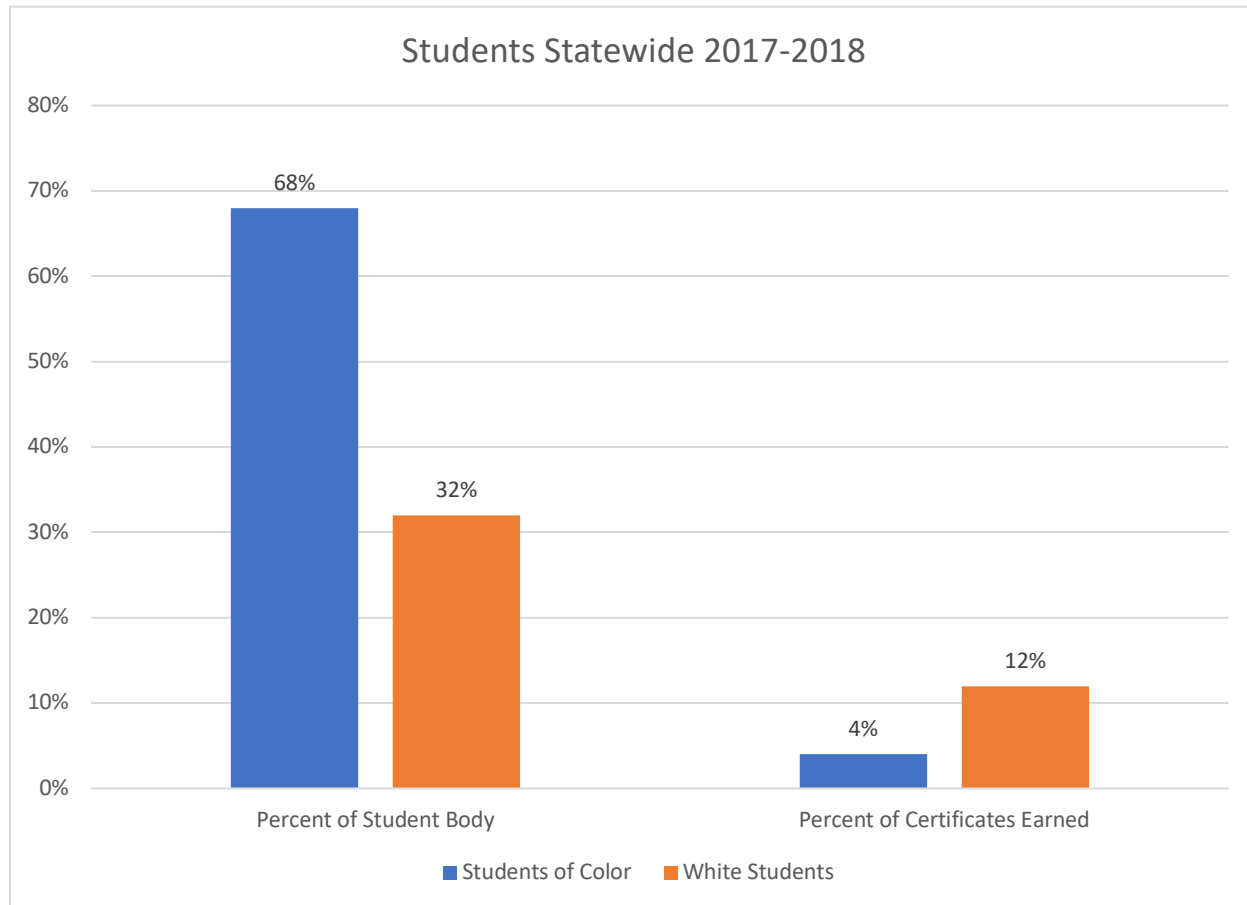


Figure 5. Students of Color and White Students Statewide



Student Supports Related to Transfer

This final section describes the supports and services that are provided to students in transferring to credit-level courses including: (a) advising and career-development services, (b) financial supports, (c) academic and support systems, and (d) transitions practices and culture. These details are intended to provide context for understanding the analysis of the study propositions in Chapter 5.

Advising and career-development services. When a student walks into the main building of Riverview campus, they will find the Transitional Studies Department has a visible presence as one of the main buildings on campus. This building also houses registration, financial aid, technology services, cafeteria, library, and tutoring center. In one end of this

building there is a dedicated area for Career & Academic Preparation services. This area offers tables and chairs along with multiple bulletin boards with information about programs and celebration of students. See Appendix E for pictures. Next to this area are offices for the support staff, navigator, and the full-time ELA faculty member. Students can walk into this office and receive information on programs or set up an advising appointment with the navigator.

Riverview has been working on streamlining their new student intake process. Beth shared that “a year ago, [the intake process] was very long and arduous...we’re really working on streamlining it, getting it...very user-friendly, less student points of contact.” Students are tested and registered for classes on the same day, and they also create an educational plan with the navigator. The navigator believes it’s her job to make things easier for new students:

I think it’s important to be almost overly friendly in some ways...sometimes, often, you’ll have a student come in who’s pretty nervous, and they don’t know where to start. [I] try to present things as this is going to be easy because I will try to do all of this extra work to support you, and you just need to enter class.

Kim, a front-line staff member, tries “to be inviting...I try to listen where [students] are...or be encouraging because they walk in here saying they don’t know anything.” Kim describes to students that the placement assessment is a tool to know where students’ skills are at. She tries to reassure students they don’t need to be nervous: “it’s nothing to be stressed about to do the assessment – we want them to show us where they belong. It’s not a test; it’s not right or wrong.”

During intake for new students, the navigator helps with career planning and goal setting. New students are given a Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) placement test to determine what level of ELA or CAP classes students can take. An intake form is completed for each new student, which includes an educational plan, and this form is stored

electronically so all CAP and ELA faculty and staff have access to the form. For CAP students, this plan has a more defined timeline, as the navigator can plug in classes that are needed for completion. For ELA students, goals are set but a timeline is not, as the navigator acknowledges language acquisition takes time. When an ELA student is about ready to transition into CAP classes, the student either meets with their faculty advisor or the navigator to finalize their educational plan.

ELA students must achieve a certain score on the CASAS test before they are eligible to enroll in CAP courses. Once students complete the series of four CAP English classes, they are eligible to go directly into college level English without taking another placement test. Riverview is working with credit math faculty to develop a similar articulation agreement with college level math. At the time of this study, ELA and CAP students were required to take the college-wide math placement test before enrolling in tuition-bearing math classes, regardless of what CAP math courses they completed.

At Riverview, faculty and the navigator both provide advising support to students. However, CAP and ELA faculty are new to advising, even though it is part of the faculty contract. All CAP and ELA faculty participated in an advising training during the academic year of this study and currently participate in the campus-wide advising day each quarter. Shelly, CAP Faculty, stated, “we just started [advising] in the last year, basically, doing more advising for our students, where I wasn’t doing that as much during the last few years because we had specific people for that job.”

Faculty advisors refer to the educational plans that are created during in-take and advise students during their tenure in the CAP or ELA programs. Bruce, CAP faculty, stated:

So, in the advising model that we currently have, [my colleague] and I do faculty advising. But [the navigator] is our bookend advising. [The navigator] does the intake and the exit, and [we] do everything in between. So, for all those students who need to continue [in] summer quarter, they've all come to me to get registered. We do mid-term advising for all of our students and all of those students come in and we do one-on-one about their progress and those types of things. So [my colleagues] and I just become more of that support advising.

Shelly explained, "I do meet with my set advisee students each term, making sure we're building a plan for them. And that way, when they are getting out, they have that plan in place to make those steps forward." There appears to be conflicting information about who and when the educational plans are created. Bruce stated this about educational plans (ed plans): "Ed plans are being done from day one, so it's here's your ed plan." The navigator corroborated Bruce's information by sharing this information about educational plans:

I pull up the ed plan for the student and put in this is what you're going to take this quarter, this is what we're going to plan for the next couple of quarters... Sometimes the first quarter is we're just going to get started, and then do a longer ed plan once you decide what you're going to do.

The navigator appears to be the one who initiates the educational plan and the faculty modify this plan when needed. Part of this educational plan includes advising students to their next steps and making a pathway to get to the students' goal. This becomes a team effort, with faculty and the navigator working together to support the students. Bruce explained:

All...of us are working with these students to get them to the next step. I have started earlier talking about what do you want to do, what's your goal, what are

your aspirations, what are your passions? And really trying to get students to see how the different things they are doing can translate into careers for them. And really talking about careers and not jobs, and future planning.

Advising is new to faculty and they appear to rely heavily on the navigator. Bruce and Shelly both advise some of the same students and it was not clear if students are assigned a specific advisor. Both stated that they advise all of their students. Since they rely on the educational plan developed with the navigator, faculty advisors make any notes or changes on this plan.

While faculty are supposed to advise students, most of the advising in the TS Department appears to be done by the navigator. The two full-time CAP faculty advise their students, but data from interviews revealed the full-time ELA faculty does not seem to spend as much time advising students. James, ELA faculty, shares opportunities that he feels are in reach for his students, such as Certified Nursing Assistant or the phlebotomy program “that is reachable for [my students].”

Financial supports. All new students are required to meet with the navigator to get registered for classes. Part of the intake process includes a WorkForce Education Services (WES) survey to determine what financial resources are needed and available for the student. WES provides support with funding through a variety of programs: Basic Food Employment & Training (BFET), Perkins, WISE Grant, Worker Retraining, and WorkFirst. WES also supports students in career exploration and educational planning, along with one-on-one tutoring on a case by case basis. Transitional studies students get connected with WES through the new student orientation for ELA and CAP classes. Bruce, a CAP faculty, shared that students complete a survey during intake and then that survey goes directly to WES. WES connects with all students

who qualify for their financial supports. WES funding can help students with childcare and transportation and cover the \$25-dollar fee for classes.

There does not appear to be any type of workshops provided to students about how to find or apply for scholarships, grants, federal and state financial aid, or loans. Undocumented students who do not qualify for federal financial aid may be eligible for the Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA). Limited information is available on Riverview's website about WASFA. WES offers financial support and may assist students with filling out FAFSA or WASFA. To receive support with either of these applications, or for help securing other funding, students need to reach out to a WES navigator for assistance.

TS Department faculty sometimes share financial and ancillary information with students. For example, Bruce mentioned that he talks directly with students about funding: “[at] the beginning of class I talk about WES services; do you qualify.” Shelly, CAP faculty, is still learning about funding options for students but realizes it's not a clear task. When asked about financial support for students, she replied, “There are more rules and things, but there are a lot of programs for students. I personally am learning more about those as I've started advising more.” James, ELA faculty, stated that his students are at least a year out from being able to utilize any scholarship money, so he does not share any scholarship opportunities with his students.

The Transitional Studies Department is working to create alternative funding opportunities for students. For instance, one funding opportunity is creating ways for CAP students to take developmental courses for the same reduced amount that is charged for Transitional Studies classes. Since the CAP math outcomes are aligned with developmental math courses, the Transitional Studies department is working towards allowing CAP students take

these credit math classes for the same fee as a regular CAP class (which is \$25.00). Shelly, CAP faculty, explained:

I think that's a great way to get students into our program, and to let students know they have an option of not paying full price for some classes. So then, if we can get those articulation agreements built, it will make it easier for students to transition through [CAP] classes then.

Faculty and staff are also working towards making Ability to Benefit (AtB) benefits available for students. AtB is part of the Higher Education Act and states that students without a high school diploma or equivalent can qualify for federal financial aid after they successfully complete six college credits (Washington State Board, 2019). CAP faculty Bruce states, "[W]e're really working hard to get Ability to Benefit on campus and started [next] term." Shelly adds more detail about the reasons why Ability to Benefit is important for Transitional Studies students:

They have what's called Ability to Benefit. So, if a student has at least six credits from the college, then they can start applying for financial aid, even if they don't have their credential yet. And so that's one thing we've really tried to make sure [that students] have options. [We] identify some classes they can do those six credits...that will count as a college level class...before they graduate from our [Transitional Studies] program.

Beth, TS Dean, shared that during intake, students complete their ed plan and share their goals, "and then we figure out if they need to apply for financial aid, if they need to apply for WAFSA, if we want to try to get them into Ability to Benefit."

WES runs a foodbank for Riverview students. Bruce shared, “We also have a foodbank on campus that is...ran by WES for all of our students. So, we also take care of food insecurities.” James, ELA faculty, didn’t state that he provided foodbank information to his students, but he did mention that one unit in his curriculum helps students navigate their community, and this unit includes information “about different food banks in town.” The two students interviewed did not mention using the foodbank on campus and did not volunteer any information about this resource.

Academic and support systems. The Transitional Studies Department has their own dedicated computer lab which doubles as a department tutoring center. Both faculty and students who participated in this study explained that students use the computer lab when they need help with their assignments. The lab is located on the first floor of the wing of the main building where other CAP/ELA classes and offices are located. This computer lab is staffed daily with TS Department faculty until early in the afternoon. Only department funds are put towards staffing this computer lab, unlike the college-wide computer lab and tutoring center which has an annual budget for its services. Faculty and staff encourage students to utilize this support service and I did not observe faculty, staff, or students exhibit any negative connotation or deficit language around using this support service.

Students are encouraged to go to this computer lab to do homework or to get additional help. Students can either work on the computer, or to receive help with their homework. James, ELA faculty, shared, “[Students] can go downstairs and get help in the lab with...the intermediate [ELA] level teacher.” Bruce, CAP faculty, confirmed this, stating that students have access to “all the computer labs.”

Transitional Studies students also have access to a college-wide tutoring center. The tutoring center is staffed until 6:00pm Monday – Thursday, and until 5:30pm on Fridays. TS students appeared to be more aware of the TS computer lab than the college’s Tutoring Center. When I asked Sofia if she has used the Tutoring Center, she replied no, and added, “I’ve used actually the computer area where you do homework.” Adele, ELA student, stated she used the tutoring center but when clarifying I discovered she utilized the TS Department’s computer lab. Additionally, James, ELA faculty, stated that he “provide[s] the support [students] need to do their homework, so I don’t feel like they’ve needed [the tutoring center].”

Riverview has a library that is open to all students. James takes his students to the library at the start of the quarter to help them get a library card and learn how to borrow a book. He states that his students have not “found books that are appropriate for their level.” Both of the CAP faculty mentioned the library just briefly when asked about academic and support services available to students. Bruce stated that all of the services, such as the library, are available to TS students, but that this has not always been the case. He said, “we really want them to feel like college students.” Adele stated that she used “the library for books” but didn’t provide more detail about the type of book(s) she used. Sofia shared that she has never used the library on campus.

Neither the TS computer lab nor the college-wide tutoring center offer support for evening students. The library is open from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm Mondays through Thursdays and from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm on Fridays. The foodbank has very limited hours and is only open during the day. The childcare center on campus is also only available during the day. As Beth, TS Dean, stated, “unless you’re on campus from 8 am-5 pm, a lot of those services are not available. So, if your instructor is not available, there’s not really a lot of options for you.”

Transitions practices and processes. This final section describes the processes by which students are able to transition from the TS department to credit-bearing classes as well as practices that were observed related to transitioning to college-level courses. All new students are given a CASAS placement test for initial placement into ELA and CAP classes before meeting with the navigator. CASAS tests are standardized tests used to assess basic and academic skills and are mandated by the state's governing board. After this initial placement, students meet with the navigator and create an educational plan. This plan individualizes each students' journey to postsecondary coursework. Riverview does not have any type of graphic that illustrates the ways of transitioning to postsecondary coursework, perhaps because each path is so individualized.

Generally speaking, students who begin in the first levels of ELA need to continue to at least the intermediate level of ELA before transitioning to something else. One option available to intermediate ELA students is to enroll in CAP classes in addition to their ELA classes. Placement from ELA to CAP classes is based on CASAS test scores. Two certificate programs allow students without high school credentials into their programs (Nursing Assistant and Early Childhood Education) and will also accept ELA students, based on their CASAS scores. The TS Department encourages students who enroll in these certificate programs to continue with their ELA courses as well.

CAP students have a variety of options, and one is to utilize the Ability to Benefit program while taking CAP classes. By successfully completing at least six college-level classes, students are eligible for federal financial aid. This financial support helps students transition into workforce programs without a high school credential. Beth, the TS Dean, believes this will allow students to transition sooner. Another option available to CAP students is to complete their HS+

program and earn their high school credential. Since the HS+ program is so individualized, and because credits from students' traditional high school are accepted, there is no one path that students must follow. When students have their high school credential, either the GED or the diploma from the HS+, students can transition to postsecondary courses. If students have completed the CAP English program during their HS+ or GED program they can go directly into college-level English. Students who complete CAP Math 017 will have completed similar outcomes as Math 75, but there is one more pre-college math class needed before college level math. Students who earn their high school credentials and want to take college math need to complete the math placement test to determine their pre-college or college level math class.

Students are connected to an advisor in the Advising Center during their last quarter with the TS Department and this new advisor will support their college-level academic goals. TS faculty and staff do not advise students into college-level classes. Beth, TS Dean, stated that when students are close to transitioning to credit-level classes, CAP faculty "connect them with that advisor for that next step...so they will advise them into their college-level classes. We won't do that." There is not a specific advising center for noncredit students, but faculty and the navigator are very available to help students with academic and career advice.

Riverview did not provide transition data broken out by race/ethnicity. However, data level data show that 46% of students who identify as White completed at least six college credits, whereas only 17% of students of Color completed the same number of credits in 2017-18. This is problematic given students of color are overrepresented in the TS Department.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the Transitional Studies Department, its faculty, staff and students, and how the programs and courses are organized. I provided an in-depth look at how

classes within the department are structured, examined course outcomes, and how basic courses align with credit-courses. The chapter concluded with an examination the types of supports provided to students in the Transitional Studies Department. Chapter 5 discusses the findings from the study specific to the study propositions and sub-questions.

Chapter 5: Findings

This study explored how institutional practices and support systems in one comprehensive community college in the State of Washington supported or hindered students transitioning from non-credit to postsecondary coursework. This chapter presents findings that were collected for this explanatory case study by comparing data against the five study propositions and sub-questions (Yin, 2014):

Summary Propositions

Proposition 1: Andragogy and relevant curriculum promotes successful transitions to postsecondary courses.

1. What aspects of the curriculum support or hinder student transitions?
2. How is culturally relevant pedagogy used to support or hinder student transitions?
3. How does institutional racism show up in curriculum and how does this support or hinder student transitions?

Proposition 2: Advising and career-development services play an important role in transitioning students to postsecondary courses.

1. What aspects of advising and career-development services support or hinder student transition?
2. What role does “cooling out” play in advising or career-development services, and how does this support or hinder student transitions?
3. How does institutional racism show up in advising and career-development services and how does this support or hinder student transitions?

Proposition 3: Students need financial and ancillary support in order to successfully transition to postsecondary courses.

1. What aspects of financial and ancillary support services support or hinder student transitions?
2. What role does “cooling out” play in financial and/or ancillary support services, and how does this support or hinder student transitions?
3. How does institutional racism show up in financial and ancillary support and how does this support or hinder student transitions?

Proposition 4: Academic and systems support are important when transitioning to postsecondary courses.

1. What academic and systems support or hinder student transitions?
2. What inequality regimes are present in academic and systems support and how does this support or hinder student transitions?

Proposition 5: A transition receptive culture matters when transitioning students to postsecondary courses.

1. What aspects of a transition receptive culture are active at the institution and how does this support or hinder student transitions?
2. If a transition receptive culture is present, what inequality regimes are present in the transition receptive culture and how does this support or hinder student transitions?

Proposition 1: Andragogy and Relevant Curriculum Promotes Successful Transitions to Postsecondary Courses

For this first proposition, I drew data from interviews, observations, course syllabi, outcomes, assignments and activities, and assessment materials to understand the aspects andragogy and of the curriculum that support students’ transitions and the degree to which institutional racism is present in the curriculum. I drew from inequality regimes, critical race

theory and culturally relevant pedagogy. This subsection begins with a discussion around the findings that addresses the three sub-questions. In sum, data illustrate that aspects of andragogy and the curriculum that either support or hinder student transition are often infused with culturally relevant pedagogy, and there will be some overlap in the sections below. I found institutional racism is too embedded in the other questions to separate out, so data that indicates elements of racism are included within the sections.

Aspects of andragogy and curriculum that support student transition. This subsection describes how alignment, teaching philosophies, and assessment may support student transitions. As described in Chapter 4, most outcomes in the Transitional Studies department are aligned to prepare students for vocational or academic transfer credit courses. Some faculty teach in both Transitional Studies and credit English which appeared to help facilitate conversations about alignment and articulation across programs. Bruce, CAP faculty, shared all of their writing outcomes are aligned with English 101, which means when students complete the CAP English classes, they should be prepared to go directly into English 101. This alignment allows students to complete the equivalent of up to English 97 in the Transitional Studies department, paying \$25.00 per term compared to more than \$500.00 for one, five-credit college level class. At the time of data collection, similar conversations were currently happening with Transitional Studies CAP math faculty and credit math faculty. CAP math outcomes were developed from the developmental math sequence, and the goal was to develop an articulation agreement with college math that is similar to the agreement with English. However, CAP math faculty do not teach across non-credit and credit courses which makes this process more challenging.

Interviews with faculty revealed teaching philosophies impacted how instruction was delivered, along with cultural beliefs and norms. When asked about their teaching philosophies,

both CAP faculty Shelly and ESL faculty James shared that building community in the classroom is important, along with creating a comfortable class. Research indicates that relationships precede learning (Howard, 2006). My data show that interviewed faculty at Riverview understand the value of developing relationships and building trust with students while also having high expectations. Shelly placed a high value on learning every students' name by the second day. She shared if she doesn't know their name, "nobody wants to be like, hey, you – that's not good." CAP student Sofia shared that her teachers build relationships with her by "communicat[ing] really well" and by "try[ing] to make everybody a part of [class]." ELA student Adele's response to that same question was "first, they support – they [faculty] support me a lot. They told me what are my strengths [sic], and they encourage me, too." Data also revealed that the interviewed faculty support and push students, which was motivating for some students. For instance, Sofia stated, "they knew like I already had that [ability], which is really good because they are pushing you to it." Similarly, Adele shared:

I think teachers work very well with students because they support them, and they give them the possibility to learn everything in different steps. They help a lot, they are patient, and I think the teachers influence a lot of students.

Additionally, James, ELA faculty, felt that transparency with students is critical and that it is important to "hold students accountable, and have very high expectations for them, but have those [expectations] be clear." In my observations, James consistently brought the focus back to the class objectives, both in class and for the online work. Although he shared that he felt he hadn't always been as transparent as he could have been in the past. However, now he is striving for this daily and has noticed that "it's working...I'm seeing faster growth than before."

Interviewed faculty at Riverview were shown to purposefully create content that was thought to be meaningful to their students' learning. Prior research indicates that students in transitional studies need a clear picture of how the classes they are taking connect to their career and academic goals (Zafft, 2008). Bruce shared that part of his teaching philosophy is that he has "to be teaching something that is relevant to my students...[E]verything that we do has to have a purpose, it has to be meaningful to them, and move them to the next steps." Bruce also connects course content to students' potential careers:

[I] really hav[e] a lot more conversations about career aspects and connecting careers to all of my content. So, in my science class, I highlight a few different types of scientists and scientific type work. And that also includes working for wastewater management and things like that – I'm not just talking about being a biologist or something like that. I'm talk about maybe working for wastewater, or natural resources, or things like that. And really trying to get students to see how the different things they are doing can translate into careers for them.

Responses from students corroborate Bruce's intentions regarding delivering relatable content to students. ELA student Adele shared that she "read a lot about racism, and I understand that this topic is very important because...[it] teach[es] me how to have a relationship with everybody. We still have racism." CAP student Sofia stated that the topics in class relate to her outside world. She described some of the content this way: "Global warming, also like poverty, because it's everywhere. Little places you can see it. Also, like the price wages, how everything has changed, and the economy and everything. That affects everybody." Course descriptions found in Bruce's syllabi included language such as, "In this course, students will investigate a current world issue in depth; the issue will vary by quarter according to instructor and/or student

interest” and “You will learn new skills to help you in your everyday life.” These data provide evidence that Bruce is utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy by building “bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences” (Gay, 2000, p. 29).

James, ELA faculty, also utilizes elements of culturally responsive pedagogy. He shared that he felt that if students feel they already know the content, they can challenge the outcomes. Culturally responsive pedagogy validates students’ knowledge and prior experiences (Gay, 2000). This data may also indicate that this part of the structure of the TS Department is somewhat immune from organizing systems that produce or maintain inequities. According to Acker (2006), most organizations are structured in a way that perpetuates inequality. Since faculty are very open with students and provide opportunity for them to challenge the outcomes, this may show that the TS Department has more of a flat system where students are also empowered in their education.

Another example of culturally responsive pedagogy was provided by Sofia, a CAP student. She shared that students can give their own opinions on the topic in class. According to Gay (2000), when students are given the opportunity to express their opinions and ideas in class, this helps to validate students’ cultural knowledge and prior experiences.

Some of the ELA curriculum was found to have built-in assessments, such as online discussion questions and quizzes. Also, ELA faculty informally assess students when they answer questions in class. James shared, “it’s just can they respond to my questions in class? Do they feel confident enough to speak up in class?” The standards are tied into the different class discussions. James stated, “I tie in the standards, the CCRs, in the different discussions and quizzes.” Students are also assessed via tests or other written work. Faculty shared that

assessment happens informally in class, along with tests. Most of the feedback from students was around feedback on tests. Sofia, CAP student, shared:

[I]n my math class, it's graded by usually the tests, and what you have learned. The tests really just show...because you're by yourself - you're not getting help. It really shows what you're capable of doing, or what you learned. In my other classes, it's mostly like, [the teacher will] give little comments like "I see improvement" or "I like how you're saying your opinions and how you've phrased it" and everything.

Adele, ELA student, had a similar view on assessment:

The teacher always makes a little test with me. She or he told me my errors and what part I need to include more, and they encourage me to do review my work. Because they told me if I move to the next step, I need to review my own work to do get better, to show better work.

Culturally responsive pedagogy includes using different instructional strategies and this extends to assessment. During the interviews, faculty shared that they use multiple measures for assessing students. However, during the student interviews, most of the assessment practices they shared were on testing. Data revealed that students in particular were content with the feedback they received from faculty on their assessments, as the feedback helped them see their learning and know how to continue to improve.

Aspects of andragogy and curriculum that hinder student transition. One aspect of curriculum that may hinder student transition is related to the andragogy used in the classroom. Shelly indicated that she believed math instruction needs to focus on the process, not just the answer. She shared:

When I'm asking them to explain something to me, or tell me why they did something, [students are] just so focused on getting the answer. And I'm like, I really don't care about the answer that much – I want to know what your process was.

A priority for Shelly was that students really understand the concepts and not just push through. She “keep[s] answering questions if they have them.” During the observation of Shelly's class, I noticed that she did ask a lot of questions. Most of the time she also answered her own questions because no student volunteered an answer. When a student did call out an answer, Shelly followed the IRE method: inquiry-response-evaluation (Grubb et al., 2011) and moved on after evaluating the answer the student offered. The observational data did not support Shelly's philosophy that math instruction needs to focus on the process and not just the answer. However, one limitation of this study is only one observation per class was completed which does not provide an in-depth look at interactions in the class.

When I asked Sofia, CAP student, if any class had been challenging, she said math. I asked her what made math challenging, and she offered this response:

Because it's so different now how things are being taught than they used to be. And then for instance my instructor he shows you like how, from the beginning, how it is like the long way to understand how math works. And we were taught the easy way [in high school]; the fast way. And it's you know; you don't really understand it. So that's like got me back because I'm used to going, you know, how I used to, when I was raised, doing, and they're changing it. So, like the concept of getting all that - it's the same one, it's just differently done. I'm not going to lie, it gets me confused until it's almost right towards the end and it's like, oh wait - I've done

that before! And it's just like, okay, I get it. But then after a while you're like, oh, okay.

Adele, an ELA student, also shared about math, noting that it was her favorite class. When asked what made math so great, she answered, "In Mexico, there are so [many] different steps that they teach. In here, it's totally different. I like the ways the teachers teach." Both of the students commented on how math was taught and how it helped them successfully complete math. This "new way" of teaching may be due to the instructor's beliefs on how math instruction should occur, or it may be the instructor's way of utilizing a variety of instructional strategies. If the latter is the case, then this instructor may be employing culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000). However, during the observation of the math class, I did not observe a variety of instructional strategies being used. Instead, I observed the instructor asking and answering his own questions and I did not see a lot of student engagement. This disconnect between what Shelly, CAP faculty, shared in the interview and the class observation may also be an organizing process that maintains inequality (Acker, 2006). Shelly stated that she wants to know the process that students use to solve problems, yet there was no evidence of this in the observation. The IRE process is one way to have the teacher be the one who possesses all the knowledge and evaluates one students' answer and then moves to the next problem. This is a common practice in development education (Grubb et al., 2011) and may be one way to maintain inequality in the classroom. As stated earlier, a limitation of this study is only one hour of each class was observed and this is not enough data to claim a variety of instructional strategies are never or rarely utilized.

Summary of Proposition 1 data. Data from Proposition 1 revealed that having transitional studies curriculum aligned with English and math may support student transitions.

When students in transitional studies finished the CAP English series, students could transition directly into English 101. Interviewed faculty were working to have a similar agreement with CAP math and credit level math. Faculty in the TS Department believe relationships with students and creating a strong community in the classroom are important and take time in the beginning of the term to develop these relationships. Interviewed transitional studies students noted that their teachers build relationships with them by communicating regularly.

Informal assessments help show faculty what students know. Students also complete tests as an assessment and data show that students appreciate the written feedback they receive on tests, along with the encouragement from their teachers. However, data around assessments was not corroborated. Interviewed faculty shared the importance of using multiple measures of assessment, which is an element of culturally responsive pedagogy. During the student interviews, only information about tests and other written work was shared.

Data indicated that interviewed faculty are employing culturally responsive pedagogy. CAP faculty Bruce shared he needs to be teaching content that is relevant to students' lives and also works to infuse career information into lesson and activities. Students who participated in this study corroborated this information when they shared the topics related to areas of their lives outside of school.

Some data from Proposition 1 showed particular aspects of the curriculum may hinder student transitions. There seemed to be a disconnect between what some interviewed faculty believed was happening in the classroom and what was actually taking place. In the interview, CAP math faculty Shelly shared she believes students' processes are more important than the answer. This evidence was not found in the observation or student interviews. There were not a variety of instructional strategies displayed during the observation and Shelly did the majority of

the talking. This disconnect between Shelly's beliefs and actual classroom practice may be an organizing process that maintains inequality (Acker, 2006) since Shelly's actions may be perpetuating a system where the teacher maintains the control of the power in the classroom.

Proposition 2: Advising and Career-Development Services Play an Important Role in Transitioning Students to Postsecondary Courses.

For proposition 2, I used data from interviews, observations, advising documents, and career-development documents. I was particularly interested in understanding the aspects of advising and career-development services that support or hinder students' transitions. I drew from cooling out theory, critical race theory, and inequality regimes to explore the extent to which institutional racism may be hindering students' progress as well as the extent that students may be consciously or unconsciously diverted away from transitioning to college-level work. This subsection is organized into two sections with data that addresses the aspects of advising and career-development services that support or hinder student transition. Cooling out and institutional racism are infused throughout and will be explicitly stated when data indicate the presence of these concepts.

Aspects of advising and career-development services that support student transitions. My data revealed that the TS Department has been working to develop an effective and efficient procedure for new students which includes early, initial advising. Beth, the TS Dean, noted "one of the things we've worked on this year that I can probably say now with confidence that's effective is our ed planning and transitioning to programs." Each student meets with Maria, the navigator, and develops an educational plan. Maria stated, "[O]ur ed planning and transitioning to programs...is effective. I would say that's been one area that we've really focused on and improved this year."

As explained in Chapter 4, new ELA and CAP students meet with Maria, the navigator, early in their experience to develop an educational plan. Maria shared that she believes her role includes advising students to their next step and making a pathway to get students to their goal. CAP students are given the choice of working towards their GED or HS+. Once that decision has been made, a plan is mapped out so the student knows what classes to take and has an approximate completion date. ELA students are provided with educational options, but a concrete plan is not created until they are almost ready to enroll in CAP classes. No evidence of cooling out was found during the observation of a new student orientation or the interview with Maria. She explained that “everybody belongs on campus” and that “students are students.” Maria acknowledged that there is “classism and racism within the institution” and that she “work[s] to minimize the impact on students.”

Documents used by both the navigator and faculty advisors are relatively short – no more than two pages. The Transitional Studies Intake Form is available in English and Spanish, and since the biggest population Riverview serves are Spanish speaking students, having this option acknowledges and honors students’ cultural heritages (Gay, 2000) and supports students’ success and transition. None of the forms ask for students’ social security number. This omission may indicate Riverview is sensitive to serving undocumented students.

The faculty that I interviewed were relatively new to their advising role. The academic year this study took place was the first time TS Department faculty were expected to advise students. Not all faculty were found to be skilled in advising and appeared to heavily rely on the navigator. Shelly, CAP faculty, shared that she refers to the educational plan created by the navigator, and when she meets with students they discuss what classes still need to be completed. If she has questions, Shelly stated, “I would go straight to the navigator and double check. I

mean I usually do anyways. A lot of times I'll just send [students] to her anyways." Bruce, CAP faculty, shared that he often tells students, "That's a great question – make an appointment with [the navigator]."

Shelly, CAP faculty, admits she has been "having the navigator do a lot of my advising," possibly because advising is new to faculty. She stated that advising is "what [the navigator's] job is, is to just help them navigate that" and if Shelly had to "do...all that and teach...there's a lot of questions I have to ask because I'm fairly new to [advising] still." I asked Shelly how she decides what advice to give students or what direction to steer students. She responded by sharing that "we do talk about our students in meetings. [H]ere's a list of our students and our navigator will talk about it." This information helps Shelly understand students' goals, but she still meets with them and says "hey, what are your plans – what do you want to do when you get done with our program?" Shelly relies on the educational plan the navigator built with the student during their new student intake. Shelly also appeared to be relying heavily on her colleagues to determine students' goals and also in supporting students to reach these goals. She didn't appear to emphasize relationship building but instead relies on others to inform her about students' goals and needs. I also observed that Shelly felt that advising was the navigator's role and not necessarily her role. This may be perpetuating an organizing process that maintains inequality on the basis of class as described by Acker (2006), since Shelly stated a couple of times that the navigator's job is to advise students. It is also possible that Shelly was just not yet comfortable with her new role advising students.

James, ELA faculty, stressed realistic goals in advising rather than "to give [students] false hope." James believed that language acquisition takes time and that he needed to be realistic with his students. He shared that he tries to inquire about what students are interested in,

and then shares how long that will take. An example James provided is if a student wants to be a policeman and they don't have a high school diploma, he would tell the student that it will probably take three or four years for them to reach their goal. He asks them to "explore other options along those same lines" to see if there is a similar job where students could get to quicker. James also had some students who have not gone beyond a second-grade education in their home country. In this case, he shared that he would not advise those students towards credit classes but instead, "tell[s] them to keep up the English study." James shows them how to get jobs but will not transition students "if they're not ready." He encouraged students "who are learning more quickly and showing up" to work towards credit courses, but also encouraged students who have little prior education or who were not of working age to focus on learning English. I observed that James was the participant deciding for students whether they should be encouraged towards credit courses, based on his belief of language acquisition and motivating factors. Clark's (1960) cooling out theory states that not all advisors believe students have the academic ability to success. In this way, James's approach to informal advising appeared to be a means of "cooling out" students.

In contrast, Bruce, a CAP faculty, was shown to have a somewhat different advising philosophy. He shared that he believes "the sky's the limit type thing" but yet he wants "to keep some reality based in" advising. An example Bruce provided was if a student "really, really want[s] to become a nurse [but they] really, really hate squishy stuff and blood, that's really not going to work out." He tries to guide students towards finding their interests and passions, and then supports them in working toward that goal. Bruce also did his best to help students set up appointments with the right people, which may be the navigator, or an advisor in their academic field of interest. He has even walked students over to different programs on campus so students

can meet the faculty member and see the program. Bruce also felt that his advising “is totally student driven” and stresses “honesty and openness, and really pushing [students] to look at their own potential, and what they want to be.” No elements of cooling out or inequality regimes were present in regard to the advising that Bruce offered to students.

Interviewed Faculty were also shown to incorporate career choices in their classrooms by providing information on the various programs at the college, and by infusing career options into the curriculum. Bruce, CAP faculty shared that he has:

a lot more conversations about career aspects and connecting careers to all of my content.

In my science class, I highlight a few different types of scientists and scientific type work. That also includes working for waste water management and things like that – I’m not talking about just being a biologist or something like that. I’m talking about maybe working for waste water, or natural resources, or things like that. And really trying to get students to see how the different things they are doing can translate into careers for them.

James, ELA faculty, explained what jobs are available in the area to his students. He encouraged students to go and talk with the navigator for more advising around future careers. He also “encourage[s students] to study career specific vocabulary.” James also would ask students “what they’re interested in, and what they did in their country of origin.” He shares what is available at Riverview, and if a student expresses interest, he would give them a one-page informational paper about the program. Moreover, James encouraged his students visit to career exploration websites to explore different options.

WorkForce Education Services was also part of the advising for students. This service was shown to help connect students to identifying scholarship and other financial supports.

According to Bruce, WorkForce Education Services provide financial support for a lot of students. He shared:

[W]e also work very closely with our WorkForce Education Services, WES. So that's our BFET, WorkFirst, and Worker Retraining. And so, they're also kind of in the mix for this advising - for the advising for next steps because that's where the funding comes for a lot of [students'] stuff.

Aspects of advising and career-development services that hinder student transition.

As described in Chapter 4, my interviews and document analysis revealed that when students are in their last quarter of CAP coursework, they are connected to college-level faculty within their area of study. Beth, TS Dean, stated, "Students who are transitioning or in their last quarter with us...do have an advisor in the area that they are going to." Sofia, CAP student, was finishing up her last term in Transitional Studies, and shared that her advisor was outside of the department. However, Adele, ELA student, did not get connected to an advisor in the department she was transitioning to, and she did not appear to get advising support from the Transitional Studies department about her desired career. When I asked Adele how she found out about her field of interest, she said, "I see the programs [on phlebotomy] on the internet." I observed a disconnect between the advising support that the faculty and staff in the TS Department believe they are providing to students with students' experiences and perceptions. This may be due to a lack of awareness of a process for an advisor, or a lack of awareness of the student.

Data also suggest that some interviewed faculty may be unintentionally cooling out students by deciding what opportunities to share with students. For instance, James, ELA faculty, decides what programs he believes are realistic for his beginning ELA students. He only shares

programs such as the Certified Nursing Assistant as he believes this is more realistic than one of his students aiming to be a doctor.

Beth, TS Dean, shared that she believes that advising is more than just helping students figure out what class(es) they will take each quarter. She indicated that students pretty much know what they will take from quarter to quarter. Beth also believes advising should checking in on students in regards to their plans, needs and concerns:

But that's not the point of advising, in my opinion. It's how are we doing on this plan, what are we doing, how are your classes going, what needs have come up?

It's all the other support systems that I want them to check in with.

In contrast, Shelly, CAP faculty, appeared her advising on what classes students should take for the following quarter. When Shelly met with students, she would focus on their educational plan and would tell the student to take those classes. She also indicated that she would do what she could to “make[s] sure they’re sticking to that – or if they wanted to change their mind.” Bruce, the CAP faculty had yet another approach to advising. He stated that he would do “mid-term advising for all of our students and all of those students come in and we do one-on-one [advising] about their progress, and those types of things.” Just as Beth noted above, nothing specific about how classes are going, or any additional needs were brought up in conversations between students and faculty advisors. However, Beth, noted that once “faculty [are] more accustomed to advising, then we’ll start training on those other questions.”

As a result, my data suggest that advisors do not always connect students to opportunities for financial support. For instance, I asked Adele, ELA student, about what financial support she had for her professional-technical program and she shared, “Scholarships [are available]. I don’t know if they have another financial resources [sic].” When I asked her how she found out about

this financial support, Adele said she looked on the internet. Sofia, CAP student, also did not appear to know a lot about scholarship or financial aid opportunities. However, she was aware that she could ask her advisor for support:

There [are] programs, to be honest – I don't know a lot of them. I think the WASFA is one of them. I can't remember what it's called to be honest. But like I said, you can turn to your advisor and they'll let you know what programs you can qualify for, or where you could actually get help.

Funding relates to a different study proposition, but the data show that financial support and advising may be closely linked. This connection will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Summary of Proposition 2 Data. Proposition 2 data showed that Riverview is creating an intake process that is efficient for students. All students develop an individual educational plan which allows each student to see a clear pathway to their goals. Once the educational plan is developed, both the navigator and faculty advisors use this plan when guiding students in advising. Transitional Studies faculty are new to advising, so currently a lot of the advising still falls to the navigator. This does not appear to be an organizing process that maintains inequity but instead faculty are in the learning process of advising.

Interviewed faculty advisors approach advising differently. One ELA faculty stresses realistic goals for students, based on their language abilities, age, and prior education. One CAP faculty encourages students to reach for any goal they want. Most faculty include career information within their classroom lessons and activities. WorkForce education is part of the advising from the start and they connect students to funding sources right away. Cooling out may be happening during advising, especially for ELA students, as the faculty member is the one

deciding what opportunities would be most appropriate for ELA students. Or, ELA faculty are approaching advising with a realistic lens that language acquisition takes time.

Riverview has processes set up to provide information to students, but this information is not always understood with students. When transitional studies students are in their last quarter of CAP classes, they will be advised into their chosen field of study by a pathway advisor. However, there is a disconnect between this system and what students know and understand. Adele, ELA student, did not have a pathway advisor and finished up her CAP studies the quarter this study took place. Both students who participated in this study were not aware of funding opportunities available to her for her pathway.

Proposition 3: Students Need Financial and Ancillary Support in Order to Successfully Transition to Postsecondary Courses.

Similar to the first two propositions, I used a critical approach to evaluate the third proposition that explored aspects of financial support that support or hinder students' transitions to credit-level coursework. I analyzed data from interviews, observations, financial documents, scholarship information provided to students, and financial information available on Riverview's website. This subsection is organized into two sections with data that addresses the aspects of financial and ancillary services that support or hinder student transition. Cooling out and institutional racism are infused throughout and will be explicitly stated when data indicate the presence of these concepts.

Aspects of financial and ancillary services that support student transition. All students fill out a WorkForce Education Services (WES) form during their new student orientation at Riverside. WES provides information about a new student orientation on their website, but transitional studies students do not attend this orientation. Instead, the WES form is

completed with the navigator. This one-page form allows WES to determine funding eligibility for students. This form does not ask for a social security number, and only asks twelve questions. The form clearly states the purpose of the form (to determine funding eligibility for WorkForce Education) and that information is voluntary. If a student needs more time, the statement at the bottom of the form reads, “If you are unable to finish this survey in the time allotted, please return to WorkForce Education Services [location noted], or call [phone number noted] for a benefits screening.” Having a form that is not intimidating increases the likelihood of students finishing the form. Additionally, during the new student orientation, students are asked if they receive any food benefits and are told that additional food benefits can help pay for school. The navigator asks students the questions on the WES intake form and completes it during the orientation.

Shelly, CAP faculty, is learning about financial supports available for students and sometimes discusses this with students during advising. She stated “there are a lot of programs for students. I personally am learning more about those as I’ve started advising more.” When she doesn’t know about something, she asks. Shelly mentioned the Ability to Benefit program and stated that she looks for classes that they can get students into “now that will count as a college level class...before they graduate from our program.” No evidence was found that Shelly intentionally or unintentionally “cools out” students due to funding; instead, it appears to be a steep learning curve for her in regards to funding opportunities.

Bruce, CAP faculty, shares about WES services at the beginning of each class, to make sure the \$25.00 fee is not a barrier for students. He shared with me that most students qualify and explained that when students qualify for WES, this helps with the \$25.00 fee “plus they get supplies, and childcare and everything else.” Bruce also stated that sometimes students are “put

in our program as a CAP student while they're trying to get all that [financial] figured out so they can transition them into their programs.”

Data also show that the TS Department was creating additional ways to help students get funding for postsecondary courses. Students who successfully complete six college-level credits will qualify for FAFSA through the Ability to Benefit (AtB) program. Shelly shared that “if a student has at least six credits from the college, then they can start applying for financial aid, even if they don't have their credential yet.” Beth, TS Dean, stated:

[Students] work on their ed plan and what their goals are, and then we figure out if they need to apply for financial aid, if they need to apply for WASFA [state need grant], if we want to try to get them into Ability to Benefit.

The TS Department was also working on ways for students to get funding for six credits while students are in their last quarter of noncredit courses so they can qualify for FAFSA through the AtB program.

Another way the TS Department was found to be working to create ways of helping students secure funding is by changing how of noncredit and developmental courses are offered. The goal of the TS Department was to have CAP courses linked with credit courses that share the same Intended Learning Outcome and be taught in the same classroom by the same faculty member. This way a transitional studies student can take a CAP class for \$25 and meet the same outcomes as a student who is taking a pre-college course. At the time of this study, Shelly was teaching a CAP math class that had the same outcomes as a developmental math class. Each class was taught separately (i.e., one CAP math class and one developmental math class, each with its own faculty). Shelly shared:

Our students are paying \$25 for the whole term...versus a student taking Math 75, a dev-
ed math class, they're paying full tuition for that. They're paying the regular \$600 and
whatever dollars. Students in one of my classes are doing the same outcomes as students
in that class.

The goal of the TS Department would be to have one class offered, with both CAP and
developmental students in the class. This goal was being met with resistance, but the department
was continuing to work towards this goal. Shelly shared:

So, getting them into those classes, for the \$25 fee, that's been met with a lot of
resistance. Like we can't have full tuition paying students in classes with students paying
\$25. And I'm like, why would that ever come up?

Bruce stated, "We have an old, traditional model of education, with a middle-class mindset. That
doesn't often work for our students." The implications of this statement revealed there may be
issues with the testing and placement system that were not revealed in data from this study.
However, changing the way students are placed in classes may help transform the traditional
model of education.

Aspects of financial and ancillary services that hinder student transition. Funding
workshops were not available for to noncredit students. A current or prospective student may go
to the Riverview's website to learn about English Language Acquisition classes or high school
programs and the costs associated with each program. The website for the ELA and high school
completion programs states tuition is \$25 per quarter. Transitional studies students may not
realize the cost of credit bearing courses, and that may be a reason why financial information is
not readily available to students. If a student does search for financial aid on the main webpage,
they will find links to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Washington

Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA). However, no workshops are available to help students with these applications and there is not a specific contact person listed. Funding through WES offers more support. Students who navigate to the WES website will find a description of a variety of funding sources, along with contact information for the various programs. Students are encouraged to contact a navigator for more information, and the navigator information is listed on the website.

Despite intentional practices to connect students to funding supports during orientation, student participants were still unclear as to where to go for financial support, or what resources were available to them once they transitioned to credit-bearing courses. For example, ELA student Adele, who was going to start in a professional-technical program the following term, said she was “looking for [funding] for that program now.” CAP student Sofia already had financial support secured for her postsecondary program, but she did not understand how it was being paid for. When I asked about how she, and other students, find out about financial opportunities, she responded:

There’s programs [sic]...to be honest – I don’t know a lot of them. I think the WASFA is one of them. I can’t remember what it’s called to be honest. But like I said, you can turn to your advisor and they’ll let you know what programs you can qualify for, or where you could actually get help.

Note that the advisor Sofia was referring to was she pathway advisor, not faculty or staff from the Transitional Studies department.

Beth, TS Dean, acknowledges that the department needs to improve how they are communicating about funding opportunities because “a lot of our students don’t know what’s available to support them.” Beth stated that with the navigator, the process has “improved

dramatically, because she is really on top of that.” As faculty become more accustomed to advising, Beth believes communication about funding opportunities will improve. She explained that during new student orientation:

Students work on their ed plan what their goals are, and then we figure out if they need to apply for financial aid, if they need to apply for WASFA, if we want to try to get them into Ability to Benefit. Then they’re enrolled in a class that will target the need at the appropriate timing of when they’re going to transition.

One of Beth’s goals for faculty financial advising was for faculty to regularly focus on other issues such as transportation, food, and housing. However, at the time of the interview her priority was for students to understand the financial options for classes that are available to students.

Data also revealed that interviewed faculty were at times determining what financial opportunities to share with students. James, ELA faculty, believed that on the whole his students were one to two years away from being ready to transition to postsecondary coursework, so he does not share scholarship opportunities. This may be a realistic approach, as language acquisition takes time, or it may be a way of cooling out non-native speakers of English. This belief also falls under Bonilla-Silva’s (2014) abstract liberalism frame, as James is making the choice for students that they are not ready for scholarship money. This belief may also be an indicator an inequality regime. Acker (2006) states that class processes are present in organizations, and “class” in this situation is defined as who has access and control over resources. When ELA faculty believe ELA students do not need financial support, this may be an example of inequality regimes at play, or instead, a realistic view of language learning.

Summary of Proposition 3 data. Data from Proposition 3 showed Riverview has created processes to connect students to funding. Part of this process requires all new students to complete a short form from Workforce Education Services (WES). Interviewed faculty also talk about WES services either in class or when advising students. Riverview is creating alternative ways for students to have financial support for Postsecondary courses. One way is to help students take six college-level courses while in CAP course so they qualify for Ability to Benefit, a federal program that allows students to become eligible for FAFSA. Another way is by allowing CAP students to enroll in credit-bearing English and math classes that are aligned with CAP outcomes for the \$25.00 fee. This last idea is being met with resistance from some people at Riverview, so faculty and administrators are still working towards this plan.

Theoretically, these processes connect students to funding. However, there is a disconnect with what students know about funding opportunities. The student participants in this study did not always know where to seek financial support. There are no workshops for FAFSA available or information on Riverview's website, but WES does provide funding information. Both students who participated in the study did not have funding secured for their pathway program. The TS Department dean acknowledged they need to improve how the department is communicating funding opportunities. This may be evidence of an organizing process that maintains inequities (Acker, 2006) as how to secure funding needs to be very transparent to students.

Proposition 4: Academic and Systems Support are Important When Transitioning to Postsecondary Courses.

For the fourth proposition, I used inequality regimes and critical race theory to uncover academic and other support systems that support or hinder students' transitions. Data for this

proposition came from interviews, observations, degree plans and documents, and information on the institution's website for academic and non-academic support. This subsection is organized into two sections with data that addresses the aspects of academic and systems supports that support or hinder student transition. Cooling out and institutional racism are infused throughout and will be explicitly stated when data indicate the presence of these.

Aspects of academic and systems supports that support student transition. ELA and CAP students were able to utilize the campus library, tutoring services, computer lab, disability services, and WES services to support their success in non-credit courses and in transitioning to credit coursework. I observed information about tutoring and technology services/help posted in the TS classrooms. In addition, interviewed faculty tell students about tutoring services during class. ELA student Adele shared, "Teacher told me about tutoring. They post papers on the wall to see if students need tutoring; they can call [if they need it]." When I asked CAP student Sofia if she used the college's tutoring center, she stated she had only used the TS Department's computer area. When I asked Adele what resources she has used when she needed extra help, she said only tutoring, although she shared "to be honest, I don't need too much tutoring at the moment." Adele feels the tutoring center "is a good way for students because they help a lot. They...support you how to understand better the assignments." The tutoring center Adele spoke about was the TS Department's computer lab and not the college-wide tutoring center.

When asked about tutoring, CAP faculty Shelly tells her students that "it's okay to go and ask someone else [for help]" because she finds many students return to her and ask for help with homework. CAP faculty Bruce stated that "our tutoring and learning center – our students are more than welcome to use this." Bruce shared that "we really want [students] to feel like college students. It's like you're not transitioning to college; you're already in college."

Navigator. Bringing on a navigator was perceived by interviewed faculty and administrators as helping fill in holes for the department in many different areas including: (1) connecting students to funding, (2) developing clear pathways to next steps for students, and (3) increased advising. All of these aspects were shown to provide students support in navigating the college system. In regard to connecting students to financial resources, Beth, TS Dean, noted, “Since we brought the navigator on, I think [connecting students to resources] has improved dramatically, because she is really on top of that.” She also stated, “I feel like that navigator piece is so critical to what we do” and she confidently stated their “ed planning and transitioning to programs” is working well, in large part due to the navigator.

Bruce, CAP faculty, shared that with a navigator in the department, this has “totally opened up for students, and opened up for because [before]...we were really struggling in transitioning students. We weren’t working as a cohesive team, and now we’re working as a cohesive team.” Shelly, CAP faculty, stated that in department meetings, the navigator talks about each student, providing updates on their progress and goals. She also shared that the navigator “meets with [students], she’s trying to have these upfront conversations and find out if there is money available for them to go to school and things like that.”

James, ELA faculty, trusted the navigator to collaborate with postsecondary faculty to help place higher level ELA students in professional-technical programs. Since James taught the beginning ELA courses, he felt that “[t]here’s a couple of years between when they leave me and when they’ll be able to [enroll in professional-technical programs] so I’m trusting that the navigator will be [collaborating].” James also encouraged his students to meet with the navigator to do some career planning and goal setting:

I explain what jobs are out there. I try to be realistic, I guess...I really do say, this is how long it will take you. [I ask students] to brainstorm all the potential ideas for work...and then set them up with the right people. [I] have them talk to our navigator.

Kim, support staff, was also happy about the TS department hiring a navigator. She said that when the navigator came and helped develop a system, she noticed students were transitioning out of ELA and to postsecondary classes:

I'll take you to a great day. It's when we got a navigator. There was some time where we felt that the students were just being recycled, circling through the department...But then we got a navigator [and] she was able to advise and listen to...students, and be able to [help them] transition. [O]ur students were no longer being just stalled in that level...they were going to pre-college, and then they were going to college.

Rather than just telling students to go to a particular department to get help from other departments, Maria, the navigator, walks students to different services on campus. She explained:

On the same day...[I] walk that student down to financial aid to help them make that connection, and to walk them to the Registrar to help them figure out what they need to do there, or the Cashier, or ...to IT to get them set up with their Canvas.

Maria also felt that it was critical to share with students that “this is going to be easy because I will try to do all of this extra work to support you, and you just need to enter class.” Her actions appeared to support her beliefs.

Non-academic supports. ELA and CAP students were shown to have access to a variety of non-academic support services including on-campus childcare, a food bank, counseling services. In addition, students who qualify for WES services were eligible for childcare support. However, the childcare on campus prioritized children of students and staff and would only accept non-Riverview children as space allows. WorkForce Education Services offered a food pantry that was available to all students. CAP faculty Bruce shared, “We also have a food bank on campus that is also ran by WES for all of our students. So, we also take care of food insecurities as well.” The other two interviewed faculty stated they also share information about the food pantry with students.

However, non-academic supports such as the food pantry and counseling were services that were not well known to student participants. In addition, some academic and non-academic supports were not always accessible to TS students as they were only available to students during traditional working hours. When Riverview hired a navigator, CAP faculty Bruce explained that this appeared to help coordinate services for students and also streamline new student intake. However, information about the food pantry and counseling did not appear to be consistently shared, even with a navigator in place.

Aspects of academic and systems support that hinder student transition. ELA faculty James feels that “students are comfortable in their part of campus and don’t often go to the library, or other services, because of this comfort level, and because they don’t need to go.” Also, in James’ class, students go to the library and he “make[s] sure [students] have access to the library with a new account set up.” James stated, “[I] provide the support [students] need to do their homework, so I don’t feel like they’ve needed [the tutoring center].” This belief may fall

under Bonilla-Silva's (2014) abstract liberalism frame, as James is making the choice for students that they do not need any additional support outside of what he can offer.

Sofia, CAP student, commented about campus supports – making the point that students may not use the supports and that these supports may not be supporting transitions:

They have so many things here I didn't even know until like, okay. Teachers will tell you, too. Wait a minute – I think she, yeah, they let us know at the beginning of the year, but, I mean, you forget.

Tutoring and the library did not align with TS class hours which made it difficult for ELA and CAP students to take advantage of these resources. Beth stated:

As a college, no, [we don't support students well]...[b]ecause our tutoring center and our library hours and our support hours are all very limited. So, unless you're on campus from 8-5, a lot of those services are not available. So, if your instructor is not available, there's really not a lot of options for you.

Non-academic supports. Even though ELA and CAP students have access to a variety of non-academic support services, they are not necessarily accessible. For instance, childcare was only open from 7:00 am – 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday, and so evening students did not have access to childcare.

The food pantry was available to students, however information about the food pantry was not posted in classrooms or any other part of the TS Department. If students search on Riverview's website, they will find one short paragraph about the food pantry. The location is provided, but hours or a specific contact name or number are not provided.

According to Riverview's website, counseling is another non-academic support available to all Riverview students. However, student participants did not mention anything about

counseling services and I did not observe any posters or any signage of counseling services in classes or the TS Department area. The website states that “counseling is available to all currently-enrolled [Riverview] students, free of charge.” This service is available Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.

With support services like tutoring, counseling, childcare, and the library only being open until the close of the business day, this system appeared to fall under the shape and degree of inequality within inequality regimes (Acker, 2006). For example, students and members of the TS Department do not have a say in regard to the hours of the childcare. This indicates this part of the college has a steep hierarchy and decisions are made at the top. Additionally, like financial supports, there appeared to be a disconnect between what interviewed faculty and staff were sharing and the resources students are aware of.

Summary of Proposition 4 data. Proposition 4 data indicate transitional studies students have access to college-wide academic supports. However, most transitional studies students choose to utilize the computer lab/tutoring center specifically dedicated to CAP and ELA students. Transitional studies students can also access non-academic supports on campus, such as childcare and the food bank. No data was available that indicated students take advantage of these services. Data showed that when Riverview hired a navigator, this helped the department fill holes in connecting students to funding, advising, and developing clear pathways for students.

Some interviewed faculty believe students are not in need of accessing support services outside the TS Department. This may be a form of cooling out students, as some interviewed faculty believe all of the needs of students are met by the teacher. This may also be an indicator of an inequality regime since the faculty are the ones who have control over what information is

shared (Acker, 2006). Most of the academic and non-academic supports are only available during the day which limits which students have access to these services. This system falls under the shape and degree of inequality and indicates the college has a steep hierarchy and decisions about hours are made at the top.

Proposition 5: A Transition Receptive Culture Matters When Transitioning Students to Postsecondary Courses.

The fifth proposition explored the aspects of a transition receptive culture that were present at the institution. Similar to the other propositions, I used inequality regimes and critical race theory in my analysis. Additionally, I drew from transfer receptive culture (Jain et al., 2011) to explain the extent to which culture supported or hindered students' transitions to credit-level courses. Data for this proposition came from documents available to transitional studies students that focus on their specific needs, and documentation of assessment and evaluation procedures for systems in place. This subsection is organized into one section with data that addresses aspects of a transition receptive culture that were shown to be present at Riverview. When data indicate the presence of inequality regimes, this was explicitly noted.

Aspects of a transition receptive culture that are active. Jain et al. (2011) suggest a transfer receptive culture is needed to increase the number of students that transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution. As described in Chapter 2, I posited that a *transition* receptive culture was needed to increase the number of students that transition from Transitional Studies to postsecondary coursework. Data collected from the current study indicate that Riverview appeared to utilize several components of this transfer receptive culture. This section will describe the data that indicate Riverview was shown to be, for the most part, employing a transfer receptive culture.

The first element of the transfer receptive culture was to “establish the transfer of students, especially nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students,

as a high institutional priority that ensures stable accessibility, retention, and graduation” (Jain et al., 2011, p. 258). Beth, TS Dean, noted that there are “two administrators above me that know and are very vocal about [Transitional Studies] being the cornerstone of the college. With that, then comes the expectations that I can lead this department to...start change.” Beth went on to say, “I do have the largest outreach to the non-traditional, at-risk students. And this is the department that will funnel students into every other program in this college.” Beth explained that the mission of the president of Riverview “is to include all of the students in our community that could benefit from our services – under-represented [students], specifically.” Beth commented that the executive leadership “have been very supportive of everything” that she has requested to change or implement.

Along with administration establishing a high priority for noncredit students to transition to postsecondary courses, the Transitional Studies department had developed a streamlined intake process for students that includes an educational plan and connection to funding when needed. Faculty participants provided students with information about available programs at Riverview and describe how to get there. James, ELA faculty, stated that he talks about the need to progress in ELA if students want to be in a credit-bearing program. He also tries “*to get them excited about the offerings* [at Riverview]” and he provides information about certificates in Certified Nursing Assistant and Energy Systems Technology, and others. James also shared that his students “know there is a program progression.” Foster et al. (2011) posit that students with low skills often do not see themselves earning a postsecondary credential, and therefore proactive advising will increase students’ exposures to postsecondary options. Procedures at Riverview include developing a learning plan during intake and this starts the process of

proactive advising. Students were repeatedly exposed to postsecondary options both in the classroom and when they meet with their faculty advisor.

Part of prioritizing student transitions requires the campus community to build strong working relationships. TS Dean Beth saw the importance of breaking down silos on campus and how building relationships with different departments would help Transitional Studies students be successful in moving into postsecondary programs on campus. She stated:

I know our CAP instructors are in a lot of communication with those instructors, so when students express interest, they'll go and get information and bring it back, and [figure out] how can this work, and what can we have [students] take, and there's a lot of dialogue. We're pretty lucky in that respect that we do have a lot of communication with the credit folks.

Beth explained that building relationships is what gets work done. Shelly noted that she has "a better relationship with [college-level faculty] than some of the TS Departments have at other colleges. It's been really hard for other places to start...conversations [about aligning curriculum].

When Beth first started as dean, she was told silos existed on campus. This didn't stop her from starting to break down those silos. She commented:

It's funny, when I first started, one of the things I was told by multiple people was you just need to know the silos are alive and well on this campus. And it became very evident to me - I met with each department before - or the first few weeks I was on board, and it was very clear that they weren't quite sure why I was coming to them. It was really interesting. But since then, I have no trouble just walking into a department and saying, hey - let's chat.

Building relationships is important to other interviewed staff, and interviewed faculty as well.

The navigator was new to the campus and she shared that every day she would consider who she needs to connect with and start to build a relationship:

Because I'm new, there's all kinds of things I still [need to learn], and every day, I'm like, oh, that's a new person that I need to connect with and develop [a relationship]. I just think that continuing to build relationships across different areas across campus is really important... [I]n my short time here, that's kind of the most fun time for me, too, is to make those connections with other departments. To find ways to make it smoother for the student, and just knowing people's names has helped me.

CAP faculty Bruce explained that building relationships across departments had helped break down silos, and helped postsecondary faculty get a better understanding of what Transitional Studies faculty do:

[T]hat actually helps other programs understand what I do, and vice-versa. When I went through the tenure process, I had instructors...like I had the turf management instructor on my tenure committee. So, and now [the turf instructor], if she has a student struggling with reading, she calls me...It's been a lot of breaking down the silos, and letting people and making people understand that I'm not special ed,...I have the rigor, those types of things, built into classes.

CAP faculty Shelly also appeared to understand the value of building relationships. She stated that because she has a good relationship with other departments, she could go to a postsecondary faculty member and say, "hey, this student seems really ready for this class" and together Shelly

and the postsecondary faculty found a way to assess the student to see if he had the skills to take the credit class (which he did).

Transitional studies programs do not always receive the same resources, or esteem, as post-secondary programs (Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008). One CAP faculty member felt this to be true on her campus, and she felt students were disadvantaged from the program's reputation. Shelly commented:

I've heard some stories about people talking about "our" program, and they make some pretty bad comments sometimes. So, I think that's just where the bias is, is sometimes people on our own campus don't really respect what people are doing in Transitional Studies. And I think that, unfortunately, our students probably get the brunt of that as they come through.

Beth, TS Dean, corroborated this feeling:

I feel like this has been a place in the past seen once you go here, you don't leave here. And I want to make sure we change that mentality. [This is] coming from all different layers. I've heard it from faculty, students, not upper administration, but some staff and lower level administration that that's the perception of this department.

Similarly, Kim, front-line staff, stated, "there was some time where we felt that the students were just being recycled, circling through [our program]."

The second element of a transfer receptive culture shown to be present at Riverside relates to "resources that focus on the specific needs of transfer students" (Jain et al., 2011, p. 258). Advising students throughout their time in the Transitional Studies department was found to help connect students to whatever resources they needed to be successful. Findings by Prince

and Jenkins (2005) suggest that students with in basic skills courses need more aggressive advising in order to learn about the college education opportunities.

A third element of a transfer receptive culture is to “offer financial and academic support through distinct opportunities for nontraditional...students” (Jain et al., 2011, p. 258). All new students at Riverview completed a survey from WES during orientation. The results of this survey were used to help the navigator and advisors determine what type of funding students needed. Beth shared:

[W]e figure out if they need to apply for financial aid, if they need to apply for WASFA, if we want to try to get them into Ability to Benefit. Then they’re enrolled in a class that will target the need at the appropriate timing of when they’re going to transition.

Academic support was offered in a variety of ways. ELA and CAP students had access to the tutoring center and also to the ELA/CAP computer lab. Interviewed faculty also welcomed students in their office hours (and beyond). Bruce’s syllabus states the following regarding office hours:

I am also available by appointment or on a drop-in basis, catch me before class, after class, at lunch, before the end of the day, or whenever you need to find me. If I am in my office and my door is open, I will make time for your question. I just ask not to be interrupted during class time, or if my office door is closed.

Shelly, CAP faculty, states that she keeps an open-door policy because students often “come in [outside of office hours], and they’re like, can I get...help?”

The last transfer receptive element that shown in my data was an acknowledgement of “the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and

family” (Jain et al., 2011, p. 258). Data from observations and interviews indicate that faculty strived to include topics that are relevant to students’ lives, or to upcoming courses. CAP faculty Bruce believes the content needs to be “something that is relevant to my students.” ELA faculty James noted that the course content “really does trickle into their lives.” James also noted the importance of “creat[ing] community and building bridges” between different cultures. CAP student Sofia stated that class topics included “global warming, also like poverty because it’s everywhere. Also, like the price wages, how everything is changed, and the economy and everything. And that affects everybody.”

The overall department culture seemed to be that when students start taking classes in Transitional Studies that they are just like any other college student, and their time in the Transitional Studies department was the first step in their path to earn a degree. Maria, the navigator, stated:

I really think it’s such a pivotal thing for students to have that transition to really start thinking at that first moment when they come into basic studies, “I’m going to move forward – this is not my end point – this is my beginning point.”

Bruce, CAP faculty, stated, “We really want [students] to feel like college students. It’s like [they’re] not transitioning to college; [they are] already in college.” Beth, TS Dean, stated that a value or belief of the department was related to student success, and this belief means going beyond Transitional Studies. Beth stated, “I think student success and transitioning them into a career field that a) as just get your GED and be done.” Beth also shared that executive leadership at the college acknowledge that her department “has the largest outreach to the non-traditional, at-risk students, and this is the department that will funnel students into every other program in this college.”

During my observation of the new student intake, language such as “...in six to nine months when you are ready to transition to a program...” was used consistently. Students receive the message that starting in Transitional Studies is the first step towards their next goal at the college. Maria also stated that the department believes “students are just students. They belong on campus; it doesn’t matter where they start, they...should be able to progress to wherever they want to get to be successful and contribute to communities.”

The culture and belief that Transitional Studies students were “regular” college students wasn’t always present at Riverside. Beth shared that in the past, when students would start taking classes in her department, the reputation was that students never left the department. She stated, “I feel like this has been a place in the past seen as once you go here, you don’t leave. And I want to make sure we change that mentality.” This perception has been shared by “faculty, students, not upper administration, but some staff and lower level administration” (Beth).

Ongoing support for students also served to create a transition culture. Sofia, CAP student, shared that communication between faculty and students was very strong, and this helped her feel supported as a student. Sofia equated quick and open communication with her teachers as a way of building relationships. When asked how, if at all, do her instructors build relationships with her, she shared:

They communicate. Really well. If you need anything, for instance, when I’m not here, I have my laptop at home and I email them that I can attend today, or such things. And I always tell them if I need any homework or anything, and if I don’t they’ll be like we’re going to be doing this, and you can work on it at home...And they answer immediately.

However, from the staff's point of view, communication could be improved. Maria noted that "cohesive communication that's to the whole department instead of little pieces here and there" can help the department function more effectively. She shared that "things change, and they don't get updated very well." Kim, support staff, shared similar views, "there's been a lot of changes, and definitely... [I need to] get more updated on the changes" to help meet students' needs. She continued:

You know recently there's been a lot of change - new leads, new everything. And I felt that we've had a little bit of a lack of communication. We are the front line and sometimes I feel like we don't have all the info. When they call, we might not be sure [what to tell students], whereas in the past, we were sure, because we were told - and this is what is was. And if it changed, we were told. Now, we just kind of find out about the change because we ask. Or we hear. So, I mean, everybody's learning with that new change. But I think overall, in the past, communication made it a more relaxed environment.

Summary of Proposition 5 data. Data from Proposition 5 revealed there were many aspects of a transfer receptive culture active at Riverview. Executive staff at the college acknowledged that the TS Department is the cornerstone of the college and has the largest outreach to nontraditional students in the community. The college supported the TS Department in all of the changes the dean had suggested, including bringing the navigator from part time to full time. Prioritizing student transitions requires building strong working relationships across campus. The TS Department dean actively worked to build these relationships to break down the silos that exist on campus. The navigator and interviewed faculty also worked to build strong

relationships with others on campus to help create pathways that result in smoother transitions for students.

Other aspects of a transfer receptive culture relate to advising, financial, and academic supports. New students meet with the navigator for advising and are connected to funding when they first arrive to campus. Transitional studies students can access academic supports, but the data from this study showed most students stay within the TS Department space and utilize the department's computer lab and tutoring center. These areas were active at Riverview; however, these areas need to be strengthened.

Chapter Summary

Data from Proposition 1 revealed having transitional studies curriculum aligned with credit English and math courses may assist students' transitions. Proposition 2 data showed Riverview has processes in place for advising students, but some students still do not receive this information. Data from Proposition 3 indicated Riverview created processes to connect students to funding for credit programs; however, similar to Proposition 2 data, not all students get connected to funding. Proposition 4 data exposed transitional studies students have access to academic and systems supports at Riverview, but most students do not take advantage of these supports. According to data for Proposition 5, Riverview is utilizing many aspects of a transition receptive culture. More information about the elements of a transition receptive culture are described in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore how institutional practices and support systems either support or hinder student transitions from basic skills to postsecondary coursework. Past literature pointed to five study propositions developed for this study. This final chapter discusses the study findings, draws connections to prior work, and offers implications for research, policy and practice. I conclude by presenting a “transition receptive culture framework” that may be used by practitioners and college administrators in developing practices and policies that support students in transitioning from basic skills to postsecondary coursework. It is also hoped that this framework may be used by other researchers and further developed by future research.

Contributions and Connections to Research and Theory

This study makes several notable contributions to research. As noted in Chapter 1, many low-skilled adults cannot move out of low-wage jobs and often struggle to provide for their families (AACU, 2012). The median income difference in weekly pay between someone with only a high school diploma and someone with some college is about \$250 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Additionally, people who have some college are more likely to exercise more, have lower obesity rates, and smoke less (Baum et al., 2010). One way to support people in low-wage jobs is to transition students from basic skills into postsecondary courses. This study provided data explaining how systems at an institution either supported or hindered students transitioning from basic skills into credit-bearing programs and presents a transition receptive culture framework that may be used by institutions to work towards increasing these transitions.

Chapter 1 explained there is a dearth of research that focuses on traditional studies students. Prior research that does exist for this population mostly looked at one of this study’s research propositions and did not take a systemic perspective. This present study provides thick

description of data that illustrates how multiple components of a system work together to either support or hinder students transitioning from transitional studies to postsecondary coursework.

There are many benefits of having a degree or certificate, yet a disproportionate number of adult education students never leave basic skills courses. Xu and Ran (2015) found that basic skills students are more likely to be from a lower socio-economic background and/or a person of Color. Past studies have not surfaced system inequities, in particular looking at how inequities impact different demographic groups. Data from my study indicate a presence of inequality regimes. System inequities that are continued may negatively impact transitional studies students, in particular students of Color. College personnel need to be aware of potential inequality systems and actively work to change these systems to remove barriers to transitions.

Since culture determines how we think and behave, this also impacts teaching (Gay, 2000). Prior studies have not focused on the role of culturally responsive pedagogy and transitional studies programs. This study specifically sought out data that revealed when culturally responsive pedagogy was utilized and considered how this may support or hinder students transitioning from transitional studies to postsecondary coursework. First year experience programs have been guided by high impact pedagogy (Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013). High impact pedagogy includes using a variety of teaching methods and stresses the importance of building relationships and collaboration, similar to culturally responsive pedagogy. This prior research has not focused on transitional studies students, whereas this present study focuses on this population. Past studies suggested that when curriculum is contextualized and relevant for students that this is a positive factor in transitioning students from transitional studies to postsecondary courses (Center for Student Success, 2009; Foster et al., 2011; Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008; Perin, 2011). These past studies did not analyze how

culture impacted curriculum and andragogy. When analyzing data from this study, I looked for evidence of culturally responsive pedagogy being used and how this may support or hinder student transitions. The next subsections discuss contributions and connections to research and theory for each of the broad areas of the study propositions.

Andragogy and relevant curriculum. Past research found common practices in traditional studies and developmental education curriculum is sequential instruction, requiring students to master one skill at a time before moving on (Grubb et al., 2003; Foster, Strawn & Duke-Benfield, 2011; Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008; Scott-Clayton, 2011). Data from this study suggested that interviewed faculty, staff, and administrators were aware of this past practice and were creating systems to eliminate this sequential instruction. ELA classes were sequential, as students transition from beginning ELA to intermediate, but CAP students did not all have to take the same classes. Instead, individualized educational plans were developed for each student and this maps out a path to the student's goals. Additionally, Riverview had developed an articulation agreement with the English department, so students who complete the pre-college CAP English sequence do not have to take the English placement test. A similar agreement is in progress with the Math Department and CAP Math.

The Center for Student Success (2009) found that transitional studies curriculum is often siloed by itself. Past studies also indicated that when students do not see the connection between transitional studies curriculum and postsecondary coursework, they may drop out of school (Center for Student Success, 2009; Foster et al., 2011; Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008). My data revealed that transitional studies curriculum is not siloed at Riverview but instead aligned (or in the process of being aligned) to postsecondary courses. Further, since students all have an individualized educational plan, they are more likely to see the connection to the courses they are

taking, and the steps needed to reach their goals. This indicates transitional studies curriculum that is directly related to postsecondary coursework may support student transitions.

Advising and career-development. A study by Hector-Mason et al. (2017) found programs that utilized one-on-one advising helped to increase transitional studies students' awareness of postsecondary options. This same study stated most of these programs used a navigator but did not discuss the role of the navigator. The present study revealed that the navigator at Riverview develops individualized educational plans for each student, and this appears to create a clear path for students to reach their goals. Results may indicate having a navigator to develop individualized educational plans may support student transitions.

Bragg, Dresser, and Smith (2012) found that advising was positively correlated with student success, in particular with students who received advising one or more times. The study did not address the specific role of advising or the most effective time for advising. This study looked specifically at the role of advising. Data from the present study show that meeting with the navigator during intake to develop an educational plan helps the student begin with a clear path in mind. Data also revealed that transitional studies students at Riverview meet with either the faculty advisor or navigator throughout their time in the TS Department.

Students without a network of people to help them figure out how to navigate the college system found the complexity daunting (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Proactive advising may increase students' awareness of postsecondary options (Foster et al., 2011; Prince & Jenkins, 2005). None of these past studies indicated how or by whom this proactive advising may happen. My data suggested utilizing a navigator is critical to filling this need for students without extensive knowledge of higher education or without having a network of people to assist in this process.

Academic advisors need to be familiar with the variety of options available to students (Moore & Shulock, 2011). Providing professional development to academic advisors is critical to ensuring all advisors are familiar with options for students. Moore and Shulock posited that when advisors offer better guidance to students that students could more easily find their way into certificate programs. Data from this study revealed Riverview chose to have all their full-time faculty advisors attend an advising training. Riverview also made the choice to hire a navigator. Both of these decisions indicate Riverview values the importance of having well-informed faculty and staff able to help guide students to their goals.

Financial and ancillary support. Most prior studies on financial and ancillary support focused on traditional college students and not on transitional studies students. This study focused solely on traditional studies students and financial opportunities and guidance. Prior research suggests first generation students need more support with funding options (Goldrick-Rab, 2010), and the majority of noncredit students are first generation students (Rendon, 2002). More specifically, past research, and common sense, show that the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) can be confusing and intimidating for students (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Bettinger et al. (2009) found that enrollments increased when students received help with the FAFSA form. Data from this study showed there was no support offered for transitional studies students and the FAFSA application. Data indicated transitional studies students were connected to other funding sources, such as WorkForce Education Services, but no guidance was offered for FAFSA.

Academic and system support. Goldrick-Rab (2010) and Karp (2011) found that the myriad of options for postsecondary education can be overwhelming for students. These studies indicated a need for clear pathways for students to help alleviate this confusion. Data from my

study surfaced how Riverview develops individual educational plans with each student which becomes their individualized pathway to their goal. Every certificate or degree has numerous milestones along the way (Leinbach & Jenkins, 2008). Past studies show that when institutions track these milestones, this helps the student see their progress, and it helps the institution better understand what barriers may exist (Duke & Strawn, 2008; Leinbach & Jenkins, 2008). These studies did not include milestones for transitional studies students but focused solely on students already in postsecondary coursework. This present study revealed that Riverview does not track any milestones for transitional studies students.

Calcagno et al. (2007) and Gard et al. (2012) found that non-traditional students were often more impacted by the effects of external pressures in their lives. These studies suggested institutions offer evening and weekend courses to help mitigate these external pressures. Data from my study indicated interviewed faculty, staff, and some administrators were aware of the need for evening courses but not much changed in the scheduling. This may be due to an organizing process within the system that perpetuates inequality regimes (Acker, 2006), or it may be due to financial constraints. My study also surfaced that while Riverview offers limited evening classes, support services are not available during evening hours.

Previous studies highlight the importance of having developmental programs coordinated with student support services (Boroch et al., 2007; Duke & Strawn, 2008). Duke and Strawn focused on traditional studies programs and found when these programs are integrated with workforce education and developmental education that multiple pathways can be created for students to transition to postsecondary coursework. This present study found that the TS Department at Riverview was integrated with WorkForce Education Services and processes are either created or in progress with developmental education to become fully integrated.

Discussion and Interpretation of Key Findings

This section is divided into subsections for each of the broad areas of the study propositions and will include a discussion and interpretation of key findings specific to the propositions.

Curriculum and andragogy. My findings suggest that curriculum in transitional studies is not always aligned with postsecondary coursework, nor is it always relevant to students' lives. Curriculum in transitional studies that supports transitions should be aligned with credit courses and relevant to students. The Intended Learning Outcomes for CAP math classes at Riverview were not always accurately depicted on the course material. I believe this is happening because the TS Department is working to align the curriculum in CAP math classes with developmental math classes, but the Intended Learning Outcomes for CAP math classes has not been officially modified. Riverview is in the process of building articulation agreements between the TS Department and developmental education/postsecondary courses. This alignment is creating clear pathways for students who begin their studies in the TS Department.

The data from this study also suggest that culturally responsive pedagogy is not always utilized in transitional studies classes. Faculty who employ culturally responsive pedagogy create lessons and activities that have meaning for students outside of class (Gay, 2000). This allows students to be learning about topics and concepts that are relevant to their lives, such as global warming and poverty. Additionally, culturally responsive pedagogy can help reduce the power inequities in the classroom. Classrooms that encourage students to be actively engaged support students in taking control over their own learning and reduces the dominance of the teacher. When this doesn't happen, classrooms are more teacher-centered and the teacher ends up simply

dictating out information. There is limited opportunity for students to engage in this new information and this is expected to impact what students learn (Grubb et al., 2007).

Another component of culturally responsive pedagogy is employing a variety of instructional strategies (Gay, 2000). Faculty who do not utilize a variety of instructional strategies may be hindering student learning. CAP math faculty interviewed for this study indicated the importance of focusing on students' process of math problem solving, but the evidence did not suggest faculty in the study used strategies to surface students' processes. Rather, the observation of a CAP math class showed the teacher asking and answering most of the questions during the lecture. Students did not speak up much, if at all, during class. This disconnect between what CAP math faculty believe was happening in the class and what was actually happening may indicate an organizing process that maintains inequality (Acker, 2006).

Advising and career-development services. Advising services that begin from students' first time on campus can support student transitions. In this study, students were found to develop an educational plan with the navigator when they first arrive at Riverview and this provides a clear picture for students as to how to reach their educational and career goals. Documentation used during advising is short and concise, and offered in multiple languages. This may make the orientation and advising process easier for students and less intimidating. Offering the needed forms in multiple languages acknowledges and honors students' cultural heritages (Gay, 2000) and is expected to support student retention and transition.

Additionally, the navigator role was shown to streamline the advising and orientation process and support student transitions to credit coursework. This dedicated person on campus was able to support students with their goal setting and career planning. As past studies have indicated, when students with low skills have access to more intentional advising, this may

increase students' exposure to postsecondary education (Foster et al., 2011; Prince & Jenkins, 2005) which may lead to increases in transitions from transitional studies courses to postsecondary courses (Foster et al., 2011). However, data from this study also showed that faculty advising was not consistent. Riverview has a navigator, and the data reveal that some faculty in the study appear to overly rely on the navigator for advising. This may indicate an organizing process that maintains inequality on the basis of class (Acker, 2006), or it may indicate a need for more training for faculty advisors.

Despite the college's best efforts and explicit ways of providing students with career information, students do not always engage with available services. Students at Riverview who are transitioning to postsecondary programs were shown to not always know what options were available. One student did her own research to find a program she was interested in, and another student utilized information she received from a college-wide advisor and not the TS Department faculty or navigator.

Study findings also provide some evidence of "cooling out." For instance, two faculty only encourage students who show up regularly to class, or who have finished high school in their home country to work towards transitioning to postsecondary courses. Faculty in the study may be offering a realistic view for students, or they may be cooling them out. Students who have social privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) tend to perform better academically (Hellmich, 1993). Faculty who are using their cultural norms (showing up to class regularly, have prior education) to decide who gets information about postsecondary options may be hindering students in transitioning to postsecondary options.

Financial and ancillary support. Findings revealed that connecting students to funding options was needed in order for students to transition from taking \$25.00 classes to full tuition-

bearing classes. My data show that students at Riverview are primarily connected to funding opportunities during orientation and through WES. Ability to Benefit (AtB) is a federal program that allows students who do not have high school credentials to qualify for federal financial aid after they have successfully completed six college credits. Riverview is in the process of implementing AtB and creating ways transitional studies students can complete six college credits while finishing up CAP classes. Federal financial aid supports students with the costs of tuition and also can provide financial assistance for living expenses if students qualify. This can reduce a barrier to transitioning from virtually free classes in the TS Department to tuition-bearing credit classes.

Changing the structure of how classes are offered may be a way to eliminate some financial barriers to transitioning. The findings show Riverview is working to change how classes are offered. The TS department offers classes for \$25.00 that have the same Intended Learning Outcomes as developmental courses. The goal of the TS Department is to have one class that is offered, for both transitional studies students and students who place in the equivalent developmental class. This would propel transitional studies students through developmental coursework compared to the old system of having ELA and CAP students take the placement test after finishing CAP classes.

Overall, financial information is not readily available for students without meeting with the navigator during new student orientation. Once a student is in the department, there are ways to find out about funding opportunities, such as going to the WES website or attending a WES orientation. However, most of the funding support appeared to come from the navigator, the two full-time CAP faculty, along with staff in WES. The full-time ELA faculty did not appear to share funding opportunities with his ELA students. Analyzing the workload for the three full-

time faculty, only CAP faculty appear to regularly share funding opportunities or connect students with WES. This seems to create an inequitable workload.

Despite the fact that all students fill out a WES funding survey, there is still a disconnect between what financial services are available and what students know about these opportunities. This evidence may point to an organizing process that maintains inequities (Acker, 2006). Students need support with funding and first-generation students often need additional support (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). More transparency with financial and ancillary support is needed to disrupt this system.

Academic and systems support. Transitional studies students need access to academic supports. Past studies indicate that adult students do not always have access to the same resources that traditional postsecondary students have on campus, and not all students have a network of people to help them learn how to navigate the higher education system (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Zafft et al., 2006). My findings indicate that transitional studies students at Riverview have their own dedicated computer lab/tutoring center and students also can access the college-wide tutoring center. Student participants in this study appeared to know about and utilize the TS Department computer lab but not the campus-wide tutoring center.

While many prior studies indicate the importance of academic supports to help students navigate the systems (Foster et al., 2011; Gard et al., 2012;), findings from this study reveal that many of these supports are only available during the day. The library and tutoring center at Riverview are only open Monday through Friday during daytime hours. Some faculty in the study promote these supports while others believe they are not needed because faculty meet all the needs of their students. This belief may be a form of cooling out students, or it may be an

indicator of an organizing process that maintains inequities (Acker, 2006) since the teacher is the one who decides what support services to share.

Nonacademic supports such as childcare, food pantry, and counseling, were lesser known supports. Information about these services were not posted in classrooms or hallways and information is not clearly posted for these services on Riverview's website. There is a childcare center on Riverview's campus, but not much information is available on the website. Hours and fees are not posted. If a student decides to call and inquiry about the childcare, they will learn the center is only open during the day, Monday through Friday. The lack of childcare often impacts female students more so than male students. With childcare only offered during the day, this burdens female students and exacerbates social inequalities based on gender (Acker, 2006). Students who are searching for a food pantry will see there is one on campus, but the hours of operation are not included. This structural system of not easily finding the hours of the food pantry may perpetuate social inequalities based on class (Acker, 2006). Students who are seeking counseling support will find more information on the website, such as the hours counseling is available and how to make an appointment. Counseling, like many other support services, is only available during the day.

My data suggest that having a navigator is one way to have a central person to connect students to funding, other academic supports, and to develop clear pathways for transitional studies students to reach their goals. Multiple data point to the importance of having a navigator to help connect students with resources. Since adult students often do not have a network of supports to help them navigate college systems, having a navigator may be one way to bridge this gap.

Transition receptive culture. Finally, my data indicate that a transition receptive culture is needed to increase the number of students that move from transitional studies to postsecondary coursework. I posit that a transition receptive model is in place at Riverview, and in the next section I used this framework to discuss implications from this study. Specific information on the data that indicate this will be described next.

Implications of Findings for Practice and Policy

Data from this study indicate that some changes in the transfer receptive culture framework (Jain et al., 2011) are needed to better meet the needs of institutions that serve noncredit students. Based on the findings of this study, I posit that a transfer receptive culture should include the following six elements:

1. Establish the transition of noncredit students, especially nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students, as a high institutional priority that ensures stable accessibility, retention, and completion.
2. Provide outreach and resources that focus on the specific needs of noncredit students while complimenting the community college mission.
3. Offer intentional, holistic financial and academic support through distinct opportunities for noncredit students.
4. Offer noncredit courses that align with postsecondary courses, either with traditionally required courses (such as college-level English and math), and/or with professional-technical courses offered at the college and succinctly map out multiple paths to transition to these courses. Curriculum needs to be meaningful and relevant to students' lives or future careers.

5. Acknowledge the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family.
6. Create an appropriate and organic framework from which to assess, evaluate, and enhance transition receptive programs. This framework needs to consider inequality regimes (Acker, 2006) and how to disrupt existing inequitable systems.

Note that this list is not divided into “pre” or “post” transition, as I believe these elements are needed both before and after students transition. The onus does not need to be on the transitional studies department; in fact, I believe one of the reasons Riverview is successful in their transitions is because the entire campus is mostly following this framework. Each subsection below discusses implications of the findings using the transition receptive culture framework.

Element 1: Establish the transition of noncredit students, especially nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students, as a high institutional priority that ensures stable accessibility, retention, and completion. To have an authentic high institutional priority of establishing the transition of noncredit students, campuses must surface, then disrupt inequities within the college’s systems that may be hindering transitions. Critical race theory (CRT) recognizes that racism is normalized and systemic throughout society including within institutions of higher education (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Institutions and the students within them are impacted by racism. Bonilla-Silva (2012) calls this ‘racial grammar’ that “helps reproduce racial order as just the way things are” (p. 174). Racial grammar is so deeply embedded in our culture that it can be challenging to even see or acknowledge how this racial grammar is the foundation for all interactions. Gay (2000) states that “even without our being consciously aware of it, culture determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we...learn” (p. 9). The navigator acknowledged that classism and racism are

present at Riverview and she consciously works to minimize the impact of these on students. Since the dominant culture on campus tends to be driven by White, middle-class culture (Bonilla-Silva, 2012), college staff and faculty need to constantly challenge this ideology. The navigator felt that all students belong on campus and by believing and acting on this, she was pushing back against the dominant culture. The navigator also believes that TS students were just like any other student and that the TS Department was just their beginning point on the road to a certificate or degree. CAP faculty also believed that TS students *are* college students who are on the first step of getting into a college-level program.

Another element of prioritizing the transition of noncredit students is to have integrated services in place at the institution. Past studies have indicated the importance of integrating institutional services for students (Boroch et al., 2007; Duke & Strawn, 2008). Unfortunately, many noncredit programs operate in silos (Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008). Riverview is actively working to breakdown those silos by continuing to strengthen relationships with other departments, both on and off-campus. Interviewed faculty and staff regularly build relationships with other departments, and this may contribute to Riverview's strong integrated services for students. Maria, the navigator, also noted the importance of building relationships across campus is important in order to help students make connections. She also acknowledged that relationships are key to developing smooth transitions for students. Institutions need to continue to build relationships across departments to dispel any old beliefs that may interfere with establishing the transition of basic skills students to postsecondary coursework.

Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum (2008) found that noncredit programs often do not receive the same resources or esteem as credit-bearing programs. Past studies have indicated the importance of integrating institutional services for students (Boroch et al., 2007; Duke & Strawn, 2008). One

way to continue to build on Riverview's integrated institutional services is to continue to develop relationships with other departments, both on and off-campus. Triangulated results of interviews, observations, and document analysis indicate faculty and staff at Riverview regularly build relationships with other departments, and this may contribute to the college's strong integrated services for students.

In addition to not always having the same resources on campus at students enrolled in traditional postsecondary courses, students often do not have a network of people to help them navigate the system (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Zafft et al., 2006). Having a navigator may be one way to help bridge this gap, and Riverview has made the choice to hire a full-time navigator. When asked what she would do if she were given a pile of cash, the TS Dean stated that she would hire another full-time navigator because she believes this role helps increase noncredit student transitions. Kim, frontline staff, noticed changes with students once Riverview had a navigator.

The TS Department reaches out to other departments and areas on campus. However, why does this appear to be a one-way street? This may be an indicator of the visibility of inequalities or organizing process that produce or maintain inequality (Acker, 2006). Data collected from this study did not indicate that any members of Riverview in the study were aware or had considered that relationship building initiates mostly with the TS Department members. This component of inequality regimes is defined "as the degree of awareness of inequalities" (Acker, 2006, p. 452). Acker reminds us that people in the dominant culture tend not to see their privilege. Acker (2006) goes on to state that all organizations have systems that produce inequalities and these systems "also produce class, gender, and racial inequalities" (p. 447). These two characteristics of inequality regimes go hand in hand, because without the visibility of this inequality, the organizing system will remain the same. Since it appears that the relationship

building stems from the TS Department members, this may indicate that the campus hasn't fully embraced a transition receptive culture, as the first element of this culture states that the entire campus establishes the transition of noncredit students as an institutional priority. More research on the issue of surfacing inequities in systems needs to be completed.

Foster et al. (2011) posit that achievable milestones need to be included as benchmarks for students and developed in a way that allows students to “stop in and stop out” of their educational pathway. When teachers talk about possibly programs that students may be interested in, Riverview needs to ensure that these pathways are developed to include benchmarks for students and ways for students to stop in and out as needed, including for transitional studies students. No evidence of milestones or benchmarks were found at Riverview.

Element 2: Provide outreach and resources that focus on the specific needs of noncredit students while complimenting the community college mission. Common goals of advising encompass both academic and navigating the college culture (Zafft et al., 2006) and advising is a key component for helping students navigate higher education culture (Gard et al., 2012). Prince and Jenkins (2005) found that students with low skills need more aggressive advising in order to learn about the college education opportunities. All students at Riverview develop an educational plan and regularly meet with an advisor. This proactive advising may increase students' exposure to postsecondary education (Foster et al., 2011; Prince & Jenkins, 2005) and may increase students' skill and confidence (Foster et al., 2011). With this additional advising support, students may begin to think of themselves as a college student which may lead to increases in transitions from transitional studies to postsecondary courses (Foster et al., 2011). Additionally, Shifting Gears (Bragg, Dresser, & Smith, 2012) found that “students who received advising at least once” enjoyed success (p. 57). At Riverview, all transitional studies students

participate in advising, beginning from intake. Procedures include developing a learning plan during intake and this starts the process of proactive advising. Triangulated results of interviews from students and faculty, observations, and program documents suggest that students are repeatedly exposed to postsecondary options both in the classroom and when they meet with their faculty advisor.

Advising is an example how the TS Department views itself as the first step to something more, an indicator that Riverview is following the first element of a transition receptive college. The TS Department follows the campus policy of faculty advising, so part of the faculty contract includes advising. No evidence was found that advising for Transitional Studies faculty is any different than the credit-bearing college faculty. However, when students are in their last term in TS, they are handed off to a department advisor. This hand-off may be helping students navigate the system.

Jacobs and Tolbert-Bynum (2008) found that not all noncredit students have access to support services on college campuses because they are not considered to be a “regular” college student. Scott-Clayton (2011) found the onus of advising often falls to the student. Triangulated results from interviews of students, faculty, and staff and program documents suggest students at Riverview appear to have access to support services and the department is actively working to break down past beliefs that TS students are not regular college students. Transitional studies students at Riverview do have access to support services; however, the students and faculty in the study stated they do not take advantage of them.

A study by Scott-Clayton (2011) indicate that advising for community college students enrolled in postsecondary coursework was typically focused on the mechanics of registration or navigation of the college system, and often not on discovering life goals or career choices. Most

advising at Riverside appears to only be academic, whereas the Beth, TS Dean wants to focus on the other life supports in addition to academic advising. Bruce, CAP faculty, noted that WorkForce Education Services (WES) is part of the advising mix. Each student completes a survey at intake to see what financial services they qualify for through WES. At the surface, evidence found at Riverview confirms Scott-Clayton's findings that advising is mostly focused on the mechanics of registration. However, some interviewed faculty ask their students what they are interested in and connects students with resources about that field. Some interviewed faculty also encourages students to complete some career exploration inventories to explore different options for careers.

Goldrick-Rab (2010) found that colleges may offer a tremendous amount of information to students but at the same time provide insufficient guidance in navigating this information. This often leads students down paths that are not helpful or productive when they do not have navigational help. Triangulated results of interviews, observations, and program documents indicate students at Riverview are presented with a variety of information the college has to offer and they have access to faculty advisors and the navigator. Despite these efforts, it appears not all students understand the details of the next steps. Adele, ELA student, is transitioning to phlebotomy and she did not know what all to do after she completed her ELA and CAP program. She found out about phlebotomy by looking on the internet. She was not aware of what supports Riverview could provide for her when she entered into the phlebotomy program. Sofia, CAP student, found out about ways to help support her classes from her advisor outside of the TS Department. Both of these students did not remember receiving information about their postsecondary programs from their TS faculty advisor. More research is needed to further

understand the disconnect between what appears to be proactive advising and what students actually take away from this advising.

TS faculty are new to advising at Riverview. At the time of this study, interviewed faculty had been advising for less than a year. Shelly, CAP faculty, explained she is only doing mid-term advising to ensure students are on the right pathway. Bruce, CAP faculty, stated that the navigator creates an educational plan with students and will also meet with them at the end of their program to help with next steps. Bruce explained that CAP faculty have been support advising in between what the navigator does. James, ELA faculty, has students brainstorm possibly careers and then encourages them to meet with the navigator to help them make a plan to meet their goal. Acker (2006) states that inequitable hierarchies are present in organizations that are structured like a traditional bureaucracy. Does the fact that faculty mainly advise students just in the middle indicate a level of inequity in the structure of the department? Or does it simply mean faculty are new to advising and as a result rely more heavily on the navigator? No data were surfaced to indicate anyone within the department felt this was an inequitable structure. Does this indicate the TS Department has a lack of awareness of inequities in advising? Further research is needed to answer these questions.

Element 3: Offer intentional, holistic financial and academic support through distinct opportunities for noncredit students. When students first arrive at Riverview, they complete a survey for WorkForce Education Services (WES). This survey helps the WES staff connect students to funding, whether it be for the \$25 fees in the TS Department, bus passes, or childcare, or for future funding for postsecondary coursework. This funding support may help increase students' transitions, as without funding, most students cannot take credit bearing courses. The TS Department is developing a way to help ELA/CAP students get funding for six

credits while they are in their last quarter of noncredit courses. By doing this, students will qualify for FAFSA through the Ability to Benefit program.

Riverview includes funding information as part of the initial advising. The institution may be trying to overcome the traditionally low percentage of students who receive financial aid after they transition from ELA or CAP programs. Prince and Jenkins (2005) found that only 18% of students who transitioned from ESL (ELA) to postsecondary course received financial aid, and only 28% of students who transitioned from ABE (CAP) received aid. In addition, Riverview is working to have CAP students in the same pre-college math class as “regular” students, because the outcomes for CAP math and pre-college math are the same. The difference would be that CAP students would continue to pay \$25 for the class because the course would be coded as a transitional studies course. These examples are showing how Riverview is trying to change the old, traditional model of education. Calcagno et al. (2007) found that older, nontraditional students were more negatively impacted by environmental factors. To counter this negative impact, institutions need to consider modifying the historical model of education (Calcagno et al., 2007; Gard et al., 2012).

Regular funding workshops are not available at Riverview. No information is posted around the college or readily available on their website. Goldrick-Rab (2010) found that first-generation students may need additional support with funding as students are more likely not to know where to go to secure funding. Rendon (2002) notes the majority of noncredit students are classified as first-generation students, and even if students do not meet this classification, economically disadvantaged students often do not have a social network to help guide them through the funding process (Karp, 2011; Rosenbaum et al., 2006).

Academic and Systems Support. Transitional studies students do not always have a network to help them navigate higher education systems (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Zafft et al., 2006). Having a navigator may be one way to help bridge this gap. The role of a navigator falls into multiple elements of a transition receptive culture, and these other benefits have been discussed in the prior sections in this chapter.

Triangulated results of interviews from faculty and staff, observations, and program documents indicate intake for students has been streamlined with fewer stops for students. Students take a placement test and are registered on the same day, as well as developing an educational plan with the navigator. Having an individualized education plan may have a positive influence on transitions. Past studies have shown that colleges offer many postsecondary options for students, but a systematic approach to these offerings has been missing for many years (Karp, 2015) and the myriad of options can be overwhelming for students (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Karp, 2011). Additionally, students in transitional studies need a clear picture of how the classes they are taking connect to their career and academic goals (Zafft, 2008). By developing a streamline intake process that includes an educational plan, this helps provide the systematic guidance for students and may help students feel more supported in their education.

On-campus childcare does not match class hours, and no evening hours are offered. Other services, such as the computer lab and library, also do not match transitional studies classes, and this makes it challenging to connect students with the needed supports. This disconnect may be a shape and degree of inequality within inequality regimes (Acker, 2006), or it may be a result of financial constraints.

Element 4: Offer noncredit courses that align with postsecondary courses, either with traditionally required courses (such as college-level English and math), and/or with

professional-technical courses offered at the college and succinctly map out multiple paths to transition to these courses. Curriculum needs to be meaningful and relevant to students' lives or future careers. Findings suggest that contextualized, relevant curriculum is one factor in transitioning students from noncredit to postsecondary coursework (Center for Student Success, 2009; Foster et al., 2011; Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008; Perin, 2011). Wachen et al. (2012) found that students believed instruction was more effective when contextualization occurred. This supports the triangulated findings from this study as students stated they felt the curriculum related to their outside lives. Much of the higher education curriculum is still Euro-centered, regardless if this curriculum has a negative impact on students (Rendon, 1994). When teachers employ culturally responsive pedagogy, this helps to connect the “meaningfulness between home and school” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). Students may drop out of classes because they do not see the relationship between the curriculum in noncredit courses and their overall goals of postsecondary coursework (Center for Student Success, 2009; Foster et al., 2011; Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008). Interviewed faculty at Riverview intertwine career connections in the content, and this may contribute to students remaining in classes and transitioning to postsecondary coursework.

James, ELA faculty, shared the importance of being transparent with students. Existing research suggests that transparency is needed for students to see how the curriculum in their courses connects to their educational goals (Jacobs & Tolbert-Bynum, 2008). James noted that he strives to be transparent with his students all of the time. He wants to make the objectives clear for students, so they understand why they are doing something, and how the activity connects to their real lives. Additionally, James also believes it is important to have high expectations of students and hold them accountable to these standards. Research indicates when

high cognitive demands are placed on students that they will persist to their goal, especially when a supportive environment is included (Grubb et al., 2003).

A study by Hector-Mason et al. (2017) showed that when students have a learning plan, this tool supports students in their transition to postsecondary courses. Additionally, Karp (2015) found that a systematic approach to all of the various college offerings has been missing for many years. Goldrick-Rab (2010) and Karp (2011) found the multitude of options can be overwhelming for students. Regular advising and an educational plan can help lessen these challenges. All students at Riverview develop an educational plan and this tool may help support students to reach their goals.

Element 5: Acknowledge the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family. This element directly relates to the theory used in this study: culturally responsive pedagogy, critical race theory, cooling out, and inequality regimes.

Transitional studies programs across the state serve more students of Color than White students (Washington State Board, 2018a). Yet students still find themselves needing to assimilate into the dominant, White, middle-class culture when at the institution (Bonilla-Silva, 2012). Culture influences how we think and behave, and also how we learn (Gay, 2000) and is deeply ingrained in the organization and this perpetuates racial order (Acker, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 2012). Faculty, staff, and administrators need to consciously work towards creating systems that acknowledge the cultural capital all students bring to campus.

Bruce, CAP faculty, creates lessons that encourage students to share what they know. He asked students what “climate justice” meant to them before facilitating an activity around this topic. Students were able to share their ideas, knowledge, and experience with climate justice

and not just have to listen to the teacher dictate what climate justice is and where it is happening (or not happening). James, ELA faculty, facilitates activities in the classroom so he can get to know his students and their home culture. One characteristic of culturally responsive pedagogy is bridging the “meaningfulness between home and school experiences” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). These are examples of how interviewed faculty in the TS Department are employing culturally responsive pedagogy.

Institutions need to create systems that acknowledge and honor students’ lived experiences. With the dominate culture still shaping organizations, this will take concerted effort. Acker (2006) posits that much of the economic inequities we face today are perpetuated in organizations throughout the U.S. Institutions of higher education are not immune to this and faculty, staff, and students need to intentionally work to surface these inequities and create ways to disrupt them. Some interviewed faculty and staff at Riverview are aware of these inequitable processes and are working to change them. Beth, the TS Dean, acknowledges that her institution does not utilize I-BEST programs to help accelerate transitional studies students into certificate programs. Beth also shared that supports outside the classroom do not meet the needs of students, mainly because most of the services are only available during the day. Institutions need to consider the student population they serve and develop strategic plans to support students and families.

Element 6: Create an appropriate and organic framework from which to assess, evaluate, and enhance transition receptive programs. This final element requires reflective analysis. The overarching goal of the transition receptive culture is to increase students transitioning from the TS Department to postsecondary courses. Many institutions measure this success by students who make this transition within one year. This may not be a realistic

measurement because most transitional studies students have outside pressures and not all can attend school full time. Students in transitional studies programs are more diverse than traditional college students (Washington State Board, 2018a; Xu & Ran, 2015) and with this diversity comes the need to create a variety of ways for students to reach their goals. In order to more precisely assess the transition culture and refine the processes, institutions must create tools that will accurately gauge the realities both students and institutions face throughout this process. These tools must include the intersections of race/ethnicity, class, and gender.

Recommendations for Practice and Policy for Riverview

In addition to intentionally creating a transition receptive culture at Riverview, here are a few additional recommendations for the college:

1. Riverview should consider tracking disaggregated data for its program instead of relying on the state to provide this information. By having this data readily available, Riverview can begin to look more closely at the inequities in the system by race/ethnicity, gender, age, and prior education. Additionally, Riverview could consider tracking the milestones that CAP and ELA students reach (or do not reach). Once patterns are surfaced, the TS Department could begin to change the systems where they find barriers and celebrate the successes of their program.
2. Riverview should consider increasing their collective awareness around critical race theory and inequality regimes. Some data may suggest the presence of inequality regimes in the TS Department and the whole college. The college needs to critically exam how decisions are made, in particular for support services. Transitional studies students do not appear to be taking advantage of support services, and further research needs to be completed to determine the reasons. One possibility is that the hours of the services do

not match the class hours. Other possibilities are that information is not reaching students, or that students are not in need of these services. More research into this disconnect is needed to fully understand what part of the system is not working. After these inequality regimes are surfaced the department can then work towards changing these systems by providing targeted professional development on inclusive teaching and advising, and other areas that are discovered during this process.

3. Riverview needs to complete the work started in aligning curriculum between transitional studies and credit English and math courses. Currently, Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) on course syllabi do not match published ILOs. Additionally, faculty at Riverview need to critically look at ELA and CAP curricula and ensure all activities are meaningful and relevant to students' lives and transparent as to how the curricula maps to postsecondary courses.

Recommendations for Future Research

More research is needed to test if the transition receptive culture posited from this study is effective in moving students from basic skills to postsecondary coursework. Studies should include both small, medium, and large programs. Creating individualized educational plans for all students appears to create a clear pathway for students which may increase transitions. However, this may not be feasible for programs that serve 1,000 students or more. Research focusing on what successful programs of all sizes are doing is needed.

Additional research needs to look at systems of inequalities within basic skills programs to determine which systems are perpetuating inequalities. This study found a disconnect between what interviewed faculty perceive as important to include in teaching versus what is actually happening in the classroom. Further research is needed to gather more data on this phenomenon.

Additionally, future studies need to consider how race and ethnicity impact results. This study considered the fact that transitional studies students were more diverse than the college-wide students; however, more data is needed before conclusions can be made.

Advising appeared to be present at Riverview, completed both by faculty advisors and the navigator. However, both students involved in this study did not appear to have all of the information needed to continue their studies. Further research is needed to determine where the disconnect is happening between the offering and facilitating of advice and students receiving and using this advice.

Analyzing these data, or data from future studies, with a stronger critical race theory lens may help surface how faculty, staff, students, administrators, and policy makers view basic skills students. Results of this analysis may surface inherent inequities within basic skills departments and the institution. Using critical race theory to analyze data may highlight if/how deficit thinking influences people's perceptions of both basic skills students and programs.

A quantitative study that models the relationship between students' educational experiences and their likelihood of transitioning to credit courses is needed. This study needs to disaggregate the data by race/ethnicity, gender, age, and possibly previous education level.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

For faculty:

Curriculum

1. Tell me about your role and experiences with the Transitional Studies department. (Ice breaker)
2. What supports does the curriculum provide for students transitioning out of ABE/ESL to postsecondary coursework? (Prop 1)
3. What hindrances does the curriculum provide for students transitioning out of ABE/ESL to postsecondary coursework? (Prop 1)
4. What do you like about the curriculum? How might it be improved? (Prop 1)
5. How do you measure the effectiveness of your lessons? (CRT/Culturally Responsive Pedagogy)
6. In what ways do you think it is clear to students that what they are doing in basic skills connects to credit courses? (Prop 4)
7. How does your cultural values, norms, or beliefs impact the classroom? (CRT/Culturally Responsive Pedagogy)
8. How does the curriculum support your type of enrollment? In other words, if there is open- or managed-enrollment, how does the curriculum support students when they enter? (Prop 1)
9. Please tell me about the relationship between basic skills and college-level faculty. (Prop 5)
 - a. How do faculty collaborate together to develop help students be successful in college courses?

Advising

10. Please talk me through how the advising students receive starting with the intake process all the way through their transition to postsecondary classes. (Prop 2)
 - a. Who all is involved in this process? (Inequality Regimes)
 - b. What do you like about the process? How might it be improved?
11. If you advise students, describe the protocol for advising. If no protocol is used, describe what questions you may ask students, or what else occurs during an advising session. (Prop 2, Cooling Out)
12. Describe workshops, activities, or events that students can attend in order to learn about transitioning out of basics skills. (Prop 4 & 5)

Financial support

13. What financial support exists for students transitioning out of basic skills? (Prop 3)
14. How does the department or institution communicate these supports to students? (Prop 3)

Academic and system support

15. Please tell me about supports outside the classroom help students while they are in basic skills. This can be both academic and other programs (such as food bank). (Prop 4)
 - a. Which of these supports continue as they transition to postsecondary coursework?
16. Please tell me about what you know about how decisions are made about what supports to offer students. (Prop 4, Prop 5, Inequality Regimes)

Wrap up

17. I've been asking most of the questions so far. What questions do you have for me, or what else do you think would be helpful for me to know about your program?

For staff:

Curriculum

1. Tell me about your role and experiences with the Transitional Studies department. (Ice breaker)
2. What supports does the curriculum provide for students transitioning out of ABE/ESL to postsecondary coursework? (Prop 1)
3. What hindrances does the curriculum provide for students transitioning out of ABE/ESL to postsecondary coursework? (Prop 1)

Advising

4. Please talk me through what advising students receive starting with the intake process all the way through their transition to postsecondary classes. (Prop 2)
 - a. Who all is involved in this process? (Inequality Regimes)
 - b. What do you like about this process? How might it be improved?
5. If you advise students, describe the protocol for advising. If no protocol is used, describe what questions you may ask students, or what else occurs during an advising session (Prop 2, Cooling Out)
6. Please describe workshops, activities, or events that students can attend in order to learn about transitioning out of basics skills. (Prop 4 & 5)

Financial support

7. What financial support exists for students transitioning out of basic skills? (Prop 3)
8. How does the department or institution communicate these supports to students? (Prop 3 & 5)

Academic and system support

9. Please tell me about supports outside the classroom help students while they are in basic skills. This can be both academic and other programs (such as food bank). (Prop 4)
10. For staff who work directly with these programs:
 - a. What percentage of students take advantage of these supports? (Prop 4)
 - b. Which of these supports continue as they transition to postsecondary coursework?
 - c. How do you measure the effectiveness of these supports?
11. Please tell me about what you know about how decisions are made about what supports to offer students. (Prop 4, Prop 5, Inequality Regimes)

Wrap up

12. How does your cultural values, norms, or beliefs impact your work with students? (CRT/Culturally Responsive Pedagogy)
13. I've been asking most of the questions so far. What questions do you have for me, or what else do you think would be helpful for me to know about your program?

For administrators:

1. Tell me about your role and experiences with the Transitional Studies department. (Ice breaker)

Advising

2. Please describe workshops, activities, or events that students can attend in order to learn about transitioning out of basics skills. (Prop 4 & 5)
3. Describe workshops, activities, or events that students can attend in order to learn about transitioning out of basics skills. (Prop 4 & 5)
 - a. About how many students attend these activities/events each quarter?
 - b. How is effectiveness measured?

Financial support

4. What financial support exists for students transitioning out of basic skills? (Prop 3)
5. How does the department or institution communicate these supports to students? (Prop 3 & 5)

Academic and system support

6. Please tell me about supports outside the classroom help students while they are in basic skills. This can be both academic and other programs (such as food bank). (Prop 4)
7. For staff who work directly with these programs:
 - a. What percentage of students take advantage of these supports?
 - b. Which of these supports continue as they transition to postsecondary coursework?
 - c. How do you measure the effectiveness of these supports?
8. Please tell me about what you know about how decisions are made about what supports to offer students. (Prop 4, Prop 5, Inequality Regimes)

Wrap up

9. How does your cultural values, norms, or beliefs impact your work with students? (CRT/Culturally Responsive Pedagogy)
10. I've been asking most of the questions so far. What questions do you have for me, or what else do you think would be helpful for me to know about your program?

For students:

1. Who encouraged you to take classes at the college? (Ice breaker)
2. What do your instructors do to build relationships with you? (Prop 1, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy)
3. In class, how do you show your teacher what you have learned? Are there multiple ways of showing this, or just one? (Prop 1, CRT, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy)
4. Are the topics covered in class similar to or reflective of topics you find important? (Prop 1, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy)
5. If you need help with your classwork, what do you do? (Prop 4)
6. If I was going to be a really good [ABE or ESL] instructor, what would you want from me? (Culturally Responsive Pedagogy)
7. What opportunities are there for you when you finish [ABE or ESL]? (Prop 2)
 - a. How did you learn about these opportunities?
 - b. What support did you receive to help you take advantage of these opportunities?
8. What do you need to do to take credit courses? How do you know this? (Prop 2, 4)
9. How do you pay for college? If you are receiving financial assistance, how did you find out about this opportunity? (Prop 5)
10. What barriers or problems, if any, do you think you will face when transitioning to credit classes? (Prop 4, Cooling Out, CRT, Inequality Regimes)
 - a. How do you think you will overcome the barrier(s)?
 - b. What could the college do to help support you in transitioning to credit classes? (Prop 5)

Appendix B

Scripts for Process

Initial Introduction to faculty and staff for interview (by phone, voice mail or e-mail)

Hello, my name is Christie Knighton. I am conducting research on the basic skills program at your college. I am conducting interviews as part of a case study that I'm developing about your college to identify how the college has been so successful at transitioning its students from basic skills to college level. You were identified as someone who could tell me about the program. I have a list of questions that will take between 30 and 60 minutes to complete. I'd like to schedule some time soon when I can ask you those questions. Please let me know if you're willing and available for this conversation. You can reach me by e-mail at knightoc@oregonstate.edu or by phone at 206-850-9417.

Interview Script for faculty and staff [by phone, web conferencing, or in person]

As I mentioned when we set up this interview, my name is Christie Knighton. I am conducting a study to identify how the college has been so successful at transitioning its students from basic skills to college level. You were identified as someone who could tell me about the basic skills program. I have a list of questions that will take between 30 and 60 minutes to complete, and we have scheduled this time when I can ask you those questions. Does this time still work for you? [if not, reschedule]

These questions will take between 30 and 60 minutes to go through. If any of the questions don't make sense, please ask me to re-state it.

The comments that you make will be kept confidential. That means that when I write my report, I won't be using any comments that you make which might identify you. I will not reference your name or position or any identifying characteristics you might use. My goal is to develop an overall picture of the basic skills, so I'll be writing my report in relation to that overall picture.

I'd like to record this conversation so that I can review the notes I will be taking for accuracy. The recording that I make will only be available to me. The audio file that I create will be kept in a secure, password protected directory on my computer until I finish my report. At that time, I will delete it from my computer and place it onto a password secured CD-ROM which will be kept in a locked cabinet. At no time will I share the recording or any transcription of the recording.

Would it be okay if I record our conversation?

[if yes, turn on the recorder]: Okay. Thanks for allowing me to record our discussion. I've turned on the recorder now.

[if no, begin taking notes]: Thanks. I will just take notes and not use a recorder. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Script for faculty to ask for introduction to students [by phone, web conferencing, or in person]

As I mentioned in our initial contact, my name is Christie Knighton. I am conducting a study to identify how the college has been so successful at transitioning students from basic skills to postsecondary coursework. You have been identified as someone who can introduce me to students. I would like to interview students to learn their perspectives about the basic skills program. Could we set up a time for me to meet your students and tell them about this research study?

Interview Script for students [by web conferencing, or in person]

As I mentioned when we set up this interview, my name is Christie Knighton. I am conducting a study to identify how the college has been so successful at transitioning students from basic skills to college level. You were identified as someone who could tell me about the basic skills program. I have a list of questions that will take between 30 and 60 minutes to complete, and we have scheduled this time when I can ask you those questions. Does this time still work for you? [if not, reschedule]

These questions will take between 30 and 60 minutes to go through. If any of the questions don't make sense, please ask me to re-state it.

The comments that you make will be kept confidential. That means that when I write my report, I won't be using any comments that you make which might identify you. I will not reference your name or class name or any identifying characteristics you might use. My goal is to develop an overall picture of the basic skills program, so I'll be writing my report in relation to that overall picture.

I'd like to record this conversation so that I can review the notes I will be taking for accuracy. The recording that I make will only be available to me. The audio file that I create will be kept in a secure, password protected directory on my computer until I finish my report. At that time, I will delete it from my computer and place it onto a password secured CD-ROM which will be kept in a locked cabinet. At no time will I share the recording or any transcription of the recording.

Would it be okay if I record our conversation?

[if yes, turn on the recorder]: Okay. Thanks for allowing me to record our discussion. I've turned on the recorder now.

[if no, begin taking notes]: Thanks. I will just take notes and not use a recorder. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Post-Script for all [by web conferencing, or in person]

Thank you for taking your time to meet with me today. I appreciate your input. As a reminder, all of your comments will be kept confidential. That means when I write my report, I won't be using any comments that you made which might identify you. I will not reference your name or

any identifying characteristics you might use. My goal is to develop an overall picture of the basic skills program, so I'll be writing my report in relation to that overall picture. I will be working on this report over the next few months, and a version of this report will be submitted to the administrators of the department. If you are interested in the findings, please connect with the administrators of department towards the end of this year.

Appendix C
Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

STUDY TITLE:	Factors that Support Student Transition from Basic Skills to Credit Bearing Courses at a Community College
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	Gloria Crisp, Oregon State University, ph: 541-737-9286
STUDY TEAM:	Christie Knighton, Oregon State University, ph: 206-850-9417
SPONSOR:	None. This study is not being sponsored or supported by any organization.
PURPOSE:	This study is about exploring institutional practices and support systems at an institution with a high percentage of students transitioning from noncredit, basic skills courses to postsecondary education. We are asking you if you want to be in this study because you have direct experience and information with the basic skills department at your institution.
VOLUNTARY:	You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You can also decide to be in the study for now and change your mind later.
ACTIVITIES:	You will be asked to participate in an interview that will take between 30 and 60 minutes.
TIME:	The interview will take between 30 and 60 minutes.
RISKS:	There are no known risks associated with this study. However, you will be asked to describe the workings of your college, and we want you to be forthright in your responses. To that end, participants' anonymity will be preserved through careful redaction of names and identifying characteristics in any reporting of what we learn from interviews. Additionally, the data will be stored in secure and encrypted directories. While the interviews may yield sensitive information from participants, no information will be connected to any single participant.
BENEFITS:	This study is not designed to benefit you directly. However, this study provides a beginning glimpse to the research question which has, to date, been addressed mostly through single-use studies that do not look at the holistic impact of institutions on students' transitions. This study will help to create a framework for looking at the question of basic skills transitions. That framework will be critical for both the future work of the researcher in this study and others who are exploring this field.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your name will never be used in any public dissemination of these data (publications, presentations, etc.). All electronic research materials and consent forms will be stored in an encrypted and password protected directory on the principal investigator's computer. This form will be kept by the principal investigator in a locked file cabinet. All documents will be maintained for five years after the completion of the study. When the study ends, any identifying information will be removed from the data, or it will be destroyed. All of the information you provide will be kept confidential.

PAYMENT: You will not be paid for being in this research study and you will not receive any gifts/incentives for participating in this study.

STUDY CONTACTS: We would like you to ask us questions if there is anything about the study that you do not understand. You can call us at 541-737-9286 or email us at gloria.crisp@oregonstate.edu . You can also contact the Human Research Protection Program at Oregon State University with any concerns that you have about your rights or welfare as a study participant. This office can be reached at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu

Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name

Participant's Signature

Date Signed

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date Signed

Appendix D IRB Approval Letter



Oregon State University
Research Office

Human Research Protection Program
& Institutional Review Board
B308 Kerr Administration Bldg, Corvallis OR 97331
(541) 737-8008
IRB@oregonstate.edu
<http://research.oregonstate.edu/irb>

Date of Notification	May 24, 2019		
Notification Type	Approval Notice		
Submission Type	Initial Application	Study Number	IRB-2019-0142
Principal Investigator	Gloria E Crisp		
Study Team Members	Knighton, Christie		
Study Title	An Exploration on How Institutional Practices and Support Systems Support or Hinder Community College Basic Skills Students Transitioning to Postsecondary Education: A Case Study		
Review Level	FLEX		
Waiver(s)	None		
Risk Level for Adults	Minimal Risk		
Risk Level for Children	Study does not involve children		
Funding Source	None	Cayuse Number	N/A

APPROVAL DATE: 05/24/2019

EXPIRATION DATE:

05/23/2024

A new application will be required in order to extend the study beyond this expiration date.

Comments:

The above referenced study was reviewed and approved by the OSU Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that the protocol meets the minimum criteria for approval under the applicable regulations, state laws, and local policies.

This proposal has not been evaluated for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human subjects in relation to potential benefits.

Adding any of the following elements will invalidate the FLEX determination and require the submission of a project revision:

Increase in risk

Federal funding or a plan for future federal sponsorship (e.g., proof of concept studies for federal RFPs, pilot studies intended to support a federal grant application, training and program project grants, no-cost extensions)

Research funded or otherwise regulated by a [federal agency that has signed on to the Common](#)

[Rule](#), including all agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services

FDA-regulated research

NIH-issued or pending Certificate of Confidentiality

Prisoners or parolees as subjects

Contractual obligations or restrictions that require the application of the Common Rule or which require annual review by an IRB

Classified research

Clinical interventions

Principal Investigator responsibilities:

Keep study team members informed of the status of the research.

Any changes to the research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to implementing the changes. Failure to adhere to the approved protocol can result in study suspension or termination and data stemming from protocol deviations cannot be represented as having IRB approval.

Report all unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others within three calendar days.

Use only valid consent document(s).

Submit project revisions for review prior to initiating changes.

Appendix E

Pictures of Physical Space for Transitional Studies Department



