

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Patricia M. Scott for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education presented on December 16, 2003.

Title: Perceptions and Experiences of Students Who Graduate with the Associate of Arts/Oregon Transfer (AA/OT) Degree.

Abstract approved: *Redacted for Privacy*

Larry D. Roper

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn about the perceptions and experiences of students who graduated with the Associates of Arts/Oregon Transfer (AA/OT) degree. This study answered the following questions:

- How did the AA/OT degree attainment assist in the overall achievement of goals?
- How did AA/OT graduates view the transfer process?
- What factors influenced the transfer process?
- What was the overall perception of the AA/OT degree?

A phenomenological approach was used. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with 18 students who graduated with the AA/OT degree at an urban community college in Oregon. Data analysis occurred through the creation of profiles of the participants and the emergence of themes.

As a result of answering the research questions about the experiences of AA/OT graduates, five themes emerged. These included:

Theme 1 – The AA/OT degree made the transfer process easier and helped students overcome common barriers or obstacles to transfer.

Theme 2 – AA/OT graduates were frustrated with the academic environment at the community college.

Theme 3 – AA/OT graduates encountered stigmas associated with community college attendance.

Theme 4 – Advising and mentoring were crucial to goal attainment.

Theme 5 – Degree attainment influenced behavior change.

This study concluded that articulated degrees can help make the transfer process smoother by freeing students from worrying about how or if their credits will transfer, thus allowing the student more time to concentrate on other aspects of the transfer process. The findings of this study suggest there are advantages to obtaining the Associate degree prior to transfer.

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Perceptions and Experiences of Students Who Graduate
with the Associate of Arts/Oregon Transfer (AA/OT) Degree

by
Patricia M. Scott

A DISSERTATION

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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.

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Patricia M. Scott, Author

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Alfred Warren Scott, Sr. who was the first Beaver in the family and didn't live long enough to see his last daughter become one.

Perceptions and Experiences of Students Who Graduate with the Associate of Arts/Oregon Transfer (AA/OT) Degree

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Starting at a community college in pursuit of a Bachelor's degree is an important cost-saving option. Two-year colleges enroll approximately 43 percent of the nation's undergraduates, and 51 percent of the entering freshmen in the U.S. enrolled in a community college (King, 1994). Tuition and fees at community colleges tend to be less expensive than at four-year institutions, and students can often maintain their current jobs and/or live with their parents while attending. The community college is also a good testing ground for students who are unsure about their goals or academic abilities. About half of the people who begin college in America matriculate at community colleges (Cohen, 1996). In fact, 23 percent of Bachelor's degree seekers who began their post-secondary education in 1989-90 started at a two-year institution (Berkner, Cuccaro-Alamin, & McCormick, 1996). The Bachelor's degree is seen as the requisite for major advancement. Therefore, those seeking a Bachelor's degree who are attending a community college must transfer to another institution if they are to be considered successful graduates. According to Cohen (1996) "this makes transfer, only one of the community college's major missions, an essential component" (p. 27).

However, unlike the curriculum at the four-year colleges, the curriculum in the community college has many uses. Most programs culminate in the Associate degree, typically awarded to students who complete the equivalent of two years of full-time study. The Associate degree was first offered as early as 1900 by junior colleges, modeled on a practice started by the University of Chicago, where the Associate degree in arts, literature, and science was awarded to students at the completion of the sophomore year (Cohen & Brawer, 1987).

By the 1940s, 40 percent of U.S. colleges were awarding the Associate degree. By 1980, nearly all institutions designated as community colleges were awarding this degree (Cohen & Brawer, 1987). As many as 50 or more types of Associate degrees were awarded by the 1980s. The most common awarded degrees are Associate in Arts (AA), Associate in Science (AS), and Associate in Applied Science (AAS). The AA and AS degrees are typically used as transfer degrees, while the AAS degree is typically considered a terminal nontransfer degree.

Throughout the history of community colleges, the Associate degree has had three main purposes. According to Cohen and Brawer (1987) these are:

1. To serve as a terminal degree for students who had completed two years at a community college, who may or may not intend to continue their studies.
2. To signal the universities that students who were transferring were prepared in freshman and sophomore studies.

3. To inform prospective employers that community college graduates have completed a program making them suitable for entry to the workplace. (p. 16)

Community colleges have played a significant role in the education of Oregon's citizens over the past 44 years. The 1959 Oregon Legislative Assembly formed education districts, which later became community college districts. Oregon community colleges now enroll nearly 500,000 students annually in a wide array of programs and courses designed to strengthen academic knowledge and skills; prepare students for entry into, and advancement in, the workplace; complete undergraduate course work toward a Baccalaureate degree; and provide employers with specialized training for their employees.

A report released in June 2003 by the United States Department of Education on post-secondary students, demonstrated that of those students who began their college education in 1995-96 at public community colleges: 11 percent entered the colleges with plans to get a degree or certificate, or to transfer to a four-year college; 40 percent intended to earn a certificate or Associate degree and not go beyond that point; and 49 percent intended to transfer to a four-year institution, with or without getting an Associate degree first. This data is based on a representative sample of students at more than 1,600 community colleges (Driscoll, 2003). Yet, research indicates that only 22 percent successfully make the transition from two-year to four-year college (McCormick & Carrole, 1997). If so many students have this goal, why aren't more of these students transferring? Many

factors enter into a student's decision to continue toward the Bachelor's degree before or after AA completion. One factor students frequently complain about is loss of credits during the transfer process. Articulated programs or degrees were designed to help with credit loss and to increase transfer rates.

States have approached articulation between community colleges and other institutions in different ways. Most states have promoted voluntary articulation agreements, meaning that institutions are encouraged to negotiate agreements among themselves (Rifkin, 1998). Many states, such as Oregon, have legislated policies that enhance articulation.

In Oregon, an attempt was made to ease course and credit transfer between university and community college campuses. In 1987, the Legislative Assembly passed HB 2913. According to Arnold (2003), this law directed "cooperation between the [university system] and community colleges on issues affecting students who transfer" and the removal of "all unnecessary obstacles that restrict transfer opportunities" (p. 1). With HB 2913 as the impetus, the university and community college campuses agreed upon a statewide Associate of Arts degree. Community colleges began offering this degree as early as 1989. Every community college in the state now offers this Associate of Arts/Oregon Transfer (AA/OT) degree, which guarantees that upon transfer to an Oregon University System (OUS) school, students with this degree have completed the receiving campus' lower-division general education requirements and have junior status for registration purposes. The AA/OT degree includes general requirements of

writing, mathematics, and oral communication (minimum of 15 quarter credits) along with a minimum of 40 credits chosen from arts and letters, social sciences, and science/ mathematic/computer science areas. Additional credits to equal the 90 required for the degree are elective.

The AA/OT degree has proven to be a popular degree that many students have taken advantage of. However, according to OUS data, in academic years 1996-97, 42 percent (about 3,000) of all new college transfer students to OUS schools came from Oregon community colleges (Oregon University System, 2002b). Of these students who transferred from Oregon community colleges, 30 percent had earned the AA/OT degree. However, as Table 1 illustrates, about 50 percent of the students who obtained an AA/OT degree transferred (were enrolled in at least one credit-bearing course) to an OUS school the next year. This number increased to about 60 percent within five years of degree attainment (Oregon University System, 2002b). If articulation agreements are designed to ease the transfer process and if this is a true “transfer degree,” why aren’t more graduates with the AA/OT degree transferring?

Table 1. Students Completing an AA/OT Degree One Year, Then Enrolling in an OUS Institution the Next Term

Year	Total AA/OTs	Total AA/OTs Transferring	% of AA/OTs Transferring
95-96/96-97	1,692	937	55.4
96-97/97-98	1,902	1,021	53.7
97-98/98-99	1,924	1,028	53.4
98-99/99-00	1,913	982	51.3
99-00/00-01	1,983	1,048	52.8

Source: Oregon University System (2002b)

Despite the fact that community colleges have been offering the AA/OT degree for 14 years and it is the most popular degree awarded at all of the 17 community colleges (Department of Community Colleges & Workforce Development), based upon the researcher's experiences assisting students and conferring with her colleagues around the state (who work with transfer students), she believes the degree has several limitations:

1. No two community colleges in Oregon have AA/OT degrees that are exactly alike. Each meets the state required minimum standards, but each of the 17 colleges have degrees that vary greatly. For example, some colleges require sequence classes (closely related courses generally extending through three terms), while others don't. Because all AA/OT degree requirements are not the same, this may make transferring between different community colleges problematic for those students desiring to complete the transfer degree.
2. The AA/OT is most suited to students who are undecided on their major and their eventual OUS transfer destination. For students who know their major and have decided which OUS school they plan to matriculate to, this degree may disadvantage them. For example, students pursuing a four-year degree that does not require transfer level mathematics courses, such as the Bachelor of Arts degree in English, foreign languages, and others, are required to take transfer level mathematics to obtain the AA/OT. For other majors in the sciences or

engineering, the AA/OT doesn't allow enough flexibility for students to get all of the required classes completed so they are ready for junior level classes upon transfer.

3. The task of community college advisors and counselors to keep up with changes at the four-year institutions is difficult. Various levels of commitment of advisors (professional advisors versus faculty advisors) to keep current on four-year requirements leads to misadvising and often causes students to self-advise. For some students this is acceptable, but for most, they simply do not get the advice they need to make the correct decisions regarding the transfer process.
4. Since the inception of the AA/OT degree, many of the OUS institutions have made significant revisions to their general education requirements. Some have decreased the number of credits demanded in the lower-division requirements. Since most students transfer without the AA/OT degree, which is designed to meet general education requirements at OUS schools, students often extend their time in college if they did not properly plan.
5. The AA/OT does not transfer well to private colleges or out-of-state colleges unless the student has properly planned. Some out-of-state colleges, particularly in Alaska and Montana, hesitate to accept a degree called the "Associates of Arts/Oregon Transfer." Some states question taking a degree designed for Oregon Transfer.

Arnold (2003) cited similar limitations of the AA/OT degree. Despite all of these limitations, the AA/OT degree remains a very popular degree. Yet no research is available from the students' perspective that tells us how the AA/OT degree helps (or not) with the transfer process.

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of students who graduated with an articulated transfer degree. Specifically, this project was designed to determine how the AA/OT degree helped graduates reach their long-term goals, what the transfer process was like for them, and if an articulated degree was of benefit to them in helping them pursue and reach their academic goals.

Research Questions

Specifically, then, to gain an insight into the transitions, support, and current activity of students who graduated with the AA/OT degree, this study was undertaken to answer the following questions:

1. How did the AA/OT degree attainment assist in the overall achievement of goals?
2. How did AA/OT graduates view the transfer process?
3. What factors influenced the transfer process?
4. What was the overall perception of the AA/OT degree?

Importance of the Study

This study is important because there are no existing studies available that have examined how articulated degrees influence the transfer process. No qualitative studies exist that have examined Oregon's AA/OT degree from the students' perspective. Qualitative studies are reported much less frequently in the literature despite the assertion that they "can help us uncover the right questions, the questions raised by our students and ourselves about what we are doing and whether we are accomplishing our goals" (Mittler & Bers, 1994, p. 62).

This study of the transfer function includes quantitative data and analysis. The past record of transfer activity is composed mainly of a series of individual studies from which generalizations about the community college enterprise from a national perspective cannot be validly inferred (Eaton, 1994a). Most data have been generated from the 1972 and 1980 longitudinal studies by the United States Department of Education which have examined students moving from high school to college.

Who exactly is a transfer student? All students who have transferred credits from one school to another are counted as transfer students. This could include high school students who are taking college classes. These students are technically transfer students, but if we want to learn something about college transfer students, should high schoolers be included in transfer research studies?

This touches on the biggest problem with existing research on transfer students. The data are often not clean. It compares apples to oranges because any student who starts at a community college and completes any number of credits is usually considered a transfer student. Studying transfer students using clean data might be impossible since there are so many options now for transfer. Enrollment patterns of transfer students are not “linear” (meaning that a student follows the 2+2 pattern—two years at a community college followed by two years at a four-year institution). de los Santos and Wright (1990) spotlighted the phenomenon of students “swirling” among several two- and four-year colleges, rather than moving in a linear path from one community college to one four-year college (p. 32). This makes studying transfer students a very complicated proposition. Townsend (2000) found seven different types of enrollment patterns in her study of 605 two-year students, including 45 percent of the students attending three or more colleges in pursuing the Baccalaureate, and 13 percent continuing to enroll at two-year colleges while also enrolled at a university. Similarly, Kinnick (1997) found students who were concurrently enrolled during the same time at more than one community college in addition to being enrolled at a university.

Awareness of the complexity of student transfer can motivate institutional leaders in both two-year and four-year schools to emphasize the importance of articulation agreements that include course-by-course and programmatic equivalencies, as well as acceptance of an Associate degree (Townsend, 2000). However, there is no consistent positive correlation between institutions with high

transfer rates and articulation agreements. According to Eaton (1994b), based on the evidence available, “we can maintain that articulation agreements may help and do not harm transfer. On the other hand, when preoccupation with articulation agreements precludes other institutional actions that might strengthen transfer, they may be harmful” (p. 121).

In a synthesis of literature on articulation and transfer, Barkley (1993) indicated a number of new challenges. First on her list was a continued decline in the number of students each year who earn Associate of Arts degrees and then transfer to four-year institutions. Berkner, Horn, and Clune (2000) analyzed data from the 1995-96 Beginning Post-Secondary Students Longitudinal Study and found that 24 percent of students who started higher education in the community college in 1995-96 intended to transfer to a four-year college before they completed an Associate degree. Half of those actually did so.

Barkley (1993) believes that articulation efforts are even more critical now than they were in earlier years for the following reasons:

1. State systems are increasingly facing serious education budget cuts that reduce the number of seats available to students (p. 38-39).
2. There is a growing recognition that community college students are very mobile and may attend more than one college or university at a time (p. 38-39).

3. There is an increase in public demand that higher education be held accountable, creating a greater need to measure the transfer success of the community college student (p. 38-39).
4. There is an increasing realization that it is virtually impossible to compare the transfer success of the community college student from college to college or state to state due to the lack of a consistent definition of the transfer student and the lack of any consistently used formulae to arrive at transfer rates (p. 38-39).
5. The increased demand for a highly-skilled, literate work force may or may not require advanced education, and there is a growing number of community college students with diverse patterns of enrollment, educational, and career goals who desire both employment and transfer opportunities (p. 38-39).

The latest data on transfer students indicate that the traditional transfer student is changing along with the community college. Increasing numbers of transfer students are older, female, taking longer than two years to complete a degree, and are likely to be employed at least part-time (Barkley, 1993; Fredrickson, 1998). However, an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Callison, 1991) indicated that traditional students (i.e., recent high school graduates) are enrolling in community college programs in increasing numbers because of the escalating costs of attending four-year institutions and a growing recognition that a quality education can be obtained within their own communities.

Callison (1991) also states that 90 percent of high school students indicate they plan to attend college. It is then no wonder that many community colleges are also experiencing a growth in enrollment of traditional-aged students.

Colleges have recognized the importance of the traditional student as well. Many community colleges now actively recruit students, especially the traditional student. At college fairs that were once only attended by four-year institutions, admissions staff from many community colleges can now be found. According to James A. Caillier, president of Delgado Community College in Louisiana, “We must offer quality academic programs and have articulation agreements. Traditional students are coming to us demanding courses they can transfer. Community colleges that don’t do this will suffer” (Callison, 1991).

There has been a sharp decline in the number of transfer students in the last 20 years. In 1972, 28.7 percent of community college students transferred. By 1980, that number had dropped to 20.7 percent. However, new data show that more students are transferring from community colleges to four-year colleges because many states are making it easier for students to split a four-year degree into two parts (MacNeil, 2001). Since the Educational Resources Information Center Clearinghouse for Community Colleges started tracking transfer rates in 1990, the student rate has remained steady at about 21 percent. The rate rose to 23 percent in 2001, and results from 18 states representing half of the nation’s population reported a jump to 25 percent (MacNeil, 2001). This number might actually be higher since reliable data are not readily available from private and out-of-state

universities. According to OUS (2002b) data, transfer activity from Oregon Community Colleges to OUS campuses have increased as well.

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (1998) forecast that the number of transfer students would rise by 50 percent from 1999 to 2010, with the most dramatic growth in the five-year period between 2000 and 2005. Numbers in Oregon are likely to be similar. Projected growth in the number of Oregon high school graduates is expected to be in the top 25 percent when compared with other states (NCES, 2000). According to a survey completed by OUS (2002a), the number of Oregon high school graduates going to college has increased in the last few years.

Table 2. Oregon High School Graduates Post-Secondary Enrollment Patterns

Percents	Class of 1993	Class of 1995	Class of 1997	Class of 1999	Class of 2001
Total Four-Year	34.5%	37.7%	35.1%	40.4%	41.0%
Enrolled Fall term			0.2%	0.6%	1.2%
Delayed to Winter term			0%	0%	0%
Total			35.3%	41.0%	42.2%
Total Two-Year & Vocational					
Enrolled Fall term	28.1%	25.7%	28.8%	25.8%	27.3%
Delayed to Winter term			3.3%	2.9%	5.1%
Total			32.1%	28.7%	32.4%

Source: Oregon University System (2002a)

Are the community colleges ready for more students coming to them who are interested in attaining a Bachelor's degree? Is Oregon ready for an increase in transfer students? The state has some good articulation measures in place with an

articulated Associate of Arts degree, a common course numbering system, dual-enrollment programs, and common academic calendars between OUS and community colleges. However, data from the OUS indicates only about 50 percent of the students who earn an AA/OT degree actually transfer to an OUS school. Does getting the AA/OT degree help ease the transfer process?

Transfer Process

Transferring is more than just simply moving from one educational institution to another. Ideally, it means planning for the move well in advance. Perhaps lack of planning is one factor influencing low transfer rates. Some students believe transferring is a simple process because they are only thinking about the physical aspect of moving credits from one place to the other or physically moving themselves. Gernand (1992) suggests that students who transfer from one institution to another embrace three states: pre-transfer, transfer, and post-transfer.

The initial stage is the pre-transfer phase. During this stage students need to develop skills in subject areas in which they have weaknesses; explore the personal, social, and financial costs of attending another institution; clarify the current institution's curricular options and relationships to possible careers; assess academic abilities; and clarify transfer articulation agreements that might exist between institutions. All students, whether or not they end up transferring, need to go through the pre-transfer process.

The middle stage of the transfer process is where students acquire relevant and necessary information so that decisions about their transfer are based on fact. This includes examining majors at different institutions; identifying contact people at the institution to which they are transferring; locating and using resources that clarify course transfer and articulation agreements; knowing the procedures for application and acceptance, including deadlines; addressing the social and emotional issues associated with transfer; and addressing financial issues.

The final stage is the post-transfer phase where the transfer student must adjust to the new institution. This means getting linked to necessary academic support services, developing a sense of belonging, finding living arrangements, and adjusting to a new educational environment.

The transfer process includes investigating and exploring options, decision making, moving, and adjusting. The AA/OT degree can help this process because students know, by mandated law, that OUS institutions must accept the AA/OT degree to meet that school's lower-division general education requirements. This can free the student to concentrate on other aspects of the transfer process such as choosing electives, deciding on a major, increasing academic skills, deciding on an OUS destination, and figuring out living arrangements.

Despite all the advantages students gain from obtaining an articulated Associate degree, most community college students transfer without a degree. In a longitudinal study conducted by Grubb (1991), this decrease in academic transfers is most apparent. Grubb used data from the National Longitudinal Study of the

graduates of the class of 1972 and the High School and Beyond students (graduates of 1980). He found that the transfer rates to four-year colleges declined significantly among students with Academic Associate degrees. Of the graduating class of 1972, 68.7 percent of community college students with Academic Associate degrees actually transferred, and 60.7 percent completed Bachelor's degrees. However, by the graduating class of 1980, only 48.9 percent of community college students with Academic Associate degrees actually transferred.

More students are transferring without the AA degree, despite the fact that students who transfer with any Associate degree are more likely to complete a Bachelor's degree than are the students who transfer without an Associate degree. Several studies support AA completion prior to transfer (Claggett & Huntington, 1991; Cohen, 1992; Grubb, 1991; Kinnick, 1997; Laanan, 2001; Piland, 1995; Spurr, 1970). The indication that greater numbers of students are transferring prior to actually earning an AA degree should be studied further, as this has strong implications for articulation (Barkley, 1993). Not only are there benefits in the transfer process with AA completion, community college graduates (those who earn an Associate degree) earn 24 percent more money than persons whose highest level of educational attainment is a high school diploma (Phillippe & Patton, 2000). Are the four-year institutions and the community colleges doing enough to encourage students to stay until they have completed the Associate degree?

The state of Oregon is having serious budget problems. The university system is crowded and tuition continues to rise. The community colleges are

getting an increasing share of Baccalaureate-bound students because of the limited capacity of universities to add freshman and sophomore classes. In Oregon, students are transferring both with and without the AA/OT degree. For the students who obtain the AA/OT degree, did this degree help ease the transfer process?

It is clear from the research that transfer is a complicated issue. Numerous states, including Oregon, are trying to make the process easier for students. Many have done this by development of an articulated Associate degree. A large number of students do not choose to take advantage of this degree but rather just transfer without a degree. For those who graduate with the AA/OT degree, little is known about how this degree actually affects the transfer process for students. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how the AA/OT degree affects the transfer process.

Overview of Research Methodology

A phenomenological approach was used for this case study. According to Patton (1990), phenomenological inquiry focuses on the question, “What is the structure and essence of the experience of this phenomenon for these people?” (p. 69). Qualitative research methodology methods were utilized to capture the perceptions of AA/OT graduates. Eighteen AA/OT graduates participated in a comprehensive interview. The interview guide approach was used to collect data. A complete explanation, including the rationale for using this type of methodology, is addressed in Chapter Three.

Assumptions

Several assumptions underlie the conceptualization, implementation, and analysis of this study:

1. Participants were assured of confidentiality and participated willingly. Their comments are complete and accurately reflect their experiences.
2. The researcher's experience with the transfer process, both as a former community college student and as a professional, adds a rich dimension to the data.
3. Initial degree aspiration of the participant played a significant role in a student's perceptions of the academic experience.

Limitations

The following limitations are identified:

1. The study focused on a single school. The sample consisted of recent graduates at one urban community college in Oregon. The ability to generalize these data is extremely limited.
2. The study was not intended to evaluate the transfer function or AA/OT degree, but to understand AA/OT graduates' perceptions and experiences with the transfer process.

Definition of Terms

Articulation: Refers to systematic efforts, processes, or services intended to ensure educational continuity and to facilitate orderly, unobstructed progress between levels of segments of institutions on a statewide, regional, or institution-to-institution basis (Bers, 1994).

Transfer: The movement of a student from one institution to another with credit recognition for coursework successfully completed (Harbin, 1995).

Transfer Process: The planning involved in moving from one educational institution to another. This includes making a personal commitment to the process, development of a transfer plan of action, building your academic skills, and dealing with the emotional stress of transfer (Harbin, 1995).

AA/OT: Associate of Arts/Oregon Transfer degree. OUS institutions have an articulation agreement with the Oregon Community Colleges to accept the AA/OT degree to meet general education requirements and to grant the student junior standing for purposes of registration.

OUS: Oregon University System. This includes Eastern Oregon University, Oregon Institute of Technology, Oregon State University, Portland State University, Southern Oregon University, University of Oregon, and Western Oregon University.

Chapter Summary

This study is presented in five chapters providing an in-depth examination of the articulated degrees, and barriers faced in the transfer process. Chapter One has provided an introduction to the research proposal. It included a brief history of community college degrees, the transfer function, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the importance of the study. Definitions of important terms were included, as well as descriptions of the assumptions and limitations of the study.

The second chapter reviews the literature that serves as a background and general context for the study. The literature review is divided into several sections: transfer function, review of transfer research, history of articulation, and Oregon's articulation efforts.

Chapter Three describes the methodology used for the research. It documents the methods and design for the collection and analysis of the data.

Chapter Four presents and discusses the results of the research. Findings indicate that AA/OT graduates had positive perceptions of the transfer process but some frustrating academic experiences in obtaining this degree. Participants also indicated how this degree helped them in their pursuit of long-term goals.

The final chapter reviews the findings of this study and the implications for future research and practice. This chapter addresses the stigma faced by many students who choose to attend a community college in their long-term pursuit of a Bachelor's degree. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future

practice, possible questions for further research, and a discussion of the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Transfer has been an important function of the community colleges since they began as junior colleges in the late 1800s. By 1896, William Rainey Harper had divided the undergraduate program of the University of Chicago into senior and junior college divisions, presaging transfer. One of the earliest statements about the junior college mission in 1922 included collegiate instruction as a major purpose of two-year institutions. College catalogs and surveys of course offerings during the first 40 years confirm that academic courses leading to transfer made up the majority of junior college work (Campbell, 1930). Surveys of student enrollments reflected transfer enrollments of from 60 to 70 percent between 1907-1940 (Lombardi, 1979).

The 1940s were a pivotal decade for the junior colleges. During this decade, the transition from junior college to community college took place. The Truman Commission's emphasis on vocational and community-based education led to a shift in status for the transfer function. With a growing interest in the vocational mission, the liberal arts curricula gave way to career interests. Relationships between the community colleges and businesses and industry became more important than relationships with senior institutions.

Although data are limited, enrollment in the liberal arts and transfer activity declined in the 1960s and 1970s. In the late 1960s, 43 percent of enrollments were

in transfer programs and by the end of the 1980s, only 20-29 percent of community college students were transferring (Palmer & Eaton, 1991). In the latter part of the 1980s, transfer once again became significant because new demands on equity, availability, and accountability by state and federal governments forced educators to pay additional attention to the transfer functions and to begin to reconsider the role of the community college.

One of the earliest published research efforts into two-year colleges and college transfer is found in Floyd M. McDowell's book, *The Junior College* (1919). In this study, McDowell examined 370 graduates from 12 public junior colleges. He found that 73 percent of the graduates continued their academic work at a higher institution. Additional studies were done in the 1920s and 1930s that looked at the nature of the transfer program, but it wasn't until the 1960s that transfer and the question of its success were rigorously examined.

Most research available on transfer has focused on transfer students or the transfer process. The overwhelming majority of the studies reported in the ERIC database are quantitative studies that used either existing data gathered by the institution or survey information collected by the researcher (Laanan, 2001). These studies focus primarily on:

- Characteristics of the transfer student—Obstacles and barriers faced in the transfer process.
- Student performance—Grades at two-year and four-year institutions.
- Time to degree—Persistence and graduation.

- Enrollment patterns.
- Determining transfer rates.

A summary of the relevant research in these areas follows.

Characteristics of Transfer Students

Many studies have been done that have examined the demographic and academic background of students who succeed in transfer. Other studies have attempted to determine what students' predisposition to transfer was based upon their characteristics. Many of these characteristics (degree aspirations, undecided major, need for remedial classes, loss of credit during transfer, and being the first in the family to attend college) have an influence on the transfer process.

Palmer and Eaton (1991) summarized a number of studies conducted during the 1980s. These studies, based most frequently on secondary analyses of the U.S. Department of Education's longitudinal databases, reveal that: 1) transfer rates for entering community college students range from 20 percent to 29 percent; 2) men are more likely to transfer than women; 3) white students more likely to transfer than students of color; 4) students from relatively high socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to transfer than those from relatively low socioeconomic backgrounds; 5) students who take an academic program in high school are more likely to transfer than students enrolled in vocational or general tracks; 6) students who earn higher grades at the community college, enroll on a full-time basis, and take more mathematics and science courses are more likely to transfer than those

who earn lower grades, enroll part-time, and avoid mathematics and science courses; 7) students who are more engaged with community college campus life (who live or work on campus) are more likely to transfer than students who merely commute to classes; and 8) students transfer at almost any point after enrollment at the community college, with the number who obtain an Associate degree varying greatly from study to study.

Lee and Frank (1990) investigated the relative importance of social and academic background factors on the probability of transfer to a four-year school for a random sample of 2,500 students who entered a community college within two years of graduation from high school in 1980. Factors describing the students' academic performance in community college were the strongest predictors of the eventual transfer.

Velez and Javalgi (1987) did a study assessing the effect of various predictors on the odds of transferring from a two-year college to a four-year college. They found that the factors affecting transfer could be grouped into four areas:

1. Personal background (socioeconomic status, sex, ethnic/racial background, and religion).
2. Academic processes (high school enrollment track and college grade point averages).
3. Psychosocial process (the influence of significant others on the student's pursuit of a college education and the student's educational aspirations).

4. Institutional integration (participation in a work-study program or living on campus).

Further, Velez and Javalgi (1987) found that students from families with higher incomes were more likely to transfer. Religion, especially being Jewish, increased a student's probability of transferring by 21 percent. Those who performed well in high school, as measured by GPA, had a higher predicted probability of transfer, but the margin was small. The college GPA translated into a higher predictor of transfer. Parental encouragement had a positive impact on transferring, especially on students who perceived their mothers as having high educational aspirations for them. Educational goals were also strong predictors of transferring in his model. Living on campus had a powerful and positive effect on the probability of transferring along with having a work-study position. Anderson (1981), however, suggests it is possible that campus employment prevents students from holding regular jobs where they would be more likely to find encouragement to pursue vocational education and work.

Adelman (1988), Grubb (1991), Palmer and Eaton (1991), and Velez and Javalgi (1987) found that the type of high school program, academic or vocational, can affect transfer. The studies indicated that students enrolled in vocational programs in high school are less likely to persist to Baccalaureate. Lee and Frank (1989) found "having been in the academic track in high school and having taken more courses in academic curricular areas like mathematics not only facilitates outcomes of high school, such as high achievement and grades (which made future

transfer more likely), but exert direct and positive influences on these students' eventual transfer from community colleges to Baccalaureate-granting institutions" (p. 191).

Transfer students often come from ethnically diverse backgrounds. According to Phillippe and Patton's (2000) report to the American Association of Community Colleges, 48 percent of transfer students entering community college for the first time were racial and ethnic minorities. Lee and Frank (1989) used a sample of 2,500 from the original high school and beyond study of the 1980 high school seniors, which included almost 30,000 randomly selected students in over 1,000 randomly selected high schools. They found that the background of students and their families and students' behavior and performance in high school indirectly influenced the probability of students transferring. Specifically, they found that students who transferred to four-year colleges were of higher social class, less likely to be minority, and less likely to be female. However, Windham (2001), in a study that examined AA graduates in the Florida Community College system over a five-year period (1994-1999), found that all major ethnic groups (white, Hispanic, African American, Asian, and Native American) transferred at approximately the same rate. A higher percentage of males than females transferred, and younger students transferred more often than older students.

Dougherty (1994), LeVine and Cureton (1998), McCormick and Carroll (1997), Piland (1995), and Velez and Javalgi (1987) determined that educational aspirations upon entry into college affect degree obtainment. The higher the

student's goals are upon matriculation, the greater the likelihood the student will graduate. LeVine and Cureton (1998) interviewed college students who were enrolled in the late 1970s and then repeated the study in the late 1990s. They found that educational degree goals for all students had risen in the prior 20 years.

Specifically, they found

To all intents and purposes, the master's degree has replaced the Bachelor's in the minds of students as the entry-level credential for professional jobs. The result is a sizable drop in the number of freshmen planning to end their formal education at the Bachelors' degree and an increase in those aiming for Master's, Doctoral, and professional degrees. (p. 118)

Students within each type of institution who aspire to Baccalaureate degrees or higher were up to three times as likely to transfer than those not expecting to complete a Bachelor's degree (McCormick & Carroll, 1997). Dougherty (1994) found that almost one-fifth of students who initially planned to finish their studies with an AA ultimately earned a BA, suggesting that although unequal educational aspirations may contribute to unequal outcomes, they do not determine them.

Crook and Laven (1989) found "that being confident in one's academic abilities seems to boost educational attainment, even when grades are controlled for" (p. 15). They also found that a student's motivation for seeking higher education can affect educational outcomes through grades. Townsend (1995) conducted a qualitative study to explore transfer student perceptions of the process. She discovered several perceptions among students regarding the transfer process. She noted that students commonly reported a "self-reliant" role in the transfer

process, as shown in their statements that they neither sought nor received any help from the community college in the transfer process. Townsend believes students took on this self-reliant role because they perceived that institutions failed to communicate with them. Students typically viewed the transfer process as easy.

Much has been written about the first generation student and the obstacles they face just getting to college and surviving. Several movies based upon true stories show the struggles first generation students faced from their families. Examples of these movies include *Rudy*, *October Sky*, *Real Women Have Curves*, and *Good Will Hunting*. In each film the main character is someone with the desire to attend college; the barriers and obstacles each of these characters faces to make it to college and succeed are featured. None would have made it without some support from family and friends and the internal desire to succeed.

These portrayals are consistent with the work of LeVine and Cureton (1998) and Lee and Frank, (1989) who found that family background proved to be an important factor associated with transfer. Velez and Javalgi (1987) found that parental encouragement to pursue a college education has a positive impact on transferring. Crook and Laven (1989) found that conflict between student and non-student roles may affect BA attainment. Family and peers can weaken the commitment to the student role. Mutter (1992) found that students' families, loved ones, and close friends play an important part in their college success and persistence. Anderson (1981) also found that family and peers can weaken commitment to the student role, as can work opportunities and the influence of

fellow workers who are not students. Full-time work places extreme demands on time and energy, threatening academic progress and degree completion (Crook & Laven, 1989). In contrast to Anderson (1981), Velez and Javalgi (1987) found that having a job on campus has a positive effect on degree completion. According to Tinto (1993),

Events which occur elsewhere in the student's life may also play an important role in determining what transpires within the college. The actions of one's family, of members of one's community, as well as those of external actors in state and national organizations, can all play an important part in the decisions of individuals to depart from college. (p. 109)

Nora and Rendon (1990) used Tinto's (1993) retention theory and found that

Community college students who had higher levels of initial commitments to the institution and their educational goals, higher levels of academic and social integration, and parents with higher levels of educational attainment were more likely to have better attitudes about transferring and to have engaged in some form of transfer behavior while at the two-year institution. (p. 248)

Eighty percent of community colleges offer remedial classes. Today, nearly one-third (32%) of all undergraduates reported having taken a basic skills or remedial course in reading, writing, or mathematics (LeVine & Cureton, 1998). Eighty-one percent of all community college students and 64 percent of all four-year college students required some remedial or developmental education (LeVine & Cureton, 1998). Students with weak academic skills are more likely to be placed in remedial courses, which carried little or no credit that would work toward a transfer degree. These courses tended to improve academic skills, but at the cost of

slowed progress toward a degree (Crook & Laven, 1989). Some feel that the increased need for remedial education has had an effect on the transfer rate because of the slowed progress toward the goal of a Bachelor's degree.

There is a plethora of studies that have attempted to tell us “who transfers” or describing the characteristics of students who succeed at transferring. These include demographic information and academic background, both prior to community college attendance, and while attending community college. These students often indicate that some of these characteristics are barriers and obstacles in the transfer process. For example, having to take remedial classes, being uncertain about one's major, and being a first generation student have been found to be barriers to the transfer process. All of these studies look at transfer students regardless of whether or not they received an Associate degree. All transfer students are lumped together and studied as one.

Student Performance: Grades at Two-Year and Four-Year Institutions

Of interest to those most involved with transfer students is the students' performance after transfer to the four-year campus. The term “transfer shock” was coined in 1965 (Hills, 1965, cited in Diaz, 1992) to designate the drop in grade point average (GPA) that students presumably experience upon transferring from a two-year to a four-year institution. Diaz (1992) synthesized the results of 62 research studies that offered academic performance data of community college transfer students. As reviewed in an OUS (2000) report,

Thirteen of the studies indicated that transfer students had a positive GPA change, zero change, or no significant GPA change upon transfer. Forty-nine of the studies indicated that a transfer shock effect occurred, at least as evidenced by lower GPAs during the first semester after transfer. Thirty-three of the forty-nine studies indicated that after the initial GPA decline, students recovered a portion of their lost GPA, sometimes even exceeding the GPA at transfer. The majority of the GPA changes reported in these studies were one-half of a grade point or less, with 34% of the studies indicating that the students recovered completely over time. (p. 33-34)

Other studies have looked at the time of transfer and the relationship to performance. Does the so-called transfer shock affect students differently depending on how many credits they transfer with? House (1989) found that time of transfer has a definite correlation on performance, with students who transferred with the greatest number of credits earning the highest first-term GPA.

Another important finding from the House (1989) study was that the GPAs of transfer students continue to rise after the first semester until they reach those of native students. The findings of Kinnick et al. (1998) were mostly consistent with House's (1989) findings.

Crook and Laven (1989) found that "first-year grades were an important predictor of Bachelor degree attainment" (p. 25). Velez and Javalgi (1987) found that "an excellent academic performance in college, as measured by college grades, translates into a higher predicted probability of transferring" (p. 89). Lee and Frank (1990) found that "students' academic behaviors in community college exhibit the strongest direct effects on transfer" (p. 186).

The academic performance of students after they transfer has been well documented. Studies indicated that transfer students do succeed after they transfer to four-year institutions. The GPA might dip slightly; however, it tends to recover in a term or two. Also, the higher the GPA prior to transfer, the greater likelihood the student will persist toward the degree.

Time to Degree: Persistence and Graduation

Another area of interest and research is the rate of Baccalaureate degree completion for students entering post-secondary education by way of the community college. Studies have been conducted to describe the success of the community college transfer students based upon the time it takes them to obtain a Baccalaureate degree after transfer.

Some, including Brint and Karabel (1989) and Dougherty (1994), believe attending a community college lowers the likelihood a student will obtain a Bachelor's degree. Dougherty (1994) believes the transfer function of community colleges is ineffective due to an influx of underprepared students, coupled with a less collegiate environment and culture.

Richardson (1985) suggests that the institutional climate of community colleges may overtly or more subtly undermine their students' Baccalaureate aspirations. Some think community colleges serve as a "cooling out" function. "Cooling out" is a term coined by Burton Clark in 1960, where he argued that two-year colleges teach some of their students to lower their aspirations and reconcile

themselves to obtaining a two-year degree when a four-year degree might have been their original goal.

Universities and community colleges have very different cultures. The culture at four-year institutions typically places more emphasis on individual student accomplishment, the environment is highly competitive for the students' and instruction is focused on research and graduate instruction. Community colleges value accessibility and student-centered approaches, minimal competitiveness, serving local needs, and offering a diverse curriculum. Because of these differences it is likely that students who wish to transfer from one environment to another face a difficult journey. Success in adapting to the culture of the community college may negatively affect a student's chance of persisting at the upper-division level (Berstein, cited in Zwerling, 1986).

Studies show community colleges with more liberal arts courses have higher rates of transfer to four-year institutions than those with a less general curriculum (Rifkin, 1998). The liberal arts curriculum aids student transfer by contributing to academic preparation, which literature has deemed the most important factor in transfer success (Rifkin, 1998).

Research has shown a positive association between academic achievement and hours per week spent talking with faculty outside of class (among other variables), and between retention (ultimately, degree completion and a student-oriented faculty) (Astin, 1993). According to LeVine and Cureton (1998), for

students there is an objective as well as emotional payoff to faculty-student interaction.

Myhre (1998) found that acts of help, intervention, and encouragement from faculty or counselors have the greatest influence on why certain urban colleges successfully transfer so many students. Faculty, by virtue of their contact with students on a daily basis, are likely to influence student transfer expectations through curriculum and advisement. Clearly, faculty involvement, whether in curriculum development, articulation negotiations, or student advising, is valuable to the transfer process (Rifkin, 1998).

The lack of financial resources is one of many barriers facing community college students who attend, persist, and in some cases, ultimately transfer to four-year institutions (McDonough, 1997). Student aid has shifted so that fewer grant dollars are awarded, whereas federal student loans have increased (Laanan, 2001). The costs associated with transferring and pursuing a Baccalaureate degree may prohibit even the most talented community college students from exercising this option.

Piland (1995) found similar results when he looked at students who had transferred and graduated from a university. He concluded that selecting a major, planning one's schedule, completing general education requirements, and having a strong goal in mind all affect transfer and graduation. He emphasized the significance of earning high grades, selecting a major, and completing the

maximum number of transferable units (especially in general education), all of which must be conveyed to students who identify transfer as a goal.

Another issue that affects persistence and length of time it takes to earn a degree is the number of credits accepted and the perception of credit loss. Kinnick et al. (1998) refer to this as “transfer efficiency,” given that the questions students ask “Will my classes transfer or not?” The potential of loss of credit is the greatest fear of students attending community colleges who have the goal of transferring to a university. To examine these fears, Kinnick et al. (1998) studied the process of student transfer among three urban community colleges and a four-year university, all in close proximity to each other. This study revealed that 80 percent of the students were able to transfer more than 75 percent of their community college credits. Reasons for non-acceptance were low grades, remedial courses, professional-technical (not designed for transfer) courses, duplicated courses, or credits attempted to transfer over the maximum amount of credit allowed.

Transfer students do persist and graduate with Bachelor’s degrees. Much research has been done to determine the impact attending a community college has on Bachelor’s degree attainment. Despite the climate that may exist at community colleges, students do transfer. Strong advising and interaction with faculty has been shown to support persistence and graduation rates.

Enrollment Patterns

More recent studies have begun to examine enrollment patterns of transfer students. The traditional way of thinking of the transfer process as linear has been under challenge since the 1990s, when de los Santos and Wright (1990) described a “swirling” dynamic in students’ attendance at Arizona’s community colleges. Other researchers (Adelman, 1992; Kinnick et al., 1998; Piland, 1995) analyzed transcripts for attendance patterns and found multiple transfer patterns. Adelman (1992), using the National Longitudinal Study of 1972, found 10 identifiable attendance patterns among the community college students. Piland (1995) found 59 percent of the students in her study interrupted their studies by “stopping out” (taking one or more terms off and then reenrolling) and 37 percent attended more than one institution before ultimately transferring to a four-year institution. Further, Piland (1995) concluded that “the notion of a student entering a community college directly after graduating from high school and taking 15 units a semester for four straight semesters and then transferring to a university to finish in two additional years is a myth” (p. 40).

Kinnick et al. (1998) also examined the flow of students in the Portland, Oregon metropolitan areas between the three local community colleges and Portland State University. She examined 504 transcripts using a stratified random sample. She identified 74 different patterns of enrollment.

Transfer rates are affected by various nonlinear transfer patterns. If nonlinear enrollment patterns are as prevalent as the work of Adelman (1992), de los

Santos and Wright (1990), Kinnick et al. (1998), and Piland (1995) found, then “transfer rates” are a questionable measure of transfer success. Transfer rates would seem to be valid when there is one sender and one receiver of the transfer student. In the nonlinear scenario of transfer, what do transfer rates mean?

These studies tell us that the ways in which today’s students pursue their academic goals are no longer a linear process for most. The use of an institutional transfer rate may be an outdated method of evaluating the success of transfer.

Decline in Transfer

Have transfer rates really declined or have student enrollment patterns changed? Transfer rates are not computed in a standardized fashion from college to college, state to state. Whatever definition is used to determine transfer rates, the decline in transfer rates has been noted consistently in the literature (Barkley, 1993; Grubb, 1991). The decline in transfer rates of community college students is significant because this avenue to higher education remains the crucial point of access for millions of low-income and first-generation students wishing to pursue higher education. Grubb (1991) suggests many probable causes for the general decline in transfer rates between the 1972 and 1980 cohorts he studied. These included: 1) Changes in curriculum focus at community colleges from liberal arts transfer to vocational. 2) Declining completion of the Associate degree, which appears to be less of a part of the path toward the Bachelor’s degree. 3) Increasing numbers of students entering community colleges to explore higher education.

Many of these students also mill around (attend a term and stop out for awhile, then return) while at the community college. 4) Increasing numbers of students requiring remedial classes. 5) Declining financial aid, which likely hurt the class of 1980 more than the class of 1972.

Yet another perspective on the decline of transfer rates says it could be due to interinstitutional factors. Deegan and Tillery (1985) have argued that there has been a major breakdown in articulation among segments of higher education. Improving transfer rates and reversing the decline in the numbers of community college students who complete Baccalaureate degrees are joint responsibilities of both two-year and four-year institutions. Better and more programmatic articulation between and within systems can have a positive effect on transfer (Berstein, cited in Zwerling, 1986). Institutional characteristics identified by Cohen and Brawer (1987) include various problems in articulating courses with senior institutions, including the practice of allowing students to take courses for which they are not well-prepared or that do not lead in sequence to the completion of a program of study.

Summary of Transfer Research

To summarize, the number of studies done to examine transfer activity and transfer students is extensive. From these studies, we have an idea of the characteristics of students who transfer and how they perform and persist toward the Bachelor's degree. We know some of the barriers and obstacles that affect

transfer, and some of the services that facilitate transfer. Enrollment patterns are no longer linear, which complicates the data used in transfer research studies. What we don't know much about is the transfer process for students who receive articulated Associate degrees.

Improving Transfer Effectiveness

Articulation is one way to improve transfer effectiveness. Articulation may be defined as the alignment of courses taught and programs offered at different levels to minimize duplication, overlap, and loss of time and credit by students as they move from one educational level to the next. The story of articulation covers most of the 20th century. As early as 1907, a program at the University of California at Berkeley was started to encourage high schools to provide college-level classes. Students could complete up to 45 units in high school. This was one of the first articulation agreements, and it continued until 1926.

History of Articulation: The Early Decades – 1990s

In the early decades, the transfer function was a comparatively simple enterprise confined almost entirely to the vertical transfer of high school graduates to junior colleges to universities (Kintzer, 1996). The early decades also saw the establishment of national commissions, private organizations, and accrediting associations, drawing further attention to articulation and transfer.

The earliest of these influential groups was the NEA-appointed Committee on Secondary Schools Studies. The most significant outcome from this committee was the widespread adoption of the Carnegie Unit, which led to the formulae for credit transfer. The most important of the early national agencies created to study higher education was the Truman Commission. *Higher Education for American Democracy*, published by the Commission in 1947, gave immediate attention to the two-year college, recommending expansion of the institution as an extension of high school. The junior colleges would offer the first half of the Baccalaureate degree. This prestigious report gave immediate impetus to articulation and transfer (Kintzer, 1996).

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 created an explosion of activities affecting school and college relations, and encouraged program and academic flexibility through the GED (General Education Development) testing program and Advanced Placement Program. *The Public Junior College*, published in 1956, was the first of several landmark publications that supported the functions of the junior college. This publication described the magnitude of the transfer function. It illustrated that transfer students were performing and completing as well as the native students. It also indicated junior colleges were reaching many students who otherwise would not have opportunities for advanced studies. Because of these observations, support for the mutual understanding and cooperation in determining transfer policies occurred.

In 1958, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers joined the Association of American Colleges and the American Association of Junior Colleges to form the Joint Committee on Junior and Senior Colleges. This committee created a set of transfer guidelines. In 1959, the committee requested a study by the University of California at Berkeley on the characteristics and transfer problems of junior college graduates. Two studies were carried out which focused on these areas and resulted in a report by Knoell and Medsker entitled *From Junior to Senior College* (1965). This landmark contribution marked the first such document to make more than a cursory reference to transfer articulation.

The 1970s were a period of proliferation for community college transfer and articulation research (Kintzer, 1996). By the end of the decade, college enrollment had leveled off to about three in eight people (38%) attending college, up from one in seven (14%) in the mid-20th century, mostly due to widespread financial aid programs like the G.I. (General Issue) Bill.

A 1970 Nationwide Pilot Study on Articulation was the first in a series of publications in this time frame devoted to articulation and transfer. This paper presented summaries of articulation and transfer policies and procedures in the 50 states.

In the 1980s, the number of traditional-aged college students declined, creating an interest by four-year institutions in recruiting transfer students. This decade marked the first studies indicating how to improve articulation and transfer

relations. Kintzer (1996, p. 8) identified four state-patterns of transfer and articulation agreements. These included:

1. Formal and legally based guidelines and policies, which were legal or quasi-legal contracts mandated by state law, state code, or a higher education master plan in which general education is recognized for transfer, and includes an emphasis on completion of the Associate of Arts degree prior to transfer. These policies were evident in approximately eight states.
2. State system policies, which were guidelines concentrated more on the transfer process and less on articulation services. Approximately 25 states used these guidelines.
3. Voluntary agreements among institutions. Approximately 28 states followed the pattern of informal processes or voluntary cooperation and negotiation.
4. Special agreements on vocational and technical credit transfer.

According to Bender (1990), the 1980s was the decade when transfer and articulation shifted, at least for public institutions, from the hands of local educational policy makers to state-level public policy makers. In 1989, legislatures in 13 states considered bills or passed resolutions related to transfer and articulation.

Some of the same themes that appeared in the 1980s were reflected in the 1990s. The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC)

Board of Directors declared that 1990 would be the Year of the Transfer. Two publications reflecting the issues of the decade were *Transfer, Articulation, Collaboration: Twenty-five Years Later*, by Knoell (1990) and *Bender's Spotlight on the Transfer Function: National Study of State Policies and Practices* (1990). Knoell's (1990) work was important because it distinguished between transfer and articulation, in part to accommodate the greatly increased complexity of the process of exchanging students and credits. Bender's (1990) work consisted of seven papers covering state-level policies, including a model of state-level articulation information and case reports of successful transfer and articulation in several states.

Rifkin (1996), reported that the 1990s presented a number of challenges in the transfer function area: a decline in the transfer rate; increased public demand for accountability in higher education; a broadening of student diversity in terms of enrollment patterns, educational, and career goals among those who seek both transfer and employment opportunities; absence of a consistent definition of transfer and lack of a consistent formula to arrive at transfer rates; serious reduction of budgets in education; and expansion of interest in assessing the effectiveness of community colleges. These challenges continue into the 21st century. Based upon these challenges, efforts to improve transfer and articulation policies and practices are critical in maintaining transfer as an essential community college mission.

Twenty-five years ago there was almost no state involvement in transfer and articulation. Today, according to a Ford Foundation survey, all 50 states have some form of higher education coordinating authority, and most are actively

involved in promoting integrated programs between the education segments and their institutions (Knoell, 1990). According to Robinson and Frier (1996),

many states have enunciated formal and precise articulation agreements. Some have established state agencies with statutory powers to direct transfer activities. Many states fund specialized services for transfer activities. Others require colleges to collect and report performance data on transfer students. In some states, transfer remains voluntary. Others make it mandatory. (p. 15)

Oregon required its State Board of Higher Education to work with the State Board of Education to ensure that students passing an Associate of Arts program at community colleges met the lower-division general education requirements of the four-year public institutions. Florida and California and other states have similar agreements.

Current Issues

The expansion of transfer and articulation agreements occurring today is a natural and predictable consequence of efforts by various states to reform and reorganize their education systems. These efforts meet the multiple demands of educating a vastly larger and more diverse population for a highly complex economy in a time of limited financial resources (Robinson & Frier, 1996). States are developing transfer and articulation arrangements not necessarily because they are attractive benefit programs that save students time, money, and aggravation, but because they embody the same principles that states are employing to improve the educational system (Robinson & Frier, 1996).

No single model has been pursued by all states. What all states do share in common are the goals that can be reached through improved transfer and articulation agreements in their public higher education systems: direct budget savings for the state and its citizens; reductions in academic program duplication; improved quality of academic programs through opportunities for greater specialization; enhanced opportunities for students to pursue higher education; and most important, the strengthened economic competitiveness of those states able to deliver a more highly educated and highly skilled workforce. All 50 states are pursuing improvements in transfer opportunities by various means.

Use of Associate of Arts Degree in Articulation and Transfer

The curriculum in the community college has many uses. Some programs culminate in the Associate degree, typically awarded to students who complete the equivalent of two years of full-time study. The Associate degree was first offered as early as 1900 by junior colleges, modeled on a practice started by the University of Chicago, where the Associate degree in arts, literature, and science was awarded to students at the completion of the sophomore year (Cohen & Brawer, 1987).

By the 1940s, 40 percent of the colleges were awarding this degree. By 1980, nearly all institutions designated as community colleges were awarding this degree (Cohen & Brawer, 1987). As many as 50 or more types of Associate degrees are currently awarded. The most commonly awarded degrees are Associate in Arts (AA), Associate in Science (AS), and Associate in Applied Science (AAS).

The AA and AS degrees are typically used as transfer degrees, while the AAS degree is typically considered a nontransfer degree.

According to Cohen and Brawer (1987) throughout the history of community colleges, the Associate degree has had three main purposes:

1. Provide a terminal degree for students who had completed two years at a community college, who may or may not continue their studies.
2. Signal the universities that students who were transferring were prepared at the lower-division level.
3. Inform prospective employers that community college graduates have received a pattern of formal education suiting them for entry to the workplace (p. 16).

It is unclear exactly how many students who start at a community college actually have a goal of obtaining a Baccalaureate degree. Somewhere between one-third to three-fourths of entering community college students indicate that a Baccalaureate degree is their goal (Cohen & Brawer, 1987). If this percentage of students have this goal, why aren't more of these students transferring? As we have seen, the answer to this question consists of a combination of factors, but articulation programs are designed to help increase transfer.

Many community colleges have received funding from the Ford Foundation for a two-part project, designed to improve the transfer process from community colleges to the four-year institutions (Donovan, 1987). Many schools attempted to improve transfer rates by improving communication between two- and four-year

institutions, increasing the responsiveness of student services, and improving the academic environment.

Dual-enrollment and coordinated admission programs are other avenues to improve transfer rates. In these programs students attend community colleges and either simultaneously enroll at a four-year institution or gain exposure to the four-year institution through a variety of interinstitutional activities. The community college and four-year institution work closely together to assure that the student takes transferable courses and will be placed as a junior at the four-year college (Seehusen, 1996).

Many articulation agreements hinge on the Associate degree, offering recipients of this credential junior standing at the university. The underlying assumption is that students seeking to earn a Bachelor's degree will follow a "2+2" sequence, completing the upper-division at the university after finishing the lower-division at the community college. However, this once popular linear path is not the most common today. Many students follow a nonlinear enrollment pattern in their attendance in higher education as they work toward the Bachelor's degree. Many students swirl around and never receive an AA degree.

During the 1992-93 academic year, a study was conducted by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities to determine the proportion of students who transfer from two-year to four-year colleges after earning an Associate degree. A random sample of 50 four-year colleges and universities from 13 states was asked to analyze the transcripts of those students who transferred

from community colleges in Fall 1991. The study's findings, which were based on information on 15,278 community college transfer students provided by 30 institutions, indicated that only 37 percent of these students earned the Associate degree before transferring (Palmer, 1994).

The Associate degree is widely recognized as a two-year college degree, generally signifying completion of the first two years of the Baccalaureate degree. The basic issue in community college-senior college articulation is defining the purposes of the Associate degree. Kintzer (1973) asked these questions: Does this work adequately prepare the student for their major and upper-division courses? Is the Associate degree a foundation for, or a part of, the Baccalaureate?

Kintzer (1973) found that early articulation agreements and first attempts at statewide plans were vague and indecisive in terms of lower- and upper-division relationships. Current statewide proposals provide a clearer answer. The trend in articulation is toward the Associate degree as a foundation for the Baccalaureate degree.

Support in this direction came from a study by Spurr (1970). He advocated general use of the Associate of Arts degree. Requiring the Associate degree en route to the Baccalaureate, he reasons, would represent successful completion of the first phase of higher education in a community college, thereby serving as a prestige and recognition mechanism as well as a safety net for individual students.

By bracketing together all who reach the two-year level with the associate degree, whether on the completion of an academic or in a technical-vocational program, all successful students at this point

will share the prestige and recognition and the sense of satisfaction and completion that comes from the possession of a college degree. Were the associate's degree required en route, many would be in a position of having successfully completed the associate's program rather than being identified as college dropouts. (p. 45)

A study by Grubb (1991) compared the graduates of the class of 1972 and the class of 1980. The rates of Baccalaureate degree completion among transfer students declined precipitously between the class of 1972 and the class of 1980. The likelihood of receiving a BA degree fell for those transferring without a credential, for those entering with academic Associate degrees, and for those entering with vocational Associate degrees (p. 208). The results of Grubb's (1991) study indicated that students who transferred without an Associate degree were less likely to complete a BA degree than those with either a vocational or an Academic Associate degree. This was possibly due to the fact that those without an Associate degree were likely to have more credits to earn, thereby requiring a longer period of completion time, which contributed to the likelihood of dropping out.

Data from the Secondary Student Longitudinal study conducted in the spring of 1994 indicated that the Bachelor degree attainment rate was much higher among the minority of community college transfers who completed an Associate degree before transferring—43 percent of Associate degree graduates had received a Bachelor degree by 1994, compared with 17 percent among those who transferred without any credential (Laanan, 2001).

Additional evidence supporting the benefit of Associate degree completion prior to transfer comes from a study by Claggett and Huntington (1991). They

reported on a voluntary project in Maryland and found that students who transferred with completed AA or AS degrees were more likely than those who transferred without degrees to have a GPA of 3.0 or higher at the university. Higher GPAs are generally associated with persistence to degree completion. Cohen (1992) agreed that transfer might be strengthened if four-year institutions required an Associate degree and accepted it in its entirety. In this way, schools could reduce the complexity of the transfer process which “may impede community college students from getting their Baccalaureate degrees” (p. 27).

A study that looked at Oregon community college students from three community colleges in the Portland metropolitan area who transferred to Portland State University found that the students who completed the AA/OT degree completed Bachelors degrees at higher rates than students who earned other degrees at the community college or who earned no community college degree (Kinnick, 1997).

Florida is foremost among the states in the study of reliance on the AA degree to insure opportunity to transfer and full acceptance of community college courses for Baccalaureate degree credit. Beginning with a statewide articulation agreement governing the acceptance of a program of general education courses to satisfy Baccalaureate degree requirements, Florida’s Articulation Coordinating Committee of the State Board of Education moved in 1971 to modify the agreement to include the entire 60 (semester)-unit Associate in Arts program for

purposes of both admission to junior standing and acceptance of lower-division coursework (Knoell, 1990).

According to Knoell (1990), transfer agreements based on the attainment of the Associate of Arts degree simplify the articulation process for community colleges, the receiving institutions, and for the many students who pursue this type of curriculum.

The Associate of Arts degree (AA) is the universally accepted credential for programs designed to prepare students for upper-division Baccalaureate study. In spite of AACJC's 1984 Associate degree policy statement, which was intended to adopt common Associate degree designations to facilitate uniformity and standardized meaning, considerable variation still exists (Bender, 1990).

Oregon's Articulation Efforts

In 1949, the Oregon Legislature passed the Dunn Bill, which authorized any school district to enter into a contract with the State Board of Higher Education for holding classes of lower-division collegiate grade (Medsker, 1960). Until a community college law was passed in 1957, several two-year colleges operated as high school extensions (Kintzer, 1973). All community colleges developed in Oregon in 1961 and after were comprehensive, student-guidance oriented, and open-door in nature. Articulation policies and procedures existed between the early community colleges and Oregon State University and the University of Oregon from the beginning.

Statutes governing the establishment of Oregon public community colleges provided that the State Board of Higher Education approve courses offered by each community college which were meant for transfer (Kintzer, 1973). In 1971, the Oregon legislature codified the community college laws, including a legislative definition of the comprehensive community college. Under different legislation the legislature also assigned an articulation function to the Educational Coordination Council (Kintzer, 1973).

The Oregon Community College Association has sought to maintain preplanned transfer on a systemwide/statewide basis for four-year institutions, as opposed to individual college-community college agreements. The four-year institutions of the Oregon University System accept transfer students from the 17 Oregon community colleges. A Council for Community College-State System coordination, composed of representatives from the community colleges, the Community College Committee, and the State Department of Education, meet to resolve specific problems of transfer (Kintzer, 1973).

The Oregon legislative charge in House Bill 2913, in 1987, directed the State Board of Higher Education and State Board of Education jointly to develop general education requirements and agreements, and enabled Associate of Arts graduates of Oregon community colleges to meet lower-division general education requirements of four-year public institutions in that state. This legislation required the joint committee of the two state boards to:

1. Propose a set of general education requirements for transfer students.

2. Establish a common course numbering system for lower-division courses offered by institutions of the two segments.
3. “Proposed systems and procedures that insure the enforceability of the agreements reached.” (Bender, 1990).

In 1997, a plan for course and credit transfer between Oregon community colleges and Oregon University System institutions was mandated in HB 2387, which was enacted by the 69th Legislative Assembly. According to Arnold (2001), the plan that was forwarded to the legislature in 1999:

stipulated, and then fully substantiated, two major premises about the student transfer process in Oregon, namely that: (1) course and credit transfer among the public institutions is a successfully completed process in the overwhelming majority of cases, and (2) an effective infrastructure is currently in place to monitor as well as address course and credit transfer issues when they arise (p. 45)

Findings and Limitations of Research

Many studies exist that analyze the transfer function to determine how transfer students compare with those who began at a four-year institution. Most of this research is quantitative and compares GPA and persistence to Bachelor degree as a measure of success. There is research supporting specific programs that can aid in the transfer function. A few studies exist which support articulated programs (Seehusen, 1996). However, the research is severely limited regarding articulated AA degrees, and specifically, qualitative studies that seek answers from the students in their own words.

There is support for AA completion prior to transfer. Several studies (Claggett & Huntington, 1991; Cohen, 1992; Grubb, 1991; Kinnick, 1997; Laanan, 2001; Piland, 1995; Spurr, 1970) found that students who got the AA degree prior to transfer completed BA degrees at a higher rate (26% in some studies) than did those students who transferred without an AA. None of these studies examined an articulated AA degree. No studies exist that explore why students graduating with articulated degrees are not transferring, or if there is a difference between the perceptions of those who get an articulated AA degree and choose to transfer, and those who get an articulated AA degree and choose not to transfer. This study explores students' perceptions of an articulated transfer degree, and how this degree influences the transfer process.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the rationale for the qualitative case study approach chosen to guide this study, a description of the case study site and participant selection, and a review of the study's design, including the data collection and analysis methods employed. Also presented is additional information on the researcher, including preconceptions and the wealth of professional and personal experiences she brought to the data analysis. The researcher, as the primary instrument for collecting data and analysis, is of critical importance.

The Researcher

The researcher was the primary instrument for collecting data and analyzing this qualitative study. She transferred from an Oregon community college to an Oregon four-year public institution 21 years ago. At that time, there were no articulation agreements or degrees available to ease the transfer process. Services aimed at assisting transfer students at the community college and four-year colleges were limited. For example, there were no advising guides available, four-year schools didn't have admissions representatives dedicated exclusively to community college transfers, and there were no websites available to aid in researching course equivalencies. All of these services and much more are available today at most colleges. Because of the lack of services available to transfer students, the

researcher's experiences transferring over 20 years ago were much different than those of current transfer students, including those who participated in this study.

The researcher has 18 years of experience working with transfer students at a private four-year institution and at public two-year and four-year institutions. She serves as an academic advisor to transfer students, provides training to other advisors on the transfer process, supervises staff who provide services to transfer students, and teaches a class called Transfer Success. This class is designed to help students understand the transfer process and make the process easier for students who are interested in transferring. The researcher has extensive experience with students who choose to transfer with or without the AA/OT degree. She understands the pros and cons of getting the AA/OT degree and will sometimes advise the student to transfer without the AA/OT degree or to get another Associate degree.

Due to the researcher's experiences working with transfer students, she brought certain perceptions to this study. Bender (1993) considers this one of the acceptable limitations of qualitative research, stating,

Rather than minimizing and eliminating researcher influence, the qualitative discipline requires elevating it to a conscious level and disclosing it to your reader. This practice not only enables you to redirect unconscious bias, but it reveals to your reader your unique perspective on the experience you are studying. Your perspective represents half the research equation. (p. 50)

Although every effort has been made to ensure objectivity, these biases have shaped the way the researcher viewed and understood the data collected and

the way the experiences were interpreted. She began this study with the perspective that the transfer function is a very important aspect of the community college's mission and that beginning the long-term goal of attaining a Bachelor's degree by starting at a community college is a wise option for many.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us to understand and explain the meanings of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible (Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research "implies a direct concern with experiences as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone'" (Sherman & Web, 1988, p. 7). According to Merriam (1998), there are five main concerns and characteristics of qualitative researchers:

1. The key concern is in understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's perspectives. (p. 6)
2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. (p. 7)
3. This research usually involves fieldwork, meaning the researcher must go to the people. (p. 7)
4. Qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy. That is, this type of research builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than testing existing

theory. Often, qualitative studies are undertaken because there is a lack of theory, or existing theory fails to adequately explain or describe a phenomenon. Typically, qualitative research findings are in the form of themes, categories, typologies, concepts, tentative hypotheses, or even theories, which have been inductively derived from the data. (p. 7)

5. Qualitative research focuses on process, meaning, and an understanding. The product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive. Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon (p. 8).

This qualitative study attempts to capture and communicate the important perceptions and experiences of students who graduated with the AA/OT degree. The researcher was interested in understanding the experience and perceptions of the AA/OT graduates. She was also interested in understanding how AA/OT graduates view the transfer process. The following research questions were posed in order to provide initial focus the inquiry:

1. How did the AA/OT degree attainment assist in the overall achievement of goals?
2. How did AA/OT graduates view the transfer process?
3. What influenced the transfer process?
4. What was the overall perception of the AA/OT degree?

In order to answer these questions, the researcher chose to profile AA/OT graduates and explore their perception and experiences while pursuing an AA/OT degree at an Oregon Community College.

Phenomenological

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), the design for phenomenological case studies evolves as the study progresses, and the researcher's primary goal is to add knowledge and understanding of human interaction from the participants' point of view. Langan (1984) asserts that phenomenology leads to action through description, reflection, interpretation, and appropriation. Van Manen (1990) confirms this in stating that the phenomenology deepens thought and that actions occur from this thought.

The criteria for truth or the epistemology of phenomenology is to make meaning of, or to understand, purposes, motives, intentions, and truth claims, and to expose hidden meaning. Phenomenology creates a strong foundation for the construction of learning through an ongoing, open-ended process, which, in turn, enhances the understanding of, and acts as a guide to, practice (Coomer & Hultgren, 1989).

Research Design

The purpose of this section is to explain the research design. It includes a description of the case study site, participant selection process, and a description of the study's overall design along with data collection and data analysis methods.

Case Study Site

The setting for this study is Chemeketa Community College (CCC), an urban public community college located in Salem, Oregon. Salem is the state capital of Oregon and the second largest city in the state, having a 2002 population of 140,958 (Eugene Register Guard). Chemeketa Community College enrolls a wide range of students with varying needs and skill levels.

Chemeketa Community College has been offering the AA/OT degree since 1988. CCC currently has an enrollment of 40,000 students. Students seeking transfer degrees represent the largest cohorts at CCC. Chemeketa Community College was chosen as the setting for this study because there is no obvious four-year public institution to which CCC students can transfer. Four of the seven OUS public four-year institutions (Portland State University, Oregon State University, University of Oregon, and Western Oregon University) are within a one-hour drive in different directions. There are also several private institutions within driving distance.

According to the Chemeketa Community College 2003 catalog, several services are available to students interested in transferring. These include:

1. A class designed to assist students through the transfer process (CG 225 – Understanding the Four-Year College Transition). This class introduces students to the four-year college system and provides strategies and information critical to both academic development and adjustment (p. 130).

2. The Student Support Services program (SSS)/TRIO (one of the three original federal programs created during the 1960s to help disadvantaged youth stay in high school and college). One of the goals of this program, as mandated by the federal government, is to encourage transfer. This program takes eligible students to visit four-year institutions and provides other activities to help students to overcome barriers involved in transfer.
3. Counseling and Career Services – CCC offers academic advising to all students. Students who are undecided or plan to transfer see a counselor (p. 24).
4. The E-Transfer website is available with all the transfer information a student needs to learn about degrees at Chemeketa, degrees at private and public institutions in Oregon, and elsewhere in the U.S.
5. Four-year school representatives come to the campus to actively recruit students.

Permission was granted by Dr. Joanne Truesdell, Executive Dean, and Mr. Jim Eustrom, Dean of Student Development at CCC, to allow the researcher to interview students who graduated with the AA/OT degree. Dr. Truesdell and Mr. Eustrom sent the initial screening instrument to students who met the criteria for the selection for this research project. Those AA/OT graduates who were interested responded directly to the researcher via telephone or e-mail. These students were then sent more information about the study, including the Informed

Consent Form (Appendix B). Once the Informed Consent Form was returned to the researcher, telephone interviews were arranged at a time convenient to the participant.

Interviews

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003) and Bender (1993), interviews are the most appropriate choice when the researcher is concerned with ascertaining the subjective meaning and experiences of participants. This researcher gathered demographic information, along with perceptions and experiences of AA/OT graduates via an in-depth interview with each selected participant.

Via telephone or e-mail, the researcher made arrangements to call at a time convenient for the student and that also allowed them to carry on a conversation with her while feeling relaxed and free of distractions. The interviews were tape-recorded and extensive field notes were taken at the same time. Adaptive recording equipment was utilized that allowed the participants to be recorded during the telephone interview. The initial electronic conversation preceded the phone interview. This helped to establish rapport and open a dialog with the participants. The participants agreed to be recorded and were informed at the start of the conversation that the interview was being recorded. A high level of content validity was assured through several separate listenings of each interview (Taylor, 1999).

An inductive approach was used. The initial direction was simply, “Tell me about yourself.” This allowed the researcher to verify demographic information and helped establish rapport. The interview guide approach (Patton, 1990) was used to collect data. Topics were specified in advance, but the wording and sequence of the questions were based on previous input from the participants. An interview conducted in this manner often turns into a form of conversation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This method provides greater depth and increases the comprehensiveness of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 1990).

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999) the strengths of the interview as a form of data collection are as follows:

1. Large amounts of contextual data are quickly obtained.
2. Cooperation with the researcher is facilitated.
3. Access for immediate follow-up for clarification and omission is facilitated.
4. Aid for discovering complex interconnections in relationships is provided.
5. Data are collected in a natural setting.
6. Analysis, validity checks, and triangulation are facilitated.
7. Flexibility in the formulation of hypotheses are provided.
8. Utility for uncovering the subjective side, the “native’s perspective” of process and phenomena are provided (p. 89).

Weaknesses in using an interview as a method of data collection do exist. Marshall and Rossman (1999) indicate one such weakness is that the process is dependent upon the cooperation and honesty of a small group of participants. However, since the participants in this research study volunteered to assist, it was presumed unlikely that they would be uncooperative. Also, in view of the length of the interview, it would be difficult to maintain consistent dishonesty. By using clarifying questions, any lack of honesty would likely have been noticed.

Another weakness noted by Marshall and Rossman (1999) is that interviewing is highly dependent upon the ability of the researcher to be resourceful, systematic, and honest in order to control bias. In addition, the interview-based study is difficult to replicate. However, since this is a qualitative study and any transferability of this research is left to the reader, it is unlikely there will be any attempt to replicate the study.

Selection of Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to choose participants for this study. According to Patton (1990) “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (p. 230). Participants in this study were chosen based upon the following criteria:

1. Graduated with the AA/OT degree in summer 2001 or spring 2002,

2. Were not dually enrolled at CCC and another four-year institution,
3. Represented a typical transfer student (age, gender, enrollment pattern),
4. Agreed to participate in the study.

Data Sources

The primary data source was the transcript of the interview. The researcher used field notes to supplement this primary data source. Descriptive field notes are well endowed with description and dialog relevant to the experiences and subjective meanings for participants. “Rich data are filed with pieces of evidence, with the clues that one begins to put together to make analytical sense of the phenomena” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 121).

Role of Researcher

The researcher was the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data in this qualitative study. As stated earlier, her background includes extensive experience with college students. Through active participation she has gained an overview and awareness of the activities and issues facing college students, especially those at community colleges who aspire to obtain a Bachelor’s degree. She has a comprehensive view of the transfer process.

During the interviews, the researcher acted as an equal participant without taking the dominant role or offering judgmental reaction to the participants’ responses.

In order to attempt to control bias, the researcher asked several experts who have many years of experience working with transfer students to review her summary of data to determine if it was consistent with what they were hearing from their AA/OT graduates. These experts included community college counselors, Student Support Services TRIO directors, and Phi Theta Kappa advisors. The depth of the phenomenological approach, combined with a methodology grounded in naturalistic settings, promoted an understanding of the importance of the experiences and perceptions of AA/OT graduates.

Data Analysis

Glesne (1999) indicates that data analysis involves organizing what the researcher has seen, heard, and read so that she can make sense of what she has learned. Data analysis was done simultaneously with data collection.

Consistently reflect on your data, work to organize it, try to discover what they have told you by writing memos to yourself, developing analytic files, applying rudimentary coding schemes, and writing monthly reports will help you to learn from and manage the information you are receiving. (p. 130)

Data analysis occurred as patterns and themes began to emerge from the conversations with AA/OT graduates. In addition, data analysis occurred through the creation of profiles of the participants by looking for patterns and themes between AA/OT graduates with linear and nonlinear enrollment patterns. Seidman (1991) writes "...the processes of gathering data through interviewing and analysis of the data are inseparable."

There are several methods one can use to encourage reliability and validity. Reliability is defined as the degree to which the finding is independent of any accidental circumstances of the research, and validity is defined as the degree to which the finding is correctly interpreted. Wolcott (1994) lists nine methods that can be used to encourage reliability and validity. These methods are:

1. Talk little, listen a lot.
2. Record accurately.
3. Begin writing early.
4. Let readers see for themselves.
5. Report fully.
6. Be candid.
7. Seek feedback.
8. Try to achieve balance of rigorous subjectivity.
9. Write accurately.

Wolcott (1994) equates validity with understanding. How this researcher did each of these is explained in detail in Chapter Four.

Trustworthiness

All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner (Merriam, 1998). Reliability is problematic in the social sciences simply because human behavior is never static. Reliability in a traditional research design is based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it

repeatedly will yield the same results. Triangulation of data strengthens reliability as well as validity. Multiple sources of data can lead to a fuller understanding of the phenomena being researched. Therefore, data gathered from individual participant interviews were triangulated with the researcher's perspectives developed from active professional participation with transfer students in general and with other higher educational professionals. Member checks were conducted with participants through written or verbal communication. The data and themes that emerged were triangulated with research studies in the literature.

Strategies for the Protection of Human Subjects

A high priority of this study was the protection of each participant's privacy. The researcher participated in the approval process for the protection of human subjects at Oregon State University before beginning the data collection. Since the participants were sharing their personal experiences, it was the researcher's responsibility to protect this information. The two most important principles for the protection of human subjects were informed consent and confidentiality. Participants were asked to sign a written consent form that clearly stated the purpose of this research project. Also, the data were coded in such a way as to ensure the confidentiality of the participants' responses.

Chapter Summary

For the purpose of this study a phenomenological approach was used to pursue the following questions:

1. How did the AA/OT degree attainment assist in the overall achievement of goals?
2. How did AA/OT graduates view the transfer process?
3. What influenced the transfer process?
4. What was the overall perception of the AA/OT degree?

This chapter provided the rationale for choosing the qualitative phenomenological case study research methodology. A phenomenological approach was used to understand and make meaning of the transfer process through the experiences of AA/OT graduates at an urban community college in Oregon.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the in-depth interviews structured to explore the experiences and perceptions of AA/OT graduates at an urban community college in Oregon. For the organizing these findings this chapter is divided into four sections. Section One introduces the reader to the setting, the participants, and describes the process for ensuring trustworthiness to validate the data. Section Two presents the findings related to the four research questions. The data presented in this chapter are the voices of the student participants. Participant statements are used to illustrate the findings because “phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people” (Patton, 1990 p. 482). According to Weiss (1994), “we can learn through interviewing, about people’s interior experiences, what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions” (p. 1). Neither the participants’ real names nor identifying information was given in order to ensure confidentiality. Section Three examines the five themes that emerged. Section Four offers a summary of the findings and transitions to the final chapter where recommendations for future practice and potential questions for future research are presented.

Section One: Participant Profiles

Section One profiles the student participants in this study, outlines their experiences and describes the setting of the study. This section also acquaints the reader with the method used to ensure trustworthiness.

Participant Profiles

Fredrickson's (1998) study of over 4,700 students who transferred from traditional, occupational, or technical/vocational programs found that typical transfer students were 26 years of age, female, and held part-time jobs. Similarly, in a report from a national survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (Cohen, 1996), 50 percent or more of students enrolled are Pell recipients. The participants in this research study mirror that of a typical transfer student.

Subject E: I'm not a conventional student. I am 24 and have been working for several years and decided to go back to school. I decided to get the transfer degree a couple of months into doing my community college work. I worked part-time and was undecided on my goals when I began at CCC.

Of the 18 participants interviewed, 13 were female with an average age of 29.6. Five participants were male with an average age of 25.4. Thirteen worked at least part-time (less than 40 hours/week). Eighty-nine percent of the participants came from families where neither parent had a Bachelor's degree at the time the participant graduated from high school. Only one-half attended full-time. Ten students followed a linear college attendance pattern of high school to community

college to university. Eight students had a nonlinear attendance pattern. Several were reverse transfer (4-year to 2-year to 4-year) students, others had attended more than one four-year institution or community college prior to enrollment at Chemeketa Community College. Fifteen participants changed their majors prior to transfer. Eight participants entered college with an undecided major. Table 3 summarizes the participants in this study.

Description of the Setting

Chemeketa Community College was chosen for this study because of its diverse student population. CCC has been offering the AA/OT degree since 1988. Students attending CCC who are interested in transferring have many options for transfer. As mentioned earlier, there are four public four-year institutions and several private institutions all within a one-hour drive. In addition, many services are available at CCC to aid students with the transfer process.

Table 3. Participant Profiles

Participant	Age	Gender	Major	Attendance Pattern	Transferred to	GPA
A	39	Female	Psychology	Nonlinear	OUS School	3.96
B	23	Male	Undecided to Psychology	Linear	OUS School	2.75
C	22	Female	Environmental Science to Nursing	Linear	Comm. College	2.8
D	41	Female	Social Science to Criminal Justice	Linear	OUS School	3.95
E	24	Female	Undecided to Nursing	Linear	OUS School	3.97
F	22	Male	English/Spanish	Linear	Applying	3.40
G	37	Female	Psychology to Business	Nonlinear	Private University	3.30
H	24	Female	Undecided to Education	Nonlinear	OUS School	3.32
I	26	Female	Pre-Med to Psychology	Nonlinear	OUS School	2.50
J	32	Female	Education to English	Linear	OUS School	3.85
K	33	Female	Accounting to Finance	Nonlinear	OUS School	3.75
L	25	Male	Undecided to Communication	Nonlinear	OUS School	4.00
M	23	Female	Psychology to Women's Studies	Linear	Private University	3.80
N	31	Male	Undecided to Computer Science	Nonlinear	OUS School	3.98
O	22	Female	Undecided to Education	Nonlinear	OUS School	3.80
P	48	Female	Undecided to Geology & Spanish	Linear	OUS School	4.00
Q	21	Female	Athletic Training	Linear	OUS School	3.45
R	26	Male	Undecided to Business	Linear	Private University	3.88

Trustworthiness of Data

The researcher has previous experience as a transfer student, as an advisor to transfer students at both two-year and four-year institutions (public and private), and as a faculty member involved in making changes to degrees. As a result, she brought certain perceptions to this study, including the belief that attending a community college to ready oneself (academically, financially, and emotionally) for transfer to a four-year university is a viable option that enables a number of students to transition to a four-year university who might not do so otherwise. As a result of her experiences, she possesses an understanding of the phenomena that enhance an awareness of, knowledge of, and sensitivity to the challenges of transferring from a community college. Bender (1993) considers this one of the acceptable limitations and strengths of qualitative research.

To ensure trustworthiness, the findings were shared with several individuals from three groups, including Oregon community college counselors, Oregon TRIO/Student Support Services (SSS) Directors, and Oregon Phi Theta Kappa advisors. Comments from some Oregon community college counselors confirmed that the findings were comparable to what they hear from AA/OT graduates who receive similar services. The counselors indicated the students in this study were representative of the type of AA/OT graduates found in their colleges, although some commented that results may be different if students with lower academic abilities had been interviewed.

To further enhance trustworthiness, the data was shared with Oregon TRIO/SSS directors. TRIO programs are funded by the U.S. Department of Education to provide services for students who are low-income, first-generation, or have disabilities. The U. S. Department of Education mandates that these programs support students toward reaching their educational goals of a two-year or four-year degree. TRIO/SSS directors consist of both community college and four-year college staff members who have many years of experience working with students, especially transfer students. This group was surprised that none of the students who participated in the study were aware of the TRIO/SSS program at CCC. About 710 SSS programs exist on college campuses nation wide. Most are funded to the level that they are only able to serve about 4 percent of the students who are eligible for services. The TRIO/SSS directors supported the Oregon counselors statements that, “the results would have likely been different if all of the participants hadn’t been so highly motivated and with such high academic ability.”

Because neither of the above mentioned groups validated the finding (Theme 2) that students were frustrated with the academic climate, the researcher decided to share the findings of this study with the Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) advisor. PTK is the two-year honor society that requires at least a 3.00 GPA to join. The advisors indicated they had heard this frustration occasionally but not often from the honor students with which they worked.

Neither group was surprised at how few services the participants in this study used, considering the GPA of the participants and their motivation levels.

Each group supported and agreed with all of the themes, except Theme 3 that derived from the participants' interviews. Few had ever heard students complain about the academic climate at the community college. However, some PTK advisors indicated they had heard some complaints by their honor students about frustrations they have with other students who aren't as motivated in the classroom as they are. All groups validated the results of this study. In addition to peer review with the counselor, TRIO, and PTK groups to further ensure trustworthiness, the researcher used Wolcott's (1994) nine methods to encourage reliability and validity.

Validity and Reliability Checks

Wolcott's (1994) was cited and his nine methods to encourage reliability and validity have been previously listed. In this research, the data analysis met his validity and reliability criteria in the following ways:

1. Talk little, listen a lot: Data analysis began when the researcher listened to the audiotaped recordings of the interviews several times prior to transcribing. She listened to the participants' words while reliving the interview experience. Through this process, she was able to be deeply involved in the process, not just with the words but also the nuances and contexts which gave richness to the interviews. All interviews were conducted by phone in her office during the evenings or on weekends.

As the students described their experiences, the researcher pictured them experiencing it.

2. Record accurately: The researcher transcribed the tapes herself, listening over and over for pauses, exclamations, questioning tones, laughter, and other subtle communications.
3. Begin writing early: During each interview, the researcher made extensive field notes. She wrote notes to herself in her journal, on her field notes, and on scratch paper as thoughts, patterns, or themes emerged. She used the same techniques when she began to transcribe the interviews.
4. Let readers see for themselves: Using participant profiles as a method of describing experiences allows the reader to live the story with the storyteller. The researcher's goal was to make it readable.
5. Report fully, be candid, and seek feedback: At the end of each interview, the researcher reviewed with the participant to seek feedback. Interviews were transcribed word for word, in participants' own words.
6. Try to achieve balance or rigorous subjectivity: This was achieved through reflexive dialogue that occurred between the participant and the researcher, and through member checking and peer review of the data.
7. Write accurately: This was a constant battle and struggle. It was difficult at times not to impose the researcher's understanding of the experience. What she sought was a blending of her perspective with the

participants' so that an understanding of the experience was achieved.

Through accurate writing, this message was conveyed.

Summary: Section One

Section One provided a brief introduction to the setting of this study, which was an urban Oregon community college. This section illustrated the trustworthiness of the study as articulated by the participants' perspectives and triangulation of data sources. The intent was to help the reader to better understand the phenomena through the participant perspective. This section also gave an introduction to the participants in the study.

Section Two: Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of students who graduated with an articulated degree designed for transfer. Specifically, the researcher wanted to understand how the AA/OT degree helped the graduates reach their long-term goals, what experiences they had with the transfer process, and what factors influenced the transfer process. The following questions guided this design of the study:

1. How did AA/OT degree attainment assist the overall achievement of goals?
2. How did AA/OT graduates view the transfer process?
3. What influenced the transfer process?

4. What was the overall perception of the AA/OT degree?

Data Analysis of the Interviews

Open-ended questions were used to collect narrative data from a sample of students who obtained their AA/OT degree. Therefore, the quality of raw data was extensive. Wolcott (1994) suggests that the researcher combine description, analysis, and interpretation in the final report. It is important not only to record the conversations but also to consider all information gathered as having a potential impact on understanding students' perception experiences.

The participants appeared eager to share their experiences with the researcher. The interviews took on a conversational tone. Several times the researcher related or summarized information for clarification or as a lead to a clarifying or probing question. The interviews were constructed with open-ended questions so the participants could respond at length. Participants were prepared for the interviews because they had received a letter and e-mail from the researcher outlining the topic areas and broad categories to be discussed.

The audiotape interviews were transcribed verbatim. All participants granted permission for recording the interview on audiotape for the explicit use of data transcription and analysis. Demographic information was also collected from each participant during the interview. Because the participants used variation in terminology, both the transcriptions and the interview notes were examined manually, highlighting concepts as the first step in analysis. The researcher took

interview notes during the interviews in order to provide immediate feedback and to outline the information gained during the interviews. Analysis of the data took several forms, including hand-coding, listening to the tapes, and review of the transcribed data several times. Hand-coding was an effective way to analyze the field notes and transcripts of the interviews. The coding and indexing of the interviews resulted in emerging patterns of experiences perceived by the participants. The coding and indexing allowed the researcher to reassemble the interviews in new ways, creating themes and patterns (Krueger, 1994). As soon as an interview was completed, but prior to the audiotape being transcribed, all field notes were reviewed and initial coding of responses was begun. The notes were considered an outline of the content of the interview and were reviewed frequently throughout the analysis process.

Research Question One

How did the AA/OT degree attainment assist in the overall achievement of goals?

Sixteen of the 18 participants in this study responded similarly to this question. They indicated that they used the AA/OT degree for transfer because their long-term goal was obtaining at least a Bachelor's degree. A common response follows:

***Subject A:** I finished at CCC and in June 2002, in the fall, I transferred to [OUS school]. Before I went to CCC, I knew I was going to get a Bachelors degree. I wouldn't stop until that I got that degree so the AA/OT is step one of my long term goal.*

Subject J: *I transferred from CCC to [OUS school] with the AA/OT and it allowed me to jump right into upper division courses. My goal is a Bachelor's degree and with the AA/OT degree, I am halfway to my goal.*

All students in this study had plans to transfer to a four-year institution.

Sixteen have transferred to a four-year college, one is in the process of applying to a four-year college, and one has transferred to another community college because of changes in her personal life.

Subject C: *I've gone back to school for a different degree, a different 2-year degree. I didn't transfer to a four-year college with the degree, but I've used the classes I had to take for the AA/OT as prerequisites for the other 2-year degree. My original goal was a Bachelor's degree; however, because of personal reasons, my goal changed.*

When probing further into goals, the responses indicated broader uses of the degree for achievement of their goals. Twelve students entered Chemeketa Community College with high aspirations for degree attainment (BS or higher). Seven of the participants entered CCC undecided about major and career. Five entered undecided about their degree aspiration. There was no difference between participants with a linear and nonlinear enrollment pattern in relation to entering with an undecided major or degree aspiration or changing the major. Many used the AA/OT degree to focus their goals and make decisions.

Subject H: *I knew going into CCC, it was always a goal of mine to get a 4-year degree, so whether or not I was going to eventually transfer wasn't really an option. I always knew I was going to continue on. When I started though, I didn't know where I wanted to go or what I wanted to do. I was undecided. So I thought I'll just get my AA/OT and then see what happens, and see what kind of*

decisions I make along the way. And sure enough, I decided I wanted to be an education major and just got all my classes lined within my AA/OT to transfer to [OUS school]. I felt more comfortable going to CCC than elsewhere because I didn't have to move to a new area and I knew a lot of people that were going to be going there. It was a more gradual change than jumping right into a 4-year with a new town, all new people. Knowing that this degree was articulated, gave me time to clarify my goals.

Summary: Research Question One

The AA/OT degree for students who participated in this study was an achievement of one of the short-term goals in their longer-term pursuit of a Bachelor's degree. Sixteen of the 18 students used the AA/OT degree for the purpose of transferring to a four-year university. However, students also used this degree as a way of clarifying their academic major and long-term career goals. The degree gave them time to learn about themselves and explore options that were available to them. Knowing the degree was articulated and that it would transfer as one block of credits allowed the students to focus on other aspects of the transfer process, such as declaring a major and clarifying career goals.

Research Question Two

How did the AA/OT graduates view the transfer process?

As mentioned earlier, the transfer process is much more than simply moving credits from one institution to another. However, when the participants were asked about their views on the transfer process, most of them didn't

understand what was involved. Most thought the process only involved moving either moving credits or themselves. Most didn't think about the barriers and obstacles to be overcome during the transfer process. All students in this study received help with the transfer process. Initial advising is required at Chemeketa Community College, and all students indicated seeing a counselor upon entry. It was at that initial meeting with a counselor where much of the transfer process was explained. Here are some typical responses:

***Subject H:** CCC had wonderful counselors. I had so many questions before I even started at CCC. I had to take a placement test, which is, I'm sure, the case at all the community colleges. And so, I met with a counselor because I was really undecided and I didn't even know what I wanted to do, and we figured out that since I wanted to go to a 4-year university, that maybe it was best for me to get my AA/OT. They suggested that is what I should do since I was undecided in my major. I just went with that and started working on my classes. And, in the process clarified my direction.*

***Subject B:** A counselor told me if I completed the AA/OT that you can usually transfer and enter the 4-year as a junior, and if you didn't complete the AA/OT then you would sometimes have to take some extra classes in order to meet the school's requirements to be a junior. I decided to go ahead and get the AA/OT before transferring. I was undecided so taking a variety of classes help me decide my major.*

***Subject E:** I talked to my guidance counselor at CCC before I started. She listed all my options and I realized that I could go farther. It was something that I wanted to do. To go for a Bachelors or maybe more. Also, I have to choose a major.*

***Subject J:** I went to the counseling center and made sure I knew which boxes needed to be checked off and, throughout the whole process, I was in contact with people at the counseling center to make sure I was staying on track with what I was doing.*

Subject H: *There was a point in time I thought I wasn't going to complete my AA/OT. I figured I would just transfer what I have out to [an OUS school], but I sat down with a couple of counselors out at CCC, who were very helpful. We figured out it was going to be more beneficial for me to complete some extra credits and go ahead and get my AA/OT and transfer with that, as opposed to transferring without it. If I had transferred without it, I would have lost a lot within the degree I wanted to go for.*

All of the participants in this study were academically motivated (average college GPA was 3.57). All participants were high school graduates. The average high school self-reported GPA was 3.35. Many of the participants described themselves as very self-reliant, which is probably why many of these students described the transfer process as being quite easy. After the initial counseling appointment at which they learned what needed to be done, they simply did it. They got the grades needed to transfer (average college self-reported GPA was 3.58), they took the remedial classes needed to increase their skills (most had to take at least one remedial class), and they did the research to determine to which four-year institution they wanted to transfer. Despite all of the services available to assist transfer students at CCC, few took advantage of any of these services. The following response summarizes the level of self-motivation involved in the transfer process for these participants:

Subject G: *I've always pretty much done things on my own. I'm the type who gets the college catalog and reads it through, pretty much handles things on my own, to the extent that I can. As far as filling out paperwork like application, financial aid and so on, I pretty much did that on my own. Then, you know, whatever the school has to do, the school has to do, and everything else I pretty much did on my own. I did most of the research and stuff on my own. CCC did have some sheets and stuff available that helped me*

out to let me know which schools took the AA/OT as a direct transfer in with the lower division completed. So, that helped me, but I didn't go through any people after the initial advising session I had upon entry.

None of these students were participants in the TRIO program nor had any of them even heard of the program; few visited with four-year college representatives when they visited CCC. Only one student took the “Transferring to a University” class.

Subject M: *I took a class, “How to Transfer to a University.” Yeah. It helped me so much. I loved that class. I was able to help so many other students, with what I found out.*

Students had positive opinions and experiences with the actual transfer of classes because the AA/OT degree is articulated with OUS institutions and several of the Oregon private colleges also take this degree as a block transfer of classes. Other experiences with the transfer process were more frustrating. Most of these frustrations involved moving to the new location and dealing with financial aid. Thirteen of the students in this study worked part-time while at CCC and therefore had chosen not to apply for financial aid while attending CCC. As the participants prepared for transfer, half of the participants were dealing with the process of applying for financial aid for the first time.

Subject R: *The transfer process was HELL! I felt like I was buying a house. I mean, there was a lot involved financially, I had never really dealt with financial aid before, 'cause I had never qualified for it. 'Cause I always made too much money, and so, I, uh, financial aid was something brand new to me. Transferring from quarters to semesters, uh, you know, I didn't understand a whole lot about the 4-year institutions, how their programs worked. I mean, all I knew was community college, I mean, I was,*

I was so frustrated, and was so overwhelmed. I, I didn't, I mean, sometimes I didn't know which way was up or down. Or, um, housing. I'd never lived on campus before. I was like, 'What's housing? What do I, I, uh, I, what's all this stuff?' It's very confusing. I felt like it was very discombobulated. So... Yeah, it was hell.

Subject P: *Uh, I, it, I was really pleased with the way the transfer process went. Because I heard, you know, some horror stories that you could lose credits or that, you know, things wouldn't transfer over, but I though everything transferred over beautifully. So... They gave me credits for all 91 credits I earned at CCC, for all my credits except those that were developmental. All my Gen. Eds. were guaranteed to be met, so I could go right in to doing my third- and fourth-year classes.*

Subject E: *It was fairly easy, I thought. The paperwork was not that hard and it was pretty simple as far as the actual paperwork transfer was easy. Moving across the state wasn't so easy, but it [the transfer process] was easy. It was very good. Because AA/OT simplified the process it gave me time to gain family and financial support while not having to worry about how the classes would transfer.*

Summary: Research Question Two

There are many studies that support AA completion prior to transfer.

Several studies (Claggett & Huntington, 1991; Cohen, 1992; Grubb, 1991; Kinnick, 1997; Laanan, 2001; Piland, 1995; Spurr, 1970) found that students who got the AA degree prior to transfer completed BA degrees at a higher rate than did those students who transferred without an AA. The students in this study had a positive view of the transfer process because they had received initial counseling/advising and therefore understood that the AA/OT degree was articulated. This allowed the participants in this study time to concentrate on other aspects of the transfer

process, such as deciding their major, taking remedial classes, and gaining family and financial support. One could also conclude that the transfer process was easy because all of the students in this study were highly motivated and bright.

Research Question Three

What influenced the transfer process?

The literature review in Chapter Two covered several studies that examined the characteristics of students who transfer. These studies show there are some demographic and academic background characteristics which affect the transfer process, including high school GPA and curriculum (Adelman, 1988; Grubb, 1991; Lee & Frank, 1989; Palmer & Eaton, 1991; Velez & Javalgi, 1987); socioeconomic status of family, if the student still lives at home (Grubb, 1991; Lee & Frank, 1989; Palmer & Eaton, 1991; Velez & Javalgi, 1987); age (Lee & Frank, 1989); gender and ethnicity (Adelman, 1988; Grubb, 1991; Lee & Frank, 1989; Palmer & Eaton, 1991; Velez & Javalgi, 1987); educational aspirations upon entry to college (Dougherty, 1994; LeVine & Cureton, 1998; McCormick & Carroll, 1997; Piland, 1995; Velez & Javalgi, 1987); motivation, self-concept, and self-reliance (Crook & Laven, 1989; LeVine & Cureton, 1981; Townsend, 1995; Velez & Javalgi, 1987); and being the first person in the immediate family to graduate with a Bachelor's degree (LeVine & Cureton, 1981).

Other barriers students often face as supported in the literature are loss of credit in transfer, being undecided on major or degree aspiration, and having to take

remedial classes. Because the AA/OT degree is articulated with OUS institutions, it eliminates the need for students to figure out how each course transfers.

Participants in this study knew if they followed the AA/OT curriculum, they would not lose credits. In return, this gave the students more time to focus on overcoming other barriers to transfer. According to the participants in this study, the AA/OT degree helped increase motivation and self-concept, especially for those who had no college preparation classes in high school, those who had been out of school for several years, lacked family support, or were undecided on major or degree aspirations upon entry. Age, gender, or socioeconomic status had no apparent impact on the transfer process for the participants in this study, although often studies have found these characteristics affect the transfer process.

Here is what several participants had to say about how the AA/OT degree helped them:

Subject B: *The first reason (for getting the AA/OT) is financial. The second, straight out of high school, I had that feeling of confusion, I didn't quite know what I wanted to do, and there was also some fear in there. Like, moving away, and some of my friends still lived in town and if I moved away to [an OUS school], that would be moving to a new town, having to make new friends, I think there was some mixed emotions, some fear, not really sure of things, like lacking confidence. Not lacking confidence in my academic abilities, but lacking confidence in just the newness of everything and being alone. The AA/OT helped me to feel more confident.*

Subject E: *I didn't know how well I could handle college since I had been out of high school for a couple of, well, several years. It surprised me how well I did, and part of it was that I really wanted to do this, and I was really motivated to study and to keep up on my work. I think the better I did, the more it encouraged me. It*

was sort of like the snowball effect on my self-concept of how well I was doing that I really could do this.

Subject A: *There's been a big change, as far as confidence. I wasn't sure if I was even going to be able to do it, or look smart enough or any of that to go back to school. There was a big boost to my self-confidence and I have become more self-reliant.*

It is well documented that many first generation students begin their educational trajectories at a community college (London, 1992; Rendon, 1995). Sixteen of the 18 participants had parents who did not have a Bachelor's degree at the time they (the participants) graduated from high school. First generation students often feel the pressure from their family or themselves to succeed and graduate.

Subject B: *I'll be the first person in my family to graduate from college. And I have this pressure, not really from my family, but from inside me to finish since I would be the first and make my family proud.*

Subject E: *Both my parents attended college but dropped out, and their pressure on me is to finish it and do what they were not able to do because of finances.*

Some families discourage the “educational pioneer” and this can lead to alienation from familial support (London, 1992). Here is the experience of one such participant:

Subject R: *It was very economical for me to, to go about getting my Associate degree and transfer rather than going, just upping, transfer into a 4-year program, I felt, my Associate degree just, maybe having a year worth of classes done and just taking the last three at a university was more financially, um, beneficial for me to go ahead and finish up my degree at CCC, and then transfer as a junior. I never took my SATs, um, I was raised a Jehovah's Witness, and in that religion, college is frowned upon, um, so, if*

my parents had their way, I wouldn't be going to school. CCC and the AA/OT helped me to focus on a major and career plan. I was a good student and found support and encouragement from faculty and they helped me with the transfer process.

Other factors that have been shown to influence the transfer process include use of services (Townsend, 1995), social involvement (Crook & Laven, 1989; Palmer & Eaton, 1991; Velez & Javalgi, 1987), support from family/friends (Anderson, 1981; LeVine & Cureton, 1998; Mutter, 1992), hours employed (Laanan, 2001; McDonough, 1997; Velez & Javalgi, 1987), perception of climate (Richardson, 1985), college GPA (Adelman, 1988; Grubb, 1991; Lee & Frank, 1989; Palmer & Eaton, 1991; Velez & Javalgi, 1987), remediation (Bernstein, 1986), faculty relations/advisement (Rifkin, 1998), full-time/part-time status (Grubb, 1991; Lee & Frank, 1989; Palmer & Eaton, 1991), and completion of Associate degree (Claggett & Huntington, 1991; Cohen, 1992; Grubb, 1991; Kinnick, 1997; Laanan, 2001; Piland, 1995; Spurr, 1970).

Almost half of all students entering community colleges enroll in at least one remedial course. The participants in this study reflect this situation. Twelve of the 18 in this study had remedial writing or mathematic classes to take.

Subject L: *Actually, I took Math 95 THREE TIMES at CCC. That first year that I went there, which is below college-level. Didn't pass it any of those times.*

Transferring to a four-year college is partially an expression of the individual's goals and intentions. Students in their high school senior year tend to estimate accurately their actual prospects for college attainment (Velez & Javalgi,

1987). All students were high school graduates with the average self-reported GPA of 3.35. The range was a GPA between 2.35 and 3.93 on a 4.00 scale. Eight students took college prep classes in high school or completed college credits while in high school. Twelve students had the goal of attaining a Bachelor's degree prior to entering the community college.

According to Velez and Javalgi (1987) "the effects of significant others on transferring indicates that parental and peer support are important elements in the transferring process" (p. 92). Sixteen of the 18 will be the first in their families to receive the Bachelor's degree, but only 10 of the 18 had family support (emotional or financial).

Subject F: *I graduated high school with a 3.93 GPA, I didn't really do as much scholarship searching as I should have during high school. I would say that retrospective is 20/20, or however the saying goes, but probably should've looked into that a little more to see what maybe more scholarship money I could get to go to perhaps CCC or even somewhere else. As it came about, when that Fall came around, when I graduated [from high school], I just realized that the financial burden would mostly be mine. My parents were going to help out some, but I decided to go to a community college for the first two years just to save money more than anything else.*

Subject H: *My dad has been really especially encouraging to me. I'm the oldest of the four and he has really encouraged all of us to pursue an education. At least our Associate's degree. As far as financially, all of us have kind of worked on putting ourselves through school, aside from financial aid and a couple of scholarships. I guess just good moral support.*

Subject B: *There was times that I really felt like giving up before I had the AA/OT, but my mom would always say to stick with it, that you're not that far away. My mom's motivation really helped me stay motivated; her talking to me, telling me to keep at it helped me*

more than anything. There were some other factors, but none as much or as important as my mom's were if I do get a degree, it would help me more than not having a degree. But my mom's encouraging really kept me going the most. My mom didn't go to college; instead she got married young so she wanted me to finish my degree, especially since she didn't.

Ten of the 18 were involved with faculty outside of the classroom, either through attending office hours, involvement in a club, or other academically-oriented activities. Research has shown a positive association between academic achievement and hours per week spent talking with faculty outside of class (LeVine & Cureton, 1998). Only five were involved in any social activities, and most common involvement was with Phi Theta Kappa club. One participant was involved in athletics.

Subject E: *I really liked CCC. I thought when I needed something, there was someone there that could help me with it. CCC is a very diverse place and it is supportive. The entire faculty and staff I came into contact with were very helpful and very encouraging. The students were, in one sense, all in the same boat, but in another, we were all completely different. There was a lot of tolerance for differing opinions. It didn't matter what you believed or what you thought, you were always heard. That was important to me.*

Subject F: *Several teachers I had there I enjoyed continuing conversations after class, and they were always very welcoming and willing to talk and to give office time to talk about whatever I had in my mind. One teacher in particular, my Spanish teacher, actually put me in touch with the people I actually ended up being in contact with in Mexico, that basically kind of inspired that trip that I took to stay down there for an extended time. So, the teachers, I felt, at CCC, were more than willing to give up some of their personal time to see to any of the needs that I had. Really, my history teacher I've seen a couple of times outside of class and have had really good, long conversations with her. Most of the faculty, I found, were very willing to take time out, and I really*

enjoyed that about the environment, the teachers especially. Also my teachers, at the beginning of class at each term asked how many students were transferring on. Then, actually, there were a few of us who raised our hands, and they [the teacher] would say, 'Then, this will work perfectly into this sort of degree field or career field.' ...A lot of the courses I took, they were actually geared that way. They were, in effect, assuming that you were going to take higher classes at another university that CCC didn't offer, preparing you for those courses.

Most of the students in this study had very positive academic experiences at CCC. However, some were frustrated with the lack of academic commitment by many of their peers in the classroom.

Subject D: *There seem to be a lot of people who are there who are not really up to the level that I would expect them to be at in order to be in a college-level classroom, both skill-wise, and attitude- and maturity-wise, and some of these were adults as well as traditional-aged students. They would come to class unprepared, they had a lot of excuses and I thought it was, like, you're paying for this, if you're not going to do the work, why even bother to be here? So there was just a different outlook on what college means. And then some of the teachers were really great and I learned a lot in their class. Others were just a total waste of time. I just had to sit in their class and just be there to get my grade and credits without having to work or read or learn anything.*

Subject J: *Oh, I loved CCC. I feel like the classrooms are a lot smaller, the teachers are no less educated than what I'm experiencing now at university. They're very available, not that they're not at a university, but, class size is definitely a different matter at a university than it is at a community college. So, um, it felt more like a town and now I feel like I'm in a city, so...But there was also a lot more age diversity that I don't really see at a university.*

Summary: Research Question Three

Factors that influenced the transfer process for the participants in this study were similar to those found in previous research. Some students lacked a positive self-concept and motivation because they had been out of high school for several years or did not take college prep courses while in high school. Others lacked family support or had remedial classes to complete. Others had to endure an academic climate that at times frustrated them because they were highly motivated academically but still had to take classes with students who were not as motivated and serious about their education. Several students in this study expressed frustration about classes in which the teacher had to slow their pace of instruction because of the variations of abilities in the class.

Research Question Four

What was their overall perception of the AA/OT degree?

Despite all of the limitations of the AA/OT degree mentioned in Chapter One, the overall perceptions of the 18 students who participated in this study were very positive. Even the one student who used her degree to transfer to another community college was very positive about the degree. This researcher thought the overall perception of the degree might be different for participants with linear or nonlinear enrollment patterns. She expected the nonlinear participants to be less satisfied with the degree, since all of them had already transferred to and from at least one school and did not want to “waste” time taking classes they did not need

for graduation requirements. The researcher found the responses from students with nonlinear attendance patterns were very similar to those with linear attendance patterns.

Nonlinear Responses

Subject O: *I think it's a great idea. And, it's a time saver, and a money saver, and you're getting, you're getting what you need. It's not skimping on anything. Um, and it's a really good idea if you're undecided on what you eventually want to be doing.*

Subject L: *I...think that if you want to transfer from CCC to a 4-year school, and you don't know which one, you can't beat it. It's, it's really, um...it's got a really diverse class requirement so that maybe you might have to go and do some remedial something at one school.*

Subject G: *I think it's a great combination of requirements to accomplish to show that you have reached some level of academic standards. I think that it's very clear-cut; it's very easy to accomplish once you know what needs to be done. For any student to be able to go through and say, 'These are the courses I need to take,' and in what order or whatever. CCC, their sheet has it very well planned out for you. Once you know what you need to do, and you have the ability to accomplish that, you're on your way to getting it. So, I think it's a great degree and I do think it has its benefits in that, the main thing I like the most about it rather than transferring to a university, and then having to also complete their lower division courses, that may have been different than CCC was expecting. Most of the universities in Oregon do accept that as completing the lower division and that makes transferring so much easier when it comes time to do that, in my opinion.*

Linear Responses

Subject R: *Overall...Fantastic. I'm very glad I did it that way. I tell people all the time that I'm glad I took my time and figured out what I wanted to do before I came to university. Had I gone straight from high school to a 4-year institution, I would've picked*

some random degree, I would not be happy with my degree. I was able to prepare myself for the transfer, you know, for the type of degree I was going to be getting. I'm very glad I did the transfer degree. I'm very glad I took my time. I'm very glad I was able to go to CCC, because had I gone here for the whole four years, I probably would've quit a long time ago. I think that the teaching at the community college, they focus so much more on the teaching, they focus so much more on the students, whereas here, at the 4-year institutions, it's like, 'Yeah, I'm really smart and I have this Ph.D., so you just, you're just lucky to be listening to me.' And, it's crap. It really is crap, I think. I can honestly get up there and do their job teaching, because most of my professors, I mean, they're brilliant people, but they don't care to teach. They don't care. They're like, 'Oh, read these 15 books, then come back to me.' And it's like, 'Okay, what am I learning? What are you teaching me? I'm paying 30 grand a year for you to tell me to read a book?' Okay, that makes sense. Whereas at CCC, it was more the process, it was more, you know, learn how to study, learn how to read, and learn how to do all these... the fundamentals. I mean, I was so, like, they taught me what it meant to be a teacher, what a school should be like. So... I'm very glad about the way that I did it.

Subject M: *I think it was amazing, because it made transferring to [OUS school] so easy. Because, they made sure you only took classes...that could go to a university, and they, um, if that's your goal, to go to a university, then that is, I think, that's your best way to go. Because you have it all done, and... it was a good experience for me. I enjoyed CCC a lot, and I liked what the AA/OT gave me. And I don't feel like I missed out on anything, going to a community college half of the time and then going to [OUS school]. So I have a very good, positive image of it.*

Subject F: *I thought it was just great. I thought it was a real blessing to come out of high school and find something like that, that was just what I needed. It allows me the time and flexibility to figure out what I wanted to do. It was financially a better option for me to take classes at a community college, the same ones that the transfer would cover at a 4-year university for the first two years, at a much lower cost. Also, it was just right here in Salem, right downtown, so I didn't have to commute, I didn't have to live on campus. The size was good, all my classes felt like high school size, 20-25 students. Some of the larger ones had more students,*

but there was overwhelming class load with 200 students and you work through a teacher's aide for your first two years of college. I felt overall, the whole experience was really easy and it was exactly what I was looking for. I'm really glad it was there.

Summary: Research Question Four

Overall, the perception of the AA/OT degree of the participants in this study was very positive. Because of the variety of classes required for the AA/OT degree participants clarified their goals. It simplified the transfer process for them because the degree was articulated with the colleges they planned to attend in the future. One student transferred to a private college that did not take the degree as a block transfer of credits. Despite this, he was still very positive about the AA/OT degree and how it prepared him for upper division course work.

As a result of answering these research questions, several themes emerged. These themes are explored in the next section.

Section Three: Major Themes

Themes, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2003) “are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs that investigators identify before, during, and after data collection” (p. 275). Patton (1990) indicates “inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data” (p. 453). Data analysis resulted in the formulation of five themes common to most of the experiences of these AA/OT graduates. These themes were:

1. The AA/OT degree made the transfer process easier and helped students overcome common barriers or obstacles to transfer.
2. AA/OT graduates were frustrated with the academic environment at the community college.
3. AA/OT graduates encountered stigma associated with community college attendance.
4. Advising and mentoring were crucial to goal attainment.
5. Degree attainment influenced behavior change.

Section Three discusses these themes, using examples from the participants' narrative.

Theme 1 - The AA/OT degree made the transfer process easier

As stated earlier in this study, there is much research that supports the notion of articulation agreements as a way to ease the transfer process. Articulated degrees are designed to simplify the transfer process by guaranteeing transfer of the classes and credits to certain schools. The experiences of the participants in this study support that research. The AA/OT degree simplifies the transfer process because students do not have to worry about how, or if, their credits will transfer. Eliminating this obstacle gives students more time to focus on other barriers they face, such as deciding what major to pursue, a four-year school destination, gaining support from family, developing college level skills, gaining confidence, and finding funding. Here is what the participants of this study indicated:

Subject O: *It was simple with that, the degree. I mean, that made it simple. 'Cause, with that degree, they just check, you know, whereas you'd have to figure out this form, they just check it off, and you're done. And you just start this set of classes, and it's pretty easy.*

Subject B: *When I started, a counselor told me if I completed the AA/OT that you can usually transfer and enter the 4-year as a junior, and if you didn't complete the AA/OT then you would sometimes have to take some extra classes in order to meet the school's requirements to be a junior. I decided to go ahead and get the AA/OT before transferring.*

Subject D: *It was pretty easy. I just applied to [an OUS school] and just checked on there that I had the AA/OT degree and that was pretty much it.*

Subject P: *I thought everything transferred over beautifully. So...they gave me credits for all 91 credits I earned at CCC, and all my general education requirements were guaranteed to be met, so I could go right into doing my third- and fourth-year classes.*

Subject G: *Well, because I'm the type of person who prepares ahead of time for things, and, like I said reads up on everything. I thought it went pretty smoothly. Other than there were some, a few little technical problems at the university where I was transferring in to, the process itself was fine. It flowed really well.*

It is impossible from this study to determine if the AA/OT degree helped students overcome common barriers to transfer or whether just attending the community college assisted them in overcoming barriers. However, students in this study clearly articulated the barriers they faced and how they overcame them. These include increasing self-confidence, deciding on major and four-year school destination, becoming more self-reliant, increasing academic skills, and gaining family support.

Subject H: *When I first started working on my AA/OT, the classes I was taking were more geared toward the business major, either OSU or Western. And then I actually had the opportunity to work with kids over one summer and I switched my major to education. So, that's what it is currently and that's what I will finish with at [OUS School] as an education major. And then my focus is in mathematics, since I like the mathematics side of things. So, a lot of those business courses ended up helping out.*

Subject A: *There's been a big change, as far as confidence. I wasn't sure if I was even going to be able to do it, or look smart enough or any of that to go back to school. There was a big boost to my self-confidence, I've always really felt self-reliant.*

Subject L: *In high school, I knew that I was supposed to go to college. I went on two visitations, but I never filled out any applications. I scored below 1,000 on my SAT. I didn't know what I wanted to do and I didn't want to think about it, I guess. And then when the time came to sign up for college, my mom, quite practically dragged me to CCC to sign me up. Um, and uh, so I did that for three-quarters, and, uh, decided I didn't like it very much, and, so I stopped going. I am much more self-reliant now.*

Subject Q: *I had to take a lower mathematics class, but it didn't bother me. I needed the extra help.*

Subject R: *I'm the first person in my family to have a degree period. With my Associates. And I will be the first person in my family to have a Bachelor's.*

Subject J: *I took, when I first went to CCC, because it had been 10 years from high school until I went back to college. I took the study skills course, and, whew, I'm so glad. It's helping me still. It was pivotal in, and, you know, taught me how to take notes again and, just got me back into thinking academically.*

Subject E: *My biggest one was that I could get all my early work done at a lower cost, at a community college and get all that out of the way without getting too much into debt, and the transfer degree seemed to be the way to do that.*

Subject O: *I saw the community college as a way to get all of the 100 and 200 level classes out of the way in a really inexpensive*

way. So, I just went to community college with intention to transfer to a four-year school.

The AA/OT degree made the transfer process easier and helped students overcome common barriers or obstacles to transfer. These included deciding on a major, deciding on a four-year school destination, gaining support from family, developing college level skills, gaining confidence and finding funding.

Theme 2 - AA/OT graduates were frustrated with the academic environment at the community college

Some critics of the community college have argued that community colleges were deliberately designed to “cool out” or derail students who aspired to complete the Baccalaureate degree (Clark, 1960; Zwerling, 1986). Much has been written about the community college climate along with studies that examine whether community college attendance hinders Bachelor degree attainment (Dougherty, 1994; Grubb, 1991; Velez & Javalgi, 1987). Many of the students in this study were clearly frustrated with the academic environment of the community college. Specifically, they were frustrated with the lack of commitment by many of their peers in the classroom. Others were concerned that professors were not free to teach at a faster pace because of the varying levels of academic ability and commitment levels of the students in their classes. This researcher is not sure this would have been the perception of all AA/OT graduates or just those in this study

who were particularly academically skilled. Here is what several of the participants indicated:

Subject M: *There are more undedicated students...at CCC. But, I think that I would probably see that at [OUS school] in freshman/sophomore classes.*

Subject D: *I think you can get a good education there, but you need to filter out a lot. There seem to be a lot of people who are there who are not really up to the level that I would expect them to be at in order to be in a college-level classroom, both skill-wise and attitude- and maturity-wise, and some of these were adults as well as traditional-aged students. They would come to class unprepared, they had a lot of excuses and I thought it was, like, you're paying for this, if you're not going to do the work, why even bother to be here? So there was just a different outlook on what college means.*

Subject J: *Because I'm an older student returning, but there was, um, kids that you could tell were going to college because that's what their moms said that's what they had to do if they wanted to live at home, so... and those kids weren't as engaged and you didn't want to have group projects with them. But, other than that, most of the time, people were really there to learn, and it came across in the classroom.*

Subject H: *CCC was very casual and laid back. One of my biggest pet peeves is cell phones going off. And some instructors, it really bothered them and some instructors would let people answer their phones. And, uh, I just think that's tacky, but... So I was glad to be done at CCC. It was good for me to get an education inexpensively there, but I'm really glad to be at [OUS school] where, not that they didn't take education seriously there at CCC, but there's a little bit more of a commitment as far as with the student body is concerned with their education.*

As mentioned earlier, this theme was validated by only a few of the professionals with whom this researcher shared the data. In all of her years as an advisor, counselor, and faculty member, she has had very few students complain

about the academic climate. She hears more complaints from the faculty about the students, not from the students themselves. So, the researcher is unsure how widespread this problem is for community college students.

Clearly, attendance at a community college, despite the academic climate, did not hinder the students in this study from pursuing their Bachelor's degree. Nor has it prevented them from being successful students upon transfer.

Theme 3 – AA/OT graduates encountered stigmas associated with community college attendance

Through a complex interactive process involving individual aspiration and institutional admissions, students connect with colleges. Potential students find out about and enroll in college through the encouragement of family, friends, high school advisors, teachers, freeway signs, radio, television, newspaper, and direct mail advertising, and many other sources (McDonough, 1997). Many factors enter into the decision of where to attend college. Students can feel pressure from many sources. Because the Baccalaureate degree is the most venerable in American higher education, it is often perceived as the minimum requirement to be obtained by an individual (Cohen, cited in Rifkin, 1996, p. 27). Many of the students in this study felt pressure coming out of high school not to attend a community college. Some of these students were honor students, yet they knew themselves well enough to know they were not ready (emotionally, financially, or academically) for the rigors of a four-year university. Rather, they wanted to stay home and attend the

community college where they knew the class size would be smaller and the environment more supportive.

Subject F: *I think that right now, there's something in our society that says if you're gifted, and that if you have certain skills, or a certain GPA over a certain number, that you should, therefore, attend a 4-year university with no other considerations. I think that, sometimes, community college students are looked down upon, whether it be a class thing, or some other motivation. I think there is just a widespread feeling that community college education isn't as fulfilling as a 4-year university. I don't know if fulfilling is the right word, but I know I got pressure from some of my favorite teachers in high school to go to a 4-year university, and I really felt that they were disappointed in me since I chose to use the community college as a stepping stone. But, I held to it and I really do feel that it was the correct decision to make and I don't know why there is such a negative sentiment toward the community college, or the transfer program in general, but I think it is there. I don't know why it exists, and I don't know why other students would go to a 4-year university for all four years. It seems to me a waste of money. In an ideal world, an evolution that took place to have every student go to a community college and then from there to go onto a 4-year university. And then the university system itself would be separated out more into 2-year programs. So you have your 2-year institutions that have general studies, then you have your more specialized institutions.*

Subject O: *My high school really looked down upon community college, and they were, like, a 4-year university or nothing. I felt pressure to attend a 4-year school, because community college was just a last resort according to some. And, I feel real good that I went to CCC. It was really beneficial to me. I'm going to get my teaching license here pretty soon, so, community college isn't that bad of a deal. And, I, you know, I felt like I really learned that.*

In McDonough's (1997), *Choosing Colleges: How Social Class and Schools Structure Opportunity*, the negative perception students face in attending a community college is reported. One student in that study indicated that although "she decided to attend one of the premier community colleges in the state, she had

to deal with the negative image of community colleges” (p. 41). Most view community colleges as places of last resort for the academically and socially challenged (Welsh, 2002). Although graduates from among the nation’s more than 1,100 community colleges have gone on to four-year schools and become leaders in medicine, business, and government, that attitude is pretty much universal.

Some students, upon transfer, felt better about telling others they were currently going to a four-year college, while other students felt a certain amount of discrimination by staff and students at the four-year college because they had attended a community college.

Subject M: *I met people, who would openly say things about community colleges, and I was never ashamed, and I would never lie about going to CCC. I had been accepted at a four-year college but instead I choose to attend CCC. But definitely, saying that you go to [OUS school], gets maybe a different look. Just listening to people talk, they don't think that community college is as academically difficult, or is as big of a deal, or, um, I've just heard comments from people, you know, to my face about that. 'Oh,' you know, 'don't go to CCC, it's nothing, it's...you don't even have to get accepted...' Those kind of comments. And I don't get that at all at [OUS school]. Which is too bad...I don't... I don't agree with that [the low opinion of community colleges].*

Subject R: *A lot of people at [private school] don't take me seriously because I came from a community college, and there is kinda, uh, negative connotation, to people who transfer in. I could care less because I know, academically, I'm superior to most of them. So it's like, you can make fun of where I came from, I don't care. It doesn't bother me. I know who I am and what I'm doin'. So...go for it. Make fun of me. I make fun of them because they go to a really snobby school, where mommy and daddy are forking the bill, I mean, it's just a matter of who you are and where you came from. I mean, I could care less. I do think there's a negative stigma towards those who do transfer in to a university. Especially at this private school. It's a very small, somewhat, I hate to say it,*

elite, but it is kinda. They do have that elitist attitude about themselves. I mean, yeah, I think, I don't personally feel ashamed. I actually tell people that I prefer CCC over this private school any day. I mean, I definitely would.

Subject D: *My study behaviors haven't changed. The only thing that is different, I feel better being able to say I am at [OUS school] rather than I am at CCC, which is kind of silly to feel that way, but because there's a stigma associated with community colleges not being as good. I don't know. I've been trying to figure that out, too. If it weren't for the community college, I'm not sure then that I would have even started this whole process. For the non-traditional student, it is a great way to get back into college. Because if I would have started at [OUS school], I don't know that I would've stuck with it.*

Subject K: *I see it more that they're more impressed that I'm a junior now, not so much that I'm going to a community college compared to a 4-year. I think a lot of that's because it's my age, too. People understand it's expensive and the best way to do it is to go to community college and then transfer to a 4-year.*

Subject G: *Well, yeah, I think so. Because, some people don't know what [my private school] is, but, for those who do, it's recognized as a university as opposed to a community college, where so many people are going. I think that sets you apart a little bit. So, I think there's a little more pride in saying, 'Yeah, I'm going to a university,' as opposed to a community college.*

This researcher found little research to support this theme of negative perceptions encountered by potential students. Perhaps of all the themes found in this study, this one is the most disturbing. It is clear that community colleges provide access to millions of students who, without them, would not pursue higher education. Why are community colleges seen as “last chance” colleges by many people in positions to influence prospective students?

Perhaps the perceived “cooling-out” function explains some of the negative perception that exists toward community colleges. The cooling-out function serves to shift students of limited academic talent from pursuit of a Baccalaureate program to an “undesired destination,” a terminal education program. Some educators encourage this shift because it is preferable to having students drop out or otherwise fail to complete a program. However, do community colleges, because of their open-door admission policies which attract students with very different academic skills, serve to “cool-out” some of the academically gifted students because these students get frustrated with the classroom climate and thus just transfer without the degree? Many of the participants in this study were frustrated with the classroom climate. The students in this study were academically motivated and became frustrated that the “cooling-out” function has become synonymous with criticism of the community colleges as a failed engine of social and economic mobility, although this is not a position taken by Clark (1960b) in his book, *The Open Door: A Case Study*, about classroom experiences. These questions suggests further study.

Theme 4 - Advising and mentoring were crucial to goal attainment

For the transfer student, the advising relationship is crucial. Every student in this study mentioned their initial advising session. According to Light (2001), “good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience” (p. 81). Academic advising is one of the most

important services that colleges campuses offer (Smith & Gordon, 2003). Advisors are concerned not only with helping the student get a degree but also with helping them become an educated person, a lifelong learner, and a contributing member of the workforce (Smith & Gordon, 2003). Clearly, these students in this study received excellent initial advising. For some, this was all the advising they needed; others utilized counselors/advisors frequently during their college experience. These students clearly understood they needed to assume responsibility for the tasks in the transfer process that needed to be completed. These students made their own decisions based on the information and advice they received.

***Subject F:** I did attend counseling, just basically the primary counseling to see which type of courses I should take, and general placement info upon entering the community college, but past that, not too much.*

***Subject O:** I used the counseling center. They were great.*

***Subject J:** I was definitely in and out of the counseling center a lot to make sure, as I said, staying on track. Uh, they have pretty good on-line services as far as registry and such. And just my teachers where great resources.*

***Subject M:** I had teachers who would make us go to tutoring, so that wasn't even a choice, but still I enjoyed it. And, um, taking that class, that How to Transfer, I, it was taught by advisors, so I knew I could come in and talk to that woman any time I needed to.*

Many of the participants developed relationships with faculty, and the faculty took on a mentoring role. The nurturing environment is more predominant in community colleges than at four-year colleges (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000).

Research has shown a positive association between academic achievement and

hours per week spent talking with faculty outside of class. According to LeVine and Cureton (1998) for students there is an objective as well as emotional payoff to faculty-student interaction. Participants spoke about their interactions with faculty:

Subject F: *Several teachers I had there I enjoyed continuing conversations after class, and they were always very welcoming and willing to talk and to give office time to talk about whatever I had in my mind. One teacher in particular, my Spanish teacher, actually put me in touch with the people I actually ended up being in contact with in Mexico, that basically kind of inspired that trip that I took to stay down there for an extended time. So, the teachers, I felt, at CCC, were more than willing to give up some of their personal time to see to any of the needs that I had. Really, my history teacher I've seen a couple of times outside of class and have had really good, long conversations with her. Most of the faculty, I found, were very willing to take time out, and I really enjoyed that about the environment, the teachers especially.*

Subject E: *Yes, I did take advantage of office hours a lot. Especially in my science classes, which kept me kinda busy. Like Anatomy & Physiology, Microbiology. I also spent a lot of out-of-class time in my statistics class. It didn't come easy to me at all.*

Subject E: *I really liked CCC. I thought when I needed something; there was someone there that could help me with it.*

To increase the overall rate of transfer, enhanced counseling and advising services as well as faculty advising have been effective (Striplin, 1999). Cohen (1996) found that the largest number of respondents from both high and low transfer rate colleges indicated “counseling and advising services” and “faculty advisors” when asked, “What forces within your own institution contributed to or facilitated transfer?” Participants’ responses in this study mirror the responses found by Cohen (1996). This researcher believes participants in the study would echo that response if they had been asked the same question.

Theme 5 - Degree attainment influenced behavior change

Most of the students in this study mentioned how they felt different after graduating with the AA/OT degree. Most common responses indicated an increase in their self-concept or motivation and becoming a more active learner.

***Subject O:** It felt good to get this degree and have something to show for two years of work. I came to [OUS school] a little more motivated than some people who were here for two years, because it was a nice change of scenery. So, that kind of, kind of, of helped motivate me, and, I'm, you know, I've not really been here that long and I'm not going to be here much longer. I think that was a good motivating factor.*

***Subject H:** I have more confidence. And I think that's because I know that I'm onto the next step and my goal's almost completed. So, as far as if I were to just stop and just have my AA/OT, my confidence probably wouldn't have changed with or without it. But, knowing that I completed that was one more step toward my final goal. I'm pretty happy that that chapter's done with.*

***Subject E:** I moved away from my hometown, moved across the state, I think that kind of gave me a little more, a little better sense of self-reliance. I don't know if it did anything in the practical sense, but it made me feel more self-reliant. I am more involved on campus and I live on campus.*

Others mentioned how they are different now that they have transferred to a four-year institution. Most were less afraid of approaching faculty and understood the importance of utilizing the faculty. They described themselves as more active and collaborative learners. The following are some common responses:

***Subject N:** I definitely don't have any problem approaching faculty anymore. And visiting during office hours, I'm fine with that. That might have changed.*

Subject H: *I have more contact with faculty at [OUS school] than I did at CCC. Especially those involved with my major. I'll meet with them and talk with them. It's more, they have more of a personal relationship, even though they are just my teachers. They are more interested in having and knowing more about me, as opposed to how my instructors were at CCC.*

Subject A: *Yes, I think so. I do go to talk to the faculty a lot more, I spend more time studying with other peers. It is totally different here than it was at CCC.*

Subject B: *None at CCC. Nothing at all, no interaction with faculty or teachers. But at [OUS school] there is more of this extra interaction. I seem to be more motivated to do things and my GPA went way up, too. Almost a whole point higher than my CCC GPA. I ask questions, I'm involved more in class participation, stay after class to ask questions, go to office hours. Never would do this at CCC. I don't know if this is part of me maturing, or what. I felt when I was at CCC that I was afraid to ask questions, that it may be a stupid question. But now, I see that that is pretty ridiculous, that asking questions is for our benefit. Now, I ask questions without worrying about if it sounds stupid or not. I'm asking the question because I don't know something and this is okay to do.*

The participants in this study indicated that they are more motivated and self-confident. Graduating with a college degree made these students feel better about themselves. For some, graduating and transferring with the AA/OT degree appears to have given them more confidence to talk with faculty and be more involved in their educational programs. The participants in this study had done well to manage the “transfer tremor,” described by Kuh (2003) as “managing the challenges that come with learning how to negotiate the cultural pathways of their new institution” (p. 30). There didn't appear to be any differences between those with linear or nonlinear attendance patterns on this theme. All of the participants

seemed more engaged and motivated at the four-year institution. For many it was because they were much closer to their goal of the Bachelor's degree and were, therefore, very motivated and more interested in being involved in classes that were in their major field of study.

Summary of Themes

Based upon the perceptions and experiences described by the AA/OT graduates in this study five themes emerged. It is important to keep in mind that the sample included only students with an average GPA of 3.58. These themes might be different if the sample included a more diverse group of students.

The themes and responses to the four research questions were checked for validity and reliability through peer review, as stated early in this chapter. But in the end, the validity and reliability of the data comes back to the researcher and her sense of trustworthiness with the material. It was an intuitive process. She did not begin with a set of themes in mind. The themes arose out of the comments that she marked as interesting. One participant's comments related to another, and one theme to another until the connections and interpretative categories became evident. Some of the themes are not supported by previous research because most of the previous research is quantitative. There is some research that supports change in students upon transfer. Townsend (2000) interviewed transfer students at a four-year university, and these students described themselves as "more self-reliant." There is no research that examines the stigmas students face when

choosing to attend a community college, nor is there research that examines the frustrations students have with the community college climate.

To summarize the findings of this research project, the researcher finds herself asking, “What did I learn?” “What were the connections between the participants who were interviewed?” “What do these experiences mean?” The comment by the following participant does a great job of summarizing the findings of this study:

Subject B: *CCC mailed me my AA/OT certificate. Sometimes when I get tired of doing the work and need motivation, I pull out that degree and see that I don't have very far to go, that I can stick with it. Compared to some of my friends, who transferred without the AA/OT degree, they have to completely finish the 4-years before they get any type of degree, whereas I have my transfer degree and that is something I can pull out and look at. It makes the journey seem shorter. It divided the degree into smaller pieces. I know what hoops I need to jump through to get a degree. Not only did this keep me motivated it helped me to clarify my goals and develop college level skills prior to transfer.*

Summary of Findings

As stated earlier in this study, most data used to study transfer students includes students with any level of transfer activity. This could mean getting three credits at a community college or an Associate degree. I believe this can complicate the research findings by combining transfer students who transfer with one or more credits with those who receive AA degrees. This study looks only at AA/OT graduates, but it does combine students with different patterns of attendance. However, there were no differences in use of services or obstacles

faced in the transfer process between AA/OT graduates with linear or nonlinear enrollment patterns.

The purpose of this study was not to evaluate the AA/OT degree, nor to evaluate the value of attending a community college. The goal was to gain an insight into experiences and perspectives of students who graduated with an articulated degree. Little to no research exists that explores the students' perspective on the transfer process and how an articulated degree aided the process. This study adds to that understanding.

CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Imagine an educational system where a person who is interested in pursuing post-secondary education can seamlessly proceed from high school to community college to a four-year university. Imagine a world where we respect the educational choices that are made by students. Based upon the themes that emerged from this study, this is what the participants in this study want. Community colleges play a huge role by providing access to millions of students who otherwise would not attend a university. Bachelor degree achievement continues to be the goal for most who enter higher education. Seventy-one percent of 1989-90 beginning community college students responded that they anticipated earning a Bachelor's degree or higher when asked, "What is the highest level of education you ever expect to complete?" (Bradburn & Hurst, 2001). Yet, many who begin at community colleges with the goal of obtaining a Bachelor's degree never achieve this goal. All of the blame for low Bachelor degree attainment cannot be placed upon the institutions, because the students must bear some of the responsibility. However, it is clear professionals at both two- and four-year colleges can do more to make the process more seamless.

Implications for the Research

The findings of this study have implications for community college professionals, for students, and for university professionals. This study answered four questions. In describing the perceptions and experiences of these participants, five themes emerged. As mentioned earlier, these themes are reflective of this sample, which was a highly academically motivated group of students based upon their GPA. Five themes were identified in this study and each have implications.

Theme 1—The AA/OT degree made the transfer process easier and helped students overcome common barriers or obstacles to transfer.

The lives of community college students are complicated. Many work at least 20 hours per week, over half have children, and many are low-income and first-generation. Academically, many start below college level in writing and mathematics. Many have not grown up with the advantage of having educated parents to serve as role models who encourage learning. Many stop in and out of the educational system.

To achieve a satisfying and economical lifestyle, one needs to be prepared with the necessary skills to be successful in today's job market. Students today will face the probability of having several different professions during their lifetime, some of which do not even currently exist. Educators must develop learners who are not only literate, numerate, and prepared for some professional endeavor, but who also are capable of synthesizing developing information structures into

evolving competencies for yet undefined tasks in the information-oriented world of the 21st century. The AA/OT degree requires a student to learn a repertoire of skills along with gaining a strong foundation in both writing and mathematics.

It is well documented that articulation can make transfer of classes easier. However, what is not well documented is how an articulated degree can alleviate stress and anxiety, thus giving the student time to overcome some of the common barriers to transfer, such as deciding on a major and a four-year school destination, generating family support, and increasing academic skills and motivation. As an advisor, this researcher has been asked countless times by potential transfer students, “Should I get my Associate degree before I transfer?” “Will it really help me, since I plan on attaining my Bachelor’s degree?” Prior to doing this research, the response would have probably been, “If you know what your four-year destination is, then transfer once you have taken all of that school’s general education requirements.” Now, the researcher realizes there are benefits to obtaining the AA/OT degree that are beyond the ease of transfer. Clearly, obtaining the AA/OT degree can help a person stay motivated toward their ultimate goal of a Bachelor’s/Master’s degree. Especially for the first-generation student who is the “educational pioneer” in the family, this degree can prove to self and family that they belong and can survive in the college environment. Since so many stop in and out of education, degree attainment is important. As college professionals, we need to convey all degree advantages to the students.

Theme 2—AA/OT graduates were frustrated with the academic environment at the community college.

As mentioned earlier, this theme was not well supported by the experts who reviewed these research findings, nor is it something the researcher had heard much about during her years working in post-secondary education. However, the academic classroom environment was frustrating for many of the participants in this study. Community colleges have been accused of “cooling out” students since the 1960s; perhaps this is because of the perceived classroom climate. Is the community college environment doing this because of its open door enrollment policies? Despite using assessment tests to ensure similar skill levels of students enrolling in their classes, few community colleges do any assessments to determine academic motivation and maturity levels of their students. Although students might be taking a particular college level writing class because they were placed in it or took the proper prerequisite, not all have the same motivation to learn.

According to Richardson and Bender (1987),

University faculty expect self-directed, well-prepared, and independent learners. They believe it is the responsibility of the student to sink or swim. The community college faculty, by contrast, are receptive to the need for support systems to assist students confronted by academic deficiencies, economic barriers, and limited educational experiences in an institution dedicated to access. (p. 34)

Because of the supportive nature of the community college, the teacher tries to accommodate all learners in the classroom. Are we hindering our bright and motivated students and setting them up to be unsuccessful at the four-year college

by not challenging them to their greatest potential? The answer to this question is not known; however, as an instructor, it has caused the researcher to rethink her approach to dealing with students.

Theme 3—AA/OT graduates encountered stigmas associated with community college attendance.

Many students feel pressure to attend a four-year college even though they know they are not ready emotionally or academically. Several participants in this study felt the need to make it clear to the researcher during the interviews that they *had* been accepted at several four-year universities but they *chose* to attend the community college. Perhaps the pressure to attend a four-year school placed upon potential freshmen by peers, parents, high school/college professionals, and the media is the reason why so many students “swirl” around in their post-secondary enrollment pattern. Does this affect the four-year college retention rates? Maybe some kind of college environment readiness assessment needs to be developed. Or perhaps we should simply respect students’ choices.

Community colleges are often perceived as being less prestigious and less academically rigorous despite the fact that many very successful people attended and graduated from them en route to four-year degrees. Each spring the researcher is invited to one of the local high schools in the area for college night. High school freshmen and juniors and their parents come to hear about “Options for a College Degree.” The researcher’s session is about the advantages of attending a

community college. This session is usually not well attended because high school freshmen and juniors are dreaming about attending a prestigious private school or some other university somewhere other than their hometown. Many of these students have told the researcher, “attending a community college is my last choice, anyone can go there.” It is not known what can be done to change this image, but there needs to be an awareness that it does exist and that it affects students’ educational choice, and potentially their long-term goal attainment, because many feel pressure to attend schools for which they are not ready.

Theme 4—Advising and mentoring were crucial to goal attainment.

There is much support for this theme. Myhre (1998) found that acts of help and encouragement from faculty and counselors have the greatest influence on why certain urban colleges successfully transfer so many students. Faculty, by virtue of their contact with students on a daily basis, can influence the transfer process through advisement and curriculum development. Eaton (1994b) indicates “faculty and counselors can play an important role as mentors and models for students, helping them to develop programs of study that fit their circumstances” (p. 126).

The value of advising to student success is well documented; however, the first areas to be trimmed in times of budget cuts are the non-FTE generating areas, usually those in student services, which usually include advising. The two-year college hosts a student population which is highly diverse and covers a broad spectrum of interests and abilities. Many students are less academically prepared

than those who go directly to four-year institutions and come from lower income families that do not value education. Lack of familial support affects the student's motivation and desire to succeed. Educational programming and counseling are critical for all of these student situations (Packwood, 1977). The population coming to the community college will continue to become more and more diverse. For example, students are arriving with more complicated personal/life issues, which affect their ability to be successful in the classroom. Students need precollege counseling, assessment testing, group orientation to the college, career information, and educational planning. Advisors and counselors can help students with these issues.

Theme 5—Degree attainment influenced behavior change.

There is a great emphasis on how degree attainment can help students get jobs or larger salaries. However, little focus has been placed on AA/OT attainment for other gains. Clearly, the AA/OT degree did more than just make the transfer process smoother for the participants in this study. This degree proved to these students that they can succeed in college. Eighty-nine percent of the participants in this study were first-generation. Many community college students come from environments where there is no value placed upon a college education. Education is not valued because it isn't considered necessary to get a good job or it isn't economically feasible to attend. Some of these students continue to face these battles with their families on a daily basis. Some finally accept the value of two

years of education, but the battle to continue towards achievement of a four-year degree remains, especially if it means relocating. Because of the environment which many of these students come from, many might experience low self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1982), self-efficacy involves a belief that one can produce some behavior, independent of whether one actually can or not. Motivation comes from the learners' beliefs about themselves in relation to task difficulty and task outcomes (Driscoll, 1994). Bandura (1982) suggests there are four possible sources from which people can gain information to influence their self-efficacy. One of these is performance accomplishments. Attainment of the AA/OT degree helped increase the student's self-efficacy by providing performance accomplishments. For the participants in this study, this accomplishment, which increased their self-efficacy, also influenced behavior changes after transfer. The students in this study indicated they were more comfortable approaching faculty, asked more questions, and described themselves as more self-reliant and motivated.

These themes emerged from the experiences and perceptions of eighteen students who attended an urban community college and participated in this study. Students bring a number of characteristics, experiences, and commitments to their college entry, including academic preparedness levels, parent's educational attainment and aspirations for their children, socioeconomic levels and aspirations for learning and degree attainment. To understand the development level of students upon their arrival at college, one could use student development theories to understand their psychosocial, cognitive or moral development. Social learning

theory, specifically Bandora's theory on self-efficacy could be used to understand Theme 5. And Tinto's retention theory could also be used to explain the themes by exploring the social and academic integration levels of students. The themes that emerged might have been different had the participants been students who were not so highly academically motivated. However, based upon the sampling techniques used for this study only the highly motivated student expressed an interest in being interviewed for this research project.

Summary of Implications

Research exists to support some of these themes. However, little or no research exists that explores Themes 2 and 3. There are many critics of the community college, including many who think community college attendance hinders Baccalaureate attainment. But is it really due to the environment at the community college, or is it the motivation of some of the students who attend the community college? Can anything be done to change the perceived climate at the community college? We know that the cultures and values between two-year and four-year colleges are very different. We cannot change the values that exist at two-year or four-year colleges, but we can prepare students for these differences by emphasizing AA/OT completion. AA/OT completion can help prepare a student for the four-year culture because it requires students to take the maximum number of transfer level classes, including a diverse group of classes in the liberal arts area, which generally prepare students for the rigors of university work. The AA/OT

requires classes that should help students to develop strong critical thinking, problem solving, and writing skills, along with oral communication skills.

This study also supports the findings of Piland (1995). He concluded that selecting a major, planning one's schedule, completing general education requirements, and having a strong goal in mind affect transfer and graduation. He emphasized the significance of earning high grades, selecting a major, and completing the maximum number of transferable units (especially in general education). The AA/OT graduates in this study all earned high grades, selected a major prior to transfer, and completed the maximum number of transferable credits, including all general education requirements, prior to transfer because that is what the AA/OT degree does.

However, why are so many students transferring without an Associate degree? There is a tremendous amount of support for obtaining the Associate degree prior to transfer because of the benefits of transferring with the maximum number of credits, transferring with college level classes (particularly mathematics), the increase in self-confidence as goals are accomplished, and gaining the understanding of how the educational process works (what requirements are needed to graduate). Yet, four-year institutions do little to encourage community college transfers to get the Associate degree.

According to Eaton (1994b), "major efforts undertaken in the last decade to strengthen the transfer function place little emphasis on acquisition of the associate degree" (p. 144). "In California, for example, the associate degree is not even a

requirement for admission to either California State University or the University of California” (p 145). Nor is it a requirement at any OUS institution in Oregon. The most extensive longitudinal study to date of community college students, the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, indicated that the Associate degree is a weak force, earned by only 25 percent of the 1972 graduates who attended a community college between 1972 and 1984. For 1980 high school graduates this number had dropped to 14 percent (Grubb, 1991). Palmer (1994) discovered, in a study of 13 states, that just 37 percent of students who transferred completed their Associate degree prior to transferring to a four-year institution. This compares to an Oregon study, from academic years 1995-96 to academic years 2000-01, which estimated that an average of just 30 percent of entering Oregon community college transfers to the OUS had earned the AA/OT degree (Arnold, 2003).

Does the Associate degree really matter? To answer this question, according to Eaton (1994b),

Community colleges need to do sufficient research to address three questions. First, does earning the associate degree confirm that students have realized the educational gains that might reasonably be associated with the completion of the second year of higher education? Second, does earning this degree produce economic and educational gains for occupational students that exceed the gains they would realize without the degree? Third, does earning this degree enhance the educational attainment of liberal arts and career education students who transfer compared to those who transfer without the degree? (p. 146)

This study supports and provides some answers to these questions. The participants of this study recognized and articulated the educational gains they made by attaining the AA/OT degree, including increase in self-esteem, more active academic behaviors after transfer, increase in self-reliance, increase in motivation to finish the four-year degree, and, for many, going on to graduate school. Also, the participants in this study indicated that earning the AA/OT enhanced their liberal arts education and set themselves up for success in the transfer process. After transfer to the four-year schools their GPAs remained the same as it was while attending community college, or actually improved.

This study supports many others that were reviewed in Chapter Two. Completing the AA/OT degree does more than just ease the transfer process. Completion of the AA/OT degree helped students overcome common barriers to the transfer process. Students also expressed gains in learning behaviors upon transfer, and an increase in their motivation level to completion of the Bachelor's degree.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

- Two and four- year institutions should promote articulated degrees. If higher educational professionals are serious about the success of transfer students, four-year schools need to be encouraged to give priorities to

students to obtain the Associate degree prior to transfer. These degrees make the transfer process easier by allowing the student to concentrate on important aspects of the transfer process (i.e., more that just how their classes will transfer). The core class requirements in the AA/OT degree help prepare students for university level work because the classes are designed to increase critical thinking, problem solving, and writing skills. All of these skills are needed to succeed at universities. In addition students who obtain the AA/OT degree describe themselves as more motivated and self-reliant, have increased their self-esteem, and exhibit different behaviors upon transfer. These are all benefits that will increase the likelihood of success at the four-year institution.

- Create a climate at community colleges that supports and encourages motivated and bright students. This could be done by offering special honor classes or an honors program, such as those found at four-year institutions. This would be especially helpful for students who plan to transfer by providing the highest level of rigor in classes for students who are motivated and serious about their education and their preparation for university-level work.
- Expand, encourage, and support advising. Advising works when there are trained and available advisors, and students are required to see them at least a few times during their time at the community college. Also, support and encourage faculty involvement in the transfer process.

Supportive faculty can ease the transfer process for students simply by being interested in and understanding the process themselves.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study explored perceptions and experiences of AA/OT graduates. Findings from this research offer abundant opportunities for further research. While these findings are informative, they are limited to the context of the participants and the Oregon community college selected for this study. Additional research with other populations is needed to determine if the findings are generalizable.

If community colleges are to understand how to enhance the transfer process for AA/OT students, research should be done in the following areas:

- What are the experiences and perceptions of AA/OT graduates with lower GPAs?
- What are the experiences and perceptions of AA/OT graduates who did not utilize the degree to transfer?
- Why are students transferring *without* the AA/OT degree, and how does their success compare to those who transfer *with* the AA/OT degree?
- What were the experiences of many high academic achievers in high school, who chose to attend a community college en route to four-year degree attainment despite facing pressure not to follow this route?

- Does obtaining an AA/OT degree make a difference in persistence and retention toward the Bachelor's degree?

Also, there are many opportunities to apply student development theory, social learning theory, or retention theories to this research and to further expand the findings.

Despite the efforts to increase transfer rates, the rates have remained unchanged in the last 30 years at around 20-25 percent. But are these rates different if we just look at students who transfer with AA degrees? Probably not, because despite the advantages of getting an AA, there is no incentive to get an AA prior to transfer. It appears that there is even less support for AA completion nationwide. Many states are attempting to address their community college to four-year transfer issues by creating a common general education core that students may complete prior to transfer. Ignash and Townsend (2001) found that 24 states had developed a common general education core (p. 184). Is this the answer to solving transfer problems? Perhaps if all educators are interested in helping students transfer classes, then this would simplify and expedite the transfer process. However, if higher educational professionals are serious about transfer student success, then perhaps this is not the answer. If students take a core set of requirements, will this prepare them properly for the rigors of university-level work? This needs to be studied further, especially in Oregon, before higher educational professionals decide to change the AA/OT degree.

Students in this study clearly articulated the benefits they gained from attaining the AA/OT degree. Most of these gains had to do with increasing their motivation to continue towards the four-year degree because they knew they were halfway to a four-year degree. Along with making the transfer process smoother, students who got the AA/OT degree had gains in the following areas: general educational, vocational and workplace skills, personal and social development.

In 1970, Spurr wrote in his book, *Academic Degree Structures: Innovative Approaches*:

It would seem desirable to require the recognition of the Associate's level en route to the baccalaureate in order to endow that step on the academic ladder with greater status and prestige than it carries when it is associated primarily with the junior and community college movement. Then the Associate's degree could no longer be interpreted as a mark of a second-track academic career, but would rather represent the successful completion of the first phase of higher education. By bracketing together all who reach the second level with the Associate's degree, whether on the completion of an academic or in a technical-vocational program, all successful students at this point will share the prestige and recognition and the sense of satisfaction and completion that comes from the possession of a college degree. (p. 184)

Spurr made this comment 33 year ago when Oregon community colleges were in their initial stages of development. Yet his comments about the sense of satisfaction that comes from the possession of a college degree are echoed by the participants in this study. In addition, there is value for the Associate degree in the workplace. According to Turner (2000) "Oregon will add close to 300,000 jobs in the next ten years. Twenty-three percent of the jobs in 1998 required at least an associate's degree" (p. 1). If an individual achieves a competitive education level,

it may make them more competitive when applying for a job, just as the Associate degree can help students be more successful upon transfer.

Articulation helps smooth the transfer process by clearly defining how classes and credits will transfer. Although articulation does nothing to help the student adjust to the new culture of the four-year college, AA degrees that are grounded in liberal arts classes that prepare students with critical thinking, problem solving, and writing skills can help prepare students for success in the four-year environment and in life.

Two-year and four-year college leaders need to collaborate more on how to make post-secondary education seamless. Farrell (2003) reported the findings from the College Board's annual survey. She found that tuition at public two-year and four-year colleges rose in 2002-03 an average of 14 percent over last year. Rising costs are pricing students out of education, or they are faced with taking on ever-larger debts. As professionals we can help students achieve their dreams and/or help them recognize their potential by working together to promote a seamless transfer process. The best investment educators can make is to help students succeed in higher education because this is the best form of economic development and civic betterment that educators can make for society. Oregon has made progress toward this goal (of seamless transfer) with the AA/OT degree. However, more can be done, and it will benefit all in post-secondary education.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INITIAL INVITATION LETTER

March 25, 2003

Dear AA/OT Graduate:

My name is Patty Scott. I am a doctoral student at Oregon State University in a program called Community College Leadership, and I am employed as a faculty member at Southwestern Oregon Community College in Coos Bay, Oregon. I am preparing to do my research for my doctoral dissertation and I am hoping you might be interested in helping me learn more about Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer (AA/OT) graduates.

The goal of my research is to learn more about AA/OT graduates by interviewing students who have received this degree. Only about 50% of the students who get this degree each year at Oregon Community Colleges use it for transfer to a four-year public institution the following year. Currently, there is limited information available about students who receive this degree. My goal is to learn more about students who receive this degree, how you are using it, and perhaps why more students are not transferring.

Your only obligation would be to allow me to interview you by telephone so that I might learn about your experiences and perceptions as an AA/OT graduate. Your participation is voluntary. Your time involved would only be about 30-45 minutes, arranged at a time that is convenient for you.

The answers you provide will be kept confidential as is required by law. Special precautions have been established to protect your confidentiality. Your name will not be associated in any way with this project.

I need 10-15 students to participate in this research. If you are interested or have additional questions, please contact me at (541) 888-7366 or by e-mail at pscott@socc.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research project, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator at (541) 737-3437 or by e-mail at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

Thank you for your help. I appreciate your cooperation and look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Patricia M. Scott, Director
Educational Support Programs, and Doctoral student

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: **Uses of the Degree: Perceptions of Students who Graduate with the Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer (AA/OT) Degree**
Principal Investigator: **Dr. Larry Roper, College of Education**
Research Staff: **Patricia M. Scott, Doctoral Student**

PURPOSE

This is a research study. The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of how AA/OT graduates use the degree. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study or not. This process is called "informed consent." You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

We are inviting you to participate in this research study because you graduated from Chemeketa Community College (CCC) with an AA/OT degree in 2002

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your involvement will consist of one telephone interview of approximately 30-45 minutes.

The following procedures are involved in this study. A telephone interview will be arranged in advance at your convenience. When reached by telephone, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your experiences and perceptions of the AA/OT degree.

RISKS

There are no risks involved in participating in this research project.

BENEFITS

There will be no personal benefit to you for participating in this study. However, the researchers anticipate that in the future, educational institutions may benefit from this study by providing better services to AA/OT degree students.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not incur any costs for participating in this research project. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you will not be compensated for participating in this research project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, federal government regulatory and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that personally identifies you. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

AUDIO

By initialing in the space provided, you verify that you have been informed that audio recordings will be generated during the course of this study. At no time during the taped interview will you be identified by name instead; you will be identified as Participant A, B, etc. All materials will be kept in a secure storage area and only the researcher will have access to this area. The recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and upon confirmation of my degree, all recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed.

_____ Participant's initials

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. You are free to skip any of the interview questions. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. If you decide to stop participating, all records will be destroyed.

QUESTIONS

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Dr. Larry Roper, (541) 737-3626, larry.roper@orst.edu or Patricia M. Scott, (541) 888-7366, pscott@squidware.com. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator at (541) 737-3437, by e-mail at IRB@oregonstate.edu or by postal mail at 312 Kerr Administration Building, Corvallis, OR 97331-2140.

Your signature indicates that this research 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 (printed):

Signature of Participant

Date

RESEARCHER STATEMENT

I have discussed the above points with the participant or, where appropriate, with the participant's legally authorized representative, using a translator when necessary. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

AREAS	PROBES	NOTES
Introduction	Read informed consent Statement Answer participants questions Explain study Tell me about yourself	
Student Demographics	Age, 1 st generation, race, financial aid, high school GPA	
Factors that influences the transfer process	High school patterns Placement in remedial Degree aspiration Major Use of services Working and attending FT/PT Interactions with faculty College GPA	
Educational Goals	When did you decide on transfer? Did degree aspirations and major change? If so why? How did AA/OT fit?	
Overall perception of AA/OT	How did you view the transfer process? How has AA/OT helped you? Are you different since you graduated?	
Closure	Is there anything you'd like to add? Words of wisdom? Answer participants questions Outline next steps.	