

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Motivations for Reverse Transfers at Rogue Community College

Abstract approved:

Sam Stern

As reverse transfer students become a larger part of community college enrollments, it is important to better understand the underlying causes of this nontraditional population's emergence in the traditional community college system. This quantitative descriptive study found that approximately nine percent of the student body enrolled at Rogue Community College (RCC) between September, 2012 and September, 2013 gained an average of 55 credits (for reverse transfer non-completers) at a four-year college prior to reverse transferring to RCC. At the time of their enrollment at RCC, these students were an average age of 32 years and made up of 68% females and 32% males. A little more than half, 51% of the students, indicated their primary motivation for enrolling at RCC was to gain an associate's degree and 27% of students indicated a longer-term goal of pursuing a career in nursing. Community college administrators should be aware of reverse transfers as an indication that the traditional forms of higher education are not serving some students. These results can be attributed in part due to the dynamic changes

in the economy after the economic downturn of 2008 and the consequences that impacted the labor market.

Keywords: reverse transfer students, community college, nontraditional students, reverse transfer completer, reverse transfer non-completer

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Motivations for Reverse Transfer at Rogue Community College

by
Aurora N. King

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

Aurora N. King, Author

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As a workforce development practitioner and programs manager, my position allows me to travel from the front lines of service delivery to meetings in the state capitol. Throughout my day, I have the opportunity to interact with different individuals ranging from the traditional welfare recipient who is mandated to engage in workforce training services, to the nontraditional dislocated worker who increasingly is someone who holds a master's or bachelor's degree. While many of my nontraditional clients may perceive my place of employment as a "last resort" option, they are often more likely than traditional clients to actively participate in the weekly workshops that are offered in support of "skilling up" and networking for a job. Throughout my daily interactions with these well-educated individuals, I have grown increasingly more interested in why they felt that they were unable to get a job although they appeared to have many transferrable skills. More often than not, these people were most interested in returning to school at the local community college rather than returning to work. As a student and a professional, I began to wonder how many people who had participated in education at a four-year college returned to two-year college. Was this common, and if so, why?

A display of the collaboration and integration of the community college and university education sectors is located across the street from my office at The Job Council. Appropriately labeled, the Higher Education Center is home to both Southern Oregon University and Rogue Community College. For Southern Oregon residents, this building is the hub for starting out at a community college and transferring to a university. After all, to do so, a person does not even need to leave the building. However, for other residents who could be considered "on the margins," it also offers a

synthesized approach for reverse transfer, or the movement from a four-year college to a two-year college.

According to Barbara K. Townsend (1999), editor of *Understanding the Impact of Reverse Transfer Students on Community Colleges*, the type of college transfers that are commonly regarded by the general public and policy makers alike follow the traditional progression through the education pipeline and are vertical (two-year college to four-year college), or lateral (two-year college to two-year college, or four-year college to four-year college). Despite the large number of students who continue to engage in the traditional patterns of higher education, there is an outlier group of students who matriculate at a four-year college and then transfer to a two-year college. Routinely regarded as “reverse transfer students,” these students can be categorized into two different groups:

(1) undergraduate students, who start their undergraduate education at a four-year school and then transfer to a two-year school, and (2) postbaccalaureate students, who complete a bachelor’s degree or higher and then enroll at a two-year college. Students in this second group have been considered reverse transfers because at many, perhaps all, two-year colleges, they can transfer in credits from their baccalaureate degree toward a certificate or an associate’s degree (Townsend, 1999, p. 1).

Statement of the Problem

When a student enrolls at a community college, the institutional research department typically categorizes this student as a traditional enrollment, meaning that the student’s educational goal (or major) resides at that particular community college. If a student has prior education or a degree (meaning that they are a reverse transfer), this

characteristic does not warrant them to be tracked in a specific way. Because the number of reverse transfers in the higher education system is on the rise, (Gose, 1997; Kalogrides & Grodsky, 2011; Kastjura & Keim, 1992; Townsend, 1999; Winter & Harris, 1999) evidently, there is an indication that a new pattern of students are not being served through the traditional channels of the post-secondary education system. “The number of studies examining reverse transfers is small, with much of the existing research consisting of field-survey reports in unpublished manuscripts and dissertations” (Winter, Harris, & Ziegler, 2001, p. 272). Therefore, this suggests that community colleges are not recognizing reverse transfer students, and as a result, are not operating or delivering services to best meet the needs of this growing population. Further exploration of this population of students is needed in order to understand the motivation and underlying issues associated with reverse transfer. As the practice of education is gravitating towards being driven by outcome related data, state policymakers will be progressively more focused on this increasing area of importance (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center Signature Report, Reverse Transfer: A National View of Student Mobility from Four-Year to Two-Year Institutions, 2012).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify who engages in reverse transfer at Rogue Community College (RCC) and their motivations for reverse transferring. Data collected included the demographics of the informants, the motivations that contributed to their decision making process, the elapsed time between when they finished with school at their previous four-year college and started school at RCC, and finally, their purpose for enrolling at Rogue Community College.

This research sought to answer the following questions:

1. Who engages in reverse transfer at Rogue Community College?
2. What are the motivations for engaging in reverse transfer at Rogue Community College?
3. What are the courses or areas of study in which they are enrolled at Rogue Community College?

The results of this study will assist Rogue Community College personnel to gain an understanding of the demographics and the primary motivations for reverse transfer students who enroll at Rogue Community College. Prospective benefits for Rogue Community College could include: targeted information to inform their marketing strategies, student services, and recruitment, as well as opportunities for potential curricular changes. Although the results of this study are not intended to be generalized, the overall results of this study could inform the practice for how community colleges use resources to serve and recruit reverse transfer students.

Significance of the Study

While the data supporting the increase of reverse transfers from four-year schools to two-year schools are minimal (Winter et al., 2001), experts have suggested that the presence of reverse transfers is increasing (Kalogrides et al., 2011). Barbara K. Townsend, a leading researcher on this subject, estimated that reverse transfer students represent “at least 16% of community college enrollments nation-wide” (2000, p. 301). Southern Oregon University, along with the University of South Florida and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, are all beginning to offer reverse credit transferring that will allow current students to count credits earned at the university that they are

attending towards two-year associate degrees awarded by the community colleges that they were previously attending (Derby, 2013; Jackovics, 2013). However, it is unknown if any of the same schools involved in the previously mentioned reverse transfer agreements are conducting research to determine if the students are university completers (or non-completers) attending the community colleges. This study specifically examined students who are reverse transfers, rather than the notion of reverse transferring credits to obtain an associate's degree while attending a university.

Definition of Terms

Reverse transfer student: The term *reverse transfer* is used differently by administrators and researchers (Lebard, 1999). For purposes of this paper, reverse transfer refers to “a pattern that is emerging for the two-year college whereby students first matriculate at a four-year college and then transfer to a two-year school” (Townsend, 1999, p. 1).

Undergraduate reverse transfer students (URTSs): Undergraduate reverse transfer students are students who have not completed a bachelor's degree before transferring to a two-year school.

Townsend and Dever (1999) define the two subsets of URTSs as: “(1) students who begin their education at a four-year school and then transfer to a two-year school and stay there for a while, perhaps to degree completion (the more common subset and the one that is typically meant by the term) and (2) temporary reverse transfers- students who attend a two-year college, often during the summer, simply to earn a few credits that can be transferred back to their four-year college” (p. 6).

The term *non-completer* can also be referred to as a URTSs. For purposes of this study, the two terms will be used interchangeably to refer to any student who has enrolled in a two- year school after attending a four-year school.

Postbaccalaureate reverse transfer students (PRTSs): Students who have a baccalaureate degree and can sometimes transfer in credits from the four-year school where they achieved that degree (Kastjura & Keim, 1992; Townsend & Dever, 1999).

The terms *completers* and *graduates* are also used to describe PRTSs. For purposes of this study, the term “reverse transfer completer” will be used to describe any student who has earned a bachelor’s degree and is enrolled in a two-year school.

Summary

In the last five decades, an increasing amount of reverse transfer students have enrolled in two-year colleges all across America (Townsend, 1999). Although some of these students have not completed their bachelor’s degree while previously attending a four-year school, some of them have. This study aimed to determine the number of students who are reverse transfers at Rogue Community college and to determine their characteristics and motivations for enrolling. The results of this research will serve to inform Rogue Community College’s student recruitment, marketing, and curricular development and will broadly contribute to community colleges, their mission, and their use of resources to serve and recruit students.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to identify who engages in reverse transfer at Rogue Community College and their motivation for reverse transferring. The results of this research will serve to inform Rogue Community College's student recruitment, marketing, and curricular development and will broadly contribute to community colleges, their mission, and their use of resources to recruit and serve students.

The goal of this literature review was to gain a well-rounded, in-depth understanding of reverse transfers and their motivations for transferring. The various sources that were relied upon for gaining information include, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Academic Search Premier, GALE Business Economics and Theory, and Google Scholar. In addition to utilizing these databases, a collection of various sources' citations were referenced in an effort to identify strong and relevant resources that may have not shown up in previous searches. Keywords included in electronic searches include (a) reverse transfer, (b) motivation, (c) community college, (d) students, (e) university, (f) completers, and (g) non-completers. Furthermore, articles by subject matter experts, Barbara K. Townsend, Paul A. Winter, and Michael R. Harris were also consulted.

By way of reviewing various scholarly journals and articles, the information revealed the work of key authors on this topic, varying opinions of the definition of the topic, and possible questions to explore in future research. This literature review is organized around (a) types of reverse transfer, (b) non-completer students' motivation for engaging in reverse transfer, (c) completer students' motivation for engaging in reverse transfer, and (d) implications for community colleges.

Types of Reverse Transfers

In addition to reverse transfer completers and non-completers, Hagedorn and Castro (1999) included students who are concurrently enrolled at a four-year university, taking summer classes at a community college while on break from a university, and students who have a degree from “a non-U.S. institution and enroll in a community college” in their definition matrix of reverse transfer students (p. 16).

James L. Catanzaro, the president of Chattanooga State Technical Community College (CSTCC) in Tennessee further unpacked the definition of reverse transfer to include five primary types of reverse transfer students:

...special purpose undergraduate reverse transfers (four-year college students who enroll at the two-year college to fulfill special needs); technical degree undergraduate reverse transfers (university undergraduate students who have reverse-transferred to earn a technical degree or certificate); enrichment postbaccalaureate reverse transfer students (students with a four-year college degree who enroll in the community college for enrichment or for a specific personal objective, often quite some time after they have left the university); specific skills postbaccalaureate reverse transfer students (students who have four-year college or university degrees but at a certain point need specific job-related skills offered by a two-year college); and transient students (students whose intermittent attendance in several settings suggests that they made choices based on comparative cost, proximity, and accessibility rather than a clear academic or career path) (pp. 28-29).

Presence of Reverse Transfer Non-completers versus Reverse Transfer Completers

Winter, Harris, and Ziegler’s (2001) statewide survey of reverse transfer students enrolled in the 14 community colleges in Kentucky generated 885 respondents (of the 1,392 who received the survey). Of these students, 736 individuals (83%) self-reported that they were reverse transfer non-completers, while 149 individuals (17%) self-reported that they were reverse transfer completers. Approximately 10 years prior, Kastjura and

Kiem's study including 10 colleges in the Illinois community college system included a total of 296 informants, with 71% being reverse transfer non-completers and 29% being reverse transfer completers (1992).

Non-completer students' motivations for engaging in reverse transfer. The notion of leaving college prior to degree completion and then later reentering college to essentially try again is not a new one. In the 1960s and 70s, the phenomenon of reverse transfers was largely focused on non-completers and overall, suggested that the motivation behind engaging in reverse transfer was largely due to not being able to sufficiently perform academically at a four-year college (Grotsky, 2011, Kalogrides, & Townsend, 2000). Kastjura and Keim's 1992 survey results of "reasons to enroll in a two-year college" for reverse transfers non-completers in Illinois community colleges were: "(1) close to home, (2) low tuition, (3) convenient class times, (4) instructional quality, (5), job training opportunity, (6) GPA improvement, and (7) relatives'/friends' advice" (p. 4). Just nine years later, in 2001, Winter, Harris, and Ziegler conducted a statewide survey of students enrolled in the 14 community colleges in Kentucky. The aggregated results of the top goals for enrolling at community college by reverse transfer (non-completer participants) yielded: "(1) completing an associate's degree, (2) improving basic skills, (3) completing courses for transfer to another institution, and (4) improving grade point average" (p. 278).

Reverse transfer non-completers also tended to be students who find themselves feeling displaced in a new dorm room at a four-year school, unable to decide on a major, and burdened with the rising tuition costs (McGlynn, 2006). McCormick and Carroll (1997) found that "students whose highest aspirations were to attain the bachelor's degree

were more likely to experience reverse transfer than those who sought to attain more advanced degrees.

Completer students' motivations for engaging in reverse transfer. During the 1990s, as the labor market and economy began to change more rapidly, the topic of reverse transfer completers began to gain more presence in academic research (Townsend & Dever, 1999). Barnes and Robinson (1999) conducted a study throughout Missouri community colleges and concluded that enrollment patterns of reverse transfer completers nearly doubled between 1991 and 1995. They later hypothesized that students with bachelor's degrees are attending community college due to a wide range of activities such as "career changes to upgrading skills, to seeking better pay or promotional opportunities related to a current job, to getting retrained because the bachelor's degree major did not produce a suitable job, or getting new skills because of an employment layoff" (p. 63).

Townsend and Dever (1999), Catanzaro (1999), Quinley and Quinley (1999), and Yang (2006) maintained that many reverse transfer completers enrolled at the two-year college due to seeking out specific workforce training, technically oriented occupational skills training, or certificate attainment. Reverse transfer completers are "not going down a level of education, they are going to the right level of education" (Quinley & Quinley, 1999, p. 44).

Implications for Community Colleges

The traditional mission for community colleges to move students through the educational pipeline on their way to a four-year college has shifted. As suggested by John Cech, Montana State University Billings College of Technology's Dean, "two-year

schools may become ‘second graduate schools’ as they help students retool for the job market” (Pickett, 2009, p. 2).

For reverse transfer non-completers, community colleges serve to provide them with a “second chance” to gain skills to be successful in the world of work, but also “contribute to the human capital and ultimate earning power of those who initially enter four-year colleges but leave prior to earning a bachelor’s degree” (Grodsky, & Kalogrides, 2011, p. 854). Because reverse transfer completers are largely focused on pursuing education at a community college in order to increase their employability, upgrade current skills, or gain new skills, community colleges should consider the relevancy of their course offerings and the extent to which they align with the current labor market skills shortages and/or growing industries and occupations.

“Age is the one characteristic where consistency emerges . . .” for reverse transfer students: reverse transfer completers are an average of 36 years, while reverse transfer non-completers are an average of 26 years (Townsend & Dever, 1999, p. 8). A similar pattern was found by Kastjura and Keim (1992), with completers averaging 37 years of age, and non-completers averaging 27 years of age. A 10 year span of age for each population was consistent with both.

Both reverse transfer completers and non-completers rated their educational experiences at a two-year college as more enriching, individualized, accessible and had a higher degree of satisfaction than at the four-year college that they previously attended (Kastjura & Keim, 1992; Townsend & Dever, 1999). Furthermore, reverse transfer students also maintain that they are attracted to the community college due to the affordability of classes, the opportunity to gain education as a life-long learner, and the

relevance of classes to the ever-changing labor market especially in technology and health care (Phelan, 1999; Quinley & Quinley, 1999).

Summary

Although there are varying opinions and studies that describe the underlying motivations of reverse transfer completers and non-completers, sources show that the main goal for returning to a community college for non-completers is to further their education while completers are focused on obtaining job related certifications and/or skills enhancement.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This chapter describes the methods used in the study. It begins with a description of the study design, discusses the study population, and concludes with data collection and analysis.

Design of the Study

This study was a descriptive analysis focused on reverse transfer students who enrolled for classes at Rogue Community College and the motivating factors that influenced their decision. The design of the study was a “self-report survey,” based on best practice research conducted by Don A. Dillman (2007). For purposes of this study, three key questions were identified by the researcher:

1. Who engages in reverse transfer at Rogue Community College?
2. What are the motivations for engaging in reverse transfer at Rogue Community College?
3. What are the courses or areas of study in which they are enrolled at Rogue Community College?

Pursuant to the three key questions, there were three sections of the survey, including a blend of closed-ended and multiple choice questions. Part One of the survey was focused on demographic information, and Part Two of the survey was focused on identifying students’ motivations for reverse transferring to Rogue Community College as well as their educational status and goals. In addition to the questions identified by the researcher, there were two questions in Part Three of the survey that were identified (and requested to be included) by Rogue Community College’s Registrar. The results of these two additional questions are not described or discussed in this thesis.

The survey contained 12 total questions and took an average of 8.8 minutes to complete. With the goal of describing who engages at Rogue Community College, the survey asked the following questions:

- Age of student (at time of first enrollment at Rogue Community College)
- Gender of student
- How many units the student accrued prior to enrolling at Rogue Community College
- What four-year school (s) the student attended prior to enrolling at Rogue Community College
- Elapsed time between when the student last enrolled in a four-year school and when they enrolled at Rogue Community College
- If the student completed a bachelor's degree prior to enrolling at Rogue Community College

With the goal of describing why a student reverse transferred to Rogue Community College, the survey asked the following questions:

- What the students' main motivation was for enrolling at Rogue Community College (This question utilized the online survey platform's forced ranking feature with a measure in place to deselect a ranking choice if it was previously used. It required a student to rank from one to seven, the following areas: (a) to finish an associate's degree, (b) to increase their skill set for their current job, (c) to gain a certificate or a degree for their current job, (d) to increase their skill set to make them marketable for a different job, (e) to gain a certificate or degree to

qualify for a different job, (f) to complete required courses prior to transferring to a four-year college, and (g) for personal enrichment.)

- How many quarter-hour credits a student completed at a four-year college prior to enrolling at Rogue Community College
- Courses that the student is enrolled in and/or has completed at Rogue Community College

Study Population

The following section describes the selection criteria and how participants were recruited for this study.

Selection criteria. Participants in this study included a wide age range of adults who were reverse transfer completers and reverse transfer non-completers at Rogue Community College. The sample size was identified by Rogue Community College personnel through the evaluation of student's transcripts and included students who were enrolled between September 1, 2012 and September 30, 2013. Rogue Community College received a total of 2,386 transcripts from 1,677 students. Of these, 1,434 were transcripts submitted by 947 students who had previously attended a four-year college prior to enrolling at Rogue Community College.

Participant recruitment. Participants were recruited through assistance from the Rogue Community College Registrar. Of the predetermined sample size of 947 students, 851 were found to have a working email. In order to stay in compliance with the U.S. Department of Education's Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, it was necessary for Rogue Community College's Registrar to send out an email message (which was created by the researcher- see Appendix A). The email outlined the purpose of the study,

the researcher's contact information, and included a link to the survey which was created utilizing Oregon State University's online Qualtrics survey. To protect the rights of the students who participated in the study, this research followed the informed consent guidelines as required by the Oregon State University Institutional Research Board.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in the form of an online internet survey (see Appendix B). Informants were given the opportunity to opt in or out of completing the survey. In an effort to elicit greater response, the researcher offered to enter participants in a drawing in which they could win a gift card of \$100.00. In modeling Don Dillman's (2007) best practice to help increase the response rate for the survey, a follow-up message (see Appendix C) was sent out approximately two weeks after the initial email. Although 851 individuals were included in the initial email that was sent out by the Rogue Community College Registrar, 120 informants (14%) responded to the survey and 109 (13%) qualified according to the researcher's criteria.

Data Analysis

The researcher conducted a descriptive data analysis based on the information revealed in the surveys that were completed. Utilizing the forced response feature in Qualtrics, informants were required to answer each question in order to move onto the next. Information was aggregated based on the key research questions which were designed to identify who reversed transferred to Rogue Community College and their motivation for reverse transferring.

Summary

The methods utilized in this quantitative study sought to determine who engages in reverse transfer at Rogue Community College and their motivation for reverse transferring. The self-report online survey designed for this study captured the informant's demographic and educational information while focusing on the underlying motivations for engaging in reverse transfer. Using the forced response feature in Oregon State University's online Qualtrics platform, the researcher was able to put measures in place which allowed the data to be easily aggregated and required survey respondents to complete all of the questions contained in the survey. The Oregon State University Institutional Research Board reviewed and approved the research procedures.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This study was designed to identify who engages in reverse transfer at Rogue Community College and to determine their motivation for reverse transferring. Research was predicated by three key questions:

1. Who engages in reverse transfer at Rogue Community College?
2. What are the motivations for engaging in reverse transfer at Rogue Community College?
3. What are the courses or areas of study in which they are enrolled at Rogue Community College?

The online survey which contained 12 questions (two of those questions were added by Rogue Community College personnel and were outside the scope of this study) was completed by 120 participants. One individual responded to the primary researcher that they have never been a reverse transfer student, and nine individuals who completed the survey had not actually completed course work at a four-year college prior to transferring to Rogue Community College. One individual was concurrently enrolled at Rogue Community College while completing course work at a four-year college (Southern Oregon University), and one individual responded to the survey twice. These individuals were subtracted from the study, and in result, a total of 109 informants were included in the data analysis, with 851 potential candidates. This resulted in a 13% response rate.

Between September 1, 2012 and September 30, 2013 approximately 851 individuals reverse transferred to RCC, and 109 out of 841 (13%) are included in these findings. Approximately 33 out of 109 (30%) of respondents were reverse transfer completers (who have already earned a bachelor's degree from a four-year college) and

76 out of 109 (70%) of respondents were reverse transfer non-completers (who have completed course work at a four-year college, but have not yet obtained a bachelor's degree). The results of these findings are discussed in greater detail throughout this chapter.

Who Engages in Reverse Transfer at Rogue Community College

The following section describes reverse transfer students who were enrolled in Rogue Community College between September, 2012 and September, 2013. Findings analyze the demographics of students, the time interval between when they were previously enrolled in their four-year school and when they first enrolled at Rogue Community College, as well as the previous major that they were seeking to attain and what four-year school they were attending.

Demographics. Overall, 35 out of 109 respondents (32%) were males, while 74 out of 109 (68%) were females. The average age of all reverse transfers at their time of enrollment was approximately 32, with reverse transfer completers being slightly older (average age was 39) and reverse transfer non-completers being slightly younger (average age was 29). Table 1 shows age distributions at time of enrollment.

Table 1

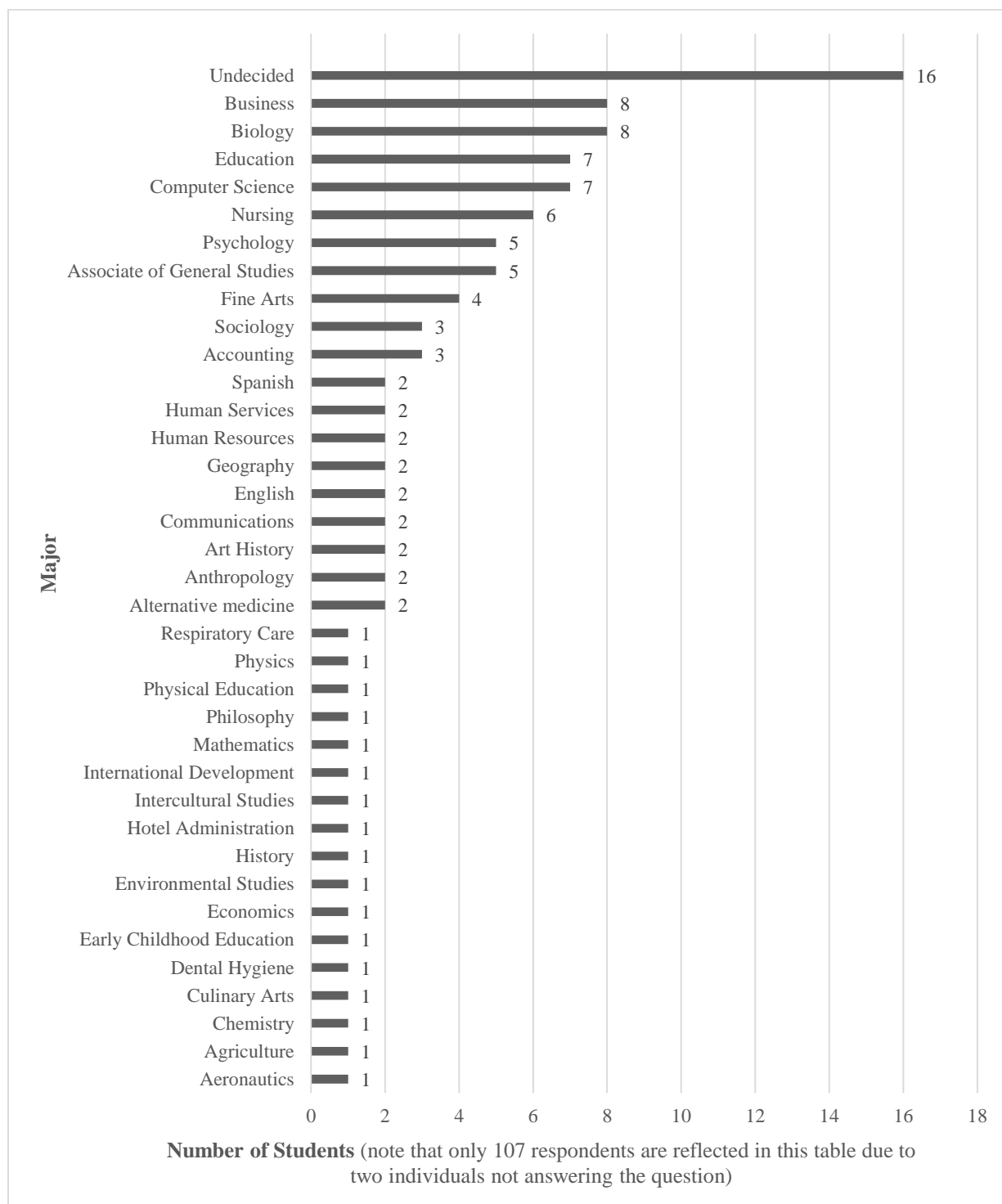
Age of Reverse Transfer Students at Time of Enrollment

Age	Number of Students
15-20	29
21-25	11
26-30	12
31-35	14
36-40	13
41-45	13
46-50	5
51-55	5
56-60	5

Time interval in between enrollments. The average elapsed time in between when an individual left their previous four-year college and enrolled at Rogue Community College (RCC) was approximately 76 months (or 6.4 years). The data revealed a variation of elapsed time ranging from 0 months to 408 months (or 34 years) from when they first enrolled in a previous four-year college and then enrolled at RCC.

Educational attainments and background. As previously stated, 33 out of 109 reverse transfer respondents included in this study completed their bachelor's degree while 76 out of 109 reverse transfer respondents did not (and are considered "non-completers"). For all reverse transfers, the largest percentage of students (17%) had not yet declared a major at their previous four-year college prior to enrolling at RCC. Two respondents did not answer the questions correctly. See Table 2 for a comprehensive breakdown of all students' educational goals at their previous four-year college.

Table 2

Students' Previous Majors Prior to Reverse Transferring to RCC

Previous four-year college attended by students prior to enrolling at RCC.

For all reverse transfer students attending RCC in between September 1, 2012 and September 30, 2013, over half of the students, 61 out of 109 (56%) attended a four-year college in Oregon (with the majority of individuals attending Southern Oregon University or Oregon State University), while 10 out of 109 (9%) attended four-year colleges in the California State University system, and 38 out of 109 (35%) attended colleges outside of Oregon or California (located in other major states across the country), including Devry University, Syracuse University, and Brigham Young University. Additionally, one individual previously attended a four-year college located in the Philippines.

Why Students Reverse Transfer to Rogue Community College

The following section describes the motivations for students who have reverse transferred to Rogue Community College between September, 2012 and September, 2013. The section begins with their primary motivation for enrollment and explores their educational pursuits at RCC.

Primary motivation. The Qualtrics survey that was distributed to reverse transfer students at RCC featured a forced ranking option in which students were required to rank each motivation from one to seven (with one being the greatest motivation). Overall, the aggregated responses revealed that (a) gaining an associate's degree was the top motivation, with (b) increasing their skill set to apply for a new (or different job) as the secondary motivation for enrolling at RCC. Table 3 shows a complete ranking of the top seven motivations for a student to reverse transfer to RCC.

Table 3

Primary Motivations for Reverse Transfers to Enroll at Rogue Community College

Motivation	Average Ranking (with 1 being the highest)
To gain an associate's degree	3.5
Increase skill set to apply for a new (or different) job	3.6
To gain a certificate or degree to become qualified for a different job	3.8
Complete required courses prior to transferring to a four-year college	3.8
Personal enrichment	4.2
Increase skill set for current job	4.6
Gain a certificate or degree for current job	4.8

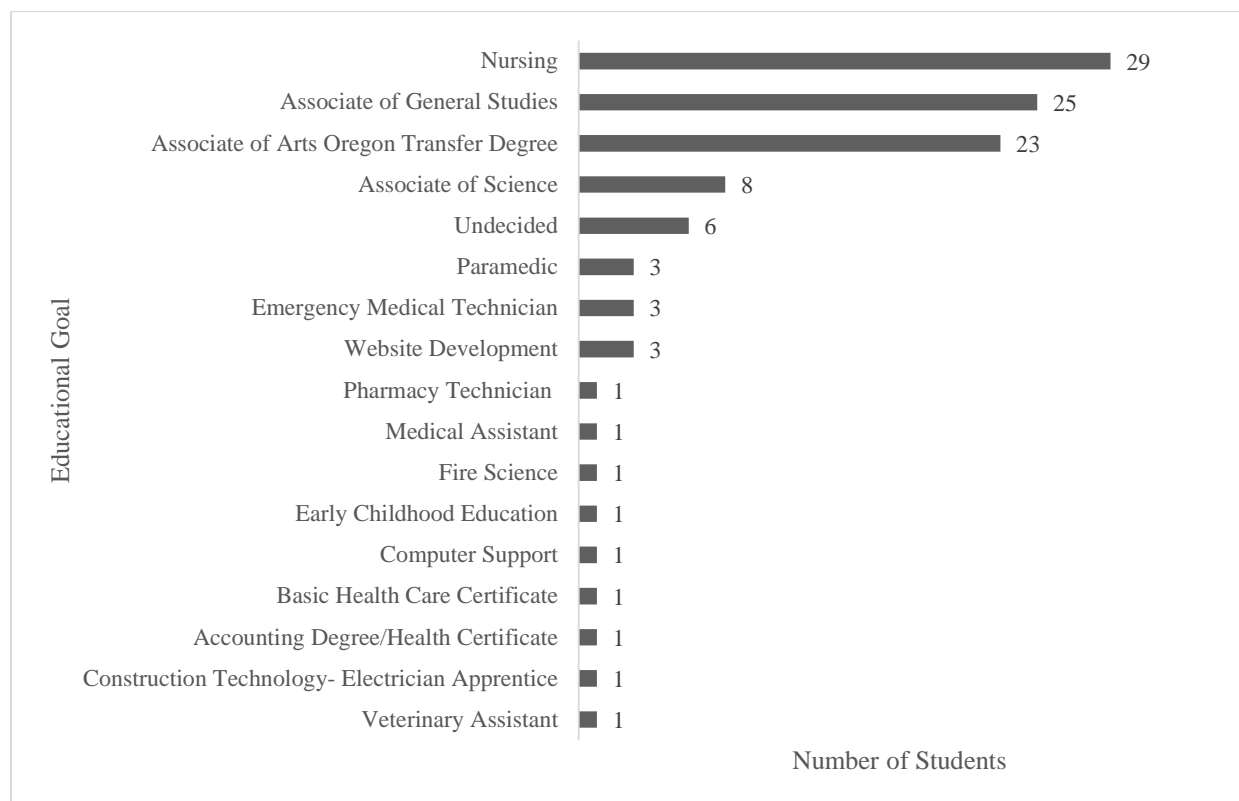
How many quarter hour credits a student completed prior to enrolling at RCC. For all respondents, the number of credits completed prior to transferring to RCC varied considerably. For some students, the number 0 was entered which makes the researcher draw the conclusion that individuals may not have not understood the question or known how many units they had completed. For reverse transfer completers, 17 out of 33 (52%) indicated that they did not know; statements ranged from “enough to earn a bachelor’s degree” to “I don’t remember.” For those who did answer the question, many responses were below 180 (which is the minimum number required to earn a bachelor’s degree), and others stated 150-200. For reverse transfer non-completers, many individuals (21 out of 76) stated that they did not know, and an average of those who did report a number noted 69.2 credits. The standard deviation for the total population was 70.1.

What are the Courses or Areas of Study in which students are enrolled in at Rogue Community College?

The final question examined the courses or areas of study in which these students were enrolled at Rogue Community College. For reverse transfer students, a significant majority of students (56 out of 109 or 51%) labeled their educational goal as to pursue an associate's degree. The most frequent type of degree was the Associate of General Studies, followed by an Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer Degree and an Associate of Science. In addition, nursing represented a frequent area of study (29 out of 109 or 28%) followed by undecided (6 out of 109 or 5%). Table 4 (shown below) articulates the other reasons that individuals listed as their educational goal at RCC.

Table 4

Students' Educational Goal at RCC



Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study of reverse transfers matriculating at Rogue Community College. There were 947 individuals identified (who enrolled at RCC in between September 1, 2012 and September 30, 2013) who met the reverse transfer characteristics (having completed course work at a four-year college prior to transferring to RCC), with , 851 having an email address and subsequently contacted by the Rogue Community College Registrar. A total of 109 student participated in this study. Overall, 68% of reverse transfer students were female while 32% were male. Their average age at enrollment was 32. The top two motivations for reverse transferring to RCC were to gain an associate's degree and to increase skill set to apply for a new (or different) job. Their educational goals reflected their motivations, with just over half of the students (51%) wanting to pursue an associate's degree, and 27% wanting to pursue a degree (or certificate) in nursing.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify who engages in reverse transfer at Rogue Community College and their motivation for reverse transferring. Through the analysis of the findings, five conclusions emerged:

1. There is a growing number of reverse transfer students at Rogue Community College which comprises approximately nine percent of the total enrollment during the 2012-2013 school year (Rogue Community College “At a Glance,” 2013). This confirms that the traditional purpose of a community college to prepare students to laterally or vertically transfer to complete a degree (or to gain entry to a four-year college) is expanding.
2. Reverse transfer students are on average, 32 years of age, and there is some variability between the age of reverse transfer completers and non-completers (which is consistent with previous research). Community college personnel should keep in mind the age group and generational differences of these students when preparing and disseminating information for recruitment.
3. Students who are reverse transfer non-completers have a very clear educational objective in contrast with the populations studied in previous literature. Students who are reverse transfer completers were in the workforce for an average of 12 years prior to returning to college. This suggests that there is a need for targeted information which shows a clear pathway to employment for individuals to make informed career path decisions- especially because students are making these decisions somewhat later in life and have been out of school for a substantial period of time.

4. At Rogue Community College, the percentage of reverse transfer completers to non-completers is substantially higher than was found in previous research. This could be due to the economic downturn of 2008 and associated labor displacement.
5. Reverse transfer students were looking to gain an associate's degree or to increase their skills set to apply for a new (or different job). Cross tabulation of reverse transfer completers revealed that 100% of the population who were surveyed are changing career paths completely, with exception of three respondents who were taking classes for personal enrichment. Nearly half of this group were pursuing a career in nursing.

These conclusions will be discussed in greater detail throughout this chapter in addition to the limitation of this study, implications for further research, and suggestions for practice.

Growing Number of Reverse Transfer Students at Rogue Community College

Staff at Rogue Community College identified approximately 947 individuals who were enrolled between September 1, 2012 and September 30, 2013 and found to have earned course credit at a four-year college prior to reverse transferring to RCC. In comparison to the 11,049 individuals who enrolled at RCC during 2012-2013, the reverse transfer population reflects approximately nine percent of the total student body (Rogue Community College "At a Glance", 2013). Interestingly, in previous research, Barbara K. Townsend found that reverse transfers represent "at least 16% of community college enrollments nation-wide" (2000, p. 301). Rogue Community College's population of nine percent suggests a lower average of reverse transfers than other community colleges

throughout the United States. However, when comparing reverse transfer completers at RCC to previous findings, there is a significantly larger proportion (30%) of individuals with bachelor's degrees who are matriculating at RCC. Considering the fact that this study is the first formalized study to examine reverse transfer students matriculating at Rogue Community College, it is difficult to discern if this population is increasing in comparison to previous years' enrollment patterns.

Demographics of reverse transfer students. Consistent with previous research that was conducted, reverse transfer completers were on average 10 years older than non-completers (Kastjura & Keim, 1992; Townsend & Dever, 1999). Findings at RCC revealed reverse transfer completers at an average age of 39 and non-completers at an average age of 29. Overall, the average age for the total population was 32 years old.

Student services should be aware of the age range of this population when recruiting and otherwise communicating with these potential (and current) students. Individuals who are 29 years old fall into the "Millennial" generation and may prefer to receive and interact with information differently than other generations. Similarly, individuals who are 39 years old fall into "Generation X" and may have different standards and preferences for receiving and interacting with information.

Educational goals of reverse transfer students. While previous research maintained that reverse transfer non-completers tended to be students who found themselves unable to decide on a major, only 14% of the total reverse transfer non-completers at RCC labeled themselves as having not yet decided on a major while they were attending their previous four-year college (McGlynn, 2006). Previous findings by James L. Catanzaro (1999), the president of Chattanooga State Technical Community

College highlighted a type of reverse transfer completers (enrichment postbaccalaureate reverse transfer students) which had a significant amount of elapsed time between finishing their bachelor's degree and enrolling at a community college. This pattern was also found with reverse transfer completers at Rogue Community College, who on average had 146 months (12.2 years) of elapsed time between finishing their bachelor's degrees and enrolling at RCC.

The typical reverse transfer enrollee is a different type of nontraditional student. These students have already attended a four-year college and should be somewhat familiar with the higher education system. However, there are potential pitfalls in assuming that these individuals will be able to navigate the pathway from their current situation to returning to the classroom. An adult who is between 29 and 39 years of age and has been out of school for a significant period of time will need a more comprehensive explanation of what degree/certificate programs are offered and how to pursue them. Creating an education plan, applying for certificate/degree programs, as well as applying for scholarships and funding has changed considerably in the last decade. RCC student services staff should be prepared with informational tools and training on how to best serve this specific demographic of student.

Ratio of reverse transfer completers to non-completers. Winter, Harris, and Ziegler (2001) found that within the University of Kentucky's Community College System, there were a total of 885 reverse transfer students. Of the population identified, 149 students (17%) were completers, and 736 (83%) were non-completers. This sampling reflects a significantly smaller population of reverse transfer completer students, compared to the respondents included in the study at RCC. Of the 109 students included

in the study, 33 (30%) of the students were reverse transfer completers while 76 out of 109 (70%) were non-completers. In closer proximity to the 30% rate of reverse transfer completer students matriculating at RCC, Kastjura and Kiem's study including 10 colleges in the Illinois community college system included a total of 296 respondents , with 71% being reverse transfer non-completers and 29% being reverse transfer completers (1992).

The higher ratio of reverse transfer completers to non-completers at RCC (than what has been found in previous literature) is a reflection of the changing labor market and could be a result of the volatile nature of the economy. Years ago, it was typical for an individual to stay in the same occupation for the entire span of their career. Today, it is common for an individual to make at least one career transition that results in a career transformation. To examine this issue with the present study, a cross-tabulation was undertaken of reverse transfer completers' previous field of study (in which they hold a four-year degree) to the current field of study that they are pursuing at RCC; 100% of these students are enrolled in a degree or certificate program completely different from the area of study in which they currently have a bachelor's degree in. Of these students, 45% (15 out of 33) are pursuing a career in nursing. See Table 6 below for more detailed information. Note that students who are indicated below as having an "undeclared" degree or certificate are not pursuing one at RCC. They are taking classes for personal enrichment.

Table 6

*Cross Tabulation of Reverse Transfer Completers' Bachelors' Degree to Educational**Goal at RCC*

Bachelor's Degree	Degree or Certificate Pursuing at RCC
Anthropology	Website Development
Communications	AGS
Psychology	AGS
Didn't correctly answer	AGS
Agriculture major in Soil Science	AGS
English	AGS
Geography	AGS
English	AAOT
Mathematics	Computer Science
Electronics Engineering Technology	Construction Technology - Electrician Apprentice
Health and Physical Education and Outdoor Adventure Leadership	Dental Assisting
Aeronautics	EMT Certification
Business management	Veterinary Assistant
Computer Science	Undeclared
Business	Undeclared
Education	Undeclared
B.A. Spanish	Nursing
Computer Science	Nursing
History	Nursing
Public Health	Nursing
Human Services	Nursing
Geography	Nursing
Business (Tax)	Nursing
Business	Nursing
Music Education	Nursing
Physics	Nursing
Teaching	Nursing
International Development	Nursing
Art History	Nursing
Management Accounting	Nursing
Social Sciences, concentration in Chinese Studies	Nursing
Master in teaching	Paramedic
Fine arts and Graphic Design	Web Development

Educational aspirations for reverse transfer students. Townsend (2000)

contended that:

Two-year colleges' admission of reverse transfers creates a dilemma for individuals concerned about the two-year college's educational role of serving academically unprepared students. In two year programs with enrollment caps or in selective programs, both undergraduate and post-baccalaureate reverse transfer students may take the place of first-time college goers (p. 303).

Rogue Community College currently offers nine limited-entry programs;

however, nursing admission is the only place where a student gets an additional point for having earned an associate's degree or higher (C.L. Sullivan, personal communication, May 5, 2014). RCC receives approximately 200 applications to the nursing program each year (and there are only 32 seats available) (C.L. Sullivan, personal communication, April 28, 2014). This fact suggests that reverse transfer students could gain an advantage over a traditional community college enrollee who has not yet completed their associate's degree.

When examining the survey responses which revealed the motivations for students to reverse transfer to RCC, the first reason was to gain an associate's degree, the second, to increase their skill set to be able to apply for a new (or different job), and the third, to gain a certificate or degree to become qualified for a new (or different job). However, when cross tabulating individuals who responded that nursing was the certificate or degree that they were pursuing with their top motivations for enrolling at RCC, 38% (or 11 out of 29) of the students indicated that pursuing an associate's degree was their number one motivator (instead of gaining a certificate or degree to be able to apply for a new or different job). Along the same lines, when examining individuals who revealed that the certificate or degree that they were pursuing at RCC was an associate's degree, 25% (14 out of 56) ranked their top motivations for reverse transferring was to

gain a certificate or degree to become qualified for a different job (instead of obtaining an associate's degree). Therefore, based on the information shared by the RCC Registrar, the students that identified their educational goal as pursuing an associate's degree may in fact be pursuing a career in nursing. As suggested earlier, it is much easier for students to declare themselves as pursuing an Associate's of General Studies while they are working on completing their required prerequisites to apply for nursing school.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the ability of students to accurately self-report information on their educational experiences and objectives. Because 14% of the identified reverse transfer population responded to the request to participate in the study and 10 students who responded were found by the researcher to not actually be a reverse transfer student, there is a potential margin of error that could exist. Furthermore, students may not have been able to remember (and information to reference may not have been readily available) how many quarter credits that they completed prior to transferring to RCC, as well as the elapsed time between when they were enrolled at their previous four-year college and when they enrolled at RCC.

When requesting a response for what a student's educational goal at RCC was at their time the time of their enrollment, 51% of students responded to the question with an associate's degree of some type (an Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer Degree, Associates of General Studies, or Associates of Science). This response could be a limiting factor because students may have answered the question based on the prerequisites that they were completing, rather than the ultimate educational goal that they were pursuing. For example, according to RCC's Registrar, "many students who want

to become nurses declare the Associates of General Studies (AGS), because they can focus their electives (and there are a lot in that degree) in science” (C.L. Sullivan, personal communication, April 28, 2014). If these students were considered as having an educational goal to gain a nursing degree (rather than an AGS) calculated into the statistic of what students educational goal was at RCC, the percentage could increase from 27% (29 out of 109 reverse transfer students) to 50% (54 out of 109 reverse transfer students).

Implications for Future Research

In response to the challenges associated with asking students what their educational goal was at Rogue Community College, it may be helpful for future research to focus more on what a person’s career goal is and what certificate or degree that they are pursuing to get them there. Additionally, because the secondary motivator (after pursuing an associate’s degree) for all reverse transfer students and the primary motivator for reverse transfer completers was to gain a certificate or degree to become qualified for a different job, it might be helpful to include a question which explores what the individuals career is at the time and what career they are pursuing. This could provide targeted information to not only educators, but to workforce and economic development agency providers whose mission it is to respond to businesses talent needs and structural challenges for retaining and attracting employees.

The differences revealed in the responses from reverse transfer completers and reverse transfer non-completers also suggest that further examination and study is warranted. It may be helpful to compare and contrast the two populations in order to better understand this emerging population in the community college system. Furthermore, in order to ascertain a more detailed analysis of this population’s

motivations and experiences that led to reverse transfer, future studies might consider including individual interviews which allow for a greater depth of understanding.

Suggestions for Practice

Reverse transfer students have previously matriculated at a four-year school, and in the case of reverse transfer completers (30%), some have proven their academic abilities and aptitude by obtaining a bachelor's degree prior to enrolling at RCC. This suggests that reverse transfer students could affect a school's academic performance through influencing school outcomes in a positive way. However, according to Rogue Community College's Graduation Rate Disclosure, the graduation rate is based on first-time degree or certificate-seeking graduates. Students that have previously attended college are not considered in this equation:

In compliance with the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-542), it is the policy of Rogue Community College to disclose its completion/graduation rate and transfer rate to all current and prospective students. Rates are based on fall term enrollment of full-time (12 or more term credits), first-time degree or certificate-seeking undergraduates. Students are counted as graduates or as transfers-out if they graduated or transferred within 150 percent of the normal time for completion or graduation. Rates do not include part-time credit students, students who have attended college elsewhere before attending RCC, students who began their studies in a term other than fall or non-degree seeking students

Given the growing number of reverse transfer students who have already completed a degree, college officials may want to consider revising this policy to include individuals who have attended college elsewhere. As stakeholders and policymakers are increasingly more focused on graduation and employment outcomes, this population of students could have a very positive effect on increasing the presence of positive outcomes at Rogue Community College. This same concept could be helpful for other community colleges

that maintain the same policy in accordance with the Public Law 101-542. According to Rogue Community College's Graduation Rate Disclosure, of the cohort of students who started at RCC during the fall term of 2008/2009, 14% of the students graduated. Given that approximately nine percent of the student body at RCC are reverse transfer students, if they were included in this graduation rate it could stand to increase significantly, allowing RCC more funding, greater recognition, and a much higher graduation rate and representation of school outcomes.

Provided that the primary motivations for reverse transfer students to enroll at RCC is to earn an associate's degree and to gain a certificate or degree to become qualified for a different job, student services should focus on marketing career technical and associate's degree programs to individuals who are 32 years of age and looking to make a career transition.

Because a substantial number of individuals (around 200 students with only 32 seats) apply to get into RCC's nursing program each year (and individuals only have about a 16% chance that they will be selected), school administrators may want to focus on developing additional career pathways programs for individuals that want to pursue a career in the medical field but are not accepted into the program at RCC.

When examining reverse transfer students specifically, 50% of respondents self-identified to be pursuing a degree in nursing. Since this study found that the average age of this population is 39 and because these individuals already hold a bachelor's degree, the probability that they have previous management experience and leadership capability is reasonably high. Due to the nature of the aging workforce of many health care professionals and in support of succession planning for the baby boomer generation who

will be retiring in the near future (and will eventually be in need of long term health care themselves), these individuals could be targeted by student services in partnership with health care administrators to be invited to join a degree program that results in them becoming a health care administrator. This joint partnership of education and private sector business is a great model for meeting the needs of the labor market (for both, students to get hired quickly and for employers to be able to fill replacement positions for those retiring), building capacity for other entry-level positions (because having a greater number of administrators trained to supervise new hires results in greater efficiency and capability), and will ultimately boost the economy and meet the needs of the community.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Dear student:

You are receiving this email because you were selected to participate in a study regarding reverse transfers, or students who have completed a significant amount of coursework at a four-year college prior to transferring Rogue Community College.

Rogue Community College is working in partnership with a graduate student at Oregon State University to administer this survey and analyze the data. The survey is 13 questions in total and should take no more than five minutes of your time to complete. If you do complete this survey, you will be entered into a drawing for a \$100 Visa gift card.

If you value your educational experience, please think of your participation as a way to “pay it forward” for students in the future. The results of this study will be used to provide targeted information regarding reverse transfer students at Rogue Community College to stakeholders (including Rogue Community College personnel). This information could be used to provide personnel with data on how to best utilize resources for recruiting and serving students like you. This survey is for purposes of research and the title of the study is Reverse Transfer at Rogue Community College. The Principal Investigator is Professor Sam Stern and should you have any question regarding the study, please feel free to contact him at sam.stern@oregonstate.edu or (541) 737-6392.

On behalf of Rogue Community College and Oregon State University, thank you for your consideration to participate in this important study.

We wish you best of luck in your educational endeavors.

Please select this link to be redirected to the survey:

http://oregonstate.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3x7BDOUqhDVvR9H

APPENDIX B



What is your Rogue Community College student identification number? (This information will be used to enter you in a drawing for a \$100 Visa gift card)

What was your age at the time of enrollment at Rogue Community College (RCC)?

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Choose not to answer

What four-year college(s) did you attend prior to enrolling at RCC?

What is the time interval (in months) between your last enrollment at a four-year college and your first enrollment at RCC?

What was your major at a four-year college prior to enrolling at RCC?

Did you complete a bachelor's degree at the four-year college that you were previously enrolled in?

Please rank in order of importance, **with 1 indicating your highest importance**, your motivation for enrolling at RCC:

This question has the forced ranking feature applied. If you apply the same ranking to a different row choice, the previous choice with that rank will be deselected.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To finish an associate's degree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To increase my skill set for my current job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To gain a certificate or degree for my current job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To increase my skill set to make myself marketable for a different job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To gain a certificate or degree to qualify for a different job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To complete required courses prior to transferring to a four-year college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal enrichment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Degree or certificate that you're seeking to attain at RCC?

How many quarter-hour credits have you completed at a four-year college prior to enrolling at RCC?

What courses have you completed since you first enrolled at RCC and/or what courses are you enrolled in this term?

Why did you transfer to your last four-year school prior to earning your Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer Degree?

Was your four-year college experience better, worse, or equal to the advising that you received at RCC?

- Better
- Worse
- Equal

Survey Powered By Qualtrics

APPENDIX C

Dear student:

You are receiving this email in pursuant to the email that you received on (insert date here). According to our records, you have not yet completed the survey on the Motivations for Reverse Transfer at Rogue Community College.

Your participation and opinion is critically important to the results of this study. As mentioned in the previous email that you received, the survey is 13 questions in length and should take no more than five minutes of your time.

[Please click here](#) to complete the survey and gain entry into a drawing for a \$100 Visa gift card.

If you value your educational experience, please think of your participation as a way to “pay it forward” for students in the future. The results of this study will be used to provide targeted information regarding reverse transfer students at Rogue Community College to stakeholders (including Rogue Community College personnel). This information could be used to provide personnel with data on how to best utilize resources for recruiting and serving students like you. This survey is for purposes of research and the title of the study is Reverse Transfer at Rogue Community College. The Principal Investigator is Professor Sam Stern and should you have any question regarding the study, please feel free to contact him at sam.stern@oregonstate.edu or (541) 737-6392.

On behalf of Rogue Community College and Oregon State University, thank you for your consideration to participate in this important study.

We wish you best of luck in your educational endeavors.

