

# Perspectives on Improving Transfer for International Community College Students

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## Problem Statement

As the largest higher education institution in the United States, with 2.1 million students enrolled at 114 colleges, the California community college system has a fundamental role in making higher education more accessible and affordable (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office 2017). The transfer function and the "two-plus-two" model contributed to the popularity of California community colleges worldwide (Anayah and Kuk 2015) and persuaded many international students to start their U.S. higher education experiences at the community college level (Farnsworth 2005). This function provides students with the opportunity to complete the first two years of the baccalaureate, then, transfer to four-year institutions to finish an undergraduate degree. Yet, there is little to no research on the transfer experiences of this student population and the existent data suggest that many international students are not transferring on time (Hagedorn and Mi-Chung 2005). This is particularly disconcerting given that the majority of international students aim to transfer in two years so they can earn a baccalaureate degree in four years.

The theoretical lens for this dissertation was informed by the Racist Nativism (Huber 2010) and Critical Race Theory frameworks (Solorzano and Yosso 2001; Hiraldo 2010). Both frameworks were relevant to show that internationalization policies provided domestic students with opportunities to enrich their cultural skills and helped many U.S. institutions to improve the quality of education; however, these same policies placed extra burdens on international students. In practice, these policies reproduced inequity by disqualifying international students from equity programs (Hiraldo 2010). Through this lens, I was able

to collect the narratives of international students and faculty and focus on the coping strategies used by international students to navigate the complexity of the community college system despite the challenges they encountered.

## Methodology

This study took place at two medium size California community colleges. The qualitative research methodology was used to illuminate the connections between internationalization policies, transfer preparedness, and equity issues facing international students. In order to provide a balanced and richer insight into international students' experiences, I used a combination of focus groups with international community college students who successfully transferred to four-year institutions and interviews with faculty from various academic areas. The following questions guided this research:

What are the international students' perceptions as to (a) the hurdles they faced in trying to successfully transfer, and (b) how they were able to overcome these hurdles?

What are the perceptions of faculty as to (a) the challenges facing international students (b) and the adjustments they adopted in the classroom to tackle these challenges?

## Findings

Three themes emerged from the data analysis. The first theme, "cultural capital" that highlights the cultural and educational backgrounds international students bring with them to their institutions. The second theme, "self-efficacy" focuses on the strategies used by international students to overcome challenges and transfer to four-year universities. The third theme, "belongingness" discusses the campus climate and the impact of support services on

the academic and social experiences of international community college students.

### Recommendations

Community colleges need to provide international students with necessary resources to serve their special needs; provide faculty with the proper professional developments to help them in the internationalization of the curriculum and the implementation of new pedagogical ways of teaching and learning that endorse the inclusion of international students; create social platforms where international students can connect with their domestic counterparts and other community members.

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