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The Academic Perceptions of Visual and Performing Arts Transfer Students
in Research Institutions

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Brenda Anahi Galvez

2020

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Academic Perceptions of Visual and Performing Arts Transfer Students
in Research Institutions

by

Brenda Anahi Galvez

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

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In recent years, top-tier (R1) research universities have become appealing to visual and performing arts (VAPA) transfer students as they seek to expand their employability after graduation (Thrasher, 2015). However, VAPA education is not embedded with the fundamental mission of the research institution leaving VAPA transfer students to face a climate where current education policy, such as testing requirements, has reduced financial and administrative support for non-tested areas, particularly VAPA education at their R1 universities (Tutt, 2014). The decreased attention to VAPA education results in less resources to assist VAPA transfer students succeed and graduate on time.

The purpose of this study was to uncover how institutional factors affect the academic experiences of community college VAPA transfer students at R1 institutions through an institutional culture framework. Despite increase in VAPA enrollments, VAPA transfer

students are extending their time-to-degree (TTD) at higher rates than their non-VAPA transfer counterparts. Graduating on time helps VAPA students reduce academic costs and stress from having to fulfill two set of requirements: artistic and academic. VAPA transfer students are a unique student population in that they carry the personal challenges of traditional transfer students and the artistic stressors of VAPA students.

The dissertation of Brenda Anahi Galvez is approved.

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DEDICATION

To all the strong mujeres in my life who sacrificed so much to make this possible. Nana, amá, tías, and sis las quiero mucho.

To my daughter Audrey. You have been a huge part of my motivation even before you were born. I hope you are proud of your mommy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of Purpose

Visual and performing arts (VAPA) education in post-secondary universities was, until recently, a terminal degree in VAPA-focused institutions (Paltridge, Starfield, Ravelli, & Nicholson, 2012). However, post-secondary programs in VAPA fields have become increasingly available and popular at non-VAPA research universities in recent years. In 2012, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that the number of degrees in VAPA majors such as art, music and theater increased by 60% from 2000 to 2011 at participating Title IV¹ funded universities. With a rising number of students seeking VAPA degrees, top-tier research (R1) institutions are left with the task of serving students who are not normally aligned with their institutional mission. The state of California is no exception. At Western R1 University (Western) alone, one of the top R1 universities in the nation, only 58% of Western VAPA transfer students graduated within a normative TTD compared to 72% of transfer students in the College of Letters and Science and 80% of all Western first-time full-time students in 2014 ([Western R1 University]², Undergraduate Graduation Rates, 2019).

The purpose of this study was to uncover how institutional factors affect the academic experiences of community college VAPA transfer students at an R1 institution through an institutional culture framework. Its results can assist universities in developing supports to help VAPA transfer students graduate within two years, or a normative time-to-degree (TTD). Although VAPA transfer students are a growing student population in higher education, there is

¹ Title IV financial aid is federally funded aid such as Federal Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG), Federal Perkins Loan, Federal Subsidized and Unsubsidized Direct Loans (<https://www.gvsu.edu/studentaccounts/title-iv-financial-aid-authorization-faq-24.htm>)

² Institutional citations use pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

limited current research that highlights how these students contended with the academic pressures of an R1 university while facing additional challenges unique to their programs.

Background of the Problem

The community college system has facilitated access of VAPA students to four-year institutions. As mandated by the California Master Plan for Higher Education (1960), one purpose of the California community college (CCC) is to offer “standard collegiate courses for transfer to higher institutions” (p. 2). In the University of California system, one out of two admitted students were transfers in the 2018-2019 academic year (UC Accountability Report, 2018). Of those, 93% attended a community college before transferring (University of California, 2018). However, the transfer function of community colleges does not often guarantee graduation for transfer students who attempt to attain a degree from a top-tier university (Herrera & Jain, 2013). Nationally, only 13% of students who transferred attain a bachelor’s degree (Shapiro et al., 2017). These statistics reflect the difficulties that all community college transfer students face during the transfer process. Challenges before transferring include deciphering articulation agreements (Hodara, Martinez-Wenzl, Stevens & Mazzeo, 2016; Jenkins & Fink, 2016; Stern, 2016; Townsend, 2007), limited funding (Nora & Crisp, 2009; Wassmer, Moore, & Shulock 2004), and the application process itself. This does not include challenges once students have transferred, such as overcoming transfer shock (Hills, 1965), learning to navigate the system (Nora & Crisp, 2009; Tovar, 2015; Wassmer et al., 2004), and dealing with academic unpreparedness (Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf, & Laanan, 2013; Hills, 1965; Ishitani, 2008).

In recent years, institutions have created campus resources, such as transfer centers and learning communities, to help traditional transfer students graduate within a normative TTD.

This surge of resources has come as a result of TTD as a measure of institutional accountability (Lee, 2010). States have been creating policies that tie graduation rates to funding in order to increase institutional accountability of their public universities (Megerian & Gordon, 2013). The pressure lies not only on institutions but on students and educators as well, given that TTD has become an indicator of student success (Shapiro et al., 2016). In addition, rising tuition costs pressure students to graduate as early as possible rather than enroll for a longer period of time and take additional loans (Urice, 2000). Despite efforts, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reported that only 7.4% of transfer students completed an associate degree in two years and only 10% completed a bachelor's in four years (Shapiro et al., 2016). This timing is particularly burdensome for VAPA transfer students because their majors have time-consuming requirements (Sturm, 2012); furthermore, the uncertain labor market for artists requires high-level skill after graduation, increasing TTD (Bennett, 2016).

To understand the experiences of VAPA students and help them graduate within a normative TTD, administrators need to examine students' experiences within the framework of organizational culture. Organizational culture in education affects the academic experiences of students (Birnbaum, 1988; Manning, 2013; Tierney, 2008). Tierney (1988) defines organizational culture as the members, actions, and beliefs of an organization. He highlights that it is not only important to acknowledge what is done in an organization but also how it is done. Organizational culture constantly changes over time and functions as cultural manifestations of society as a whole (Alvesson, 1995). Tierney (2008) notes that institutional culture is most noticeable when students move from one campus to another. In these transitions, students must adapt and learn the new relationships, processes, and routines that are not explicitly defined

when transitioning. Institutional culture is particularly important for transfer students when they transition from their community college to four-year institutions.

Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Transfer Students and R1 Institutions

One subset of disciplines not normally associated with research institutions is VAPA studies, including dance, art, music, theater, and photography. However, since the economic crisis of 2008, VAPA students are applying in larger numbers to multiple-discipline institutions that combine their VAPA interests with non-creative subjects to maximize their career prospects after graduation. In his study on the effects of VAPA coursework on college admissions outcomes, Elpus (2018) discovered that the selectivity of the college attended, or college choice, is associated with substantial economic benefits for music and art students. Research institutions become appealing to VAPA students as they seek to expand their employability after graduation (Thrasher, 2015). However, once transferred, VAPA students face a climate where current education policy, such as testing requirements, has reduced financial and administrative support for non-tested areas, particularly VAPA education (Tutt, 2014). In his survey of educational experiences of art majors in four-year institutions, Cohen (1987) uncovered that community college and four-year institutions view art as important and enduring but not central to the institutional mission. This approach reduces the attention paid to VAPA education and its students.

Lack of institutional resources. VAPA transfer students are required to fulfill major requirements for their respective majors, along with facing additional institutional challenges. These challenges include add-on costs for course materials and lack of tutoring services for program requirements, which puts them at a disadvantage compared to traditional students (Sturm, 2012). For example, Western offers multiple tutoring centers for its students; however,

none of these centers offer tutoring sessions for required major preparatory courses such as musicianship or music theory ([Western R1 University] AAP, 2019; [Western R1 University] Resident Life, 2019). In addition, the arts fields in higher education work within a curriculum structure for a bachelor's degree that has remained unchanged for decades (Sturm, 2012). This structure forces R1 faculty to remove or deemphasize the knowledge and expertise required for a VAPA degree at a time when math and sciences take priority over VAPA. Of all graduates, VAPA students have the greatest need for support both during and after graduation (Bennett, 2016). Yet, they are met with limited support because most resources are designed for majors that align with the mission of an R1 university.

Articulation agreements. One challenge VAPA transfer students encounter before and after transferring is understanding credit mobility. In 2014, The National Student Clearinghouse reported that 60% of community college transfer students lost all their credits once they transferred (Shapiro et al., 2014). Articulation agreements, or agreements that help students transfer credits from one institution to another (Townsend, 2007), are implemented between colleges in order to facilitate the transfer process for the increasing number of transfer students. However, articulation agreements have been identified as one of the biggest challenges before transfer faced by students moving between multiple institutions (Hodara, Martinez-Wenzl, Stevens & Mazzeo, 2016; Jenkins & Fink, 2016; Stern, 2016). In their study of the constraints of the transfer process for California students, Shulock and Moore (2005) explained that articulation and curricular agreements between CCCs and four-year institutions remain a complex process compared to that of other states. Specifically, CCCs use an articulation system that requires partnerships with individual community college campuses rather than using statewide agreements. For example, CCCs have general education articulation agreements with

UCs (Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum) and CSUs (CSU GE-Breadth) that guarantee freshmen and sophomore level general education requirements completion. However, freshmen and sophomore level major requirements vary per campus and per program. In reality, students do not transfer from institution to institution; they transfer from program to program (Lang, 2009), which makes credit mobility more challenging and uncertain for students who are applying to multiple institutions.

Due to the cumbersome articulation process, some agreements are outdated or nonexistent, leaving transfer students with the responsibility of deciphering which courses transfer credit to their four-year universities. Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf, and Laanan (2013) revealed in their study of students' transition experiences that a majority of transfer students interviewed were anxious about the uncertainty of how their community college courses would be incorporated into their degree program at their four-year institution. Wassmer et al. (2004) reported that better articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions is associated with higher transfer rates; researchers proposed cooperative agreements between community colleges. Without articulations agreements, VAPA transfer students have no guarantee that their program credits will transfer to four-year universities.

Issues with credit mobility increase TTD completion by forcing transfer students to duplicate coursework already taken at their community colleges and add time to their degree (Doyle, 2006; Hodara et al., 2017; Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2017; Monaghan & Attewell, 2015). Monaghan and Attewell (2015) reported that in 2004, only 58% of community college transfer students were able to transfer 90% or more of their college credits, while the remaining students lost some credits. For 14% of students, their transfer institution accepted less than 10% of their credits. Due to the low number of transferable credits, transfer students are required to

take courses at their four-year institutions even if they have completed similar courses at the community college level.

Gap in the Research

A plethora of studies highlight the multiple barriers that affect the academic experiences of traditional transfer students in four-year institutions; however, limited studies focus on VAPA transfer students in higher education. Several studies have noted the need for current research in VAPA fields (Hains-Wesson, 2011; Fitzpatrick, Henningar, & Taylor, 2014; Lehmann, 2014; Van Dyke, 2012), with a notable need to examine the student experience in higher education (Burwell & Shipton, 2011). In her study of performance students' learning experience in higher education, Hains-Wesson (2011) found there was a disconnect between teachers' and students' perceptions around the usefulness of performance techniques to enhance the learning experience. The study lacked conclusiveness because there is limited research on performance students' perspective in the last 15 years. In contrast, extensive research has uncovered the unique academic experiences of traditional transfer student populations such as first-generation students, student-athletes, and veterans (Acevedo-Gil & Zerquera, 2016; Fike & Fike, 2008). This broader research has looked at the effective supports that institutions provide to help these populations succeed academically. A gap remains in how VAPA transfer student academic experiences compare to those of traditional transfer students and how R1 institutions support VAPA students.

Design and Methods

With the growing population of VAPA students in R1 institutions, this study examined how VAPA transfer students successfully complete their studies within a normative TTD. It used qualitative methods because it aimed to uncover the nature of the problem, through students' subjective experiences, before assuming resources to fix the problem. Individual interviews will

helped capture participants' voices to best inform administrators of students' experiences within their academic context. According to Creswell (2015), probing participants' experiences through qualitative methods allows participants to freely share information without the constraints of predetermined instruments such as surveys, observations, or documentation.

This study examined students' academic experiences through an institutional culture lens within Western R1 University's (Western) School of Arts (SOA), School of Music (SOM), and School of Theater (SOT). The goal of this study was to highlight how VAPA transfer students respond to these challenges and the types of supports, if any, they receive at an R1 institution, to inform administrators of best practices. Given this emphasis on interpretation, I employed qualitative methods to address my research questions. Participants were thus able to share historical information and personal knowledge that would not be readily visible through predetermined instruments (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016).

Research Questions

1. How do VAPA transfer students experience institutional challenges that hinder their normative TTD?
2. How do VAPA transfer students respond to institutional challenges that hinder their normative TTD?
 - a. According to VAPA transfer students, how did campus resources help them, if at all, respond to these challenges?
 - b. According to VAPA transfer students, how did personal resources help them, if at all, respond to these challenges?
3. What recommendations do VAPA transfer students have for supporting VAPA transfers in R1 institutions toward normative degree completion?

Research Methods

To best uncover the experiences of VAPA transfer students at Western, I recorded the experiences of the participants through semi-structured in-depth interviews. This approach allowed me to uncover detailed findings and incorporate the personal context relevant to each participant. It also allowed for more thorough personal insights regarding students' time at Western and how they navigated completing academic and artistic requirements within a normative TTD. The interview protocol focused on the academic challenges VAPA transfer students experienced at Western, the resources, or lack thereof, that they utilized to respond to these challenges, and recommendations for administrators. All data collected through interviews was recorded, transcribed, and coded by themes.

Site and Sample

Site. Western R1 University (Western) provided a unique perspective on VAPA transfer student experiences in a public research institution. Western provided qualities of an institution that are best-fitting for the purpose of this study: its institutional mission as a research university; a comprehensive academic structure that separates VAPA majors from other areas such as humanities; large VAPA student enrollment and its accessibility to the transfer student population; and the pressures of graduating students within a normative TTD.

Western is the nation's top public research university (Kowarski, 2018). Western's mission states that its "primary purpose as a public research university is the creation, dissemination, preservation, and application of knowledge" ([Western R1 University] Mission and Values, 2019). The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education defines an R1 institution as a doctoral university with very high research activity that has conferred at least 20 research/scholarship doctorates and reported at least \$5 million in total research expenditures

(Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2016). In 2016, Western spent \$163.3 million in research expenditures and received 18% of its revenue from research funding ([Western R1 University] Economic Impact Report, 2019), classifying it as a top tier R1 institution. As an R1 institution, Western provides multiple research opportunities to undergraduates, graduates, and visiting students. During the 2018 fiscal year, it received \$1.12 billion in research awards ([Western R1 University] Research and Creative Activities, 2019). The institutional mission of Western helps guide its purpose and its commitment to research.

Western holds a comprehensive structure of VAPA undergraduate majors in academic units/professional schools while other research institutions within its system hold VAPA majors in colleges assigned to general arts and/or humanities; Western contains schools specifically for undergraduate VAPA programs: the Western School of Arts (SOA); the School of Music (SOM), and the School of Theater (SOT). In addition to its academic structure, Western holds a large population of VAPA transfer students. As one of the most applied-to research institutions in the nation, Western has attracted students applying to every major offered on their campus (Kowarski, 2018). In 2017, Western received a total of 113,000 first-time full-time and transfer applications (Vazquez, 2017), 24,000 more applications than the next applied to institution. This is no exception to the VAPA majors at Western. In 2018, Western received 180 transfer applications in the SOM, 762 in the SOA, 926 in the SOF ([Western R1 University] Undergraduate Admissions, 2018).

Finally, as a public institution, Western relies heavily on funding generated from student tuition, state/federal appropriations, and grants and contracts (Douglass & Bleemer, 2018) that increase pressure and expectations to produce positive student-related outcomes. Without such outcomes, public institutions are susceptible to lose their funding. Due to the public pressure

Western faces, it is important to know how the institution supports student populations who normally extend their TTD.

Sample. This study looked at eight participants who are classified as community college transfer students majoring in art, architectural studies, dance, design and media arts, ethnomusicology, theater, or music at Western. Criteria for sample selection included transfer students who were required to audition and/or interview as part of the admissions process; had completed at least 12 units (one year) of studio, laboratory, and/or activity courses at Western; and had completed at least three quarters (one year) at Western whether they were on-track to graduate or not.

Significance of Problem

VAPA transfer students bring a wealth of experience from their off- and on-campus life to R1 institutions. They are involved in a wide range of formal and informal learning experiences before entering their institutions, including projects and collaborations inside and outside the classroom, private lessons, and part-time jobs (e.g. leading private instruction of their own to support their studies) (Lebler, 2008). These experiences help VAPA graduates as they encounter portfolio requirements and non-linear careers featuring multiple concurrent roles (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015). As Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth, and Rose (2013) indicated, students in creative fields feel increasing pressure to boost their academic credentials through activities that convey added-value skills to their resumes. It is critical that VAPA students are given the support necessary to excel in institutions not catering primarily to their needs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

While the 1960 Master Plan of Education helps students transfer, the current plan does not help transfer students, specifically VAPA transfers, with the academic process of completing a bachelor's degree within two years, or a normative time-to-degree (TTD). Studies show that extending TTD can become expensive to students, taxpayers, and the state (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2002; Gilmore & Hoffman, 1997). For students, funding opportunities are limited when they extend their TTD, as they are only allowed to receive federal financial assistance if they are making satisfactory academic progress (six years for a four-year degree and three years for a two-year degree) (Federal Student Aid, 2019). In addition to funding limitations, other studies show the negative psycho-emotional effects of delaying degree completion, such as academic stress (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015) and burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Unlike traditional transfer students, VAPA transfer students are required to prove their artistic skill in addition to their academic competency in order to graduate.

Current studies on transfer student academic experiences have not examined how VAPA transfer students mitigate the academic demands within research institutions in order to complete their degree within a normative completion time (Thrasher, 2015). This study contributes to knowledge of the transfer student experience by uncovering how institutional factors affect the academic experiences unique to VAPA majors at four-year research universities, including how they negotiate the academic and artistic demands within a normative TTD. In this literature review, I first provide a historical overview of the emergence of VAPA in American education and how policy has impacted its reception in higher education enrollment. Then, I focus on the academic and personal barriers VAPA transfer students encounter, such as the admissions process and credit mobility, and the resources available, or lack thereof, to VAPA transfer

students at research institutions. Finally, I focus on how institutional culture dictates the academic experiences of VAPA transfer students.

Overview of Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) in American Education

The history of VAPA education in the American K-12 education system can be traced back to the 19th century. However, the student demand for VAPA education in postsecondary institutions did not actualize until recently. The sections below outline a general history of VAPA education in K-12 and how economic and political climates increased its demand into postsecondary institutions.

Emergence of VAPA Education in the American Curriculum

The history of VAPA in American education begins in the early 19th century. The Boston Academy of Music, opened in 1832 as the first music school of its kind, expanding the music curriculum beyond singing techniques to the teaching of music and theory (Pemberton, 1988). Its success in teaching music encouraged other schools in the Boston area to include music in their curriculum. Only once American educational reformer John Dewey proposed, in the early 20th century, that the arts could play a significant role in curriculum rather than serve as an elective did VAPA education become an integral part of American education (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010; Nakamura, 2009). At the same time, medical research on VAPA and its effects on the human body began to increase; specifically, studies showed the impact of music on physiological changes in the brain and emotion recognition (Seashore, 1922). With these new developments on the benefits of VAPA, VAPA education continued to blossom in the late 19th to early 20th century (Heilig et al., 2010; Zakaras & Lowell, 2008).

VAPA as the Lost Curriculum in American Education

The importance of VAPA education decreased in the mid-20th century despite its prominence in the 19th and early 20th century. In the 1950s and 1960s, federal government involvement in education increased with school desegregation and the launch of Sputnik taken as an indicator that American education was behind the Soviet Union. The focus on American education shifted fully to the sciences and math. In addition, the 1983 report “A Nation at Risk” described how America's education system was failing to educate students at the same rate as other countries and called for accountability measures (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) that would ignite the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy environment. However, it was not until two decades later, in 2001, when the NCLB Act focused its attention on high-testing areas such as math and language arts. This resulted in schools focusing most funding efforts to these subject areas and ignoring other areas such as foreign language and VAPA. In her analysis of NCLB and its impact in VAPA education, Chapman (2005) found that NCLB did not completely obliterate VAPA education but rendered it a “lost curriculum” (p. 118). Chapman defines the lost curriculum as the subject areas that lost funding and support during the NCLB era. Gara, Brouillette, and Farkas (2018) studied the effects of NCLB in early elementary classroom instruction and found that despite efforts of teacher associations, lobbying groups, and VAPA advocates, VAPA education in K-12 decreased between 1999 to 2012. The decreased emphasis on VAPA curriculum was not only present at the K-12 level but in in post-secondary education as well.

The Effects of NCLB and the Economic Crisis on VAPA Enrollment in Higher Education

Despite the implementation of NCLB and the decreased availability of VAPA curriculum at the K-12 level, enrollment at post-secondary institutions in VAPA fields increased over the

same period. Rappaport (2003) reported that in the UC system, overall arts enrollment was growing at a rate faster than the growth in university population. VAPA enrollment in the UC system increased from 15,501 in 2000 to 22,190 in 2009 (University of California, 2019) as a result of the Great Recession of 2007-09. In a study of the effects of the economic recession on music student enrollment in American universities, Thrasher (2015) found that music enrollments increased due to low wages and lack of job opportunities. Individuals sought higher education as a way to become more employable in a declining market and enrolled in college despite high costs and limited space (Gault, Leach, Duey, Benzing, 2018; Nielsen, 2015; Thrasher, 2015).

The California Community Colleges (CCCs) became a more accessible alternative for students who sought to attain a higher education VAPA degree. The open-admission policy of CCCs offered freshman and sophomore classes for students intending to transfer to four-year colleges and universities at a lower cost (Nora & Rendon, 1990; Thrasher, 2015). VAPA education at community colleges became appealing due to their mission to prepare students for jobs in art-related fields, for transfer to four-year institutions, and for the fulfillment of the general education of all students (Cohen, 1987). Unlike the K-12 system, the issues with VAPA education at the post-secondary level centered not on accessibility but on academic quality: the diversity of instructors, the administrative organization, and the content of the VAPA curriculum. The quality of arts education at the CCC level became problematic when students transferred to four-year institutions and realized their lack of preparation.

Contributing Factors for Extending Time-To-Degree (TTD) and its Implications

VAPA transfer students are among the few student populations of transfer students who extend their time-to-degree (TTD). The extension of TTD has become a national concern in

higher education. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center defines TTD as the time elapsed between initial enrollments (Shapiro et al., 2016). The issue of extending TTD is significant for community college students who are already graduating at lower rates than their counterparts at four-year institutions (Bailey & Cho, 2010; Harris, 2017; Johnson, 2011; Shulock & Moore, 2005). The sections below outline the institutional factors identified by studies that contribute to transfer students' extended TTD. Most of the literature applies these factors to the general transfer student population, but they are also applicable to the VAPA transfer population.

Institutional Factors

Funding. Studies have shown that students with greater financial need had the longest time to degree (Astin, 2006; Bound, Lovenheim, & Turner, 2012; Messer & Wolter, 2010; Oseguera, 2006; Runyan, 2011; Wei & Horn, 2009). In their study on the impact of budget constraints for low-income transfer students, Shulock and Moore (2005) uncovered that transfer students are the student population most affected by financial challenges. The study demonstrated how state budget cuts in community colleges have impacted transfer students by decreasing course selections, support services, and financial aid, resulting in a 5% enrollment decline in fall 2002. Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) found that transfer students experience significant financial strain, as they receive significantly less grant and loan aid to attend college compared to first-time, full-time students. In order to decrease their financial hardships, most transfer students seek employment to pay for college (Bound, Lovenheim, & Turner, 2012; Johnson, 2011; Lau, 2003). This can distract students from their academic careers and extend their TTD. In their study on factors influencing transfer decisions, Nora and Crisp (2009) found that transfer students who received smaller financial aid packages were less likely to transfer and more likely to work full-time.

On top of the already limited funding opportunities for transfer students, VAPA transfers accrue additional costs for program requirements. VAPA students are required to spend money on supplemental materials, private lessons, instrument repairs, and/or art supplies which cause additional financial hardships (Urice, 2000). For example, in 2018, Western charged music students \$325 per quarter (\$975 per year) for required private lesson instruction and \$57 per quarter (\$171 per year) for practice room and locker usage ([Western] School of Music, 2018); these costs for the music major were in addition to tuition. In their study on music students' approaches to instrumental/vocal practice time, Burwell and Shipton (2011) found that although instrumental/vocal practice is not a requirement for graduation, it represents the largest proportion of time spent on music students' performance studies. Most music students are forced to take employment by giving private lessons or performing in their free time in order to pay for educational expenses not covered by financial aid (Fredrickson, 2007). Urice (2000) also found that apparent cost to deliver a credit hour in the fine arts is higher than in life sciences, and even dramatically more than in humanities programs. These differences are not surprising because VAPA courses are labor-intensive, especially studio courses. Increased educational costs and limited funding opportunities cause VAPA transfer students to extend their TTD by seeking employment that takes time away from their academics.

Transfer admissions process. Navigating the transfer application process is a challenge for community college students transferring to four-year institutions (Davies & Kratky, 2000; Fitzpatrick, Henninger, & Taylor, 2014; Shulock & Moore, 2005). Universities regularly change admission requirements resulting in a confusing process for students to navigate (Neault & Piland, 2014). In addition to the general transfer application, VAPA transfer students are required to complete the audition and/or portfolio process to prove their artistic qualifications for

admission. In their study of marginalized students in music education programs, Fitzpatrick et al. (2014) found that while applying to the music degree, students reported the most difficult part of the admission process was coping with the logistics of the supplemental application itself. Moreover, in his study of factors affecting student withdrawal from an undergraduate music degree, Gavin (2012) stated that the audition process created a hostile environment for applicants.

Community colleges have protested the portfolio as a prerequisite to transfer to four-year institutions, and regard it as an indication of mistrust between the two levels of post-secondary institutions (Cho, 1994). Some maintain that the problem with auditions is the lack of specificity in difficulty or demands of audition requirements (Burke & McManus, 2011; Daughtrey, 2010). Fitzpatrick, Henninger, and Taylor (2014) concluded that the highly specialized admission and audition process required for music degrees raises questions about equity of resources and music preparation which leaves underserved students at a disadvantage. Essentially, the audition/portfolio process judges VAPA students' potential through value judgments connected to historically privileged ways of being (Burke & McManus, 2011). The transfer admissions process for VAPA students is more cumbersome as it requires multiple elements to prove students' proficiency in more than one area. VAPA transfer students are also left to decipher the admissions process on their own, not only extending their time to transfer, but ultimately extending their TTD for a bachelor's degree.

Articulation and credit mobility. Lack of articulation agreements and increased loss of credit each extend a students' TTD (Anderson, 2015; Borden, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2015; Stern, 2016; Townsend, 2007). In his study on how transfer students perceive their transition to a four-year university, Lazarowicz (2015) found that transfer students considered their advisors to be

knowledgeable about the articulation process but wished the credit evaluation process would take less time. For the most part, transfer students are tasked with the responsibility of seeking out transfer resources and then knowing the right questions to ask (Chase, 2018). In his study of articulation and transfer issues in community college art programs, Cho (1994) discovered that even when art students completed studio courses at the community college, the courses would not transfer to four-year institutions. He found that the problem appears to be that CCC curriculum is not meeting the skills demanded by four-year universities in arts majors. For example, Western music students are required to take a theory placement exam even after completing the recommended two years of music theory at their community college ([Western R1University] General Catalog, 2018); if they do not score at a certain level, transfer students could be required to take first-year music theory courses, placing them at least a year behind in their theory studies. As a result, 40% of SOM transfer students who were required to take music theory in cohorts 2015-2017 extended their TTD ([Western R1 University] SAWeb, 2019). Without clear articulation agreements, VAPA transfer students are forced to take courses they had already completed at CCCs. Lack of articulation agreements and loss of credit mobility increase students' TTD.

Double majoring and/or minoring. The prospect of a double major or minor is appealing for students, especially VAPA students, who want to be competitive in the labor market (Hemelt, 2010; Kurlaender, Jackson, Howell, & Grodsky, 2014). VAPA students in majors such as art, dance, music, and theater are below the average employment six months after graduation compared to majors such as communications and psychology (Brown, 2007). For this reason, many VAPA students decide to double major and are required to complete two sets of requirements (Hemelt, 2010). In their study of overcoming time-dependent and time-independent

barriers for TTD, Yue and Fu (2016) found that students who had a double major or minor took 10.2 semester terms compared to 9.9 semester terms for students who only had one major. This data does not include students who change their majors multiple times, which further increases TTD (Johnson, 2011). The decision to double major can encourage educational decision-making that may result in diminished academic performance and extending TTD for transfer students (Pathways to Commencement Task Force Report, 2014).

Evaluation on “skill.” Another factor that contributes to VAPA transfer students’ extended TTD is the external evaluation of their artistic skill. In their study on music students’ experiences and expectations in higher education, Burland and Pitts (2007) found that music students are expected not only to master new demands for their academic skills, but for their performance skills as well. Music departments in research institutions find it increasingly difficult to raise students to the level of desired artistic quality with the additional coursework (DeGraffenreid, 2001). In some instances, faculty are forced to evaluate their students at a lower “skill” level in their classes in order to make them competitive and appealing in the VAPA labor market. To make matters worse, there are no set requirements for VAPA major requirements; currently, requirements vary by institution and even by faculty (Bergee & Demorest, 2003). Manternach and Smith (2019) point to the fact that there are no current standards established for the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree program in acting. This uncertainty leads institutions to have requirements and expectations that vary between campuses. In their research on the cultural politics of art and design education, Burke and McManus (2011) question the complexity judgments made about students’ “potential” in their program. In addition, Bergee and Demorest (2003) uncovered the unreliability of faculty evaluations in higher education music juries, including instances in which evaluators could not explain why they arrived at certain ratings. The

different expectations and lack of standardized evaluations across VAPA programs cause students' extended TTD when transferring to four-year institutions.

Personal Challenges

Social and cultural capital. Social and cultural capital contribute to a student's ability to navigate the educational system and graduate on time. Capital, in the social and cultural realm, functions similarly as in the economic world; it develops a value that is realizable in terms of power, social standing, and money (Bourdieu, 1997). Wassmer et al. (2004) identified the importance of the low level of social and cultural capital coming from students' parents', community members, and friends' low attainment levels of education. They found that this leaves students without mentors or role models within their close personal circles who can provide the information and resources needed to successfully navigate the higher education environment. Crisp and Nora (2009) also confirmed in their research the importance of parent education in students' successfully navigating the college environment. Similarly, VAPA students rely heavily on the networks they create in- and outside of their academic careers. Creech, et al. (2008) found in their study of music students' transition into the professional arena that performance opportunities, sometimes perceived as a matter of luck, were often found to be created through engagement with peer networks. In addition, students rely heavily on networks to successfully navigate the bureaucracies of their institutions, but with an already low level of social and cultural capital, VAPA students find themselves learning how to navigate the system on their own.

Funding. Studies on transfer students have found that transfer students are a student population with greater financial need (Astin, 2006; Bound et al., 2012; Messer & Wolter, 2010; Runyan, 2011; Wei & Horn, 2009). In their study on the impact of budget constraints for low-

income transfer students, Shulock and Moore (2005) uncovered that transfer students are the most affected student population with financial challenges. Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) found transfer students experience significant financial strain, as they receive significantly less grant and loan aid to attend college compared to first-time full-time students. In their study on factors influencing transfer decisions, Crisp and Nora (2009) found that transfer students who received smaller financial aid packages were less likely to transfer and more likely to work full-time.

Available Support Programs and Interventions for Transfer Students

States and institutions have implemented programs and initiatives to support students' normative degree completion (Johnson, 2011). Chrystal et al. (2013) stressed the importance of academic support programs and how they have shown to ease the transition of transfer students and increase retention and completion. Students in their study mentioned, for example, how pivotal programs like as the Admission Partnership Program (APP) were in helping them connect with support staff and transition to their four-year universities. Through APP, transfer students expressed being able to receive the guidance at a four-year institution that they were unable to receive in their communities. Post-secondary institutions at the two- and four-year levels have begun to pay closer attention to students with low social and economic capital. CCCs have implemented programs aimed at helping students who are entering college for the first time. Programs such as the First Year Experience (FYE), TRIO, and Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) provide services in and outside the classroom that help students navigate the postsecondary system (Bers & Younger, 2014).

Another program whose mission is the academic development of transfer students at the four-year level is Western's Center for Community College Partnerships (CCCCP). CCCC's goals

are to impact policy, curriculum, and provide research opportunities for transfer students (CCCCP, 2006). In addition, Western implemented the Challenge 45 initiative which aims to decrease the number of upper-division units for an undergraduate major to 45 (Pathways to Commencement Task Force Report, 2014). Challenge 45 was implemented to help decrease the academic burden that departments impose on their students and encourage students to graduate on time, or even early. Schools and colleges within research institutions have also created their own initiatives in order to help their students graduate on time. For example, Western's SOF does not allow their students to double major in other areas within the university ([Western R1 University] General Catalog 18-19), in order to decrease the academic workload for students.

Despite the efforts from institutions, studies show that the number of retained transfer students at the four-year institution level remains low. Chrystal et al. (2013) found there has been a low number of transfer students utilizing such services, and many transfer students are unaware altogether of the programs and the services their campuses provide. VAPA transfer students face additional challenges during the transfer process that the general transfer population do not encounter. Due to the unique challenges of VAPA transfer students, the currently available resources at four-year institutions do not help VAPA transfers with the transfer transition and with completing a normative TTD. VAPA transfer students carry similar personal challenges as traditional students in addition to the artistic challenges or VAPA students. This study sought to examine what four-year institutions are doing to help their VAPA transfer students graduate within a normative TTD.

Theoretical Framework: Organizational Culture

An integral aspect of an institution that defines institutional culture is its mission. Tierney (1988) states that institutional mission includes programs, clientele, and the college's adaptations

to change. VAPA institutions—such as conservatories, studios, centers, and institutes—focus on enriching the academic experience of their students; even when VAPA institutions offer a liberal arts education, VAPA is their main focus (Mitchell, 2007). The institutional mission outlines the purpose and priorities of the university, and when students do not align to an institutional mission, their academic experiences suffer. In his study of the realities and expectations for music faculty in higher education, Sturm (2012) found that although research institutions expect their STEM and VAPA faculty to develop equally competitive research/creative activity portfolios, there is an inequality in research and funding potential; music faculty carry larger course loads than their research counterparts for less pay. In addition, Sturm (2012) notes that music departments pay for most of their expenses through donations or tuition-generated income, while STEM departments receive assistance from government subsidies or federal grants. The decreased attention paid to VAPA education in research institutions results in decreased attention paid to VAPA students. This inattention creates an academic environment where students find it difficult to graduate in a timely manner.

Conclusion

In many ways, VAPA education is not embedded with the fundamental mission of the research institution. However, the current increase in VAPA enrollments encourages research institutions to provide effective resources to aid these students in graduating within a normative TTD. Graduating on time helps VAPA students reduce academic costs and stress from having to fulfill two set of requirements: artistic and academic. VAPA transfer students are a unique student population in that they carry the personal challenges of traditional transfer students and the artistic stressors of VAPA students. My intent was to examine the academic experiences of

VAPA transfer students at research institutions from an institutional culture framework to inform institutional agents on how to create resources to help VAPA students graduate on time.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative study contributes to knowledge of the transfer student experience by uncovering how institutional factors affect the academic experiences unique to VAPA majors at four-year research universities (R1), including how they negotiate the academic and artistic demands within a normative time-to-degree (TTD). Using an organizational culture framework that emphasizes how an institution's mission affects the academic experiences of student, it exposed the effects institutional and personal factors have on the academic experiences of VAPA transfer students at R1 institutions. The results of this study can better inform institutional agents on how to create resources to help these students graduate on time.

Research Questions

1. How do VAPA transfer students experience institutional challenges that hinder their normative TTD?
2. How do VAPA transfer students respond to institutional challenges that hinder their normative TTD?
 - a. According to VAPA transfer students, how did campus resources help them, if at all, respond to these challenges?
 - b. According to VAPA transfer students, how did personal resources help them, if at all, respond to these challenges?
3. What recommendations do VAPA transfer students have for supporting VAPA transfers in R1 institutions toward normative degree completion?

Research Design

Qualitative methods were appropriate because this study uncovered how students experience institutional challenges and how these affect the academic experiences of VAPA

transfer students within an R1 institution. Given this emphasis on participants' discordant experiences, qualitative methods best addressed my research questions. According to Creswell (2015), probing participants' experiences through qualitative methods is uniquely valuable because participants can freely share their perspectives without the constraints of predetermined instruments such as surveys or documentation. Using interviews had the added benefit of giving participants the opportunity to give structural information and personal knowledge that was not readily visible through predetermined instruments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since the goal of this study was to understand the academic experiences of transfer students, specifically how they navigate completing academic requirements within a normative TTD, a quantitative design would not have been appropriate. Although quantitative methods such as surveys and questionnaires can identify the academic and personal challenges of the VAPA transfer student experience, these methods would not have provided a comprehensive understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In-depth interviews provided rich and detailed findings to reveal the authentic personal perspective of the students interviewed and how they navigate the completion of their requirements within a normative TTD.

Site and Sample

Site selection. For the purposes of this study, I looked at a doctoral public institution classified as R1 whose primary mission is research. Due to the high focus on research, R1 institutions assign less supports for VAPA majors, making it more challenging for VAPA students to graduate within a normative TTD. As an R1 institution, Western R1 University (Western) provided a unique perspective on VAPA transfer student experiences. It holds a comprehensive structure of VAPA undergraduate majors in academic units/professional schools while other institutions within its system hold VAPA majors in colleges assigned to general arts

and/or humanities. For example, Northwestern R1 University, another top R1 university in the nation within Western's system, houses its music program in the College of Letters and Science while Western contains Schools specifically for undergraduate VAPA programs. Western has three separate Schools that focus on different areas of VAPA. The Western School of Arts (SOA) houses art, architectural studies, dance, design/media arts, independent, and world arts and culture majors. The Western School of Theater (SOT) houses film and television, independent, and theater majors. In addition to SOA and SOT, Western founded the first School of Music within its system in 2016 (Hampton, 2016). The Western School of Music (SOM) houses ethnomusicology, global jazz studies, music composition, music education, music performance, music history and industry, and musicology majors. Western is the only research institution within its system that provides a major for a specific area of music. As a result of its increasing number of applicants and demand for music-focused curriculum, Western SOM offers the second Bachelor of Music (B.M.) within its system, where traditionally only Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degrees are conferred.

Western holds a large population of VAPA transfer students, as well as initiatives that aim to help transfer students graduate within a normative TTD. Western is currently launching a multi-year project to increase six-year first-time full-time and four-year transfer graduation rates to 90% and eliminating graduation gaps, and investing in the next generation of faculty and research ([Western R1 University] Center for the Advancement of Teaching, 2019). It has also invested in supporting the transfer pipeline, recruitment, and support for community college students ([Western University System] Office of the President Transfer Action Team, 2014). Therefore, studying this issue of normative TTD among VAPA majors at Western provides the opportunity to look at this issue in-depth across multiple VAPA majors and various initiatives.

Participant selection. All participants in this study were classified as transfer students who meet the following criteria. First, they had transferred from the California community college system. Although Western receives VAPA transfers from conservatories and art institutes, I looked specifically at students from community colleges due to the clear articulation and admission process between community colleges and four-year institutions. Second, participants must have completed a supplemental application (in the form of an audition and/or a portfolio) as part of the admission process. A supplemental application presents an additional step that many students applying to non-VAPA majors have to complete; the supplemental application can bring unique institutional challenges onto students applying to VAPA programs. Third, students must have completed at least 12 units (one year) of studio, laboratory, and/or activity courses at Western. Students who have been at Western for at least a year, and completed hands-on arts courses in this time, have a better understanding of the academic challenges and the resources available to assist them in facing such challenges. Due to the nature of this study, only programs that required courses with instructional codes, or Total Instructional Effort (TIE) classifications, of activity, studio, and/or lab were interviewed. These courses included one-on-one instruction or instruction that focused on technical-skill development ([Western R1 University] Registrar's Office, 2019). Finally, students must have completed at least three quarters (one year) at Western, whether they were on-track to graduate or not. I selected from this pool through snowball sampling. I emailed advisors, faculty, and/or students at SOA, SOM, and SOT to gain referrals of transfer students in art, architectural studies, dance, design and media arts, ethnomusicology, and music, and they responded with emails of potential participants they believed would have the most information and would be the most helpful

(Alkin & Vo, 2018). I emailed each of those possible participants an outreach protocol that laid out the purpose of the study, time commitment, and financial incentive (\$35 Amazon gift card).

Access. I gained access to this population by contacting the advisors, faculty, and/or students of SOA, SOM, and SOT. As a previous employee of Western, I have collaborated and built relationships with the advisors, faculty, and students in SOA, SOM, and SOT and many agreed to provide referrals as long as student personal information was not disclosed. Also, as a current graduate student of Western, I had access to campus resources such as meeting rooms to interview students in a quiet neutral environment.

Data Collection Methods

Eight potential participants were contacted to schedule individual 45 to 60 minute, semi-structured interviews. Individual interviews helped capture participants' voices to best inform administrators of students' experiences within their academic context. Individual interviews were recorded with two recording devices (an iPhone 8 and a MacBook) and held in a conference room at Western at a time convenient to the participants. I used Temi.com to transcribe all recorded interviews.

Semi-structured interviews provided in-depth responses that indicated how students navigated through academic and personal challenges in order to graduate within a normative TTD. Interview protocol questions focused on students' academic experiences during the admission, matriculation, and continuation of the academics towards graduation (See Appendix A). For example, probes included questions about how prepared students felt in the transfer process and what resources they utilized in order to graduate from their four-year institutions. All protocol questions were designed to collect narratives about how VAPA transfer students experienced their time at Western and how they navigated, or attempted to navigate, the artistic

and academic demands within a normative TTD. The goal of the protocol questions was to uncover any institutional challenges VAPA transfer students encountered while completing their degrees, thus highlighting any academic supports the students utilized during this process. Some of the protocol questions included topics such as any institutional services they know of and/or utilized during their first year to help them complete requirements. For example, Western houses the Academic Advancement Program (AAP) which offers tutoring services for students from underserved backgrounds, a program most participants mentioned they had not used the resources themselves.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis was conducted by using Creswell's (2015) six-step approach: a. organizing and preparing data for analysis, b. reviewing data and recording general thoughts, c. developing a qualitative codebook that defines codes to allow for themes such as support systems and/or programs to emerge organically in the data, d. generating descriptions and thematic categories, e. utilizing narrative analysis to present data, and f. interpreting the qualitative findings. I used descriptive coding methods to analyze interview transcripts. First, I reviewed the recordings for reoccurring themes. For accuracy and specificity, I compared the recordings to the written transcriptions to make any necessary corrections. Finally, I contacted participants for clarification.

The interview protocol addressed overarching themes to answer the research questions in this study, including differences and similarities in academic experiences; institutional and personal resources used to respond to institutional challenges; and participant recommendations for future VAPA transfer students. However, I also kept an open mind and let general themes and meaningful categories appear throughout the interviews, using probing questions and

following up on any new themes as they emerged organically (Creswell, 2015; Maxwell, 2013). This allowed for demographic themes, such as social and economic capital, to arise that informed within-group comparisons and identities of participants when I analyzed final results. In addition, I utilized Tierney's (1988) theory of theoretical framework to assist in grouping themes into categories such as the transfer process, university processes, and campus culture. All themes were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and transcriptions of interviews were coded with these themes to group data and triangulate findings.

Summary

The research methods used in this study were designed to gather data that reflects VAPA students' perspectives on their unique experiences of negotiating academic and artistic requirements at Western. The findings can provide administrators with in-depth information on this unexplored college experience and how universities can assist this unique student population. The goal of this study was to help inform administrators of best practices to support VAPA transfer students in graduating within a normative TTD. Through interviews, the experiences of VAPA students had a deeper context for interpretation. VAPA student interpretations of their academic experiences within an R1 institutions added to the rich yet limited literature of VAPA student experiences in post-secondary education.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to uncover how institutional factors affected the academic experiences and time-to-degree (TTD) of eight community college VAPA transfer students at Western R1 University (Western). Beginning this study, I conjectured that VAPA transfer students were extending their TTD due to institutional factors such as lack of resources and support from administrators and faculty. I expected to uncover that VAPA transfer students would not be able to thrive in a campus whose mission is focused on research and not the arts. However, as this study unfolded, it became clear that VAPA transfer students were extending their TTD primarily due to personal enrichment factors such as taking advantage of a “better education” and the professional support provided by faculty and peers. Although all participants expressed hardships and challenges with having to stay longer than expected at Western, the benefits of staying outweighed the costs. The findings shine a different light on the reasoning behind this group of students’ extended graduation timeline.

In sum, unlike traditional transfer students, VAPA transfer students believe staying would improve their artistic skill because they are learning from a “better” institution compared to the community colleges from which they transfer. As older non-traditional students, VAPA transfers do not see extending their TTD as a detriment; they arrive to the school with professional experience, and hope the additional classes will supplement their artistic practice. Challenges, however, included retaking courses, learning to advocate for themselves, and increased personal stress due to extending TTD. Participants were asked a varied series of questions in interviews (See Appendix A). Their responses were coded and analyzed to address the study’s three research questions:

1. How do VAPA transfer students experience institutional challenges that hinder their normative TTD?
2. How do VAPA transfer students respond to institutional challenges that hinder their normative TTD?
 - a. According to VAPA transfer students, how did campus resources help them, if at all, respond to these challenges?
 - b. According to VAPA transfer students, how did personal resources help them, if at all, respond to these challenges?
3. What recommendations do VAPA transfer students have for supporting VAPA transfers in R1 institutions toward normative degree completion?

In this chapter, I introduce the participants in the study and the demographics of their backgrounds. Then, I respond to each research question with three primary objectives: 1. to uncover differences and similarities in the way participants experience institutional challenges; 2. to identify ways in which participants respond to institutional challenges; and 3. to synthesize the recommendations participants would give to new VAPA transfers. In each of the findings, I specify the differences and similarities in challenges VAPA transfer students have amongst themselves, as they navigate Western. Finally, I conclude with my final thoughts on findings.

Participants

The eight participants ranged in demographic identify, including by gender, race, age, and first-generation status, as indicated in Table 1. Five participants were male-identifying and three were female-identifying, while three participants identified as “Caucasian/White” and five identified as “students of color.” All students were between 22-40 years old at the time of their interviews, older than the age of traditional students. Five students also identified as first-

generation and one student identified as a student-parent. All students were California natives with the exception of an out-of-state participant who received her state residency before attending community college. Four students were extending their TTD by at least two quarters while four students were graduating on time. However, students who were not extending their TTD admitted taking more than the allowed 20 units per quarter and/or also taking summer sessions.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name*	Age**	Race	TTD	Other
Adriana	Between 25-30	White	8 quarters	First-generation
Carlos	Between 25-30	White	6 quarters***	
Felipe	Between 35-40	Non-white	9 quarters	Student-parent; first-generation
Jason	Between 25-30	White	9 quarters	
Jose	Between 25-30	Non-white	8 quarters	First-generation
Karla	Between 22-25	Non-white	6 quarters***	First-generation
Rosa	Between 22-25	Non-white	6 quarters***	First-generation
Tony	Between 22-25	Non-white	6 quarters***	First-generation

*Pseudonyms used to maintain anonymity.

**Age range provided to maintain anonymity.

***Students graduating within 6 quarters (2 years) compiled their additional TTD by taking more than the allowed 20 units per quarter and/or taking summer courses.

Findings

VAPA transfer students face two main institutional challenges when they matriculate to, and during their time at Western R1 University: the adjustment to a new institutional culture, and the need to repeat courses. However, the findings of this study indicate that VAPA transfer students believe they are able to succeed in the academy and even benefit from these challenges. Academically, most students expressed being “overly prepared” and taking “easy” classes once they transitioned to Western. Findings also suggest that participants’ background information and the complexities of intersectionality informed their varying experiences at Western. The

following sections link primary findings to the research questions and offer evidence on how participants provided a cost-analysis lens of their academic experiences at Western.

Differences and Similarities in Academic Experiences

Finding #1: Demographics affect academic experiences. In regard to RQ1, race and capital emerged as the institutional challenges hindering VAPA transfer students the most. These were two of the most mentioned demographics participants discussed to highlight differences in their experiences at Western. Three out of eight participants identified as Caucasian and five out of eight as students of color. Altogether, Caucasian students reported more positive experiences of being non-traditional transfer students compared to the students of color. For example, participants who identified as Caucasian expressed how they “have glowing things to say about [Western]” and had never thought about quitting. They consciously wanted to stay longer at Western due to their positive experiences in the institution. On the other hand, VAPA transfer students of color delved into the challenges they faced due to their race and were more likely to report wanting to move on from Western. Felipe specifically talked about an incident where another student judged his academic ability “based on [his] appearance.” He explained taking a course in the astronomy building when he came upon a flyer to grow coral on campus, a subject he already had experience in. He explained:

I grabbed [the flyer] and then some girl started talking to me and she’s also in the major and I’m like, “Man, this is great. Like I’m going to reach out to them. I have so much experience and knowledge that could really help them.” And she looked at me, I kid you not. She’s like, “you know, they have like PhD students. I don’t really think they’re going to need your help.” Like that. Just like that...so just based on my appearance I’m unqualified, basically, to help or contribute. I have nothing to contribute or offer.

These experiences of racial bias made the academic environment a more complex one, where students of color did not always feel welcome or assured.

Social capital. The level and kind of social capital was another factor that appeared to make a difference in the way participants experienced Western. Caucasian participants had more support systems that provided them with academic guidance even if family members and/or friends did not major in VAPA areas.

Two of these students had parents who had attended college while the third participant had the support of her boyfriend at the time, whose parents had attended college. Jason, a white male student, for example, has a father who is a professional composer and gives Jason career advice as he completes his VAPA major. On the other hand, most of the participants of color identified as first-generation (with one student whose parents went to college in the Philippines) and talked about not being able to rely on family and/or friends while at their community college or when applying to Western. One such participant was denied the first time he applied to transfer, and was only able to transfer after reapplying. Being denied gave the student the opportunity to understand the transfer admissions process more thoroughly and to be accepted on his second application. Consistent with the literature on first-generation experiences for transfer students of color, VAPA transfer students of color must complete extensive research on their own on the admission process because they lack the necessary social capital to help them transfer (Crisp & Nora, 2009; Wassmer et al., 2004).

All participants described relying heavily on peers to work against institutional challenges. While Caucasian participants had peer support prior to transferring, students of color described having to develop their peer networks once at Western. Prior to transferring, both Jason and Jose had friends who had successfully transferred to Western a year prior and helped

them navigate the process. Before transferring, Jason's friend put him in contact with his current mentor at Western, and Jason studied with the faculty member for one year in preparation, compiling his supplemental application to transfer. His mentor guided Jason through the process and helped him apply to multiple universities. Jose also relied on his peers who aided him through the transfer application process and connected him to faculty at Western:

I had known a few people who had some sort of affiliation with [Western]. [My friend], he was a student here and I had asked him a million questions and I asked him to give me contact information of faculty I could talk to.

Participants also shared that they rely on one another when it comes to the challenges of articulation and course requirements. Carlos reported asking his peers for course requirements: "I usually just talk to a lot of my peers and be like, 'Oh, are you taking this class?' I'm like, 'Oh, no worries. I'll sign up.'" Karla also shared that she "ask[s] around about information on like what people have done in the past." There is not one particular person Karla depends on; rather, she asks multiple peers and "adds all that information together and then [goes] from there." When VAPA transfer students are unable to rely on family members or institutional agents for academic support, they seek guidance from peers who have successfully transferred to Western.

Economic capital. Differences in economic background and status presented as differences in social and academic experiences at Western. Although all eight participants talked about working either part-time or full-time, students who identified as Caucasian could financially rely on family even though they held jobs of their own. They defined their economic status as "not being rich" but being able to live "comfortably." One participant shared that even though he's "poor 'cause [he] don't make any money right now," his parents are well-off since they have been "smart with investments when [his] dad was making more money." On the other

hand, students of color faced economic challenges that affected their experiences at Western. Rosa talked about financial difficulties her family endured after her father passed away a month before she transferred to Western. “I get a little bit more worried with money,” she said. She also talked about added administrative stress in order “to get more money through [her] dad's life insurance.” When asked whether he ever thought about quitting, Felipe talked about, as a father, being the “rock” of his family: “If I quit, it's game over for me and for my family.” Unlike the other students of color, he never thought about quitting, but his reasoning was different than Caucasian students; to Felipe, quitting was perceived as a “privilege” that he did not have. Being sole providers for themselves and their families, many VAPA transfer students of color faced additional challenges that impacted their experiences at Western.

Paths Participants Use to Respond to Institutional Challenges

Finding #2: Adjusting to a new institutional culture. For RQ2, which asked how VAPA transfer students respond to institutional challenges, a large part of this barrier was the adjustment to Western’s institutional culture as older non-traditional students who feel ready to enter their professional fields. Seven out of eight participants mentioned the difficulties of adjusting to a campus where most students do not seem “focused” or “serious” about their education. Jason talked about the strain of entering Western as a 27-year-old student, citing a “hard time relating to these 18-year-olds” whom he says are “very immature.” As an older student, Jason found it hard to connect to peers; he made a clear distinction between his goals as “an adult...ready to be a professional” and those of his younger peers, who he believes “treated [Western] like high school.”

VAPA participants repeatedly stated that because they were focused on their studies, they separated themselves from students they perceived “did not work as hard” as they did. Adriana, a

white female student, said she did not realize “Greek life was [so] very important” before coming to Western. She felt students were more “concerned with partying and other things” rather than academics. Being around students who did not care became “distracting” to her to the point where she would study in the law building next to “older students who [were not] really messing around” like “kids who don’t care or don’t decide to come to class.” Adriana sought to surround herself with older students who she said took their studies more seriously.

Jose also talked about how he gravitated towards other transfer students since “making friends [at Western] is harder when you don’t live on-campus.” He elaborated, “When I do make friends, it’s weird, they all just happen to be transfer students.” Jose attributed this to the fact that transfer students have “similar paths on how [they] got where [they] did” and therefore are able to more easily connect. As non-traditional students, all VAPA participants initially find it challenging to adjust to Western’s institutional culture, which embraces the traditional transfer student experience (Birnbaum, 1988; Manning, 2013; Tierney, 2008).

Once VAPA transfers were able to adjust to Western’s institutional culture, they felt more at ease connecting with peers and maximizing their experience at Western. Creating a network of peers and mentors was extremely important for VAPA majors as these connected them to opportunities beyond academics. Five out of eight students named the importance of such networks in their personal and professional well-being. When asked about any advice he would give incoming VAPA transfer students, Jose said students should “reach out to other individuals” and further stated: “In this major, you have to talk to people. There is no way around it, you just have to do it, or you won’t get very far.” Adriana also shared how her classmates would be her biggest “connection” to professional opportunities. She said: “My classmates tell me about gigs where my instrument is needed and that is really how you get

work. We rely on each other to hear about work opportunities.” Though participants expressed difficulty with joining the mainstream social life dominated by younger, traditional students, they also acknowledged the importance of socialization to their professional life. Given that they identify as deeply focused on their careers, especially compared to their classmates, this need to network presents a complex dynamic for transfer VAPA students which extends to the existing literature on social networks for transfer students (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Finding #3: Repeating academic courses. A second challenge VAPA transfer students indicated regarding RQ2 was the need to repeat academic courses, in large part because they found it difficult to transfer courses to Western. One reason VAPA transfer students were not able to receive credit for their courses was due to a lack of articulation and lack of course offerings. Aside from general education (GE) courses, which eight out of eight participants completed by following the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC), seven out of eight students said they did not receive credit for their major courses due to a lack of articulation (the eighth participant’s program automatically waived him from lower-division requirements).

Karla, a female student of color, explained how she must retake basic music courses even though she has played the piano since she was four years old. She stated, “Well [courses] transferred as credit, like units for my GEs, but not for the music school itself, which is why I’m stuck taking like super beginner theory and same with musicianship.” Another reason why students were not able to transfer courses is because their community colleges did not offer them. Four out of eight participants said they had to take courses at multiple institutions because their primary community college did not offer required courses for transfer. For Carlos, a white male

student, finding courses at different community colleges was a task that he had to complete for admission to multiple colleges. He said:

For some schools it's like there's some random requirement they have that, you know, our school doesn't even offer. So I'd have to go find a different institution to take that class at, which just seems kind of crazy to me. And if I didn't have that requirement, I couldn't even transfer. I couldn't even audition there.

According to Carlos, the process of fulfilling transferable requirements at multiple colleges was “the most difficult part” of transferring. To complete the program, VAPA transfer students must retake major courses because academic institutions do not have the necessary supports, such as updated articulation or curriculum, to assist them in transferring courses.

Lack of transparency. Both a lack of articulation and offerings and a lack of information on transferability forced VAPA participants to retake courses at Western. Rosa, a female student of color, stated that she was not aware which courses would transfer to Western until after she transferred. She retook similar courses once at Western to fulfill a diversity requirement:

I'm in this class called media history, which could have been supplemented and gotten credit for it if I took a modern history class, any type of modern history class at community college. But I didn't know that that's what covered it prior. So even though I've taken like three or four different art history classes, none of them could transfer over for that specific class.

If Rosa had known about Western's requirements ahead of time, she could have taken those courses at her community college prior to transferring. Even when students try to reach out to Western, they are not given guidance on which courses they should be taking. Tony, a male student of color, who met consistently with his community college counselor, said his counselor

was told by Western's admission office that Western's program only cared about general education requirements. Because the office did not elaborate on transferable major requirements, Tony and his counselor were left to decipher which courses he needed to take for his VAPA major. This lack of information, typical of Western, created common educational barriers for VAPA transfer students similar to the lack of information traditional transfer students encounter when deciding which courses to take (Chase, 2018; Cho, 1994; Lazarowicz, 2015).

In at least six cases, students who had taken courses that could count for their major were not allowed to petition to have those courses count. While discussing retaking theory and musicianship, Karla noted that she does not have the option to "petition out of those classes" even though she has contacted the administration to do so. Jason also expressed that not being able to petition out of classes is one of his biggest complaints at Western. He stated that "students should be able to test out of classes for which they're above." His attempts to petition the administration for course credit for courses already taken were also unsuccessful. He revealed that he had appealed: "I came in and asked please, pretty please can I test out of this? I know all of this stuff. Hard no on that." Felipe had also gone to the administration to have his courses count. He recounted:

No, [administration was] just like, "they didn't transfer over because they were not relevant to the major." According to their policy or whatever, protocol it may be. But my rebuttal to that actually all of the things that I learned in community college are extremely relevant here.

Karla, Jason, and Felipe were not given the opportunity to petition out of classes which they had already taken or had the expertise to test out of. VAPA transfers are left with no option but to retake courses and extend their TTD similar to traditional transfer students (Cho, 1994).

Upsides of course repetition. Despite the overlap in course content, VAPA transfer students viewed retaking courses that added time to their degree as having a positive effect on their overall growth as artists. Six out of eight participants noted the differences in academic rigor between their courses at community college and Western, perceiving their retaking of courses at Western as beneficial to their practice. Rosa realized that some students do not see a problem with retaking courses since they see this as attaining better training. She noted:

There are students that are milking this and will retake classes that they've already taken because they know that they're going to get a better education, which is true. No, like no days in the week I would say that my community college had a better system. [Western] will always beat them.

To Rosa, VAPA majors have subjective requirements that can be interpreted in multiple ways; learning material from different views thus adds to a student's professional growth. During his interview, Carlos reaffirmed Rosa's statement by acknowledging that it was his decision to retake courses he had already taken at his community college: "I chose to do that just because I, I retook a lot of stuff here because I wanted to as well. I wanted to learn from a better program than my old school." Jose also retook courses at Western that he had already taken at his community college. Though he was required to take the courses, he did not ultimately see a problem with retaking them, as the courses in his major are taught differently in every institution; he acknowledged that every time he retook a course, he was learning the material from a different perspective. Although participants wished for a better articulation system to help them transfer courses, they recognized that retaking courses in their major provided alternative or more rigorous viewpoints, and allowed for additional time to practice, two factors that were a benefit to their overall development as artists.

VAPA transfers said that in addition to retaking courses, they took advantage of taking courses not required for their major as a way to increase their artistic skill. Carlos explained that he is taking additional courses in order to take advantage of the education at Western, and that he is often “excited to learn” the course content in classes outside of his major requirements. In his department, Carlos is only allowed to take 20 units per quarter. Students who wish to take above the allowed unit count must petition to administration and get approval from faculty. Even though he already petitioned to enroll in 24 units toward his major on paper, Carlos took eight additional units outside of it for a total of 32 units of class.

When asked about taking courses in his VAPA major, Jason shared that even though he might take courses that do not seem related to his specific major, at the end of the day, the external content serves his artistic practice in helpful ways, “like more stuff in [his] toolbox.” He expanded:

There was a lot of composing involved and even the stuff that wasn't composing it was learning about totally necessary stuff. Like all the instruments in the orchestra, what are their ranges, what are their sweet spots, what are their intervals of transposition, how are they used, what, what can you do with them.

For Jason, material that seemed irrelevant during the first time he took a class began to feel more relevant when he retook it at Western. Felipe shared a similar experience since he had completed several majors at his community college. He talked about the advantages of having to take courses in an interdisciplinary major, where “you have to use all these lenses.” For Carlos, Jason, and Felipe, taking additional courses outside of their major was necessary for their artistic development. The benefit of taking classes is so high that VAPA transfer students take courses even if they cannot credit for them. This finding adds a new dimension to the literature that

complains that retaking coursework is necessarily wasteful, suggesting that VAPA students may have a different outlook (Ellis, 2013).

Using Campus Resources to Respond to Institutional Challenges

Finding #4: Lack of use of campus resources. When asked about campus resources that helped them respond to institutional challenges (RQ2a), similar to traditional transfer students, VAPA transfers expressed being unable to fully utilize campus resources available to them due to time constraints (Chrystal et al., 2013). Although five out of eight participants indicated not utilizing offices such as the transfer or career centers for professional development or networking, all eight participants acknowledged the benefits of having campus resources available. The participants who did utilize resources did so mainly for personal rather than academic reasons. For example, Felipe explained that he uses the resource center for support with his responsibilities as a parenting community student who is low-income and has a disability. He cited that the resource center helps “to access like everything on campus.” When asked why he didn’t use resources for academic reasons, Felipe explained, “there’s not much for my major. Maybe the library to study, but that’s it.”

Another participant who uses resources for personal reasons rather than academics is Adriana. Adriana is only able to use the gym to help with her mental health. She said she had not been to the transfer center, citing a lack of time: “I mean that's the thing with [my VAPA major] classes, it's nine to noon and then two to five and I commute from Silverlake every day, two hours in the bus each way.” Due to her busy schedule, Adriana had to prioritize which resources to use. In her case, she prioritizes mental health rather than utilize resources for academic support.

Similarly, Jason does not use academic supports, but appreciates how his department connects him to resources and opportunities outside of Western. When talking about his department, Jason shared that “the coolest part about the school is extracurricular.” He reads emails that alert students to contests, and he learns of and attends every undergraduate and graduate concert on campus (one each per quarter). He reflected that he generally “take[s] advantage of more opportunities here extracurricular than anyone.” Jason highlighted the important opportunities students receive through departmental communications, like being able to perform his compositions with fellow student musicians. Although campus resources are available to VAPA transfer students, they are less likely to utilize them for academic purposes compared to traditional students due to a lack of relevant content or lack of available time. This data corroborates existing research indicating that transfer students have less campus involvement overall than traditional students (Roberts & McNeese, 2010).

Personal Resources to Respond to Institutional Barriers

Finding #5: Lack of family support. The impact of a lack of understanding from participants’ families and the need to self-advocate were recurring themes for how personal resources helped students (RQ2b). In interviews, participants frequently discussed using and developing resilience to address institutional challenges. Similar to traditional first-generation transfer students, the five out of eight participants who identified as first-generation students expressed being unable to rely on family members for academic support compared to peers who had college-educated parents (Choy, 2001; Hsaio, 1992; Terenzini et al., 1994; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Some even disclosed that they had to justify to their parents why they were pursuing a VAPA major. Tony talked about how he needed to “convince” his parents into letting him choose his

VAPA major because his parents did not perceive his VAPA major as being academic enough for him to have a stable job after graduating. He clarified:

I did get some pushback from my parents. Growing up they were very strict about academics and stuff. I'm an only child, so they really wanted to make sure that whatever career I chose I'd be able to support myself. I think it's the main thing they were worried about. So it did take some convincing on my end and I think trying to convince them also reaffirmed that that's what I want to do.

Another student who received pushback from his parents was Carlos. After completing two years in his initial STEM major, Carlos decided he wanted to pursue music. He noted that his family's reaction was ““what are you doing? Like, you know, you don't play music, why are you trying to do this?”” Carlos's grades in his STEM major began to decline as he focused more on his VAPA interests. Ultimately, his parents were supportive of his decision to transfer from his community college into a VAPA major at Western once he explained to them that “there was something in [him] that told [him] [he] needed to do it.”

When asked about personal support systems, Rosa indicated that she is the first in her family to pursue a VAPA major and how her family is unable to provide academic support. She said: “I can't really go to someone and ask like, ‘Hey, does this look good? Like does this, is this a nice code for this piece I'm trying to create?’” Rosa further disclosed that even if she tried to ask for help, talking about her academic work would be like communicating in “another language” that her family would not understand.

Family members of VAPA transfer students provide personal support when they are unable to provide academic support and guidance (Crisp & Nora, 2009; Wassmer et al., 2004);

however, VAPA transfer students of color have an added layer of challenges when their parents do not initially see the benefit of pursuing a VAPA major (London, 1992, 1996).

Finding #6: Lack of Support from Institutional Agents. Another finding for RQ2 was the lack of support from institutional agents, which hindered some students' academic timelines. Even with support from their families, VAPA transfer students expressed the need to self-advocate at their community colleges to be able to transfer to Western. Seven out of eight participants described having to self-advocate pre-transfer due to a lack of support from institutional agents. Consistent with transfer student literature, VAPA transfer students expressed the lack of guidance, or misguidance, from their academic counselors (Acevedo-Gil & Zerquera, 2016). One VAPA transfer student in particular, Felipe, had to create his own VAPA curriculum. He explained that he lacked support from institutional agents who told him transferring to Western in his major was "not possible" and he was "wasting [his] time." However, Felipe did his own research and created a transfer pathway on his own in order to transfer to Western:

When I approached my academic counselor at my community college and they couldn't help me, I advocated for myself. I reached out to the dean. Then I reached out to the chair of the arts department, the chair of the transfer department, and I basically created my own education.

Felipe had to contact multiple individuals to get the help he needed. In other cases, students who speak to an institutional agent are discouraged from transferring. Jason explained how his counselors at the time told him to "set [his] sights lower" and "not try to transfer to [Western]." Similar to Felipe, Jason used his own motivation and social resources to connect with peers who had already transferred to Western, who then gave logistical and emotional support during the transfer process.

Self-advocacy was not only important pre-transfer, but also upon enrolling at Western. Adriana and Karla both decided to switch into VAPA majors once at Western, but were each discouraged by the administration, since switching between majors meant extending even more time to their degree, which is highly discouraged at Western. Adriana knew early on that she would have to advocate for herself to switch from a humanities major to her VAPA major at Western. She recalled:

So from the very beginning of my first term at [Western], [my VAPA major] intrigued me. So I started trying to get into classes in that major. And then after my second quarter here, I kind of identified [with my VAPA major] as where I think I belonged and started trying to get my way into studio classes and apply to the major and was accepted with very, very crazy results.

She noted that having more experience with academic institutions has taught her that “in any place that you’re going in life is as much as you advocate, you can get what you want.”

Similarly, Karla was interested in switching between two separate performing arts majors even after her counselors told her that switching would add an additional year to her academic career. However, with her experience in the workplace, she was able to negotiate with the school in order to switch and still graduate in two years, taking lessons with a faculty member who talked to the administration on her behalf.

Adriana and Karla shared their experiences about self-advocating while at Western even when they were discouraged. Even if it meant extending their TTD, both students knew that switching to their VAPA majors would benefit them and their careers. Studies indicate that the support from institutional agents is critical to the success and positive academic experience of transfer students (Acevedo-Gil & Zerquera, 2016; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

VAPA Transfer Student Recommendations for Supporting VAPA Transfers

Finding #7: Participants most frequently suggest various forms of connection.

Finally, when participants were asked for recommendations for supporting other VAPA transfers in R1 institutions toward normative degree completion (RQ3), multiple students suggested that social connection was a crucial factor in supporting VAPA transfer students toward graduation. Jose indicated that there are a variety of solutions to struggling students and that “there’s definitely resources where you can get help.” He also noted that for art-specific resources, “there’s not many, but [students] can always reach out to other individuals” for guidance. Karla likewise stated how important it is to create relationships with peers “and get any type of information you need from them,” both while at Western and beyond graduation, in terms of sustaining an artistic career.

Performance stress. Transfer students also acknowledged the potential benefits of caring for mental health in addressing the toll that “intense” coursework and extracurricular activities take on them mentally and physically. Four out of eight participants expressed the challenges of being in majors where they are judged on musical skill on an almost daily basis. When asked about factors that have extended his TTD, Carlos talked about the toll of having to perform in front of peers and faculty over a long period of time. He shared:

I guess the only thing would maybe be like my mental health is probably the biggest one. It just, especially when you’re performing all the time, it’s really, it can be really difficult to be putting yourself out there 24/7 even when you’re feeling awful and that can be really hard.

According to Carlos, he is not the only VAPA student experiencing this. He compared performing to “having a test every day” and how this is challenging particularly for students who

“struggle with like anxiety or depression.” Carlos wanted new VAPA transfer students to acknowledge the importance of mental health in a major that is competitive. Similarly, Adriana mentioned the struggles she goes through when going to her major courses and how this compared to traditional large lectures. She shared:

It’s hard, you know? You’re dealing with your personal stuff and then you have to go in front of your entire faculty to get graded. It’s not like I can go to a lecture and hide behind a desk and no one will notice.

For students who are accustomed to bigger lectures in community college settings, coming to Western as a VAPA major means smaller class sizes and more one-on-one instruction with faculty. Despite the stress, VAPA transfer students said their majors prepared them for self-care in the high-stress careers after they graduate. They acknowledged that knowing how to take care of themselves would help them succeed in their profession.

Conclusion

Extending TTD was not an ideal situation for many VAPA transfer students, with participants frequently frustrated by navigating the institution and its inconsistencies, or its lack of transparency. VAPA transfer students shared their academic experiences and how their personal backgrounds affected their time at Western, especially how various forms of capital and identity impacted the way they were treated. While speaking to participants, it was clear that the intersectionality of their identities affected their academic experiences and attributed to extending their TTD. However, all participants expressed that staying longer at Western benefitted their academic and artistic growth, a finding specifically notable for VAPA students, who are afforded more time to produce art and/or perform. Given the deep reliance of all participants on social and emotional bonds within and outside of Western, extending TTD was

important to VAPA transfer students in providing more opportunity to take advantage of networks and training that would prepare them for their careers.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Introduction

When I first began this study, I wanted to approach it through an institutional culture lens that would shed light on the institutional challenges VAPA transfer students face at a research institution. Although the literature highlights the personal challenges that non-traditional students encounter in large four-year institutions such as social and economic capital (Astin, 2006; Bound et al., 2012; Messer & Wolter, 2010; Runyan, 2011; Wei & Horn, 2009), I did not want to focus on personal challenges since they are not within the power of institutional administrators to rapidly resolve. However, as participants became more vulnerable about their personal experiences, especially participants of color, it became necessary to confront how the intersectionality of identities bring additional academic challenges that are not directly imposed by the university but are nevertheless cultivated by the culture of an institution set up to serve residential and financially dependent students (Blumenstyk, 2018; Cook & King, 2004; Duke-Benfield, 2015; Laanan, 2001; Ishitani, 2008; Rosenbaum et al., 2006; Townsend, 2007; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Though my original approach to this study centered on institutional factors surrounding TTD, interviews revealed more about how students' various roles and concurrent identities affected TTD. The study's focus then shifted to the VAPA transfer students' experiences at Western especially when transfer student literature highlights that a transfer student's chance of success depends considerably on their racial/ethnic background and the wealth of their community (Dowd, 2007; Parker & Bustillos, 2007). Even though these can be identified as personal, non-academic challenges, they are brought upon by systemic inequities that exist in all types of institutions, including educational ones, and they add to an

understanding of student need. The recommendations for research that follow will thus center VAPA transfer student experience and address the responsibility of institutions to support them.

All participants had spent at least a year at Western after transferring into VAPA majors that required an audition and/or portfolio as part of the admissions process. The eight students ranged in identity and experience, with five non-white and three white participants, five men and three women, and five first-generation students. Their ages ranged from 22 to 40 and their TTD ranged from six to nine quarters, with many of the students graduating more quickly taking more than the allotted units per quarter and/or taking summer classes.

The findings in this study shed a new light on the experiences of VAPA transfer students at R1 institutions. These students shared similar challenges as those of traditional transfer students (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007; Ishitani & McKittrick, 2010; Sims & Barnett, 2015), but they faced additional challenges that current literature does not address. For example, in addition to lacking parental academic support, first-generation VAPA transfer students carried the emotional labor of convincing their parents that majoring in a VAPA field would be lucrative after graduation. In addition, VAPA transfer students could not rely on community college counselors as most were not familiar with VAPA majors' transfer requirements. The current counseling systems do not account for the nuanced needs of VAPA fields of study, including their portfolio and audition requirements, need for studio or practice space, and course equivalencies. The following sections first outlines the significance and then the limitations of findings to help identify strengths and weaknesses of the study that affect the interpretation of results (Creswell, 2015). Then, I explore the implications that the findings have for research and practice and include my recommendations for research institutions. Finally, I conclude the chapter with my personal reflection on the findings.

Significance of Findings

This study used qualitative methods to fill a research gap about a subset of transfer students who had not previously been studied. Interview analysis revealed that participants uniquely face isolation from two important support groups: their peers and, sometimes, family. They described social separation from the traditional students who were younger and had less professional experience. These constant challenges on their time and experience occurs in a field where social connections are particularly important. Compared to other majors, VAPA majors require networking to succeed and to work while in school and in their careers beyond graduation. In addition, VAPA transfer students initially lacked the support from their families when it came to majoring in VAPA areas. Literature on community college students' social capital indicates that parental support and involvement is low for students whose parents did not attend college (Kuh et al., 2006; Wassmer et al., 2004); however, the current research does not address the unique situation VAPA transfer students face with their parents' opposition to pursuing a higher education degree in VAPA fields, perceiving them as impractical or unnecessary. The findings thus make clear a need to study and support the needs of the VAPA transfer students, especially the students of color, who face more responsibility and resistance at home.

The findings also indicate new understanding of the bureaucratic institutional barriers that transfer students with VAPA majors in particular face, including processes to transfer and the expectation and/or reality that these students will repeat courses. Although research institutions like Western pressure students to graduate within a normative TTD, this study indicates that they may not provide the necessary resources for VAPA students to graduate on time and, in certain instances, institutions themselves imposed challenges that increased TTD for

VAPA transfer students. Participants' experiences struggling to communicate with administrators, including not being able to find current and accurate information pre-transfer and then being met with resistance by school officials when petitioning for more courses or to avoid course repetition post-transfer, making clear the need for more VAPA-specific resources. The administration of R1 universities is faceless and difficult to navigate for many transfer students (Davies & Kratky, 2000; Fitzpatrick, Henninger, & Taylor, 2014; Shulock & Moore, 2005), but VAPA transfer students face further barriers. Administrators may not know where to direct questions, and when reached, they often give inconsistent answers about VAPA majors (for example, about petitioning or auditing). A surprising finding from this study was that though students struggled with avoiding the repetition of courses once they got to Western, many also found positive benefits of such repetition. Their reportage that this provided more expertise and additional time for their practice is specific to VAPA students, and new to the literature on VAPA majors.

Finally, the narratives of VAPA transfer students in this study add information that could assist administrators and faculty in implementing a welcoming and trusting culture in institutions not focused on the arts. Participant voices shed light on the implications of transferring from a community college to an R1 university as VAPA majors. They make clear that though they can benefit from a R1 university's academic and social resources, research institutions are currently not designed for VAPA transfer students, on academic and social levels. Universities with a research focus frequently prioritize their financial investments and academic identities in non-arts fields, and even non-VAPA transfer students struggle to adjust to a large university setting. Participants in this study were not receiving the help necessary to transfer even after participants sought help from administrators at both institutions. Specifically, students did not receive course

credit information that would prevent them from retaking courses and extending their TTD, as established by Fitzpatrick et al. (2014) and Shulock and Moore (2005). Further, the R1 university lacked understanding or care regarding how to best support VAPA transfer students. Specifically, it failed to provide resources aimed at helping VAPA transfer students both academically and personally. This is important because R1 universities provide a vast amount of resources to traditional students in STEM and humanities majors, which leave VAPA transfer students at a disadvantage (Sturm, 2012). This study helps concretize the dynamic role that school plays for artists, as a direct gateway to their careers through networks and professional opportunities, a potentially different role than students in STEM or other humanities, and adds to the research on transfer students by focusing on VAPA majors.

Implications for Future Research

Although there is a plethora of research on the transition of traditional community college students to large four-year institutions, there are no recent studies investigating the experiences of VAPA transfer students pre- and post-transfer. There is a clear opportunity for future research to further investigate the ways in which R1 institutions support their VAPA transfer students, and how their experiences overlap with two groups of students: non-VAPA transfer students and traditional VAPA students. A follow-up study exploring how VAPA transfer students navigate their four-year institutions as older, and sometimes professional, students could identify how the intersectionality of their identities compares to the other student populations. Further, there is a need to investigate how R1 institutions serve, and fail to serve, these students who are ready to enter the professional world. This research could encompass both academic and social aspects of the student experience, given that the social aspects impact their outcomes.

Second, future studies would benefit from quantitative methods; quantitative and qualitative data from VAPA transfer students could together yield more information for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of existing institutional support systems. For example, implementing a quantitative survey as a collection method would increase sample size and generate generalizable findings across institutions (Creswell, 2015). Creating surveys with pre-established themes such as student satisfaction of the transfer process, campus resources, and institutional culture can yield data that is repeatable and objective. Expanding data from this study is important, especially when the VAPA transfer student population is increasing at R1 institutions but lack the necessary resources to encourage students to graduate within a normative TTD.

Finally, studies pertaining to artists' transitions from their studies to their careers have outlined the fact that students in VAPA fields are often not well-equipped to successfully transition (Bennett, 2009; Throsby & Zednik, 2012). Similarly, participants in this study extended their TTD to gather better skills that made them feel more employable in a competitive workforce. However, contradicting the findings available in the literature about transitions for VAPA students, participants in this study felt that their education cultivated transferable skills that would allow them to become more employable after graduation. It is possible that their non-traditional student status and work experience would provide different results in studies on their transitions to working after graduation. Future research can explore how students utilize these transferable skills into the workforce and how institutions can translate that knowledge into programming that encourages VAPA majors to graduate within a normative TTD.

Implications for Future Practice

The experiences that VAPA transfer students have on R1 campuses are underrepresented in the literature and need to be foregrounded by institutional cultures. It is critical for administrators and faculty to ensure that VAPA transfers are supported pre-transfer, post-transfer, and post-graduation to ensure they receive equitable opportunities compared to traditional students in non-VAPA majors. Participants expressed a lack of communication with the school, both pre- and post-transfer. University administrators could look at the experiences VAPA students have at their institutions and allow the data to inform new policies that meet the needs of their students and help them graduate within a normative TTD. This study may be useful for educational leaders, practitioners, and students as they make sense of the challenges they face while preparing for transfer to a four-year university.

Recommendations for Practice

Assigning a Community College Transfer Counselor

Designating a community college transfer counselor for VAPA majors would give transfer students a common person who could answer questions about the transfer process. Participants in this study expressed difficulty around finding a point person who could guide them through the transfer process. Similar to counselors assigned to special populations such as student-veterans and first-generation students, the VAPA counselor should have an understanding of the issues unique to VAPA transfer students, a knowledge of the community college VAPA programs that the majority of transfer students are coming from, and in-depth knowledge of the requirements, policies, and procedures of VAPA majors. This position could help alleviate the barriers students face in audition processes and supplemental applications as documented in the literature (Fitzpatrick et al., 2014; Gavin, 2012).

Create Articulation Pathways and Partnerships with Community Colleges

Throughout interviews, participants expressed their discontent with the lack of knowledge of community college counselors to assist them with the transfer process, particularly due to the lack of available information from the school. Participants shared that while they were able to complete their GE requirements through articulation agreements, these agreements were nonexistent for their specific VAPA programs. Community college and four-year institution faculty should meet and align the learning outcomes and expectations of lower-division courses that would be comparable to their respective programs, and potentially to create articulation agreements in the VAPA fields. As curriculum is ever-evolving, faculty and administrators should maintain recurring meetings to continually inform community college counselors of curricular and admission updates. By doing so, VAPA students would be reassured of the content equivalency of their courses pre-transfer, preventing them from retaking credits that extend their TTD and avoiding an additional burden on students (Chase, 2018).

A second institutional support for VAPA transfer students would be the creation of comprehensive community college and university partnerships in order to expose VAPA transfer students to the four-year institution and prepare them for transition. This can include annual artistic collaborations with current four-year students and faculty, or artistic summer bridge programs that will prepare them for upper-division coursework. Research supports the potential impact of these partnerships for vulnerable students (Anderson, 2015; Borden, 2004; Shapiro et al., 2015). In addition, faculty and administrators should visit their prospective students and create intentional outreach programs. University faculty would benefit from learning about the current academic culture and student population at community colleges, given that faculty members who are removed from the educational experiences of their prospective students are

less able to create a learning environment that promotes successful adjustment (Jackson & Laanan, 2015). This aligns with the study conducted by Chrystal et al. (2013), in which transfer students indicated the importance of the Admission Partnership Program (APP) in helping them connect with administrators and transition to their four-year institution. The first step in building a campus that is transfer-friendly is bridging students' experiences to the academic expectations of the four-year institution.

Create Partnerships With Existing University Campus Entities

Western has an abundance of campus resources to help various student populations academically succeed; however, most of these resources are not equipped to help students in VAPA majors. VAPA transfer students, even while not utilizing campus resources, report positive attitudes toward knowing that there are resources available. Institutional faculty and administrators have the opportunity to build partnerships with existing programs on campus to benefit VAPA students without exhausting their resources. For example, one VAPA participant indicated not using campus resources because there was not much there for them. Although Western holds multiple tutoring services, none offer VAPA-related tutoring. Partnerships can also create broader awareness of VAPA student needs.

Campus resources could also expand their timing to consider the needs of VAPA students. Participants described hectic schedules that included early classes, late rehearsals, and weekend concerts/exhibits; expanding hours of resources on campus to include evenings and/or weekends can help students take advantage of resources that are available to peers with traditional course schedules.

Create Partnerships Within VAPA Majors

One area VAPA participants mentioned lacking was possible collaboration with students in other VAPA majors; there is currently no formalized structure to connect with students in other professional schools. For example, one student talked about the potential, as a music composer, to work with theater, film, or dance students but not having the necessary avenues to connect. A few collaborations already exist, including between musical theater students in the School of Film and classical performing students in the School of Music. However, these opportunities could extend to other areas as well. Since VAPA transfer students have expressed difficulty connecting with other students during their transition, creating inter-school curriculum requirements could increase the exposure of new VAPA transfers to students in other majors. Creating partnerships with other professional schools would expand the social and professional networks of VAPA transfer students.

Alumni Networks for Post-Graduation Support

Participants highlighted how peer networks at Western also translated to professional opportunities outside academia. One recommendation for the school would be to create an alumni database that gathers updated information from alumni interested in networking with one another, as well as connecting with students. In order to attain meaningful information and facilitate helpful exchanges, the creation of this database should focus on institutional engagement in alumni friendships and connections. In addition, as mentioned by participants, VAPA majors are inherently multidisciplinary and hold valuable transferable skills. Seeing alumni in various career paths can encourage VAPA students to expand their career prospects and apply their transferable skills in various professional fields. This would also encourage them to graduate within a normative TTD and begin their professional careers.

In order to receive information from alumni, VAPA faculty and administrators need to create meaningful relationships and communication with alumni. VAPA faculty and administrators are at an advantage to create meaningful connections with students and alumni as their case loads are smaller than their STEM and humanities counterparts. Participants in this study expressed the necessity to rely on faculty and advisors to receive pertinent academic information. There needs to be meaningful collaboration between faculty, staff, and the development office to ensure alumni have the opportunity to personally engage. In this role, faculty and staff act as more than educators—they are an extension of the development office by preserving and strengthening alumni relationships with the institution.

Limitations

One limitation for this study was the small sample size of VAPA transfer students at Western. Only students who were required to audition and/or submit a portfolio for admission to their programs were eligible for the study. This eliminated three programs out of 11, leaving only VAPA transfer students in seven programs eligible for recruitment. In addition, due to state safer-at-home orders after COVID-19, it became complicated to finalize the recruitment of more participants as they were in the midst of dealing with a pandemic, and new data reporting relationships with the school could be skewed by the present circumstances. It is important to mention that interviewing a small sample of students from one institution limits the scope and perspective of the study. The experiences of these students are unique and cannot be generalized to the VAPA transfer population.

Another limitation is that of my own bias as a researcher. As a former advisor in two eligible VAPA majors at Western, it is possible that my past experiences may have shaped my interpretations and analysis of data. Although it is not possible for researchers to completely

remove our biases, it is important to use expertise in the field productively without letting our bias affect our research (Maxwell, 2013).

Finally, the use of snowball sampling had the potential to skew the type of participants in the study. All VAPA students who participated were highly motivated and involved in their programs; they may have been likelier to participate in the study, and the experiences they reported could have tended positive compared to other VAPA transfer students. It is important to further study if this pattern is unique to this particular group of VAPA students or to all VAPA transfer students at research institutions.

Personal Reflection

VAPA transfer students who were highlighted in this study were incredibly candid about their experiences in their transfer process. They described, with great depth, the added layers of challenges not present in the literature, including a lack of family support for an art-based major, compared to traditional transfer students.

Similar to the literature on traditional transfer students, students of color were faced with not only institutional challenges but also personal challenges, including funding, additional responsibilities, and the lack of support systems (Nora & Crisp, 2009; Wassmer et al., 2004). It was remarkable to see how student experiences at Western differed based on race; VAPA transfer students of color shared similar institutional challenges as white students, but dealt with an added layer of personal challenges during their transitions.

However, this did not deter participants of color from pursuing academic careers in VAPA majors; if anything, they were more motivated to pursue it. Felipe, a father, described “not having the privilege not to work hard.” For this reason, VAPA students of color developed strategies for their transition that existed outside the formal procedures of their individual four-

year institutions and their community colleges. In general, the coursework for VAPA majors involves a great deal of problem solving skills, a perspective which could shift the limited understanding of the artist as a creative individual to a broader view of artists grounded in the realities of continual problem solving.

One tension in this study was the focus on the institution's role, while students of color dealt with many challenges that burdened their academic journeys. Rosa's father, for example, had passed away the summer before she entered Western, which not only took an emotional toll on her family, but also a financial one. As she deals with grieving the loss of her father, Rosa has to be a support system for her mother. Karla's boyfriend went to prison the summer she started at Western. For the summer, Karla became the caretaker of his two children until their grandparents could get custody of them. These are only examples of what participants of color had to deal with before in their path to Western. As a researcher, I sometimes noted that the challenges they face at Western do not seem like the decisive factor in the bigger scheme of their everyday lives, especially for the first-generation, working-class students. In my data analysis, it became clear that students of color have managed and continue to respond to institutional challenges at Western in large and small ways. They are accustomed to advocating for themselves and facing obstacles daily. This study focused on the experience of students, and the findings indicate many variable facets, including the resilience of students who are outside the status quo as non-traditional students, and as transfer students in VAPA majors, as well as by race, class, and experience. Though there were commonalities between students about the use of capital and the experience of studying the arts, transferring between institutions was a very distinct journey for each individual student.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Opening: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I want to reiterate that everything that is discussed in this interview is completely confidential. There will be no identifiable information used throughout the interview or in the final product of this process. You have the right to stop the interview at any moment.

The purpose of this interview is to understand your experience as a VAPA transfer student at UCLA and how you have navigated institutional and major requirements.

1. First, let's start by talking about your experience with art/dance/music/theater.
 - a. How you were introduced to it?
 - b. When did you know/decide it was the subject you wanted to major in?
2. Transferring to UCLA.
 - a. How did you prepare at your community college to transfer to UCLA in this particular major?
[Potential probes]: Did you receive any type of support from instructors/advisors/mentors/peers at your community college? Did you contact anyone at UCLA?
 - b. What was it like to complete the supplemental application process? How did you prepare for it? (RQ1)
[Potential probes]: Did you have to upload a pre-screening video or portfolio? Did you know about the supplemental application process before you began the transfer application process?
 - c. Did you receive any guidance from family, friends, teachers, or counselors with the supplemental application? If so, how did they help? (RQ1b)
 - d. Would you be willing to share your experience about your audition (or for completing a final portfolio)? How did you prepare for it? Did you receive any guidance from family, friends, teachers, or counselors for this part of the application? (RQ1b)
 - e. How did you navigate the credit transfer process? (RQ1)
[Potential probes]: Did you know in advance which courses would transfer? Did you receive any guidance for completing IGETC or completing major transfer work? Did you contact anyone at UCLA?
3. Tell me about your experience once you transferred to UCLA?
 - a. How well prepared did you feel you were academically by the time you transferred? (RQ1)
 - b. How well prepared did you feel you were academically by the time you transferred? (RQ1) Was there an initial evaluation process of your artistic skill before you transferred to UCLA? Tell me about this.
[Potential probes]: Were you aware of this process before you transferred? Please explain. (RQ1a)

- c. Did you have any units from your community college courses transfer to UCLA? (RQ1)
 - d. What skills/training did you need to retake at UCLA that you had already taken at your community college? [RQ1]
[Potential probes]: What was this experience like for you?
 - e. How have you negotiated completing academic and artistic requirements for your program? How do regular classes affect your performance classes? (RQ1a)
 - f. How have you utilized campus resources (tutoring, career, transfer center, etc.), if at all? Tell me about your experience with that. (RQ1a)
 - g. What personal factors would you identify, if any, that have affected your TTD (double majoring, minoring, studying abroad, etc.)? Please explain. (RQ1b)
 - h. UCLA offers resources such as the Career Center, Transfer Center, and the Academic Advancement Program to provide support to students. What is your experience, if any, with these resources? What other resources have helped you navigate your time here at UCLA?
 - i. What would you identify as the most critical personal support to help you with your academic and artistic requirements? (RQ1b).
4. I have a last few questions for you.
- a. Imagine you are a mentor for a new UCLA VAPA major transfer. What do you tell them and what advice do you give? What do you tell them to do and not do? What are your recommendations for another student who is thinking of transferring to UCLA as a VAPA major? (RQ2)
 - b. What do you wish existed at UCLA to help you with the transfer process? (RQ2)
 - c. Is there anything else that we should have talked about but didn't? Is there anything else you can tell me about your experience as a VAPA transfer student at UCLA and how you have navigated completing two sets of requirements within a normative TTD?

Closing: Thank you for your participation. I will transcribe the interview and contact you if there are any areas that need clarification.

APPENDIX B

Participant Consent Form

University of California, Los Angeles

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Academic Perceptions of Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Transfer Students in Research Institutions

Brenda Galvez M.Ed. – Diane Durkin PhD, from the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a community college transfer student attending a research institution in a VAPA major. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study will help uncover how institutional factors affect the academic experiences of community college VAPA transfer students at an R1 institution. It will assist universities in developing supports to help VAPA transfer students graduate within two years, or a normative time-to-degree (TTD).

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- One 1:1 45-50 minute audio recorded interview.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take a total of one interview session. Participants will be contacted once interview has been transcribed and receive a copy of the transcription for data accuracy.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no potential risks or discomforts

Will I be paid for participating?

You will receive a \$35 Amazon gift card upon completion of the study.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudonyms, keeping data on a password protected laptop and an encrypted cloud based storage platform (Box).

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. Study participants will be able to review, edit, and erase the tapes/recordings of their research participation if they wish to do so.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

Brenda Galvez at 951-488-4597 or bagalvez4488@gmail.com
Prof. Diane Durkin at durkin@humnet.ucla.edu

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

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