Nearly all of the survey respondents were traditionally-aged college students, under the age of 25 at the time of the survey. The survey respondents had children. The interviewed students were primarily non-traditionally-aged, with most between 26-35 years old (Goldrich-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Lichtenberger, 2011). Hence, reverse transfer students account for a disproportionate portion of the four-year to two-year institution transfer population, and are expected to follow traditional patterns of behavior. The phenomenon of reverse transfer was not expected to result in a significant portion of the community college student population, although it was perceived as a potential barrier to college completion.

ABSTRACT

Attention to reverse transfer (i.e., student mobility from a four- to a two-year institution) has increased in recent years due to its association with extremely low rates of bachelor’s completion. In light of the national completion agenda to increase the number of students with higher education degrees/credentials, examining reasons related to reverse transfer is pertinent. Recent research has established that nearly one-fifth of college students reverse transfer; but more alarmingly, less than a quarter of reverse transfer students eventually earn a bachelor’s degree and even fewer earn a certificate or associate’s degree while at their respective community college (Goldrich-Rab and Pfeffer, 2009; Lichtenberger, 2011). Hence, reverse transfer students account for a disproportionate portion of the four-year to two-year institution transfer population, and are expected to follow traditional patterns of behavior. The phenomenon of reverse transfer was not expected to result in a significant portion of the community college student population, although it was perceived as a potential barrier to college completion.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, attention to reverse transferring (i.e., mobility from a four- to a two-year institution) has increased due to its association with extremely low rates of bachelor’s completion. In light of the national completion agenda to increase the number of students with higher education degrees/credentials, examining reasons related to reverse transferring is pertinent. Recent research has established that nearly one-fifth of college students reverse transfer; but more alarmingly, less than a quarter of reverse transfer students eventually earn a bachelor’s degree and even fewer earn a certificate or associate’s degree while at their respective community college (Goldrich-Rab and Pfeffer, 2009; Lichtenberger, 2011). Hence, reverse transfer students account for a disproportionate portion of the four-year to two-year institution transfer population, and are expected to follow traditional patterns of behavior. The phenomenon of reverse transfer was not expected to result in a significant portion of the community college student population, although it was perceived as a potential barrier to college completion.

METHODS

The results presented here focus on the general question ‘Why did you transfer to the community college?’ To hear in students’ own words their reasons for reverse transferring. Interview and online survey data were collected from students who reversed transferred from a four-year institution to one of two regional community colleges. Questions were based on Perna & Thomas’ (2008) model of student success, Tinto’s (1975) theory of integration, and Astin’s (1999) theory of involvement. After numerous attempts to recruit participants from all four-year institutions and phone interviews and 24 students completed an online survey (out of a possible 839 students). Email reminders, an automated phone call, and posted flyers were utilized for recruitment. Students completing the interview received a $25 gift card from a national retailer. Students completing the survey received a $10 or $25 gift card to a national retailer.

RESULTS

Overall, students’ responses related to school context (49 responses) most often, followed by internal context (42 responses) as their reasons for reversing transferring. Students mentioned the perceived affordability of community colleges in general terms (i.e., “less expensive”, “cheaper”). However, in many cases, affordability was viewed in relative terms with students comparing the community college expense to that of their initial four-year college, particularly related to the expense of general education courses. Affordability was also defined in terms outside of tuition costs, such as being able to save money by living with family or being able to maintain work schedules due to close proximity to the community college. Lastly, several students indicated the desire to stay close to home as one of the benefits of their “own pocket”, thus, cost was extremely important to them. “I’m living at home because it’s cheaper, and the tuition at [the community college] is a lot cheaper than [the four-year college].”

DISCUSSION

Fit. Some students described a better fit in terms of the smaller size or location of the four-year college, additional academic supports, feeling safe, and less rigorous course work to ease them back into postsecondary education. “I had my own space and community colleges is terms of receiving help and support.”

To “ease my way back in...less rigorous coursework.”

Internal Context. Students frequently mentioned reasons relating to internal context as influencing their decision to transfer, with most often, family/friends as their reasons for reverse transferring. As seen in the figure, words related to school context (e.g., classes, program, degree) are the largest which signifies words used most often by students and survey respondents. Further discussion of each context area is provided, in order of highest endorsements by students. Quotes from students’ responses are also included to illustrate the findings.

REFERENCES

CONTACT

Brenda Klostermann, IERC, breklos@siue.edu