

Dimensions of the Transfer Choice Gap: Experiences of Latina and Latino Students Who Navigated Transfer Pathways

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This article draws on the voices of three Latina and two Latino students who navigated transfer pathways from a community college to four-year colleges. Although all but one of these students was eligible for admission to the selective University of California system, none of them exercised that choice. In fact, only one enrolled in a selective university. The transfer outcomes for the group interviewed illustrate the informational and cultural barriers that students must overcome in order to exercise choice in the selection of transfer institutions. The findings indicate that institutional “transfer agents” are needed to help qualified community college students overcome informational and cultural barriers to transfer into selective institutions. The students’ transfer stories reveal the detrimental consequences of lack of access to transfer agents.

In 2009, the election of Barack Obama as the first African American president and the appointment of Sonia Sotomayor as the first Latina (or Latino) Supreme Court justice underscored the effects of historic, institutionalized, and contemporary discrimination on access to positions of political power for members of traditionally minoritized racial and ethnic groups in the United States. The lack of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity at highly selective institutions has come under criticism in numerous books and news articles, which call on these elite institutions to reform their admissions practices (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005; Carnevale & Rose, 2004; Kahlenberg, 2004; Klein, 2005). In 2005, Nobel laureate and former South African president Nelson Mandela addressed an Amherst College gathering and urged that highly

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selective liberal arts college to open its doors wider to underserved populations of students, making a case for the responsibility of elite institutions to ensure access:

All institutions of higher education have the obligation to open the door widely. Above all, those who educate more rigorously carry the highest obligation. You have the quality, the ability, the standing, and the support to press further. I hope you will show the will. (Robertson, 2005, p. A3)

These critiques press the need for greater fairness in the distribution of access. Supporting college enrollment and a student's "choice" of the highest quality institution at which she or he is eligible to enroll are core principles of higher education funding in the United States. The choice principle holds that no student should be constrained from enrolling at the institution that best suits his or her talents and abilities based on inability to pay.

Equity issues quickly emerge when we discuss college choice, because enrollment at highly selective institutions¹ that educate the nation's "elite" professional, business, and civic leaders is correlated with racial ethnic background (Bowen & Bok, 1998) and socioeconomic status (Bowen et al., 2005; Kahlenberg, 2004).

California, the site of our study and the most populous U.S. state, is of particular concern because it has the fifth-largest economy in the world, a highly educated baby boom generation nearing retirement age, and an educational system that has failed to prepare the new Hispanic majority to take its place. Myers (2007) describes demographic change and the economy in California as "headed on a collision course" that can be avoided "only by elevating the educational level of the newest generation entering the workforce" (p. 199). That newest generation is distinctly Latino.² The share of Latinos in the California work force is expected to grow to 40 percent by 2020 and to constitute the majority by 2040. Yet current educational disparities in the state signal the emergence of a dangerously polarized society with a shrinking professional and educated middle class and a growing population of Latinos in the unskilled labor force. It is clear that society must increase its investments in Latino higher education to ensure the greater social welfare.

Toward that aim, Latinos must have greater access to highly selective colleges and universities, which, compared to other higher education institutions, convey special benefits to their graduates. Those who graduate from elite institutions experience substantially higher earnings in comparison with peers who earned equivalent degrees from less selective institutions (Zhang, 2008). This is in part due to greater access to professional and graduate study among elite college graduates, including more prestigious programs at major research institutions.

In addition, those who attend highly selective institutions are much more likely to graduate than their peers at less selective institutions. Comparing African Americans and Hispanics with similar academic characteristics, the

likelihood of graduation is 32 percent greater for students enrolled at highly selective institutions than for those enrolled at nonselective ones. The higher rates of degree completion are not surprising, given that students at elite institutions benefit from a much higher concentration of resources, both human (counselors, academic tutors, and administrators) and material (computers, learning centers, books, journal subscriptions, and facilities) at institutions of greater selectivity.

The overrepresentation of Latinas and Latinos at community colleges and their underrepresentation at selective institutions contribute to the gap in bachelor's degree completion between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites, which is roughly 20 percent. Without increased enrollment and degree attainment in undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs, particularly at highly selective institutions, Latinos are likely to continue to be denied access to positions of leadership and power (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2006). In addition, they are less likely to acquire the credentials to teach at the university level, where they would be in positions to mentor the next generation of Hispanic leaders (Gandara, 1986).

Beyond the implications for the economic well-being of Latino families, communities, and the nation as a whole (especially as Latinos come to represent larger shares of the overall population), the underrepresentation of Latinos at elite institutions highlights the fact that a college choice and admissions system that we like to think of as meritocratic is not (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Bowen et al., 2005; Douthat, 2005; Dowd, 2003; Labaree, 1997). If college choice in the United States were meritocratic, the distribution of access to highly selective institutions would not be correlated with racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic characteristics. It is clear that the distribution of innate intelligence, talent, and potential is not correlated with these social categories.

Inequities in elite college participation and graduation rates point to the need to rectify unequal access to high-quality schooling, advising, and college financing. If a democratic society chooses to support elite institutions, which produce high numbers of the country's civic and corporate leaders, the rationing of access to those institutions must be democratically governed. The Supreme Court decisions in the University of Michigan affirmative action cases (*Gratz v. Bollinger*, 2003; *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003) affirmed that providing access to elite institutions and to positions of leadership for "all segments of American society" is a compelling democratic interest (cited in Bowen et al., 2005, p. 344, note 54).

In our previous work (Bensimon, 2007; Dowd, 1998; Dowd et al., 2006; Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008; Dowd & Melguizo, 2008), we illustrated the inequities in transfer access from community colleges to highly selective institutions. Transfer access to elite institutions has become more constrained in recent decades, and very few low-income students are among those who transfer. Transfer pathways primarily serve as a route to elite institutions for middle- and high-income students. This is particularly problematic because the

community college and the opportunity to transfer provide a second chance to students who had only a “bare opportunity” to demonstrate their merit for admission to an elite institution. Among the possible solutions to the lack of diversity at elite institutions, transfer is one that merits considerable attention. Access to selective universities, such as the University of California (UC) system, is constrained by a lack of appropriate course work in high schools where Latinos are concentrated. Community colleges provide the bulk of compensatory education in the United States and typically have smaller class sizes and a professoriate focused on teaching as their primary responsibility.

As is true nationally, the majority of Latinos who enroll in postsecondary education in California, about 75 percent, enroll in community colleges (Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005, p. 283). Among students attending the community colleges in California with the highest rates of transfer to the UC system, only about five out of every one thousand Latino first-time students make their way to a UC (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2009). Latinos represent only 13 percent of those enrolled at the highly selective UC campuses, which represents a substantial gap in comparison to their representation at 43 percent in California’s college-age population (Moore & Shulock, 2007, p. 2).

Among Latinos who were eligible to enroll at a UC campus in 2003, over 40 percent enrolled instead at a community college (Moore & Shulock, 2007, p. 9), which suggests their college choice process was constrained by factors other than academic preparedness.

In this study, we examine what we term the “transfer choice gap” (Bensimon, Dowd, Alford, & Trapp, 2007) for Latino students. This transfer choice gap refers to the phenomenon of students who are academically eligible for transfer to a selective university but elect to transfer instead to a less selective institution or not transfer at all. A principle of the California Master Plan adopted in 1960 was universal access and choice. It required the University of California and California State University Systems to reduce the enrollment of first-time freshmen in order to achieve a lower-division to upper-division ratio of 40 percent freshmen and sophomores and 60 percent juniors and seniors to provide transfer opportunities to the upper division for community college students, who were to be given priority in the admissions process. Over the last few years, there has been a slew of reports documenting the curricular barriers to transfer, such as the absence of a common course numbering system and the variation in course requirements by major field of study (*Overview of California’s Master Plan for Higher Education*, 2005); however, the Latino transfer choice gap has not been part of policy discussions about transfer to selective institutions in California.

This problem is not limited to California. Latinos with high levels of academic achievement are more likely to enroll in a community college than students of other racial/ethnic groups with similar levels of preparation (Kurlaender, 2006). Socioeconomic background also has a smaller influence on

their college choices, as relatively affluent Latino students are still more likely to elect to enroll in a community college (p. 12).

Although there are many reasons why some qualified Latino students may not want to attend a highly selective institution, from a social perspective it is imperative to support the graduation of Latinos from elite institutions in order to increase the number of Latinos who are well positioned, given existing power networks, to assume leadership of major social, economic, and civic institutions. Important principles of educational equity and opportunity are violated when access to elite institutions is cut off to those who, for a variety of reasons, begin postsecondary education in community colleges (for further discussion, see Dowd et al., 2008).

This article is based on an investigation of what happens to community college students in California who complete the curriculum and grade point average that qualifies them as “ready” for transfer to a four-year college.³ It explores potential causes for these gaps and highlights the important role of faculty members and counselors in addressing them.

Conceptual Framework

Students’ expectations and aspirations are socially constructed through their interactions with institutional agents and significant others in their lives (McDonough, 1994; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). These interactions also have important implications for students’ “sense of belonging” and socialization in various postsecondary settings (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Tierney and Venegas (2007) refer to this broader context of the college choice process as the “cultural ecology” (p. 20) of student decision making, where choices are influenced in educational environments by families and “fictive kin” (Tierney & Venegas, 2006, p. 1688), such as peers and mentors, and the “social environment of the neighborhood and community” (2007, p. 21).

A number of studies document the discrimination students may face in the pursuit of their college goals based on their racial-ethnic background (González, Stone, & Jovel, 2003; Linnehan, Weer, & Stonely, 2006; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Rendón, 1992; St. John, 2006). Counselors, for example, might not have “big college dreams” for their African American, Latina, and Latino students and their families because they view them as too poor or disinterested in higher education (McDonough & Calderone, 2006, p. 1712). Indeed, these students and their families may limit their postsecondary aspirations with the expectation that they will face discrimination in admissions, fields of study, or financial aid eligibility (Malcom, 2008; Malcom & Dowd, 2008; Trent, Lee, & Owens-Nicholson, 2006), making the role of counselors and other institutional agents in raising aspirations and encouraging the idea of elite status colleges all the more critical.

As DesJardins and Toutkoushian (2005) observe, “A further complication regarding student choice arises when uncertainty is introduced into the deci-

sion making process. This requires that we become more precise about beliefs, their role in the shaping of preferences, and how students respond to uncertainty” (p. 221). Experiences and perceptions of discrimination introduce legitimate uncertainty into the college choice process (Trent et al., 2006). For Latina and Latino students, uncertainty about belonging, or “fit,” may stem from the underrepresentation of Latinos at elite colleges and the lack of available role models, mentors, and advocates.

Stanton-Salazar (2001) lists six potential types of support that institutional agents can provide to help students navigate educational opportunities:

1. Funds of knowledge: for example, information about resources and how colleges operate
2. Bridging: acting as a human bridge to opportunities
3. Advocacy: acting on behalf of students to promote their interests
4. Role modeling: modeling behaviors associated with effective participation in academic domains
5. Emotional and moral support
6. Personalized and soundly based evaluative feedback, advice, and guidance: providing institutional funds of knowledge as well as genuine emotional and moral support (p. 268)

Authority figures in community or four-year college settings can play a special role in validating students’ aspirations to transfer from a community college to a selective college, a process that has been likened to “crossing the border” between two very different worlds and cultures (Dowd et al., 2006; Pak, Bensimon, Malcom, Marquez, & Park, 2006). In many cases, for students from marginalized or oppressed groups, this cultural border crossing necessitates deep-seated identity transformation, requiring support from others.

A number of emerging studies provide evidence of the ways in which institutional agents act to increase students’ sense of belonging and effectively facilitate their ability to navigate postsecondary education (Bensimon, 2005, 2007; Bensimon, Rueda, Dowd, & Harris, 2007; Dowd, Malcom, Nakamoto, & Bensimon, 2007; Pak et al., 2006; Rueda & Márquez, 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). With greater appreciation of the “lived experience” of college choice, faculty members, counselors, and administrators can gain insight into ways to support and increase the educational aspirations of their students. In addition, policy makers can develop better solutions by investing in strategies to develop the characteristics of institutional agents among faculty, counselors, and administrators who play important roles in influencing students’ choices.

We address the following research questions:

1. What are Latina and Latino students’ experiences in navigating transfer pathways?
2. What are their lived experiences of transfer (both successful and unsuccessful) to selective institutions?

3. What factors contribute to a transfer choice gap among Latino students?

Through a secondary analysis of interviews with a sample of five students who were eligible to transfer to highly selective institutions (the UC system), we investigated how the students in our sample tapped into the institutions' transfer resources, how they accessed information, how they sought advice about their transfer decisions, and why they decided to forgo the possibility of completing the baccalaureate at a UC campus. The most commonsense assumption—that the students had been denied admission—was ruled out by our review of student transcripts, which revealed that the majority of students in our sample were academically eligible to enroll at a UC.

Research Methods

A relatively small but growing body of research in the United States (Cejda, Casparis, Rhodes, & Kelly, 2008; González et al., 2003; McDonough, 1994; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; St. John, 2006; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002; Tierney & Venegas, 2006; Venegas, 2006) and in Great Britain uses ethnographic methods to examine the lived experiences of students in the college choice process and how their college aspirations are formed. As Dowd has argued previously, such studies are essential to understanding the “intersubjectivity” of the college choice process—the dynamic interplay between students' collegiate aspirations and decision making and the expectations of their parents, peers, teachers, and counselors as well as of society more broadly.

Here we report on the empirical findings of one component of a multiyear, multisite action research project.⁴ The analysis is based on the pretransfer experience of three Latinas and two Latinos who started their college education at a single California community college, Long Beach City College (LBCC), in 2000–2001 and who, at the time of their interviews, had transferred to a four-year college. These students were interviewed because they had met the requirements for transfer to a UC campus yet none had done so.

This sample is a subset of a group of twenty interviews conducted by counselors and faculty members at LBCC with former and current students who had transferred or who attempted to transfer to a selective university, such as a UC campus or the University of Southern California (USC). Through our involvement as action researchers, we designed the interview guide, provided training and modeling in the methods of interviewing, arranged for transcription, facilitated the inquiry team's analyses of the interview data through meetings, and drafted a report to the LBCC community reporting the findings (Bensimon et al., 2007). The purpose of the interviews was to engage practitioners in a structured study of a campus problem in a manner that would lead them to reflect on their own practices, as well as those of the institution, and to understand how they could be made more responsive to the needs

of students. Through the interviews, the practitioners-as-researchers identified: (1) students' educational goals when they entered LBCC, (2) their social and academic experiences as LBCC students, (3) challenges and successes in attempting to transfer, and (4) beliefs about the role LBCC played in their transfer experiences. The students' transcripts were reviewed to confirm that their grades and course work established their eligibility for UC transfer.

The interview transcripts were analyzed, and our results are presented using narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) in order to represent the students' lived experiences in their own voices. This approach is consistent with the advocacy principles of action research and of critical race theory (see, for example, Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004) and the notion that practitioners or readers draw on their own experiences and develop new knowledge, what qualitative researchers describe as naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 1995).

Population and Sample

The population under study was restricted to a very small group of students from among a multiyear (1999–2002), four-cohort sample of 27,422 students who had gained eligibility for transfer to a UC campus within three years of first matriculation. This population is referred to as “fast-track” students because only 2 percent, or 520 students of 27,422, managed to complete transfer requirements in three years (the expected, but no longer common, standard for “on-time” associate degree completion). In this group of 520 fast-track students, 80 percent of those who were eligible to transfer to a UC did not, as revealed by a comparison of LBCC's institutional data and matching records from the National Clearinghouse Data.⁵

Table 1 shows that about four out of five of the 520 transfer-eligible fast-track students from the 1999–2002 cohorts had transferred by spring 2006. The remainder, about 22 percent, had not transferred anywhere, leaving 112 students in what we have termed the “transfer gap,” that point between transfer eligibility and actual transfer. Among the 520 fast-track students, 322 were eligible for transfer to a California State University (CSU), having completed LBCC's curriculum Plan B; and 198 were eligible for transfer to a UC, having completed LBCC's curriculum Plan C. The majority of those who were CSU transfer-eligible (66 percent) transferred to a CSU; 10 percent transferred to another type institution; and 23 percent did not transfer at all.

However, of the 198 students who were eligible for transfer to some of California's most selective universities, including UCLA, UC San Diego, UC Santa Barbara, and UC Berkeley, only 20 percent, or 40 students, did in fact transfer to a UC. The majority of UC-eligible students (53 percent) transferred to a CSU campus instead; 8 percent transferred elsewhere; and 19 percent did not transfer at all. With only 20 percent electing to attend a UC campus, 80 percent experienced what we refer to as a transfer choice gap: they attended a less selective institution when one of greater selectivity and prestige was available to them.⁶

TABLE 1 Joint frequency distribution of transfer status by race and ethnicity among LBCC fast-track transfer-eligible students, 1999–2002

Racial/ Ethnic Group	CSU or UC-Eligible (Completed Plan B and Plan C)			UC-Eligible Only (Completed Plan C)		
	(1) N (% of eligible students)	(2) Transferred (% of transfers)	(3) Did Not Transfer ^a (% of non- transfers)	(4) N (% of eligible students)	(5) Transferred to a UC (% of transfers)	(6) Did Not Transfer to a UC (% of non- transfers)
African American/ Black	38 (7.3%)	35 (8.6%)	3 (2.7%)	17 (8.6%)	6 (15.0%)	11 (7.0%)
Asian/ Pacific Islander	107 (20.6%)	84 (20.6%)	23 (20.5%)	34 (17.2%)	6 (15.0%)	28 (17.7%)
Hispanic/ Latina/o	136 (26.2%)	111 (27.2%)	25 (22.3%)	48 (24.2%)	11 (27.5%)	37 (23.4%)
White	163 (31.4%)	121 (29.7%)	42 (37.5%)	68 (34.3%)	9 (22.5%)	59 (37.3%)
Other	76 (14.6%)	57 (14.0%)	19 (17.0%)	31 (15.7%)	8 (20.0%)	23 (14.6%)
TOTAL	520 (100%)	408 (100%)	112 ^b (100%)	198 (100%)	40 (100%)	158 (100%)

Note: “Fast-track” refers to students who became CSU or UC transfer-eligible within three years of first enrolling at LBCC. The sample studied is drawn from a multiyear population of 27,422 students who enrolled for the first time at LBCC in the years 1999–2002. Table 1 is reproduced from Bensimon, E. M., Dowd, A. C., Alford, H., & Trapp, F. (2007).

^a Students who had not transferred as of spring 2006 are treated as nontransfers.

^b This group includes 37 UC-eligible and 75 CSU-eligible students.

The racial/ethnic distribution of transfers (not shown) was similar to the distribution of transfer-qualified students in the fast-track group, with the exception that African Americans made up a smaller share (2.7 percent) of nontransfers than of the transfer-eligible group (7.3 percent). The Latino representation was 26 percent of the transfer-eligible fast-track group. That share was similar among the transfer categories, although it was slightly lower (27.5 percent) among UC-eligible who transferred to a UC.

The overall number of transfers from LBCC to a UC is strikingly small (only forty), despite the fact that the special fast-track subgroup that had achieved transfer eligibility in only three years was culled from a combined four-year (1999–2002) population of first-time students. The numbers transferring to a

UC from any group is extremely low, ranging from 6 African Americans and 6 Asian/Pacific Islanders to 11 Latinos. For each of those 11 Latinos who did transfer to a UC, there were at least 3 more in the UC-eligible pool of 48 Latinos who did not.

In our sample of 5 Latino students, only one transferred to a selective university (USC) despite the fact that 4 were eligible for transfer admission to a UC.⁷ As students who had achieved “transfer-ready” status, according to the rigorous transfer standards of the UC system, they were “extreme,” information-rich cases (Creswell, 1998). Not one of them applied or transferred to a UC campus despite the design of the California Master Plan, which presumes opportunities for transfer from the community colleges. The one student who was not UC-eligible was added to the sample because, besides the USC transfer student, she was the only one who transferred to a campus that was not within commuting distance, which suggested we could learn about support systems that enable a student to make such a move by including her in the study.

Results

As mentioned previously, the focus of this study was to understand the transfer choice gap. The narratives illustrate students’ lived experiences in navigating transfer pathways, which were characterized by a lack of knowledge about transfer opportunities. Students’ lack of knowledge and uncertain goals were amplified by the institution’s lack of resources to provide a full complement of services to assist students from the time they first enroll until they become ready to transfer.

Each narrative is structured to capture the presence or absence of the six forms of support that institutional agents can provide students. Ernesto was the one among the UC-qualified Latinas and Latinos to transfer to a highly selective institution (USC) and who did not fall into the transfer choice gap. His story is instructive because it depicts relationships with institutional agents whose actions—sharing funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Stanton-Salazar, 2001), serving as role models, and acting as bridges to resources—contributed to his successful transfer. In Ernesto’s story, we can also appreciate the role of siblings as role models and of peer social networks in intensifying and reinforcing high aspirations. The story of Graciela, featuring the “pink sheet” handout she received listing the courses she needed in order to transfer, shows that individual perseverance and determination is not all it takes to succeed. To realize her dream, Graciela needed better access to information and someone to help her plan a trajectory to USC, her “dream” institution. The pink sheet is not a substitute for funds of knowledge, role models, or emotional and moral support. The detriments of not being connected to institutional agents are illustrated by the similar experiences of Joaquin and Carola. They, like the great majority of community college students, transferred to the CSU campus that is closest to LBCC and within com-

muting distance. The college, CSU–Long Beach, is one of the most selective in the CSU system; however, the students’ stories suggest that they made a choice without knowing all the possible alternatives or whether it was the right fit for their educational goals. Finally, Josefina’s story illustrates the impact that one instructor’s simple advice—go see a counselor—can have in transforming a student’s aspirations. Josefina entered LBCC with the expectation that she would earn an associate degree in an undetermined “specialty.” But heeding her instructor’s advice made it possible for her to anticipate transfer as doable and logical. Moreover, financial aid and an on-campus job at the transfer institution made it possible for Josefina to break away from the modal transfer path to a local four-year college. Together these five stories show that institutional agents are crucial to the success of students, but that their presence is not strongly felt in most of these students’ lives.

Ernesto: The Power of Social Networks

Ernesto’s story is noteworthy because he was not an academic star and was the only one among the UC-qualified students who had started out in English and mathematics courses that did not carry college-level credit. Why did Ernesto transfer to USC, a private and highly selective institution, while Graciela, Joaquin, and Carola did not exercise their opportunity to attend a highly selective UC campus or manage to attain a “dream” of attending USC? In what ways were Ernesto’s goals, academic and social experiences, and actions different or similar from the others? In what ways did LBCC facilitate his transfer to USC that was not evident in the experiences of the other students? These are the questions that framed the reading of Ernesto’s story.

Ernesto entered LBCC with a very clear goal: to transfer to USC. “USC was in our family. We grew up around USC so we knew the school, but we were too little to know what it really was.” By the tenth grade, Ernesto remembers saying to himself, “You know what? That’s where I want to go. I don’t really want to go anywhere else.”

His path to USC started at LBCC because that was the way his brother and his brother’s friends had done it. He went directly from high school to the community college and did not apply to any other colleges. “LBCC was the one because people that came before me, my brothers and friends, they all had the same goal, this is where they did it, and this is the way I knew.” After completing the transfer requirements, he transferred to USC, just as his brother had. Although there was always the possibility of being rejected, having a role model and a road map to follow gave him confidence and kept him focused on the prize: “The good thing is, I had people before me that laid down the process. So for me it was, I’m going to apply and I’m going to get in.”

After going to his economics professor to find out more about the field, Ernesto chose it as his major, which was an unusual choice at the community college. “I just went to him and I said, ‘I want to learn more about the process and how economics works [because] I’m thinking of majoring in it.’” The

instructor offered to “make a class” just for Ernesto, who recalls, “He helped me out a lot because he showed me how to write economic reports.” The instructor also showed him how to do “stats.” More than three years later, Ernesto still remembers feeling special because this professor, whom he admired, was willing to go through a lot of paperwork to make a class up “just for [him].”

In the three years he spent at LBCC, Ernesto was involved in President’s Ambassadors, a small group of students selected on the basis of their academic record and leadership qualities. Ambassadors are rewarded for their service with formal recognition on the graduation program announcement, a letter of recommendation from the college president to a four-year university of their choice, and a small scholarship stipend. Leaders Across Campus was another selective club that Ernesto’s brother advised him to join.

Interviewer: So how did you get hooked up with that [Leaders Across Campus]? Because that’s only, what? About seven students a semester?

Ernesto: Yeah, I did Leaders Across Campus because I’d seen my brother and my friend were in it already.

Involvement in these groups enabled Ernesto to become part of a community that created its own academic supports: they established “study groups” and shared “insider information” on courses and faculty members.

They helped me on what teachers to take. Sometimes they gave me the book. I got notes. I was prepared before I even got into the class. That helped me out because, like, there’s people that were better in English, and there’s people who were better in math, and all these people were in the group. We helped each other.

LBCC provides students information on transfer to four-year colleges in various ways: through one-on-one counseling, college fairs that bring recruiters to the campus, workshops, and college tours. Surprisingly, Ernesto said that he did not participate in any of the organized transfer activities sponsored by LBCC, including campus tours. The only exception, he said, was when a USC admissions representative visited the campus. “I went to see her and I introduced myself and it turned out that she was on the Admissions Review Board. I stayed after and I talked to her for awhile. I got to know her really good, and she went out of her way to help me get into SC.”

Ernesto also received a lot of help from counselors and instructors. He calculated that in the three years he was at LBCC, he probably met with a counselor between ten and sixteen times. When it came to writing the college application essays, he said, “I had my teachers, I had people look at them. Every single person that I talked to kind of gave me advice.” He added, “LBCC showed me not to be scared or afraid to call people when you need help.”

High-achieving students may be dissuaded from applying to selective institutions because of the cost of tuition and the reluctance to accept loans as part of a financial aid package. When the interviewer mentioned students’ appre-

hension about the price of private universities, Ernesto responded, “It was a sacrifice that I was willing to make and it’s worth it. It’s a good investment. I’m investing in myself.” After three years as a full-time student, sixty-seven transferable units, and a 3.22 GPA, Ernesto transferred to USC and three years later fulfilled his hope to be able to say, “I graduated in economics from USC.” Ernesto was twenty-four years old when he spoke to the LBCC interviewer and was working his way up the corporate executive ladder.

Graciela’s Story: Following the “Pink Sheet”

“It’s kind of sad, but I applied there [USC] two times. The first time [as a high school senior] I was fine with not being accepted, but then the second time I applied to other schools too, just in case.” Like Ernesto, Graciela had made up her mind about going to USC when she was “young, since before high school.” Asked what made it her “dream school,” she said, “I don’t know. It’s just I’ve always wanted to go there. Probably, because, like, my family would talk about it.”

In high school, Graciela was on the college academic track, and she took advanced placement and honors courses. During her senior year, she applied to USC but was rejected; however, she was accepted to at least two CSU campuses. Instead of going directly into one of those CSUs, she decided to start her college education at LBCC and try for a second time to be admitted to USC, this time as a transfer student. Asked about whether she had considered UC campuses when she was a high school senior, Graciela said “only UCLA,” but that she decided not to apply because she “figured it was going to be more money [for the application fees].” Later on in the interview, she mentioned having considered UC Berkeley as well, but it was not the school she wanted to go to. The distance was an issue, and although she thought it might be good to leave her home, she did not want to go that far. San Diego State University waived the application fee, and Graciela felt that it really wanted her: “I was, like, ‘Oh, I should have gone there.’ They sent me other letters that they were going to waive other things too. So I thought about San Diego . . . but I don’t think I was ready to go. I wasn’t ready to move.”

Graciela placed directly into college-level English and mathematics and graduated from LBCC with a 2.90 GPA. Graciela’s transfer expectations were exclusively focused on USC, which she referred to as “the school of my dreams.” Soon after enrolling at LBCC, she reported, “I saw this lady, I can’t remember her name, but she gave me this pink sheet, and it had the classes I needed [to transfer to USC], so I followed it.” When Graciela was ready to transfer, her list of colleges was practically identical to what it had been as a high school senior: USC as the first choice and four CSU campuses as backups. “I’ll probably get into my dream college this time,” Graciela thought at the time, so once again she did not apply to any UC campuses.

Graciela entered LBCC with the hopes of qualifying for USC, but in the end she was in the same situation she faced as a high school senior—denied

admissions by USC and needing to choose from among the CSU campuses that admitted her. The difference was that three years earlier she had a second chance, through transfer, to try for USC. However, because she had not explored transfer to a UC, her choices were limited to the same institutions she could have entered previously.

Graciela's transfer choices may have been constrained by lack of information or lack of opportunities to discuss different options with counselors and instructors. Other than the counselor who gave her the pink sheet, her contact with counselors appears to have been limited. "I don't think I really had anybody here who would say to me, 'Are you going to transfer? Where are you going to go?'"

Graciela was surprised that USC did not accept her the second time around. "This time I thought I had an okay GPA, and I took the classes that were needed." No one had told Graciela that there might be additional requirements to qualify for admission into her chosen major, journalism, such as a portfolio or experience working on the school newspaper. When asked whether any of her journalism instructors had talked to her about a career in journalism, Graciela could only recall one instructor who praised her writing. "She always told me that I was a good writer and stuff. She was the only one." Another instructor, she said, "would tell us about schools that were good for journalism. One of them was Berkeley, also USC. But he never, like, individually, told me anything."

After being rejected by USC, Graciela decided to transfer to the local state college to which her sister had also transferred. Because she had limited support in planning for transfer, it was not until she actually transferred that she learned that journalism was not offered and she would need to choose a new major. Graciela was interviewed just a few weeks away from graduating and earning a BA in history. As to what she would do next, she was not sure whether to go on to graduate school and try once again to be admitted to USC, or try to get a job. We were left with the impression that she continued to have limited contact with institutional staff in a position to counsel her.

Joaquin: The Fifteen-Minute Transfer Advice Session

Joaquin completed the transfer curriculum with a 3.0 GPA and transferred to CSU-Long Beach, where he was still enrolled at the time of the interview. Joaquin went to a private high school and, beginning in the ninth grade, went on college tours throughout California. While both of his parents were college educated and expected him to go to college, it was up to him to figure out what he needed to do. Most of his friends decided to go to UCLA, but Joaquin opted for LBCC. "I was just sort of burned out from school and I just wanted to take it easy for two years," he said. While in high school, he enrolled in a course about college-going that required him to apply to UCLA as well as other four-year colleges. He was not able to remember whether he had been accepted or not.

He entered LBCC intending to major in engineering and eventually transferring to UCLA or USC. “I knew that in southern California, those are the two big names you always hear.” But about halfway through the program, he changed his major to business and instead transferred to CSU–Long Beach. In response to the interviewer’s question about why he had decided to only apply to CSU–Long Beach, he said it was mostly because of convenience and affordability. “I probably only would have gone [to UCLA or Berkeley] if I’d gotten like a full ride, a scholarship, or financial aid. It’s probably 50 percent because of the money; the other 50 percent is the convenience.”

Joaquin’s information about transfer came mostly from a former high school classmate and his older brother, both of whom went to CSU–Long Beach. “I had mentors,” said Joaquin. “One of my classmates from high school and his older brother helped me. They already graduated from Cal State.” They advised Joaquin on “deadlines” and which classes to take at LBCC and which to take at Cal State. “‘You’ve gotta take business law at Cal State, don’t take it at City,’ they told me. ‘Because then when you go to Cal State, they’re going to say no, we don’t accept that class. So don’t waste your time.’”

In addition to his two friends, his primary source of information seemed to be Plans A, B, and C, which identify the courses one must take to transfer to UC and CSU. His interaction with counselors was very minimal. Over the course of four years, he saw a counselor twice, and usually for no more than fifteen minutes, which is the maximum length of time for an appointment.

Joaquin said, “You can’t sum up the questions about the next two years in fifteen minutes.” The small number of counselors to attend to the complex needs of a very large number of students made it impossible for students to receive individualized attention or what Joaquin wished for: more “in-depth” counseling. Like other students (see Josefina’s story below), Joaquin felt he did not know what questions to ask, and as a consequence he was not able to get the information he may have needed. He wished that instead of “me asking him [the counselor] questions and he answers, he could, like, help me out more.”

To Joaquin, “helping out more” meant that the counselor would also offer alternatives or other options instead of just responding to questions: “Rather than me just straight transferring to Cal State–Long Beach, what kind of programs could I have gotten into with the classes I have taken.” He wished the counselors would have been more involved in his decision making and provided more direction. He wanted the counselor to offer more options. “How do I pick that rather than just pick one [college to transfer]?” According to Joaquin, the delivery of transfer information was “sort of just random.” “Professors throw out hints, like ‘we’re having a college fair, you guys, check it out,’” but it was “maybe like once a semester from every professor.” He also complained that announcements of transfer activities were usually posted on bulletin boards that had “hundreds” of other announcements on them.⁸ The limited availability of counselors also forced him to take charge of his transfer

choices. Professors might pass out information about transfer activities, but since there was not a strong culture reinforcing the importance of transfer, students often do not pay attention to them. “I think a lot of kids just say that’s just another waste of time.” In retrospect, Joaquin would have made greater use of the resources that LBCC offered had he been more aware of them. He said he would have gone to the transfer fairs, tried to see a counselor more often, and made more of an effort to talk to professors, specifically about transfer. “I talked to my professors . . . I just didn’t ask them the right questions concerning transferring.”

Throughout the interview, Joaquin made references to how little students like himself know when they first arrive at LBCC and as a consequence do not make good choices or take advantage of what the college may have to offer. “I didn’t think I needed to go to transfer fairs, but in the end, yeah, it’s just good information you should know. I think a lot of kids just say that’s just another waste of time.” Joaquin felt that community college students tend to be unsure about their goals and what is best for them. “They need to find out their interests, what would suit them, and their strengths.” The college, Joaquin said, could be more helpful by making activities such as transfer fairs mandatory. He pointed out that students take more courses than they need to graduate or transfer because they have not selected a major or because they don’t know what is required for transfer. “A lot of kids are in a community college [because] they’re not exactly sure.” Based on his experience, he felt that students need more direct help, particularly from faculty. If faculty members took on a greater role as advisers, students might be less likely to take the wrong courses. “Like, I think maybe the professors can help the kids take the classes that the book says [are needed for transfer] . . . Professors should keep you on your toes, tell us, ‘if you want to transfer to UCLA, you guys check out the fair that will be going on.’”

Carola’s Story: “Nobody told me, Do this!”

Like Joaquin, Carola also wished for more direct assistance. She said, “Nobody said ‘go here, go there.’ I don’t know if it is because I didn’t take a counseling course or maybe because I didn’t search for it [transfer services]. I didn’t feel like anybody really was supporting me; nobody said ‘you should do this, yada, yada, or something.’” Carola created her own course plan by following the transfer general education curriculum printed in the course schedule and did not see a counselor until her third or fourth semester at the community college. Choosing a major was one of the reasons she sought counseling. “I was first intending to be a poli sci major and I changed my mind to history, then to poli sci, and I told her [the counselor] I wanted to go to law school, and she gave me all these like lists of, you know, what majors I could take.” Carola ended up majoring in English, a choice she attributed to a professor who acted like an “informal advisor.” He told her “you’re good at English, I can see that you have—he didn’t say talent, he said the potential to write bet-

ter, and like okay, so I guess I'll be English." Speaking about the professor she said "he kind of broke it down for me. 'If you're going to law school, writing skills and argumentative skills, those will be the best for you.' That's what he said," Carola recalled.

Carola had hoped to go directly to CSU–Long Beach after graduating from high school but was not accepted because she was short of math credits. The alternative was to enroll at LBCC and prepare for transfer. Being at a community college "felt like an extension of high school . . . I was expecting something different . . . The image I have of what a college is like is always Harvard or Yale." Carola was also disappointed that the CSU college she transferred to was not more like what she thought a college should be, "I am somewhat disappointed. I thought it was going to be tougher . . . but no, it's so laid back." When the interviewer asked her if she had hopes of attending an Ivy League university, Carola said "not really . . . I mean, I'm hopeful, but I'm kind of realistic about that, I'm not going to get in no matter what."

Carola decided not to apply to UCLA because the price was "kind of scary" and she did not feel she could afford it. She thought the cost of UCLA was about \$34,000 per year and at the time did not realize the amount included tuition, room and board, and other expenses. Carola went to the financial aid office at LBCC several times to submit her paperwork, but she never talked with a financial aid counselor. Surprised, the interviewer mentioned that the office is more than just "the staff in the front that collect the papers" and told Carola about the financial aid counselors, "the people who sit down with you and explain financial aid," but Carola said that she had never sat down with a counselor. At the time of the interview, Carola, a junior at the CSU campus to which she transferred, told the interviewer that "there's some things that I still don't know about financial aid."

While Carola spoke with the interviewer about going to law school, she also shared that she did not know what was required, "I've skimmed through some stuff but not really got into detail about it." She also doubted she could get in, so she did not have a reason for even applying.

Carola's recommendation on how LBCC could strengthen transfer assistance to students was to "send a letter or an e-mail to everybody saying, you know, send us your major, your goals, what profession you would like to work in, and we'll send you back like a list of all the things you need to accomplish here at LBCC, like a to-do list." As with Joaquin, what seemed to be missing for her was more structured assistance. She wished somebody had been there to give her deadlines, someone who would say, "By this time you should have done this, this, and this." Carola described herself as "procrastinating," and this was one of the reasons she wished someone would have told her about deadlines. Even so, Carola acknowledged that LBCC had the resources available, "but for some reason I just didn't use them . . . Most of the time I was thinking, 'why do I need them, I'm just going to fill out an application, that's it.' Other times, it was like, 'oh, I don't have time for it.'" At the four-year col-

lege, Carola also regretted that no one was telling her what to do. "There is no one to say you have to do this, this, and this. I don't even get it from the professors." Asked by the interviewer if there might be someone who could work with her as a mentor or adviser, Carola said no.

Josefina's Story: "Plan A, Plan B, Plan C. I had no idea what any of it was."

As Josefina was about to complete her contract with the armed services, she realized she "needed something else to do." The "something else" was an associate degree in an undefined "specialty." "I wasn't sure. At the time I thought that I wanted to pursue the medical field because in the service I was a combat medic, so I wanted to apply what I had learned." So Josefina just started enrolling in classes to meet the general education requirements for the associate degree, or what at LBCC is referred to as Plan A. In the first semester, without talking to a counselor or anyone else, she enrolled in whatever classes were still available.

Thinking back to when she first arrived at LBCC, Josefina described all that she did not know at the time about being a college student. "Plan A, Plan B, Plan C. I had no idea what any of it was." As Josefina explained,

They were just things that I hadn't read, and even though they're all in the schedule of classes, since it was my first year, I didn't know. I just read what I needed to choose my classes, and didn't make the time to read everything else that I needed to know. I didn't know that you could meet with an academic counselor. I didn't know that was available to students. I was under the impression that I would be assigned a counselor or that somehow I would get a letter telling me when I get to meet with a counselor. I didn't know it was on me to ask and make an appointment for myself.

Earning a bachelor's degree was not on Josefina's horizon. In fact, when she was in high school, the notion of being in college for four additional years seemed like a long time. It was not until she became a student at LBCC that she realized how quickly four years can go by. The way that Josefina describes how her goals changed from seeking an associate degree to transferring to Cal Poly underscores the accidental nature of transfer for some students, almost a matter of being at the right place at the right time.

Interviewer: When did you see the counselor?

Josefina: It was on my second semester. In the career course, Miss Firestone [pseudonym] told us that even if we weren't sure about what we wanted to do, we consider meeting with a counselor. So I did. I met with a counselor because I wasn't sure what I needed to do to fulfill the requirements for the associate's degree, and after meeting with the counselor we saw that I was close to fulfilling the requirements for Plan B, to go on to a Cal State University.

Interviewer: Did you go to the counselor with the intent of talking about transfer?

Josefina: No, I didn't know that was my option. I didn't know that I could actually apply and be accepted to a university. After meeting with a counselor twice, I realized that I actually qualified, that I could apply and possibly be accepted to a university. That's when my goals changed.

Interviewer: Would you have done anything differently if you had seen the counselor the first day of school?

Josefina: Yes. I would have chosen classes that I needed towards general education and to transfer; I would have opened up my options, to also UC, and because I didn't meet with a counselor until my second semester, my first semester I took classes that I didn't really need, I enrolled in them just because I needed a unit.

Making an appointment to seek information and advice from a counselor was not something that Josefina knew how to do. Based on her own experience and that of other students (see Joaquin's story), she summed up the two biggest barriers to seeking help as "not knowing what to ask" and "being afraid that if they do ask that they're going to feel like they shouldn't be asking."

Josefina's apprehension about seeking help dated back to her first encounters with staff and remembering them as being not very friendly.

I felt like when I would ask the question, the response felt like the individual was telling me I should know it already. The different people that I asked, they felt frustrated answering my questions. Like where do I get a student number, how do I apply, what is a schedule, what is a catalog and a schedule of classes, because those are two different things. And it just felt like I should already know and I shouldn't be asking. I should know.

She was fearful that she would "get the same attitude" from the counseling staff. She wished that it could be possible to "actually sit with a counselor and let them know that you're completely lost, that you don't know what to do, and that you need help."

Other than Ernesto, Josefina was the only other student to go to a college that was more than thirty miles away from home and become a full-time residential student. For Josefina, the only student in the group who had not thought of herself as a future transfer student, being able to go to Cal Poly was an "honor," and she said, "Sometimes I do not even believe I am actually here." During the time the study was conducted, Josefina was still enrolled at Cal Poly and was completing her undergraduate studies and earning a BA within the next twelve months.

Discussion

These stories of three Latinas and two Latinos reveal different dimensions of the transfer choice gap. One interpretation of these stories would focus, as many analysts and practitioners have (Bensimon, 2007), on student effort, in

this case the effort students invested in learning about opportunities and procedures for transfer to a UC. From this perspective, we might hold up Ernesto as the model transfer student and compare the actions of the other four students to his. However, rather than viewing the stories as a representation of the actions students took—or did not take—on their own behalf, we interpret them for what they can tell us about the institutional factors that influence transfer choices.

From a sociological perspective focused on the role of social capital and the ways in which teachers, counselors, and other authority figures facilitate educational opportunities for racial minority students (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001, 2009), we find the absence of faculty members, counselors, and others within the college who acted as “institutional agents” in these students’ lives particularly striking. In a previous study (Dowd et al., 2006; Pak et al., 2006), we found that students attributed their successful transfer experiences to authority figures who provided them with the resources to cross the “cultural border” that divides two- and four-year colleges, particularly community colleges and highly selective universities. Drawing on the work of Stanton-Salazar (1997) defining the roles of institutional agents, we refer to these individuals as “transfer agents” who act on behalf of students and use all the resources at their disposal to help students navigate bureaucracies, develop a sense of belonging in college, and overcome barriers to their educational progress.

Ernesto took a different path than Joaquin, Carola, and Josefina. His story underscores the importance of having someone like his economics instructor take notice and be willing to provide the kind of assistance Joaquin wished would be available to everyone. Ernesto also networked with peers and authority figures and took advantage of resources and opportunities that helped him get closer to his goal. He had the confidence to seek help without fear of rejection or feeling self-conscious. Unlike his peers, Ernesto knew what questions to ask and was not reluctant to do so. His experience suggests that the college’s structure and culture work best for those who have acquired the academic and social skills to be successful students. Ernesto benefited from the experiences and know-how of his older brother, who provided him with a road map of how to access resources, including individuals and influential networks. He established important relationships with faculty members, he saw his counselor regularly, and he had a network of peers who he could count on for support.

Students like Graciela, Joaquin, Carola, and Josefina also have aspirations and hopes, but without the guidance, support, and active involvement of transfer agents, they may not have access to the resources they need to be successful. Ernesto, for any number of reasons, had learned how to approach instructors, ask for, and get their help. He stood out from the others in that his knowledge gave him the confidence to get help if it was not directly offered to him, though, as Joaquin observed, “a lot of kids are in community college because they are not sure.” But financial constraints make it almost impossible

for community colleges to offer transfer support services that are comprehensive and individualized. Students do not have assigned counselors or advisers, so no one tracks their progress through the curriculum.

Observations made by the students illustrate the barriers they faced. Joaquin said, “You have to know what questions to ask”; Josefina talked about “being afraid to ask questions that she should not be asking”; and Carola said, “I didn’t feel like anybody really was supporting me, nobody said, ‘you should do this.’” These comments point to the need for colleges to guide students in their help seeking assistance and not assume that students know how to reach out for it, or find it.

The absence of transfer agents—instructors and counselors who were remembered by our respondents as having reached out and making them feel important and valued—is part of the problem creating the transfer choice gap. In a previous study of community college students who successfully transferred to elite institutions, we observed that the relationships between counselors and students at community colleges have a haphazard, “accidental” quality. The opportunities to benefit from the guidance of transfer agents appear to be a result of serendipity, being in the right place at the right time, rather than design (Dowd et al., 2006; Pak et al., 2006). When these successful transfer students told us their life histories, these relationships emerged as playing a pivotal role in students’ lives.

In this study, Josefina was the only one who did not have transfer as a goal when she entered LBCC. The circumstances that led to her becoming transfer-oriented illustrate the considerable influence practitioners can have on students’ beliefs about themselves, their options, and the choices they make. In Josefina’s case, a general remark by an instructor to the whole class led her to take a series of actions that culminated with her successful transfer. Josefina’s self-ascribed identity as an associate degree seeker changed. She adopted a new, wholly unexpected transfer student identity.

But just as Josefina’s instructor told students about the importance of seeing a counselor to develop an education plan, there were instructors who only gave “hints” about what to do. Others were nice, such as Graciela’s instructor who praised her writing. Yet as reassuring as such praise might be, Graciela needed more direct guidance. If the instructor who praised her writing would have also shared her knowledge about what to do to pursue a major in journalism at USC, Graciela’s chances for admission may have been higher.

This study reveals an absence of transfer agents who could have helped Graciela, Joaquin, Josefina, and Carola consider more transfer choices, understand the intangible differences in the value of degrees from different types of institutions, and realize the additional benefits of graduating from an elite institution. We suspect that thousands of Latina and Latino students fall into the transfer choice gap because counselors and instructors do not have the funds of knowledge to assume the role of transfer agents, knowledge students

hope counselors and instructors will have. Except for Ernesto, the other students wished that counselors and instructors would offer their help without being asked to do so. Graciela said, "I have no one [who asked,] 'Are you planning to transfer?'" Joaquin wished that instead of him asking the counselor questions, the counselor would take the initiative to help him. Carola wanted a "to-do" list, her way of asking for more structured and continuous assistance in reaching each milestone. Finally, Josefina waited in vain to get a letter from the college telling her what to do because she did not realize it was up to her to know that she should make an appointment.

Demographic changes throughout the country, and in California in particular, demonstrate the tremendous need to increase Latino bachelor's degree attainment and acquisition of elite status. This study demonstrates that developing highly effective "expert transfer agents" is necessary to increase transfer generally and transfer choice more specifically among racial and ethnic minority students. The usefulness of articulation policies (e.g., curriculum alignment and common course numbering); highly sophisticated Web-based transfer information systems; and guaranteed transfer policies is diminished in the absence of institutional professionals who have the specialized funds of knowledge to perform the roles of bridging, advocacy, and role modeling. These institutional professionals can provide emotional and moral support as well as personalized and soundly evaluative feedback, advice, and guidance (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). The students we interviewed talked about not knowing what questions to ask, the feeling of being lost, and the desire for greater structure. To some extent, this represents a lack of information. More important, however, their words reveal that information systems are insufficient policy interventions in the absence of individuals who can act as transfer agents to facilitate students' experiences of transfer.

Transfer agents provide much more than information and advice. Through their status as institutional authorities, they convey permission to students to assume the identity of an "elite" (Pak et al., 2006). Whereas students from affluent families with college-educated parents and siblings assume their status as elites as a natural expression of their "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1986), students from racial and ethnic groups that have been underrepresented in higher education and discriminated against in the broader society may well require the experience of a transformational journey to assume elite status.

Elite status is an unconscious perspective through which individuals expect they will have the opportunity—perhaps even the right—to ask questions, receive individualized counseling, and benefit from financial subsidies that are an integral part of the financial aid and postsecondary funding system in the United States. Those systems are designed to distribute public goods so that investments are directed toward fostering, identifying, and selecting the next generation of elites. This is an essential aspect of the ideology of choice (Slaughter, 1991). Yet, we see by the dramatic underrepresentation of Lati-

nas and Latinos at the University of California and other selective institutions that this ideology has not yet developed in ways necessary to fully incorporate Latino transfer students among elite college graduates.

Epilogue

LBCC faculty members and staff, in collaboration with the authors as practitioner-researchers, conducted the interviews in this study. Additionally, the LBCC practitioner-researchers conducted an audit of their transfer services in which they identified several barriers to transfer advising and preparation. In the final report from the larger action research project, the team of practitioners, with our assistance, documented a series of informational, structural, policy, and cultural barriers. They then identified possible solutions to address the problems evident in the students' stories and in the team's findings from the institutional audit. As a consequence of this project, LBCC made many important changes, the most significant being the creation of a Transfer Academy to involve first-time students with transfer aspirations in very structured transfer socialization activities. Unfortunately, in 2009 the Transfer Academy is in a very vulnerable position in light of California's severe budget reductions for higher education.

Notes

1. To qualify for admission to a UC as a freshman, a student must complete fifteen year-long high school courses known as the "a-g" subjects and meet a minimum eligibility index that is based on GPA and test scores.
2. We recognize that the terms "Hispanic," "Latina," and "Latino" are not interchangeable but report these statistics using the terms of the original reports in which the data were presented.
3. To qualify for transfer to a UC, community college students have to be certified as having met the lower-division general education courses prescribed in the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC), which was developed by the Academic Senates of the CCC, UC, and CSU to facilitate California community college transfer students.
4. The action research was conducted in two projects. The first, entitled "Equity for All: Institutional Responsibility for Student Success," was conducted in 2005–2006 in collaboration with nine California community colleges. The second, entitled "The Missing '87: A Study of Transfer Ready Students Who Do Not Transfer," was conducted in 2006–2007 in collaboration with twenty faculty members, counselors, and administrators at LBCC, which was also one of the participating colleges in "Equity for All."
5. The cohort was combined from students entering in 1999 through 2002, and their transfer outcomes were observed in 2006.
6. When we include the small number of students within the "transferred elsewhere" column who went to other selective institutions, the percent remains almost unchanged.
7. See Rivas (2008) for further information about the study methods in the original data collection.
8. At the time this study was conducted, the college was not able to provide students with an institutional e-mail address, preventing mass and systematic dissemination of infor-

mation. The only students who received direct communication about transfer paperwork, making appointments with recruiters, deadlines, etc., were in the honors program, because they had their own counselor.

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