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Faculty Institutional Agents in Community College

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Chicanos/as are one of the most underrepresented groups in higher education and least likely to complete a baccalaureate degree. Most Chicana/as in California begin and end their postsecondary educational journey at a community college. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the role classroom faculty institutional agents play in the successful transfer of Chicano/a students. Eight Chicano/a students who transferred and graduated from a university were interviewed and they nominated classroom faculty members viewed as instrumental in their transfer success. Five classroom faculty members identified by the students were interviewed. Findings suggest that faculty institutional agents engage in five important practices to assist Chicano/a students to transfer: taking responsibility for student success, holding high academic expectations for students, developing strong relationships with students, sharing their personal educational stories, and connecting students to resources and contacts.

Background

As open-access institutions, community colleges offer hope for students who would not otherwise have had a chance to enter directly into 4-year postsecondary institutions because of financial, academic, and extraneous circumstances (Moore, Shulock, & Jensen, 2009). As an alternative educational route toward completion of a baccalaureate degree, many historically disadvantaged students (working-class and students of color) choose to attend affordable community colleges even though they may be eligible to seek admission at a more elite institution of higher education (Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006; Bensimon & Dowd, 2009). Unfortunately, the educational aspirations of many students who intend to transfer are not realized (Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004). This is particularly true for Chicano/a students—individuals of Mexican heritage. Driscoll (2007) found that of the 60% of Latino students in California who identified transfer to a 4-year institution as their educational goal, only 30% actually transfer to 4-year institutions within 6 years of enrolling at the community college, compared to 49% of Asian students and 44% of White students.

The statistics clearly suggest that access to higher education via community college does not typically translate into transferring to a 4-year institution, much less degree completion. Wassmer, Moore, & Shulock (2004) astutely argue that because Latino students represent a significantly growing share of the population in community colleges, institutions need to improve their understanding of resources and tools that enhance transfer “in order to preserve access to higher education, ensure educational

equity, and produce the educated workforce essential to the nation’s economic future” (p. 669). Further, given the inequitable outcomes of transferring to a university, understanding the ways in which Chicano/a students can be supported to successfully transfer to a 4-year postsecondary institution is critical.

Although research has long established the importance of faculty-student interactions as a major source of support for students in higher education (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010), little is known about the role faculty members play in enabling and supporting community college students to successfully transfer. What is clear in the literature about faculty-student interactions is the importance of relationships. Students who develop close working relationships with faculty in 4-year institutions—through research projects or office hour visits, for instance—show a higher satisfaction with campus life and are more likely to complete their baccalaureate degree (Kuh et al., 2010). Yet information about the resources, contacts or advocacy that community college faculty members provide Chicano/a students to assist them to transfer to 4-year institutions is not yet well understood. This article focuses on Chicano/a transfer students and their interactions with faculty members who support their successful transfer to a 4-year institution.

The Chicano/a Community College Student Experience

Researchers have discovered a combination of factors that explain the low transfer rates for Chicano/a

students, though the literature disproportionately focuses on student demographic variables and characteristics (e.g. socioeconomic status, parents' level of education, etc.) as explanatory factors. While such information is useful in targeting students who are more likely to need assistance, research that digs deeper into institutional structures, processes, and politics that contribute to the production of inequitable outcomes in transfer serves to reframe the responsibility of closing the transfer gap as one that is shared between the institution and the student.

A number of studies have evaluated support programs geared toward first generation, low-income students for their ability to enable students, including Chicanos/as, to transfer (Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004; Oseguera et al., 2008; Rendón, 2002; Yosso, 2006; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Compared to literature on transfer services and support programs, much less literature explores how faculty and instructors at the community college make a difference in students' lives. These are the individuals who are largely responsible for students' academic success in the classroom and interact with students on a weekly, if not daily, basis. In addition, the narrowly focused literature on support programs reflects educators' ideas that empowering students to transfer is an administrative responsibility. Much less literature focuses on faculty as the change agents.

Social Capital: A Theoretical Lens

A number of scholars have tied the problem of low transfer rates to issues of social capital (Bensimon, 2005; Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Gonzales et al., 2003), which is a concept derived from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of durable networks of one more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 51). When an individual experiences strong forms of social capital, they not only benefit from the social relationships themselves, but also from the resources gained through the social relationships. Social capital, then, constitutes "resources embedded in social structure" (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p. 52).

Underrepresented students do not often possess or have access to the informal or formal social networks that may serve as conduits for college opportunities (Gonzalez et al, 2003; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). In a community college context, students can benefit from social capital when relationships with institutional agents are formed that can be converted into socially valued resources and opportunities. For lower income or students of color who may be the first in their families to attend the community college, institutional agents are needed to provide the necessary assistance and advocacy for students who lack transfer knowledge and are unaware about

how to navigate the system. Institutional agents can act as mediators between two cultures--the institutional culture and student culture--with the purpose of supporting student success within educational systems (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Pak, Bensimon, Malcolm, Marquez, & Park (2006) make a further distinction between transfer agents and transfer champions. Transfer agents work on an individual level with students, while transfer champions work at an institutional level. Transfer agents refer to authority figures that in helping students navigate complicated academic requirements and application procedures, validate students' educational aspirations and dispel fears of not belonging (Pak et al.). A transfer champion is someone who demonstrates a commitment to educational equity by advocating for administrative practices that promote transfer access. While the authors provide a great deal of information on what a transfer agent or champion can do, the study does not report research findings about specific practices and approaches that transfer agents or transfer champions have taken to support students to transfer.

While Pak et al. (2006) have extended Stanton-Salazar's scholarship into the community college context, there is a dearth of literature that presents research findings on the ways in which institutional agents assist Chicano/a students to access resources, networks and social capital within the community college system. Unknown are the strategies, techniques or actions taken by faculty that facilitate the successful transfer of students. Because 60% of all Chicanos/as in California begin their journey of higher education at a community college (Yosso, 2006), understanding the role of faculty institutional agents at the community college level of higher education is imperative for Chicano/a transfer success.

Method

The overarching research question that guided this study was: what role do faculty, as institutional agents in a community college, play in the transfer success of Chicano/a students to 4-year universities? The purpose of the study is to understand the practices, approaches and actions of faculty members whom Chicano/a student's identify as institutional agents.

Case Study Methodology

A qualitative case study methodology was employed, an approach involving the study of a phenomenon explored in-depth through one or more cases within a bounded system (Yin, 2009). The phenomenon of interest in this case study were the experiences of community college faculty members as institutional agents and the ways in which they assist students through the transfer process at Vision College (pseudonym), one of the 112 community colleges in California. Various faculty participants who

were identified by transfer students as institutional agents formed a multiple case study, wherein each institutional agent was considered a case (Stake, 1995). These multiple cases are then analyzed to understand a phenomenon or influence across their shared experiences (Yin, 2009).

Participants

Qualitative research relies on purposeful sampling in an effort to select information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). Thus, eight Chicano/a students who transferred successfully from Vision College and graduated from a university were recruited to gain their perspective about the role community college faculty played in their transfer process. Five student participants were female and three were male. Six of the eight participants were first-generation students. Each student met the following criteria to participate: (1) of Mexican descent (Chicano/a); (2) attended and graduated from a university within 8 years of transferring from Vision College; and (3) could identify a faculty member who provided a form of institutional support which enabled the student to transfer.

While being interviewed, the student participants identified one or two key faculty members whom they identified as institutional agents. Of the nine faculty members identified in the interviews, five of these exemplary faculty members were successfully recruited to participate in the study. The faculty interviewed for this study viewed their role as integral in the transfer success of students. See Table 1 for more information about the institutional agents who participated in the study.

In total, eight students who transferred from Vision College and five institutional agents at Vision College participated in the study.

Data Collection

The sources of data collected for the case study comprised (a) student interviews; (b) faculty interviews; and (c) a reflection journal entry from both students and

faculty participants. For all student and faculty interviews, a semi-structured interview protocol was utilized with questions developed in an open-ended format. The interviews took the shape of a guided conversation rather than a structured query (Yin, 2009), allowing for flexibility in drawing out information from each participants' unique experiences. Students were asked questions about their community college experiences and their interactions with supportive institutional agents. In addition, during one-hour interviews, faculty members explained their educational philosophy and the types of advocacy they took on behalf of students. More specifically, they recalled and reflected on actions, resources, networks, and contacts that they intentionally accessed on behalf of students seeking transfer to a university.

The structured journal entries gave participants a chance to clarify and elaborate on responses provided in the initial interview. Journal entries were a powerful tool to get a different perspective from individuals outside of an interview (Hatch, 2002). In addition, participants were asked to provide any additional information they felt was important for the researchers to know that was not disclosed during the interview.

Data Analysis

The researchers used an inductive approach, moving from the particular (the detailed interview data) to the general (codes and themes) (Creswell, 2007). First, a preliminary exploratory analysis was conducted to explore the interview transcripts and journal entries as a way to obtain a general sense of the data, memo ideas, and think about the organization of the data. The second step to analyzing the data was coding, the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions of emergent themes. The object of the coding process is to make sense out of the text data, divide it into text segments, label the segments with codes, and review codes for overlap and redundancy. Third, the list of codes were aggregated or collapsed to form primary themes that describe the participants' experiences.

Table 1: Faculty Identified as Institutional Agents

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Years	Faculty status	Educational pathway
Linda	Female	White	20	Full-time	HS → CCC → CSU
Joaquin	Male	Chicano	35+	Full-time	HS → UC
Grace	Female	Latina	20+	Full-time	HS → CSU
David	Male	Chicano	25	Full-time	HS → CCC → CSU
Erica	Female	White	8	Part-time	HS → CCC → UC

*HS=high school; CCC=California Community College; CSU=California State University; UC=University of California

Findings

The narratives presented in this section were constructed from the combined voices of Chicano/a transfer students who benefitted from the support of institutional agents and the faculty members who were identified as institutional agents themselves. By weaving their stories together, the particular ways that institutional agents enabled and empowered Chicano/a students to transfer are documented.

Personal Responsibility for Student Success

The findings of this study suggest that a sense of personal responsibility for student success underpinned institutional agents' practices in supporting Chicano/a students to transfer. Rather than expecting students to navigate community college structures on their own, institutional agents took it upon themselves to find ways of supporting students in and out of the classroom. The Chicano/a students in this study interpreted institutional agents' actions as evidence of "care." When Chicano/a students noted that a faculty member personally cared about their academic well-being, they were more likely to approach the faculty members, or at least feel safe to do so. For instance, Linda, a white faculty member of sociology who was keenly aware of the "inequalities" faced by Chicana/o students, asserted that students sought her assistance because she conveyed a sincere concern for their lives. She explained, "You know, I am not a super teacher. I just care about my students, and that is all. That is the most important part, if you care about your students, they will come to you."

Most of the institutional agents who participated in this study had a deeper awareness of historical and political forces that shaped Chicano/a students' educational experiences, deepening their commitment and sense of responsibility to students. Joaquin, a Latino professor, believed that many Chicano/a students were uncomfortable with approaching faculty members because they were the first in their families to seek higher education. Joaquin shared that "a lot of them are scared and they don't think they are going to go beyond. I went to [a local, rural high school] and there are very few, very few who go on." When Joaquin met Chicano/a students at the community college he made a conscientious effort to "encourage them, because I know other faculty don't! Students need support and need to know how their life will change with a higher degree. So many are the first in their family to come to college." This understanding of student needs drove Joaquin to initiate more interactions with his students. He reflected on his approach with students in the classroom:

I turn to acknowledge them and bring them out, you know. In general, Latino students still feel kind of alienated, marginalized, so in the classroom they are often quiet. They're not going to raise their hand. They are not going to lead a discussion. So I try to break that by focusing on them. By making the class interesting and challenging, so they feel like they are participating and I try to always engage them. I like to engage them.

Similarly, Professor David expressed awareness of personal, social, and structural experiences that often complicated the lives of Chicano/a students to be successful in higher education. "Many students work to help their families financially, while studying a full load. They are

to be admired, not ridiculed or shamed because they have to work," he asserted. In his role as a professor, David was acutely aware of the resources he had at his disposal to support students who wanted to be successful transfer students. David understood that students "need help, because they seek it...[but] they are not going to come on directly to tell you because you are in a very strong position of influence, either in positive or negative."

Likewise, Erica believed that it was her responsibility to intervene when she noticed a student at risk of dropping out of her class. After one of her students missed two class sessions, Erica emailed and called her on the phone to encourage her continued participation in the class. I called the student and told her, 'Do not quit on this class. We need you. You are part of this class dynamic and I have an investment in you, and your classmates are depending on your contribution to the group.' Thankfully, I was able to convince her to return.

Erica noted that the student was the first in her family to attend college and had not been socialized to navigate the community college system. Erica explained to the student that keeping the lines of communication open with the faculty member is important because faculty members who care can support students to overcome barriers in class. Without Erica's intervention, the student would have dropped the class. Erica shared, "students sometimes have a misperception, and as their teacher, I feel it is my responsibility to convey how I've invested in them and to encourage them not to quit."

High Expectations

While institutional agents cared for students and felt responsible for their educational success, they did not waiver on their academic expectations for students. According to the Chicano/a students in this study, once faculty members discussed their expectations for course work, readings, visiting office hours, and visiting the transfer resource center with them, students considered transferring to a university to be an achievable aim. The implication of setting the expectations high was that institutional agents believed in students' ability to succeed in higher education. "I tell [students], you know, 'You're smart, you know. You are a talented young man or young woman.' Go to the university," stated Professor Joaquin.

Institutional agents paired high levels of support with high levels of challenge. Professor Grace shared that she "feel[s] like their [students'] parent" because she listens to her students' concerns but still holds them accountable to meet her expectations. "When I need to, I also set the law, as far as making them accountable. They have to be accountable. And the way I see this, that this is just what happens in the classroom, this is just a microcosm of real life. So I see them as a student, I see them as someone who lives outside of the classroom. So whatever I use in

the classroom I try to make these life skills that can be applicable outside of the classroom too.”

Believing in students, according to Grace, was particularly important with Chicano/a students who oftentimes lack confidence in their own academic abilities. “I just tell them that they can do it. And I expect them to get a degree. Not only do I set the standards pretty high in the classroom, but I also set the standards pretty high outside of the classroom. And just believing in them, knowing that they can do it, and supporting them in any which way that I can.” Grace urged students to “believe in themselves” and “know that they can make it, no matter what!” These words planted a seed of encouragement and hope in students, which helped raise their self-confidence and educational aspirations.

Students in the study corroborated the finding that institutional agents’ high expectations provided an important foundation of support for academic success. Antonio, a Chicano student in the study, reported that he took a number of classes with Grace and became a leader in a student club in which Grace served as a faculty advisor. Grace was the first faculty member to encourage Antonio to begin preparing for the transfer process to a university. He elaborated, “Meeting Grace is where [the idea to transfer] started. She would always tell me, ‘This is going to look so good on your application for college when you go to a university.’ She would say things like this all the time to me and I realize that I was building up a beautiful resume. So that is where the idea started about pursuing a university degree.”

Mercy, another Chicana student who successfully transferred to a four-year university, recounted preparing for class diligently in anticipation of and wanting to be “ready to be called upon” in class by Professor Erica, a white institutional agent who taught in the history department. Erica successfully engaged students by drawing them into class discussions in a way that inadvertently held them accountable for knowing and reflecting on class readings.

The material first was what got me interested, and not only that, was how she taught it. Like, it wasn’t her speaking the whole time; she would ask questions, she would get discussions in. She kind of made you think. She asked questions. She called on me a lot.

Erica’s engaging pedagogical approach in tandem with her expectations for student learning served as a catalyst for Mercy to thrive in Erica’s classroom, giving her the courage to visit Erica during office hours. Erica signaled to Mercy that she could and should interact with her both inside and outside the classroom.

Developing Personal Relationships

With a belief system rooted in a sense of personal responsibility and high expectations for student success, faculty members developed relationships with students

as the first concrete step in navigating the transfer process. What stood out most in Chicano/a students’ stories during their interviews was that all of them developed a strong personal connection with an institutional agent. In fact, all faculty institutional agents in this study viewed the development of a personal supportive relationship as highly important.

Inviting students to speak with faculty members one-on-one was imperative to gain a deeper understanding of student needs and, in turn, find ways to support them. Professor Grace explained, “I allow them to come in and just talk about anything they want without judgment or criticism. I listen. I listen to them.” Mark, a former Chicano transfer student recalled how supportive Grace was to him in class, which helped him decide to visit her during office hours. Mark shared, “She is very supportive, not only in the way she ran her lectures in her classes, but also in being really helpful, and sees you as an individual. I guess just to know who you are and if there are certain obstacles that you have overcome or need to overcome, if you lend yourself to her or if there is a situation that you need to talk to her about, she would actually sit down with you and hear you out and then see what she could do to assist you.”

Professor Joaquin similarly developed personal relationships with students to become acquainted with them on a personal level so that they felt welcomed and comfortable in the classroom. He wanted students to achieve academic success and turn to him with concerns or for guidance. Joaquin described how he developed a personal rapport with students: “First of all I bring them [into the classroom], develop a relationship that is personal. Where I give them the attention, I know their names, you know, I make them feel good, I greet them, you know. I kid with them. I chitchat. I ask them what is going on with their lives. Do they want to talk? And so, that is my first connection, it’s to make them feel comfortable.”

As students developed comfort in class, they grew a sense of belonging and increased confidence in their academic ability. Rosa, a student in Joaquin’s class, reported that he made her feel “incredibly comfortable, no question was foolish. Every question was valid, valuable and you were the smarter for asking it.” As a result of this encouragement, Rosa became more engaged, “arrived early [to class] to ask questions, and to talk.”

Despite the fact that the institutional agents in the study taught large classes, they found ways to get to know and relate to students. Professor Erica explained: “The first thing [I do], and I know it sounds ridiculous, but I learn their name. And you do that by having them sit down and then stay in a place they’re comfortable. I just create, just a seating chart, like you had in second grade and I learn their name. It takes me a couple of weeks, but I learn their name. And that helps me then in class discussions, call

them by name, create that personal, not just accountability, but a personal relationship.”

Mercy, a student in Erica’s class recalls how the attention she received from Erica helped increase her enthusiasm to learn. Mercy elaborated: “I actually got very close to her [Professor Erica], in the class and outside of class. She really inspired me. She just right away noticed that I was really putting forth effort, getting good grades and she kind of just suggested, ‘Hey, if you ever need a letter of recommendation, let me know.’ So just that her letting me know, you are doing good and I would be happy in writing you a letter of rec. That just kind of motivated me to even get closer to her and start talking to her about the college process.”

Sharing Personal Educational Stories

After developing a relationship with Chicano/a students, faculty members shared their personal educational stories with their students. These stories served to motivate and inspire students to transfer to a university. This was especially important because seven of the eight students interviewed in the study were first generation college students and the first person from their families to attend a community college. Professor David, for instance, shared his experiences of being a first generation college student with his Chicana/o students. Like some of his own students’ parents, David’s parents “only went to eighth grade. They didn’t tell me to go to college, I mean they didn’t discourage me, but they didn’t know.” David told this story to demonstrate that students from similar family backgrounds can succeed in college.

Professor Erica, shared her own educational experiences as a former community college student. She explained: “Yes, and I share with them my own shortcomings. I make no bones about telling them, I went to Vision College and I got my AA from here. I wasn’t a model student... and then I got my act together. You know, like, ‘This is costing me money. Get your act together. You staying, or are you going?’ So, I share with them my own foibles.”

Professor Linda even shared the educational journeys of her children: “I tell my students about my children’s dreams, because my children weren’t real successful in high school, that Vision College was the actual gate for them to do incredible things. I let them know it’s ok to set your sights high and transfer to private schools not just public schools. . . I weave that into my own story about how you can work and still go to school and have all these things against you and still make it.”

Linda and Erica disclosed their personal experiences with an intention to motivate their students by developing an understanding that it is never too late to get serious about their studies.

Providing Resources and Contacts to Networks

Faculty institutional agents recognized that Chicana/o students were often unfamiliar with campus resources. This recognition prompted faculty to provide information to students about navigating the community college system and connect students to resources, including other institutional agents, on campus and in the community. While institutional agents assisted students to the extent they were able, they acknowledged the limits to their knowledge about the transfer process to a four-year university. David recognized that “transfer involves a lot of technical information. I think you should have resources as an instructor. I think you should identify resources that are reliable and credible.” In these cases, David and other faculty members often connected students to academic counselors and other services such as the career center, financial aid department and Extended Opportunities Program and Services (EOPS). David asserted that once the referral is made, faculty members “have to follow up. So I always tell them, next time I see you in class, I want you to tell me what you found out.”

The Chicano/a students in the study substantiated the importance of receiving information and resources from institutional agents. Antonio, for instance, was referred by Professor Grace to meet her colleague in the academic counseling department. The purpose of the meeting was to catch Antonio up to speed with developing a student educational plan to transfer. Without the referral to the academic counselor, Antonio would not have become aware of completing applications for university admissions, financial aid, scholarships and housing.

Discussion

Each year a small number of Chicano/a students successfully bridge the divide between community colleges and four-year colleges in a move that epitomizes the cherished American Dream of social mobility. This study documents the critical role that faculty members in community colleges can play in this endeavor. The narratives of faculty and Chicano/a students, when woven together, represent the fabric of faculty institutional agency at a community college.

Toward an Understanding of Faculty Institutional Agents in Community Colleges

In his book *Manufacturing Hope and Despair*, Stanton-Salazar (2001) discussed the ways in which institutional agents played a significant role in the lives of Mexican origin youth. Given the low structural position of these adolescents in the principal hierarchies in society, and the contradictory roles of school personnel as both agent-

advocate and gatekeeper, relations between adult and student, when they become genuinely supportive, carry the potential to transform a student's life chances in very positive and lasting ways. (p. 162)

The impact institutional agents had on the students in Stanton-Salazar's study resonate with the experiences of the Chicano/a students in this study. Faculty members became agents of change in students' lives by directly intervening and providing mentoring, linkage with college services, linkages with other individuals that can provide student services, tutoring, advocacy, and other forms of formative support. Even when faculty institutional agents in this study were limited in their knowledge on specific criteria of the transfer process, all five agents were found to support students through bridging—the process of acting as a human bridge to gate-keepers, to social networks, and to opportunities for exploring various mainstream institutions, for example, university campuses (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Borne out of caring relationships and high expectations, faculty institutional agents transmitted knowledge and resources that are in particular characteristic of the social networks and social ties of middle and upper classes (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Though gaining access to resources was an important aspect to transfer success, students may have not been compelled to take advantage of these resources had they not first developed strong relationships with faculty members. Kuh et al., (2010) suggest that the single most important factor to enhance teaching and learning is frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes. Similarly, this study found that the faculty-student relationship benefits the student in that it promotes and fosters student persistence and success. As this study documents, when faculty members take personal responsibility for student success, hold high expectations, develop strong relationships with students, share their own educational journeys, and connect students to resources and other contacts, students can be informed and motivated to take steps toward transferring to a four-year institution.

Recommendations for Institutional Practice

Faculty members may underestimate their ability to help students navigate from the community college to the university level (Bensimon, 2005). Further, not all faculty members share the belief that they should support Chicana/o students to transfer. In response, community colleges might consider investing in long-term faculty development opportunities aimed to encourage inquiry into the lives of students' educational success. Researchers have found that structured inquiry activities, such as interviewing students of color on campus multiple times and discussing interview results with other faculty during collaborative team meetings, facilitates a deeper level of commitment and actionable knowledge to serve students

at the margins (Peña, 2012; Peña, Colyar, & Bensimon, 2006). The way in which this knowledge is developed is significant. When faculty first learn from students by developing relationships with them and then process what was learned with others, they develop a critical consciousness that informs more responsive teaching and advising practices with students of color.

The role that faculty members play in student success is critical, especially during the current economic atmosphere in the state of California with constant reductions in community college budgets and evisceration of student support services. With fewer institutional resources and support from staff and administrators, students will increasingly benefit from faculty who make the choice to become institutional agents by developing caring relationships with students and by providing knowledge about and access to transfer resources. Faculty members can develop knowledge about transfer process and transfer resources by collaborating with student services staff and faculty. Community colleges may consider structuring professional development opportunities that unite classroom faculty with student services staff and faculty to enhance dialogue and understanding about how each other's role is necessary and important in the successful transfer of students to universities.

There are obvious hurdles to developing meaningful relationships with students. When faculty members teach a large number of students, for example, class discussions or social media outside of class can be used to discuss transfer options and to inform students about campus resources. Further, institutional agents in the study expressed concerns about the changing community college culture and the trend of hiring part-time faculty who do not have the time on campus to develop personal relationships with students. Professor Erica's reflections and recommendations are sound: "We have way more faculty that are part-timers. Without a stable faculty, you don't have the continuity; students don't have an opportunity for an office hour. Students in high school create very personal relationships with faculty in high school, but in the college level, there are too many teachers that work part-time. The institution should hire more full-time faculty who can work more on campus and be accessible for students."

Concluding Thoughts

Understanding the ways in which students of color can be supported by institutional agents to successfully transfer to 4-year postsecondary institutions from community colleges is critical for student's upward social mobility through higher education. While few studies discuss the importance of institutional agency in community college (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009), they do not elaborate upon the

specific belief systems, actions or practices of the agents based on qualitative data collected from both students and the institutional agents themselves. The findings of this study do just that. Classroom faculty members have the greatest contact with students and are in a position to empower students. As such, community colleges should invest in cultivating the beliefs and skills of faculty members institution-wide to become institutional agents on behalf of students who are in need of assistance to transfer.

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