

**NISTS 2023**

# BE A CONNECTOR FOR TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS

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The following presentation was given at the 21st Annual Conference for the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students. Please cite responsibly and direct questions to the original presenter(s).

*Research Spotlight*

## **2814 - Expanding Health & IT Bachelor's Degree Capacity Through Transfer Pathways**

Matriculation Trends and Issues, Credits and Degree Pathways

Research has shown that Health and IT fields demand a more diverse and skilled workforce who can appropriately fulfill the needs of the varied communities they serve. Currently, a small body of literature exists on community college students in Health and IT and even less on those who have transferred to a 4-year institution. This session aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of Health and IT transfer pathways and recommendations for supporting transfer success.

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# Expanding Health & IT Bachelor's Degree Capacity Through Transfer Pathways

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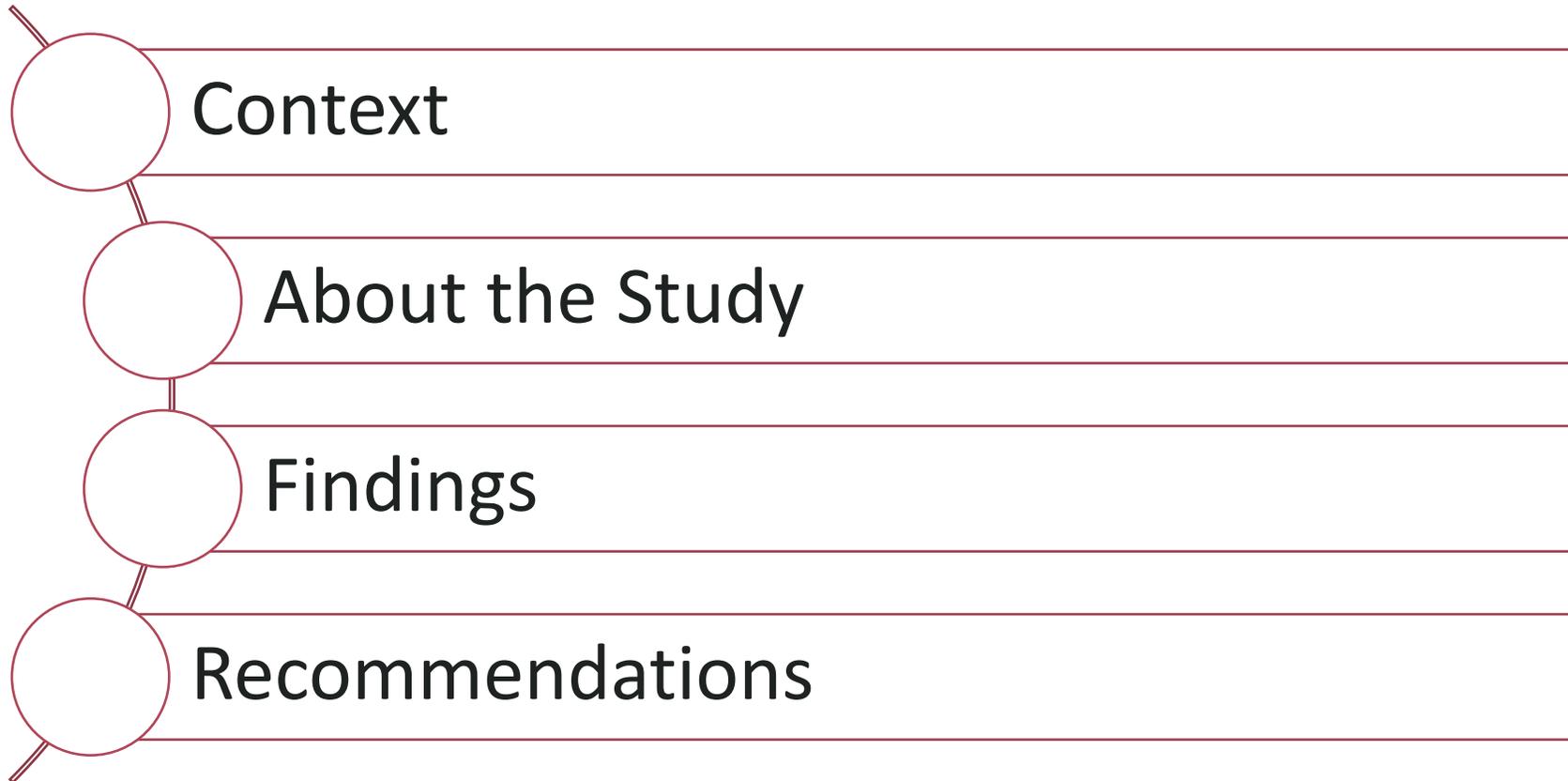
Dr. Melissa T. Buelow, Department of Psychology

# Land Acknowledgement

The land on which we inhabit is situated on the ancestral homelands of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde the Community and Confederated Tribes of Siletz. We acknowledge the history of genocide and settler colonialism that continues to impact Native & Indigenous communities. We offer gratitude to their resistance and survivance. We honor the past, present, and future stewards of this land.



# Overview



# Context

- There is a national drive to increase the number of students pursuing STEM fields (National Science Board, 2018), with a particular focus to address disparity in STEM workforce (Funk & Parker, 2018).
- Community colleges serve as critical pathways for historically marginalized groups of students interested in pursuing a career in STEM (Bailey et al., 2015; Wang, 2016).



# National Transfer Landscape

**80%**

Of first-time community college students have the goal of earning a bachelor's degree

**25%**

Of community college students transfer to a four-year institution

**42%**

Of transfer students earn a bachelor's degree within six years

# Capacity-Constrained Majors



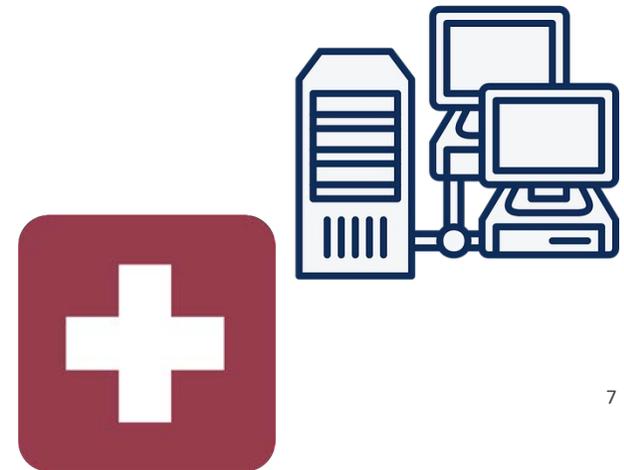
- Heavy market competition for potential faculty
- Expensive equipment or practicum requirements
- Many institutions lose money on these majors
- Most institutions put a cap on admissions for these majors
- Major admission criteria > institutional admission criteria
- Students who could be successful in the field never have the chance



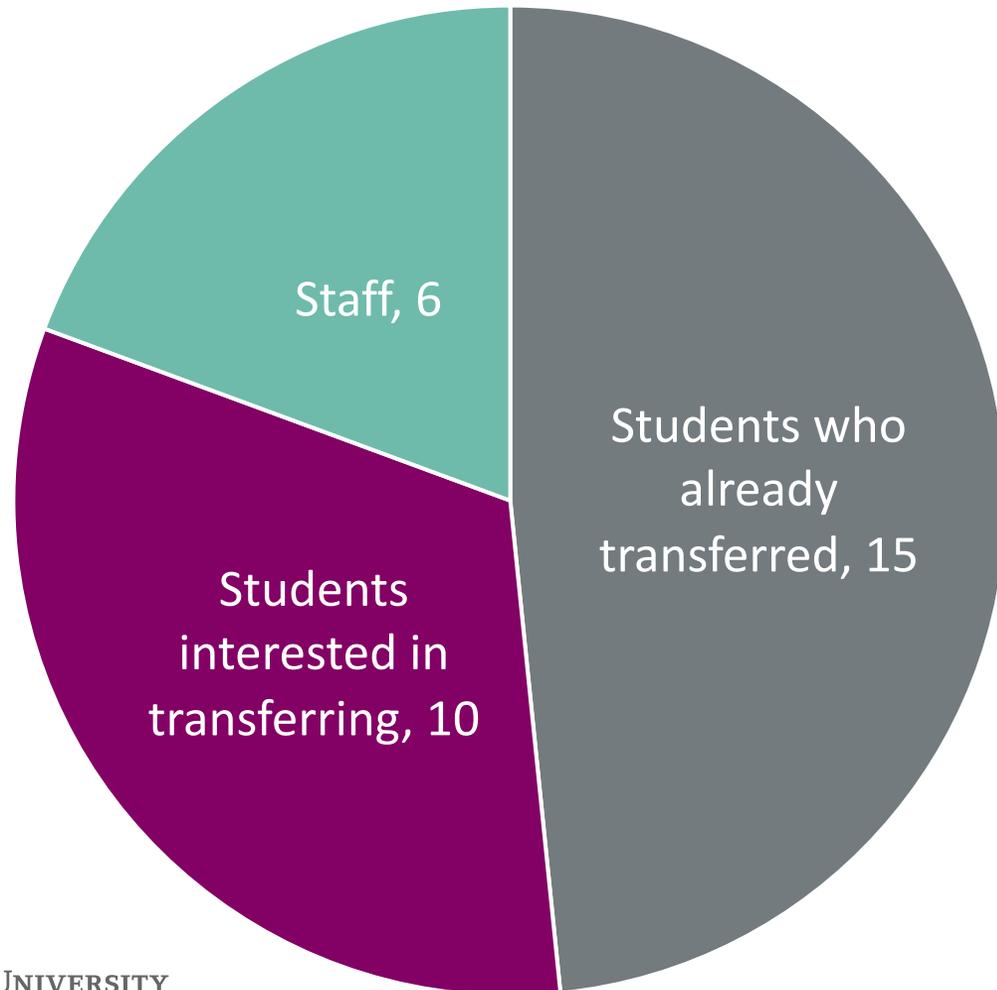
# About the Study

Purpose: To explore the experiences of students in health and information technology transfer pathways from a community college to a large research institution in the Midwest.

Goals: Understand “what’s working” and “what needs improvement” for transfer students in Health and IT and identify potential solutions to address barriers.



# Number of Interviews



Interviews (N = 31)

- Students who already transferred
- Students interested in transferring
- Staff

# Overview of Findings



Applied vs. Transfer Pathways



Transfer Credit Applicability



Competitive vs. Open Access



Online Degree Options



Challenges: Pathway & Classroom Issues



Supports for Students

# Applied vs. Transfer Pathways

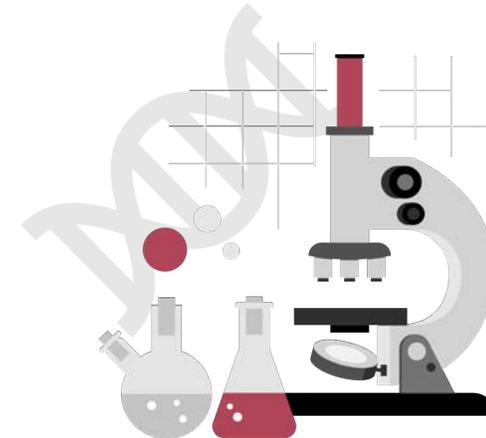
## Applied associate degrees (AAS)

- Career-oriented
- Comprised of applied courses, fewer GEs
- Graduates can immediately go into the field



## Transfer associate degrees (AA or AS)

- Transfer-oriented
- Comprised of GEs and pre-requisites
- Graduates need to transfer and earn a bachelor's degree to go into the field



# Applied vs. Transfer: Interplay with Career

## Applied associate degrees

- Focus on career placement
- Enter field of interest quickly
- Pursue further education for career advancement while working
- Internships, apprenticeships, mentorships provide immense value

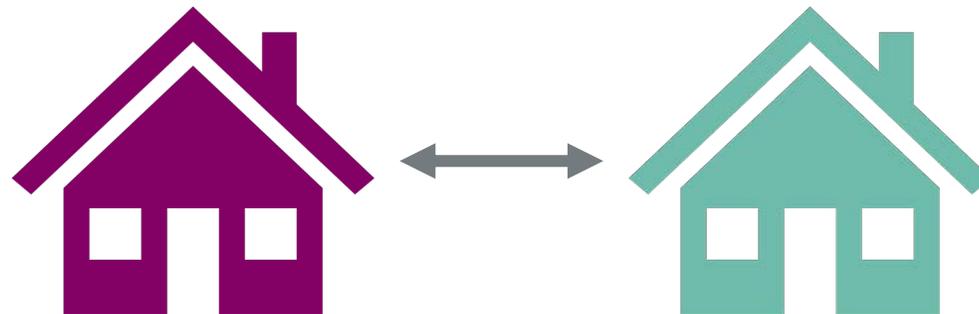
## Transfer associate degrees

- Focus on preparation for further education and advanced professions
- Enter field only after earning bachelor's degree (or beyond)



# Applied vs. Transfer Associate: Student Choice

- Students don't know the difference unless they meet with an advisor
- Degrees housed under different divisions have different requirements, different advisors
- Students typically want applied experience and entry into field of interest as quickly as possible



# Transfer Credit Applicability

## Applied associate degrees

Major courses transfer  
as elective credit

## Transfer associate degrees

Major courses are  
transfer-approved or  
pre-reqs

General education  
courses typically transfer  
seamlessly



# Transfer Credit Applicability: Time to Degree

- Applied Associate Degrees
  - Transfer students may need 6 semesters to complete their program
  - Need to take additional GEs
- Transfer Associate Degrees
  - Transfer students can complete their program in 4 semesters

2+3 vs 2+2

“When I was at Midwest CC, there was a mention that *most of the classes you take there would transfer to Midwest U with very little problems*...Four or five classes didn't count towards Midwest U's curriculum. But I have had to use the knowledge from the class in my computer science classes. So, I've still found it helpful. *It just didn't count* for credit at Midwest U per se.”

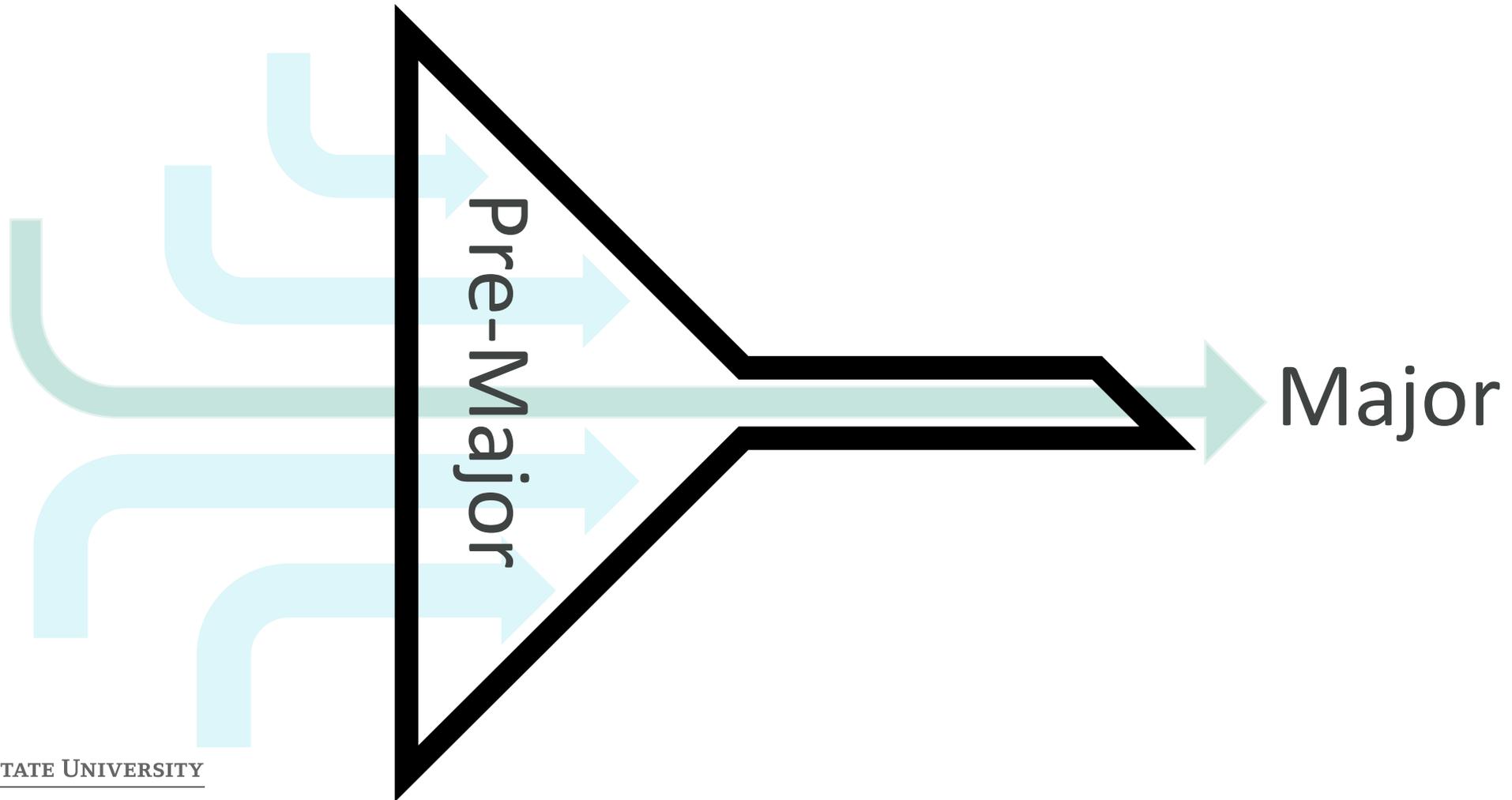
“It is unfortunate when students have maybe spent two or three years at another school [Midwest CC], and they come here and learn that they have six more terms to complete this major. *It’s a frustrating conversation for the students...but that is the reality of the major.*”

# Competitive vs Open Access

- Competitive programs – “Limited-access” or “Capacity Constrained”
  - Fewer seats
  - Strict academic admissions criteria
  - Must be above minimum requirements to compete (e.g., higher GPA)
  - Higher graduation rates
- Open-access programs
  - Accept any student accepted to the institution
  - Lower graduation rates



# Competitive vs. Open Access: Pre-Majors?



*“It’s one thing wanting to be admitted into the program and another process to get accepted into your program...Initially, I went into health, but there was a determination that *my GPA does not merit for that program*. So, I started as undecided, and I did that for a semester or two. And then from that point, I applied for the health program, in which my GPA had been fine-tuned somehow and was able to get admission into the program.”*



“More than likely [a transfer student doesn’t get admitted], *because they didn’t pass a course that they needed to be eligible*...I often will send up a follow-up email and say, ‘Hey, all you got to do is repeat this class and apply again and we’ll admit you.’ *Trying to make them aware and educate them about why they weren’t admitted, and then that way they know that they can come back if they’d like.*”



# Online Degree-Completion Options



- Working adults typically successful with format
- Asynchronous-online = flexibility for full-time workers & irregular shifts
- Online teacher pool = expand enrollment capacity to meet demand
- Allows guaranteed admission to program if all requirements are met



“When I started as an employee at Midwest U...my manager told me that *I can work [while getting] my RN-BSN degree*...[After reaching out to a Midwest U advisor], they replied to me, listed the things I needed to go to get into the program, and I did exactly what she told me, and here I am.”



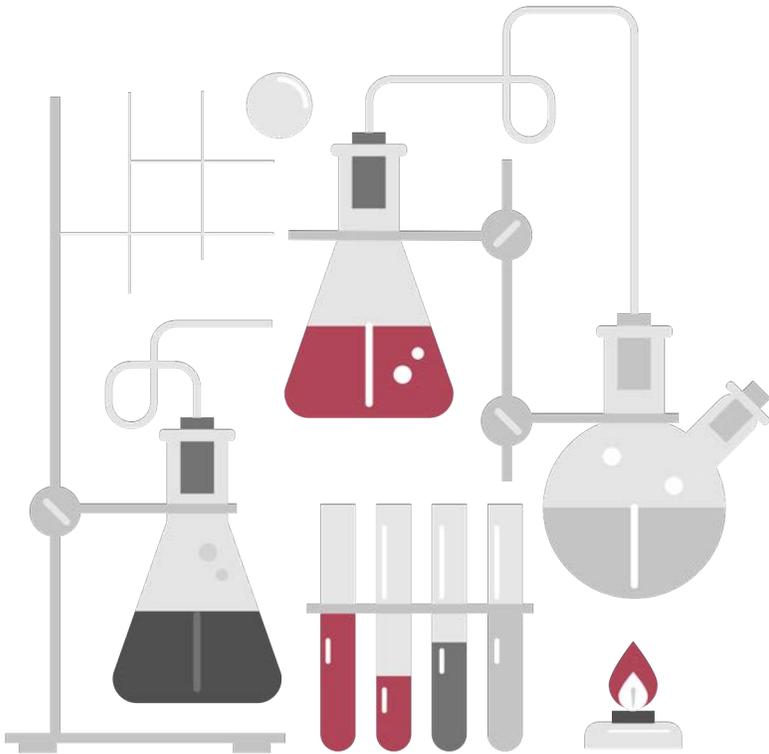
# Challenges – Pathway Issues

- Confusion of the distinction between applied vs. transfer associate degrees
- False assumptions of acceptance requirements
- Misalignment between pathway and students' career goals



# Challenges – Classroom Issues

- Calculus requirement a barrier
- Large enrollment science pre-reqs challenging
- Instructors not always culturally sensitive



“We have instructors that are very mean. *People just want to give bad examples of Africa. I’m from Africa. What are you talking about? You know? They’re talking about things that don’t even happen there.* They think Africa is a village, and they bring up a small thing that this instructor learned overnight, and they want to come and give false information in class. And students really vibe the instructor up. Some things are hurtful. So, you can’t stand up to your instructor and say, ‘Hey, that’s not true.’ *I feel like Midwest CC was more sensitive...Midwest U is not very sensitive to people’s race and cultures.*”



# Supports that Helped Students

- Advising (and user-friendly self-advicing tools)
- Survey Course
- Early Alerts
- Tutoring & Peer-Led Team Learning
- Affiliate Groups



“I shared [my experiences] with one of my instructors who is Black. I stayed after class, and I was like this is what I’m going through. *She’s the one who told me to join this [student organization] group. So, when I joined the group, we learned from other people’s experiences.*”



# Overview of Recommendations

- Applied Degree Pathways
- Sending vs. Receiving Colleges
- Institutional Partnerships

# Recommendations – Sending vs Receiving



- Sending Institution
  - Build advising into orientation requirements
- Receiving Institution
  - Expand proactive tutoring and/or PLTL in key courses
  - Encourage inclusive teacher training
  - Help connect new transfers to affiliate groups

# Recommendations – Applied Degree Pathways

- Design 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> year of new degree option around applied associate
- Critically re-examine math pre-reqs – could relevant math be built into major courses?
- Guarantee program admission if complete applied associate and industry-recognized credential
- Accept partners' AAS major-relevant credits as a block to fulfill major requirements
- Expand flexibility & teaching capacity by offering online program option



# Recommendations – Institutional Partnership

- Create shared materials and consistent messaging at both institutions – admissions and curricular information
- Provide regular joint programming on range of degree pathways and career options in the field



Questions?

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