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Research Spotlight - NISTS Award Winner

**2309 - Collaboration in Transfer Student Work: A Cultural Historical Activity Theory Study at Four-Year Institutions**
Partnerships and Collaboration, Leadership and Strategic Planning

Practitioner ability to effectively collaborate with colleagues inside and outside of the institution is a critical function of creating and sustaining transfer student programs and services. This session will share results from a research study on the practice of collaboration in transfer student work from the four-year institution perspective. Interviews and documents from practitioners engaged in transfer student work at two institutions will be analyzed using qualitative methods and an Activity Systems Analysis (ASA) framework.

Jason Mastrogiavanni, *Executive Director, Office for Student Success*
Texas A&M University
Collaboration in Transfer Student Work: A Cultural Historical Activity Theory Study at Four-Year Institutions

- Partnered with NISTS – Research Grant 2020

- Partnered with JNGI – Institutional Site broker
  - Foundations of Excellence for Transfer Students (Transfer-in) Institutions

- Dialogue about the findings – Collaboration, Transfer, and maybe FoE
  - This study focused on how “transfer-affirming cultures” (Handel, 2011) are established and sustained through these collaborations, with particular attention to the collaborative actions within and from the perspective of the four-year institution which appears to need more elaboration in the literature at this point.
Significance of the Study

**COLLABORATION RESEARCH**
- Internal motivations and context
- Group-culture and activity-culture
- New theoretical context and implied methodology for collaboration research

Klein, 2017; Youngs, 2017

**TRANSFER RESEARCH**
- Shine a light on the role of 4-year institutions in cross-institutional transfer activity

Handel, 2011; Jain et al., 2020
Problem – Collaboration Lens

- Collaboration as commodity
- Senior-level
- Institution

- Practice-based
- Between groups/individuals
- Within activity contexts

Kezar, 2001, 2003, 2005b; Bensimon & Neumann, 1992; Whitt et al., 2008; Arcelus, 2008; Klein 2017; Youngs 2017
Problem – Transfer Lens

2-year institutions (National/State Performance Metrics)

4-year institutions (???)

Fink & Jenkins, 2017; Handel, 2011; Jain et al., 2020
Problem – Transfer Lens

2-year institutions
(National/State Performance Metrics)

4-year institutions
(???)

Admissions
(Enrollment Streams)

Faculty
(Curriculum Integrity)

Strempel, 2013
Purpose

Motive directed actions of individual educators at the 4-year institution when engaged in cross-institutional transfer activity
Theoretical Context

CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY (CHAT)

Engeström, 2001; Vygotsky, 1930/1978
Theoretical Context

CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY (CHAT)

Engeström, 2001
Methodological Overview

Qualitative Case Study

Population
- Institutions (FoE transfer self-study)
- Participants (FoE participants)

Data Collection
- Documents (FoEtec)
- Interviews

Incentives
- NISTS Grant
- $50 gift card for Interview
- $50 gift card for transcript review

Data Analysis
- Constant Comparative (Charmaz, 2014)
- Activity Systems Analysis (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010)
FINDINGS
Research Questions

How do educators in four-year institutions contribute toward collaborative, cross-institutional transfer activity?

What motives do educators share while participating in the cross-institutional transfer activity?

How do educator motives differ while participating in the cross-institutional transfer activity based on their organizational goals and shared norms?

How do educator motives in the four-year institution influence the cross-institutional transfer outcomes?
Emergent Themes

- The Value of Including Others
- Communication and Internal Perception of Progress
- Differences in Institutional and Educator Motivations
Private University
- “Metro CC” included as members
- Strong institutional inclusion
- New employee “Darren” immediately added to dimension group
- Student voices not present

State University
- Advisor inclusion beneficial for understanding student exp.
- Perception that committee was formed by who the leaders knew
- Student affairs employee “Ingrid” advocated for lost voices and was successful in getting added
- Student and CC voices not present
Private University
- Covid was a communication challenge, but grace was given
- Faculty “Esther” and “Stanley” given agency to work with counterparts at “Metro CC”
- Faculty “Esther” and “Margaret” valued transparent communication from leadership

State University
- Covid was a communication challenge, but skepticism took hold
- Some indication that communication breakdowns in FoE process led to “leadership-voiced” final report
- “Valerie” de facto leader of continuation historical external communicator now responsible for internal communication
Differences in Institutional and Educator Motivations

Institutional Motivations

◦ Enrollment and institutional finances a common theme
◦ “Chris” and “Tim” from State – Competition and declining high school population
◦ “Margaret” from Private – Metro students’ sense of belonging

Educator Motivations

◦ Varied, but not enrollment or
◦ “Esther” – personal, former transfer student
◦ “Tim” from State – Existential

Manifestations
Institutional Motivations
Educator Motivations

Activity Systems
Tim’s Existential Activity
DISCUSSION
1. Intentional **inclusion** may build **trust** within the 4-year institution activity.
   - or -
   The intentional or unintentional **exclusion** of groups may instill **skepticism** within the 4-year institution activity.

2. The *lack of internal communication* may instill **skepticism** within the 4-year institution activity.

3. Intentional **inclusion** may defend against the establishment of **skepticism** within the 4-year institution activity.
Structures vs. Collaborative Practice
- Four-year recommended structures – Strempel, 2013
- Advisory boards and improve comm - Burack et al., 2014
- State participant – Valerie - State wanted JNGI to provide “answer”
- State participant – Chris – Skeptical of Transfer Implementation Group

Defining Roles Internally & Externally at Four-Year Institutions
- Reflecting on my positionality – Group-culture not necessarily silos
- State participant – Valerie – pre-existing role as external communicator
- State participants – Adrienne & Chris – Explained TIG
**Boundary Spanning (Inclusion)**
- Border crossing – Giroux, 1992; hooks, 1994
- Bilingual/cultural – Barr & Fried, 1981; Fried, 1995
- Boundary spanning – Klein, 2017; Engeström, 2008
- Private participant – Esther’s relationship with institutional leaders
- State participant – Ingrid’s agency – “expert generalist”

**Empathetic Perspective Taking (Inclusion & Trust)**
- Cognitive Functions - Bensimon & Neumann, 1992
- Private participant – Darren extends trust to Metro CC
- Private participant – Stanley thinks about future Metro CC collab

**Perception of Progress (Internal Communication)**
- Vague notion “attend to culture” – Kezar, 2005b
- State participants – Chris, Tim, & Ingrid – Lack of comm & skepticism
- State participant – Valerie – Dual roles; de facto leader & lay person
Questions?
References

- Arcelus, V. J. (2008). In search of a break in the clouds: An ethnographic study of academic and student affairs cultures. [Link](https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/catalog/8354)
References

Supplemental Slides
**Institutional Sites**

**“Private University”**
- Foundations of Excellence Self-Study in 2019
  - Partnered with “Metro Community College”
- Private, religious-affiliated, four-year institution
- Undergrad enrollment - 1,500-3,000 students.
- Urban area location
- Master’s university w/ medium programs (Carnegie)
- In-state tuition is more than $35,000.
- Transfer students 9% of the incoming student pop.
- Transfer admissions requirements:
  - 2.5 GPA
  - at least 15 transfer credits

**“State University”**
- Foundations of Excellence Self-Study in 2019
  - Two-year represented through “Valerie”
- Public, four-year institution
- Undergrad enrollment - 10,000-15,000 students.
- Suburban area location
- Doctoral university (Carnegie)
- In-state tuition is less than $12,000.
- Transfer students 22% of the incoming student pop.
- Transfer admissions requirements:
  - 2.0 GPA
  - at least 12 transfer credits
# Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>“Private University”</strong></th>
<th><strong>“State University”</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Darren”</strong></td>
<td><strong>“Chris”</strong></td>
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<td>Academic Affairs</td>
<td>Enrollment Management</td>
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<td>Middle Manager</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
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<td>Committee Member</td>
<td>Committee Chair</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>“Stanley”</strong></td>
<td><strong>“Ingrid”</strong></td>
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<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Student Affairs</td>
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<td>Middle Manager</td>
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<td><strong>“Jill”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>“Tim”</strong></td>
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Collection and Analysis Order

1. Document Collection
2. Open Coding (Document only)
3. Interview Collection
4. Open Coding (Interview only)

Sub-processes:
- Focused Coding (Document & Interview)
- Selective Coding (Document & Interview)
### Open Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Systems Analysis</th>
<th>Collaborative Qualities</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>UnCollaborative Qualities</th>
<th>Transfer Elements (Old Recommendations)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASA-Action</td>
<td>CQ-Actionable</td>
<td>MO-Assessment Data</td>
<td>UQ-Barriers</td>
<td>REC-Academic Support</td>
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<td>ASA-Community</td>
<td>CQ-Barrier Elimination</td>
<td>MO-Complaints</td>
<td>UQ-Buy-in</td>
<td>REC-Administrator</td>
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<td>ASA-Division of Labor</td>
<td>CQ-Change</td>
<td>MO-Consistency</td>
<td>UQ-Competition</td>
<td>REC-Admissions</td>
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<td>ASA-Object</td>
<td>CQ-Collaborative Hist.</td>
<td>MO-External Pressure</td>
<td>UQ-Different Values</td>
<td>REC-Advising</td>
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<td>ASA-Outcome</td>
<td>CQ-Communication</td>
<td>MO-Financial Benefit</td>
<td>UQ-Discrim. Exclusion</td>
<td>REC-Articulation</td>
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<td>ASA-Rules</td>
<td>CQ-Compromise</td>
<td>MO-Improvement</td>
<td>UQ-Hopelessness</td>
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<td>ASA-Covid</td>
<td>CQ-Documentation</td>
<td>MO-Institutional Status</td>
<td>UQ-Not Priority</td>
<td>REC-Bridge Initiatives</td>
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<td>ASA-Subject</td>
<td>CQ-Feedback</td>
<td>MO-Intrinsic</td>
<td>UQ-Not Sharing Info</td>
<td>REC-CC</td>
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<td>ASA-Tension</td>
<td>CQ-Generative</td>
<td>MO-Making Decisions</td>
<td>UQ-Outsourcing</td>
<td>REC-Communication</td>
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<td>ASA-Tool</td>
<td>CQ-Good Data Story</td>
<td>MO-Need Understand</td>
<td>UQ-Poor Comm.</td>
<td>REC-Coordination</td>
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<td>CQ-Improvement</td>
<td>MO-Resource Shortage</td>
<td>UQ-Poor Data Story</td>
<td>REC-Curriculum Align.</td>
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<td>CQ-Inclusion of Others</td>
<td>MO-ROI</td>
<td>UQ-Poor Service</td>
<td>REC-Early Alert</td>
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<td>CQ-Institutional Size</td>
<td>MO-Service</td>
<td>UQ-Reactonary</td>
<td>REC-Employee Diver.</td>
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<td>CQ-Intentionality</td>
<td>MO-Student Belong</td>
<td>UQ-Resistance to Chg.</td>
<td>REC-Faculty</td>
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<td>CQ-Learning</td>
<td>MO-Student Diversity</td>
<td>UQ-Silos</td>
<td>REC-Family Services</td>
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<td>CQ-Name Collab.</td>
<td>MO-Student Enrollment</td>
<td>UQ-Skepticism</td>
<td>REC-Financial Aid</td>
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<td>CQ-Perspective Taking</td>
<td>MO-Student Equity</td>
<td>UQ-Status Quo</td>
<td>REC-Governing Body</td>
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<td>CQ-Relationships</td>
<td>MO-Student Experience</td>
<td>UQ-Top Down</td>
<td>REC-Grass Roots</td>
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<td>CQ-Supportive Enc.</td>
<td>MO-Student Know.</td>
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<td>REC-Infrastructure</td>
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<td>CQ-Time Invested</td>
<td>MO-Student Metric</td>
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<td>REC-Investment</td>
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<td>CQ-Trust</td>
<td>MO-Student Prep</td>
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<td>REC-Learning Exp.</td>
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<td>MO-Related</td>
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<td>REC-Marketing</td>
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### Collaborative Qualities
- Actionable
- Barrier Elimination
- Change
- Collaborative Hist.
- Communication
- Compromise
- Documentation
- Feedback
- Generative
- Good Data Story
- Improvement
- Inclusion of Others
- Incremental
- Institutional Size
- Intentionality
- Learning
- Name Collab.
- Perspective Taking
- Relationships
- Supportive Enc.
- Time Invested
- Trust

### Motivation
- Assessment Data
- Complaints
- Consistency
- External Pressure
- Financial Benefit
- Improvement
- Institutional Status
- Intrinsic
- Making Decisions
- Need Understand
- Resource Shortage
- ROI
- Service
- Student Belong
- Student Diversity
- Student Enrollment
- Student Equity
- Student Experience
- Student Know.
- Student Metric
- Student Prep
- Related

### UnCollaborative Qualities
- Barriers
- Buy-in
- Competition
- Different Values
- Discrim. Exclusion
- Distress
- Not Priority
- Not Sharing Info
- Outsourcing
- Poor Comm.
- Poor Data Story
- Poor Service
- Reactionary
- Resistance to Chg.
- Silos
- Skepticism
- Status Quo
- Top Down

### Transfer Elements (Old Recommendations)
- Academic Support
- Administrator
- Admissions
- Advising
- Articulation
- Assessment
- Bridge Initiatives
- CC
- Communication
- Coordination
- Curriculum Align.
- Early Alert
- Employee Diver.
- Faculty
- Family Services
- Financial Aid
- Governing Body
- Grass Roots
- Infrastructure
- Investment
- Learning Exp.
- Marketing
- Mentorship
- Orientation
- Policy Alignment
- PostMatric
- PreMatric
- Relationships
- Representation
- Residence
- Reverse Transfer
- Rewards
- Seminar
- Shared Value
- Student Cnty.
- System
- Transfer Students
- Understand
# Focused Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Systems Analysis</th>
<th>VIO - Value of Including Others</th>
<th>CIP - Communication and Progress</th>
<th>DIEM - Different Institutional and Educator Motivations</th>
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<td>◦ Learning from Others</td>
<td>◦ Grass Roots Comm</td>
<td>◦ Institutional Motivations</td>
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<td>◦ Leadership Comm</td>
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<td>◦ Forming Relationships</td>
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<td>◦ Lament of Lost Voices</td>
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Selective Coding

Activity Systems Analysis

- ASA-Action
- ASA-Community
- ASA-Division of Labor
- ASA-Object
- ASA-Outcome
- ASA-Rules
  - ASA-Covid
- ASA-Subject
- ASA-Tension
- ASA-Tool
Activity Systems Analysis
Yamagata-Lynch 2010;
Engeström, 2015;
Leon'tev, 1974/1981;
Vygotsky, 1930/1978
Example Manifestations - The Value of Including Others

Learning from Others - Valerie from State – Learning about email

- Valerie described an improvement made to an email user-interface. The institution was trying to figure out why students were not checking their email. She said that it was from advisors that they learned the interface needed to be explicit for students because the existing interface did not use the word “email”.

Empathizing with Different Perspectives - Darren from Private – Two-year needs

- “if we’re going to collaborate effectively with another partner it can’t be all about us. So, making sure we’re thinking about what our partners need, how we can support our partners so that they’re not just coming to serve our ends and our goals. So, make sure you’re asking your partners, what do they need? how can we help them? how can we support them? Because they have goals, too, and maybe we can collaborate and support their goals.”

Forming Relationships - Margaret from Private – Reflected on first name basis

- “He’s also the [specific title] and maybe something else in his title. I call him [Name]. ... She runs our [student affairs] office, and she has some title that starts with Dean of something, but again I know her as [Name]. So, we don’t bother much with titles at [Private], I’m finding out as I’m telling you this.”

Lament of Lost Voices - Ingrid from State – Insight into who needed to be included

- This department might be a good department to have here because they’re interconnected in this specific way. Maybe not as much as records is or financial aid is, but their vantage point might offer a very specific lens that is able to carry the conversation further.
Tensions

- Covid restrictions prevented focus group and feedback meeting tool from occurring as intended
- Covid restrictions prevented communication of progress
- University and state transfer policy affects different students differently
- Faculty are frustrated that adult education was cancelled

Subject
- Private
- University
- Leadership

Tool
- FoE self-study
- Survey, Focus group
- Feedback meetings

Object
- Enrollment/Financial
- VETTED study
- Collaboration with Two-year partner
- Inclusion
- Implementation

Outcome
- Trust
- Agency to act on curricular relationships

Rules
- COVID restrictions
- Curriculum policy
- State policy
- Include broadly
- Communicate proactively/ openly

Community
- Metro Community College
- Competitor institutions
- Student voices
- Student advisee
- Dimension group co-chairs
- Steering committee
- Faculty - Stanley, Esther, Margaret
- AA - Darren, Jill

Division of Labor
- Empower academic programs
- Include others
- Dedicated adult education resources
**Subject**
Darren

**Rules**
COVID restrictions

**Community**
- Dimension group
- Steering committee
- Leadership
- Metro Community College

**Division of Labor**
Outsider perspective
Inclusion

**Object**
- New, Happy to say “yes”
- Learn campus
- Make connections
- Communication on progress

**Tool**
FoE self-study Survey

**Outcome**
- Campus network
  - Trust
  - Extra-campus network

**Darren’s Perceived Metro Institution Activity**

**Subject**
Colleagues at Metro

**Object**
Metro’s Needs

**Division of Labor**
Investing in partnership with Private

**Tensions**
a - Potential tension between investing in partnership and Metro’s needs
Tensions:

a - Community was initially formed based on relationships, Ingrid advocated for others to be included
b - Helping community understand how rules designed for FTIC students were inequitable for transfer students
c - Skepticism regarding progress felt in the community
Example Manifestations - Communication and Internal Perception of Progress

Grass Roots Communication - Esther from Private – Curricular path comm established trust
◦ “At least from the departmental standpoint, I think everyone was somewhat relieved to see that we sort of had clear cut requirements being articulated to the community college, because we hated it when students came from the community college with all these credits that basically didn’t count towards their final degree”.

Leadership Communication - Darren from Private – More progress updates
◦ “I would love to hear more about the actions. I’d love to hear more about, “hey we did this thing, hey we did this thing, this is one of the action items, guess what we’re doing that as of today”. It has been a little quiet as far as action items go. And I think Covid is some of that. Everything got pushed back. Our timelines all got pushed back”.

Leadership Communication - Valerie from State – Quasi-lead role and internal comm
◦ Tim, Chris, and Ingrid were unaware of communication to students or any two-year partners. However, Valerie indicated in her interview that she was the one who personally communicated to Public’s two-year institutional partners. No other participant was aware this had occurred.

External Factors in Communicating Progress - Chris – Evidence from piecemeal sub reports
◦ “I remember looking at the recommendations that were made from each of the committees and then looking at some of the evidence that they use to support those recommendations. I felt that there were some disconnect at times between those two”.
Tool: FoE self-study Survey

Subject: Esther

Object: Improve student experience
        Personal transfer experience

Outcome: Articulation clarity
         Better policy and communication to student
         Trust

Rules:
COVID restrictions
Tenure
Administration changes

Community:
Dimension group
Steering committee
Leadership
Metro Community College
Faculty at other institutions

Division of Labor:
Advising/articulation improvements

Esther's Perceived Other Institution Activity

Subject: Faculty at other institution

Rules:
Tenure

Community:
Leadership

Tensions:
a - Tenure practice keeps honest communication from happening
Tensions:

a - Committee chairs were less invested in the objective, skeptical of tangible outcome
b - Committee chairs did not complete some reports
c - Community may have been formed by relationships, not intentional transfer strategy
d - Lack of communication from Leadership to community, skepticism ensues; hinders campus buy-in for improvement
e - Transfer Implementation Group not communicating with campus community about progress
f - State leadership have not formally defined the role of internal transfer work and communication
**Tensions**

a - State community looks to her as leader because of title and because of co-leader status

b - Valerie’s role has historically focused on external communication, not internal communication

c - Valerie sees the good work in areas of campus, but has not seen her role in communicating that good work or facilitating
Example Manifestations - Differences in Institutional and Educator Motivations

Institutional Motivations - Margaret from Private – Metro students' sense of belonging
- “Basically, we wanted [Metro] students to feel like they were [Private] students, the whole way. And just that they were starting out at [Metro] and then coming over to us permanently, but even in that time that they had access to the amenities, of a four-year college”.

Institutional Motivations - Chris from State – Competition and declining hs population
- “We feel that our policies are competitive in that area. But, knowing that as our high school population in [Public’s State] continues to drop for the next 10 years or so, we’re going to be relying even more so on our transfer student population for enrollment. And so, we thought that would be an opportunity to review our whole approach to student transfer and make sure that we’re doing the things that we need to do to be competitive”.

Educator Motivations - Darren from Private – Help Student
- “we see an opportunity to help students attain their 4-yr degree from us in a more affordable way through effective partnerships with [Metro]. We just haven’t effectively implemented those pathways—hence, the motivation for the transfer self-study”.

Educator Motivations - Tim from State – Existential
- “I can’t count the number of really sharp young professional advisors that we have lost to the [Public’s four-year competitor]. And well, it’s understandable, because the [Public’s four-year competitor] doesn’t have the enrollment issues we have. They want to enroll more students; they just turn on the tap. The dynamic is a little bit different for us. ... And as individuals leave, ... those of us who remain wondering, “my God, so will they let us replace this one?”
Tensions
a - Tim blamed resource shortage on state-wide dynamics and Governing body, resource constraints impact advising responsibilities
b - Tim was skeptical that Governing body would allow his objectives to happen
c - Tim appreciated two-year partner involvement, but others disputed that they were even involved
d - Inconsistency in college advising practices
End