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International Reverse Transfer in Iowa: Perspectives from Both Sides

Current Research – *NISTS Research Grant Winner*

This study used a mixed methods research design to study transfer swirl activities among international students. We focused on international reverse transfers who have been transferring from four-year institutions to community colleges. An online survey and face-to-face interviews were conducted to obtain perspectives from international students who are enrolled in both four-year and two-year institutions. Findings provide practical implications to higher education professionals who are interested in transfer and/or working with international students.

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International Reverse Transfer in Iowa: Perspectives from Both Sides

Yu (April) Chen, Louisiana State University

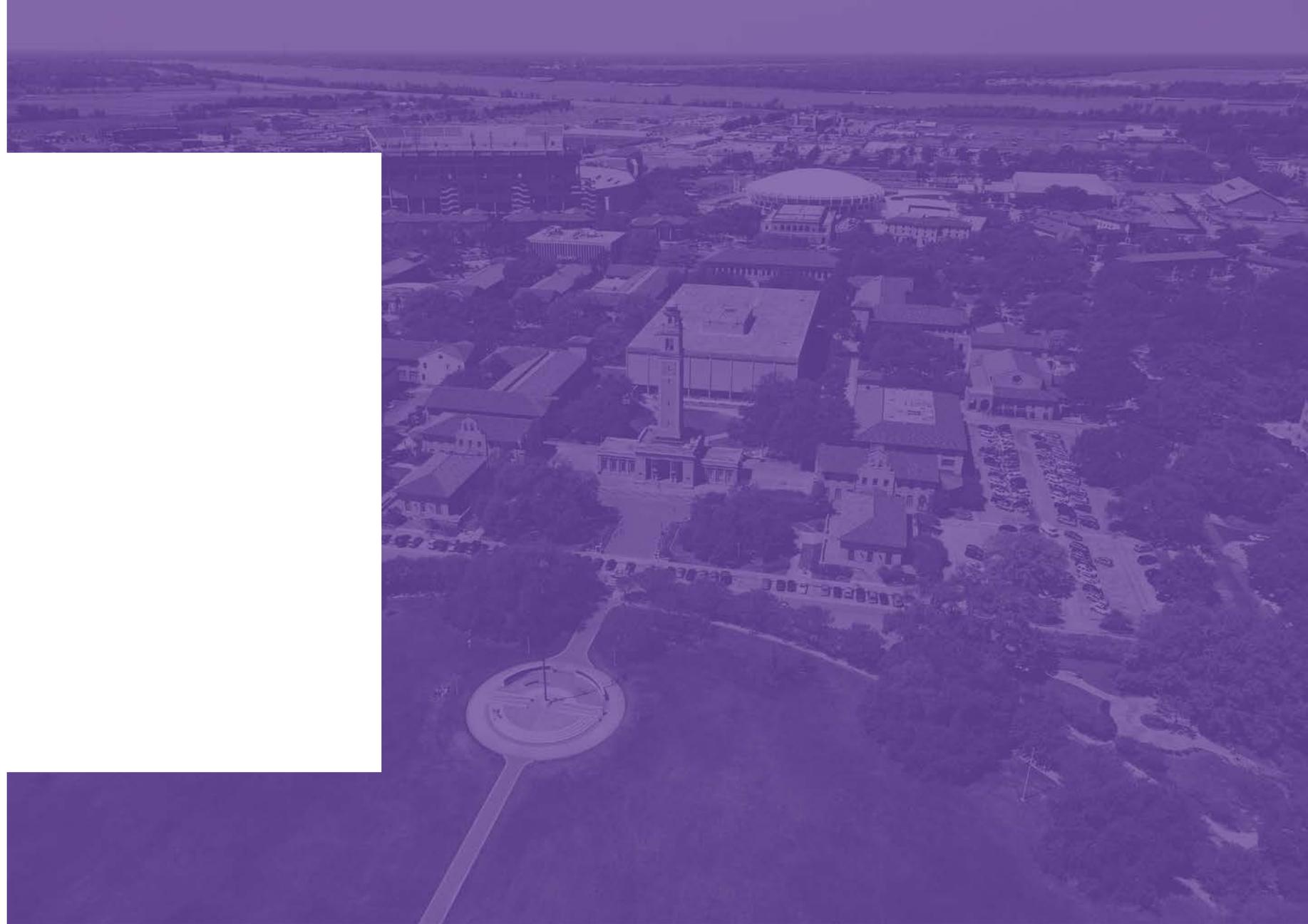
Linda Serra Hagedorn, Iowa State University

Ran Li, Iowa State University



Agenda

- Background
- Objectives
- Methods
- Findings
- Implications



Background

- Defining Reverse Transfer:
The act of transferring from four-year institutions to two-year community colleges
- National Picture:
10%-15% of the four-year students have reverse transferred into a community college at least once.

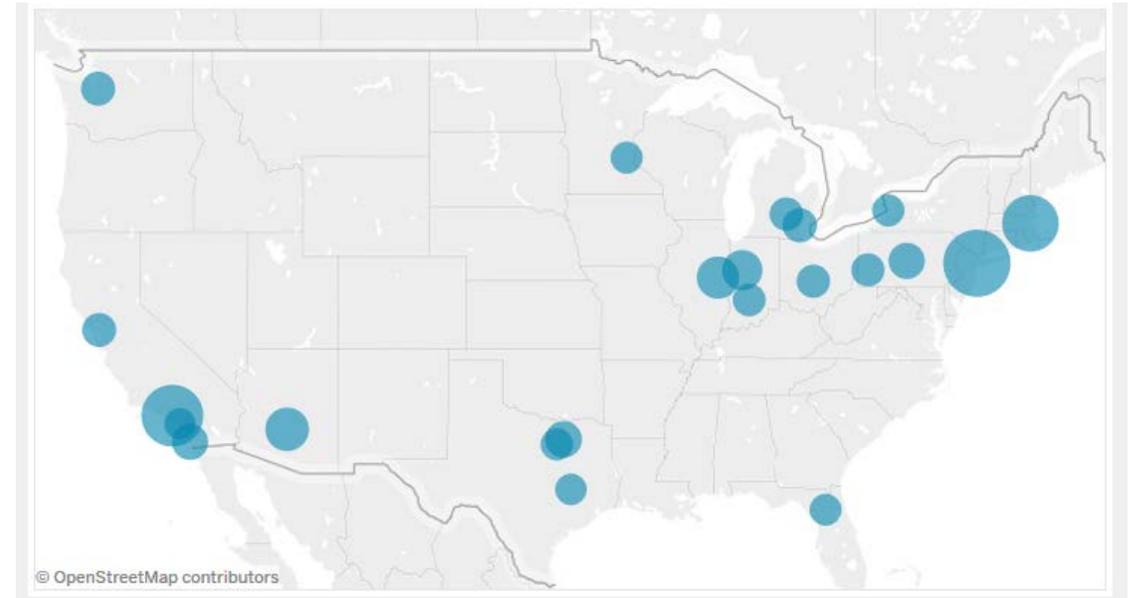
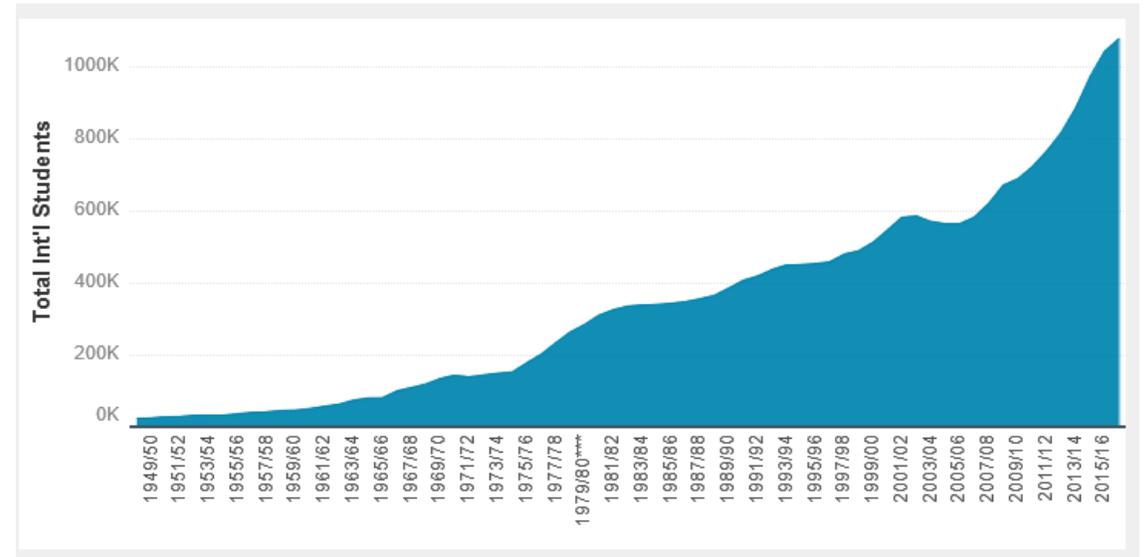
Background

- Types of reverse transfer students (Townsend & Denver, 1999)

Undergraduate Reverse Transfer Students (URTS)	Temporary Reverse Transfer Students (TRTS)	Post-baccalaureate Reverse Transfer Students (PRTS)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No immediate plan to transfer back to four-year institutions• Changes in education plans, poor academic performance, and/or financial concerns• Only 15% of the URTS will return to a four-year institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take courses at a community college temporarily (i.e., online or during summer),• Has a goal of transferring back to four-year and complete a bachelor degree.• Attracted by lower cost, convenient class locations, smaller classroom sizes, and chances to improve GPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Already have a bachelor degree• Need additional professional training in order to satisfy job requirements or switch to a new occupation

Background

- International Enrollment in the U.S.
 - Historically increasing international enrollment
 - 18.3% of the international undergraduate enrollment is within community colleges
 - General reasons for attending community colleges: lower college entry requirements, lower tuition costs, and the “access bridge” function
 - International students are more academic prepared than their domestic counterparts.



Objectives

- Purpose:

Obtain a comprehensive understanding of international reverse transfer phenomenon through an investigation of their decision-making process and transfer experiences.

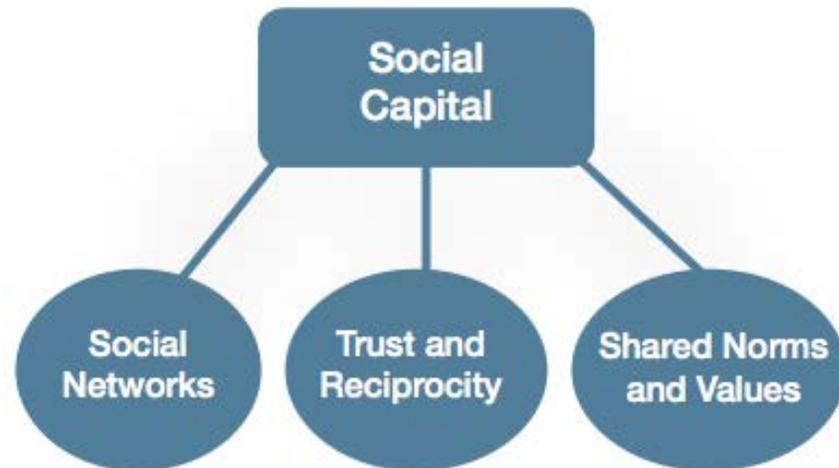
Objectives

- Research Question

1. What are the demographic of international students who have reverse transferred to a 2-year community college? How do their characteristics compare to those who did not/do not intend to reverse transfer?
2. How do international reverse transfers come to understand the function of a U.S. community college?
3. What is the decision-making process of reverse transfer for international students?
4. After arriving at a community college, what kind of support will benefit international students?

Research Design

- Theoretical Framework: Social Capital Theory
- Rationale:



- International students may be stereotypically viewed as young adults from advantaged families in their countries.
- However, many of them possess medium to high economic capital but low social capital that is needed to succeed in a U.S. higher education institution.

Quantitative Research Design

- International students who are enrolled in both four-year and two-year institutions are invited to participate in an online survey.
- Three institutions participated: one four-year university, and two community colleges, all located in the state of Iowa
- Lists of international students were provided by the institution.
- Those who completed the survey will enter a random poll for winning one of the four \$25 bookstore gift card.

Q4 What was your average grade in the past semesters (Fall 2016)?

	A or A+ (1)	A- (2)	B+ (3)	B (4)	B- (5)	C+ (6)	C (7)	C- (8)	D or below (9)	Not applicable (10)
In four-year University (i.e., Iowa State University) (1)	<input type="radio"/>									
In community college (i.e., DMACC) (2)	<input type="radio"/>									

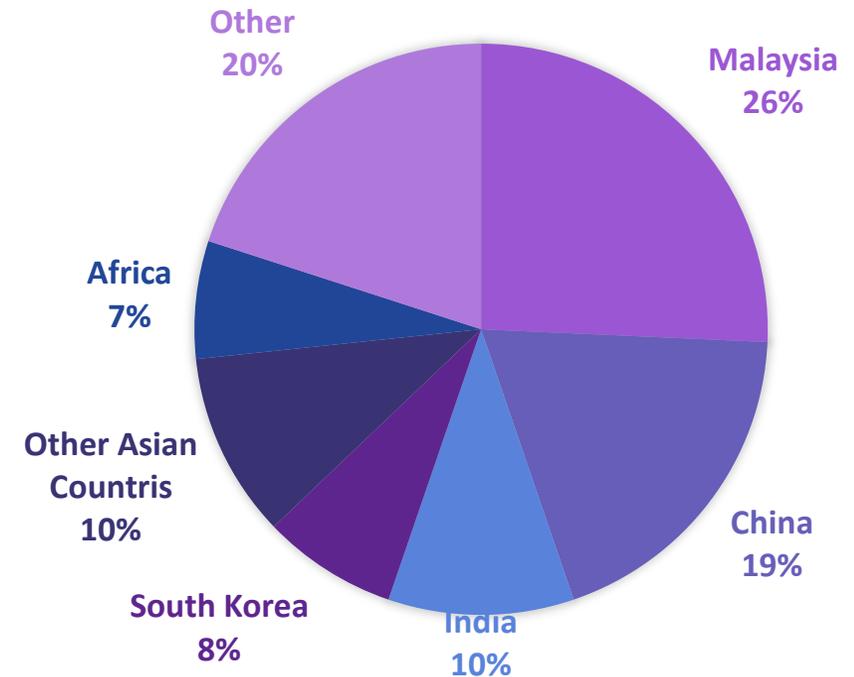
Q5 Which one(s) of the followings describe your education plan in the near future?

	Definitely not (1)	Probably not (2)	Maybe (3)	Probably yes (4)	Definitely yes (5)
Take course only at the 4-year college/university (1)	<input type="radio"/>				
Take some of the courses at a community college (7)	<input type="radio"/>				
Transfer to another 4-year college/university (2)	<input type="radio"/>				
Become full-time students at a community college (4)	<input type="radio"/>				
Become full-time students at a community college, and then transfer back to the 4-year college/university (5)	<input type="radio"/>				

Quantitative Findings

- Total sample $n=105$, with 86 responses from a four-year institution and 19 responses from two community colleges
- Demographics:
 - Equal distribution of males versus females (50.5% female)
 - Most of the participants (85%) are traditional students (age 18-24 years old)
 - More than 80% are not speaking English as native language

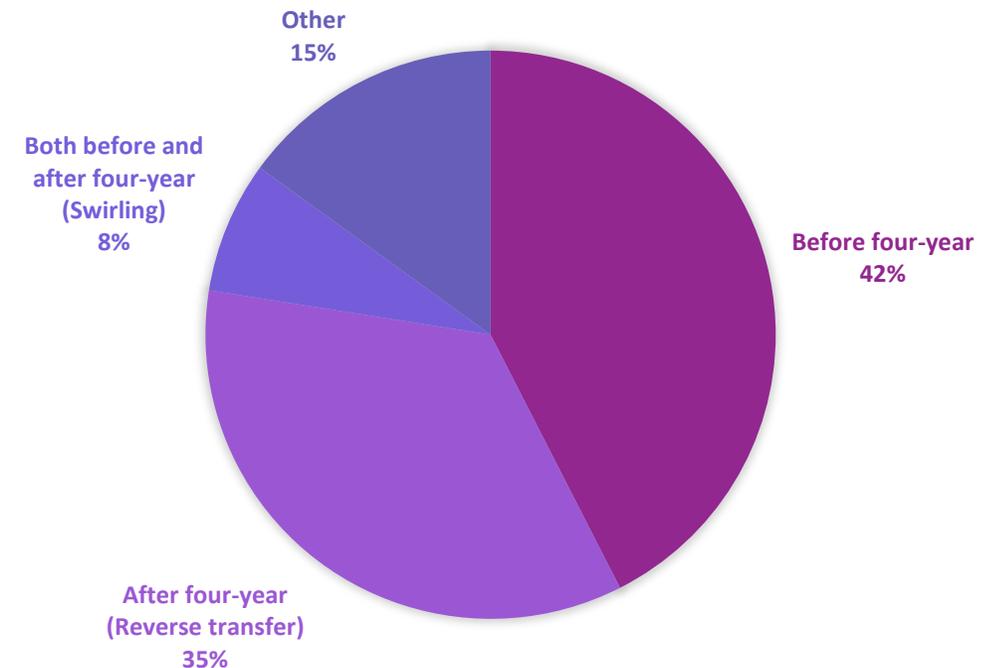
NATIONALITY BREAKDOWN



Quantitative Findings

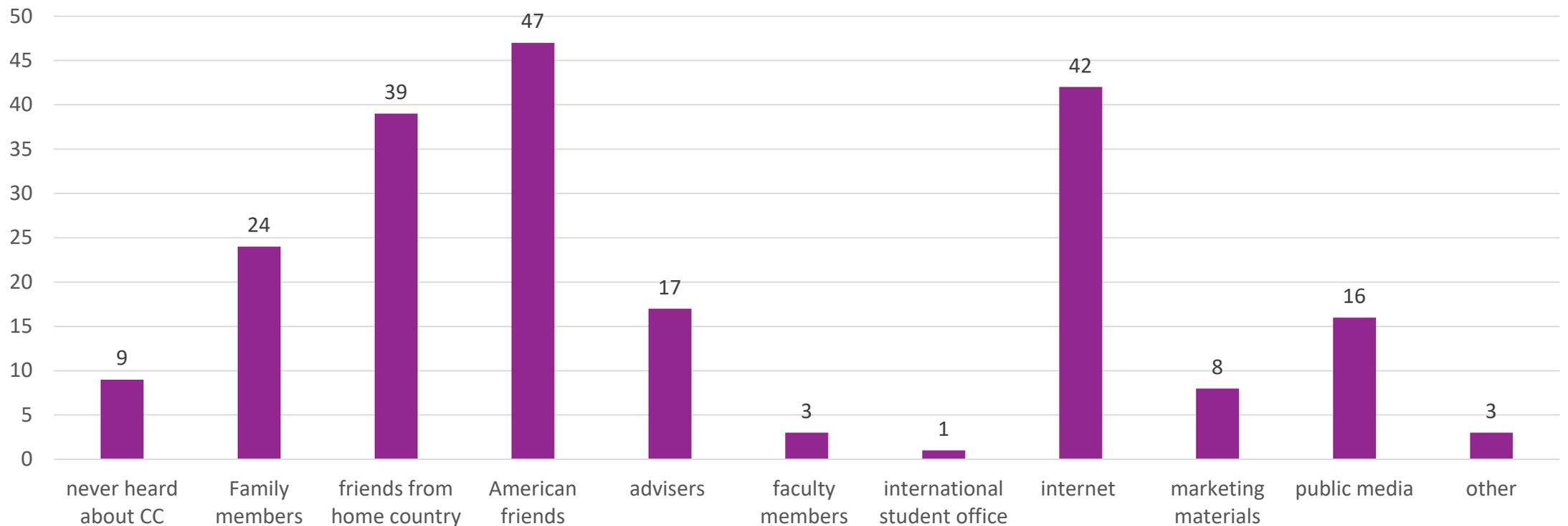
- Reverse transfer status
 - Among 105 responses, 40 international students had experiences with community colleges. About half of them were enrolled in a four-year institution; another half were enrolled in a community college.
 - 35% of them, or 14 students can be identified as reverse transfer students

REVERSE TRANSFER STATUS



Quantitative Findings

- Resources of Social capital: Where did you learn about community college? (n=105)



Qualitative Research Design

- Two institutions participated in the quantitative data collection: one four-year university and one community college, both located in the state of Iowa
- 10 International reverse transfers were interviewed individually.
- Interview participants were recruited through
 - Survey
 - Contact from an international student list
 - Snow ball
- Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated (if conducted in a foreign language)
- Incentives: every interview participants received \$15 bookstore gift card.

Findings

- Interview Participants' Profile

Pseudo Name	Age	Gender	Major	Nationality	Type	Current Enrollment
Terra	21	Female	Liberal Arts and Sciences	China	URTS	Full time 2-year
Brandon	21	Male	Liberal Arts and Sciences	China	URTS	Full time 2-year
Victor	25	Male	Liberal Arts and Sciences	China	PRTS	Full time 2-year
Chris	20	Male	Business	India	URTS	Full time 2-year
Lizy	21	Female	Biology	Malaysia	TRTS	Full time 4-year
Eric	20	Male	Civil Engineering	India	URTS	Full time 4-year
Amber	19	Female	Animal Science	China	TRTS	Full time 4-year
Shelley	22	Female	Industrial Engineering	Malaysia	TRTS	Full time 4-year
Olivia	21	Female	Advertising	Malaysia	TRTS	Full time 4-year
Maddie	28	Female	Accounting	China	TRTS	Full time 4-year

Qualitative Findings

URTS: Community college as a safety net

- Life Story of Terra, interviewed via phone in Spring 2017
- By the time of interview, she is a full-time student at a community college, studying within the department of liberal arts and sciences.

Terra, a female student from Shanghai, China, came to the United States in spring of 2015. Her mother encouraged her to study abroad. Thus, she consulted in the [study abroad agency](#) and decided to study in the United State. The initial four-year university she attended offered her a [scholarship](#). Her major is liberal arts, focusing on economics, and she plans to pursuit master degree.

She transferred to a community college in fall of 2016 due to the fact that she was caught [plagiarism](#) and was [suspend](#) for a year.

She did not want to worry her parents and she wanted to stay in the U.S. Her understanding about community college was limited to the vocational training and associate degree before she actually enrolled. Her thoughts changed after she set her foot in the community college. She thought that the class size is smaller than four-year colleges, professors are more approachable, and the credits she earned can be transferred back to the four-year colleges. She thinks community college is the springboard for international students, where they can gradually get used to the pattern and lifestyle in the States.

Qualitative Findings

TRTS: Community college as a helping tool

- Life Story of Maddie, interviewed face-to-face in the campus of a four-year university in Spring 2017
- By the time of interview, she is a full-time graduate student in accounting in a four-year university.

Maddie, a female student from China, came to the United States in August 2013 to pursue the master degree in higher education. She had a bachelor's degree in English literature major. After college, she worked as an auditor in a bank for about three years.

During the time of interview, she is working on her second master degree in accounting. After she got her first master degree in 2015, she took her OPT Visa and work with American high school students for different companies.

There were bumps on the roads in the first semester for Maddie. She needs to fulfill some [prerequisites](#) before starting her degree. She completed these requirements in a community college due to its [cheaper tuition](#) and [flexible schedule](#). Since her very first acknowledgement about community colleges was through a social occasion with her Chinese friends, she decided to do her own research.

She said that she would recommend new international students to explore and take courses in community colleges.

Qualitative Findings

PRTS: non-academic purposes

- Only one participant is classified as a PRTS
- Life story of Victor, interviewed face-to-face inside the community college campus in Spring 2017

Victor, came to the U.S. after finishing high school in fall 2010. He is originally from Sichuan, China. He thought study abroad could mature his mind and learn to become independent, so he chose the United States as the destination to obtain higher education degree. Thus he found the study abroad agency and started the application process. Before coming to a community college, he had got dual bachelor degrees in Mathematics and Computer Science

After Victor got his bachelor degree in 2015, he used the **OPT** to work as a car dealer. During this time, his family wanted him to apply for permanent residency in the U.S., thus, they hired a lawyer and filed the case. In order to stay in the United States and continue the green card application, going back to school and get the **student VISA** would be the most efficient way. Therefore, he registered as a student in a community college. This time, he hired the study abroad agent as well.

He thinks that community college is a friendly place for starters, the tuition is rather cheap comparing to the four-year colleges and the class materials is comparatively easier to the four-year colleges.

Qualitative Findings

Non-family resources for social capital

- Previous literature: family support, interactions, and networks as important resources for accumulating social capital
- For international reverse transfers, non-family resources such as peers and institutional agents may be more important.
- 8 out of 10 participants had very little to no knowledge about community colleges prior to their arrivals. They obtained knowledge and skills from
 - Friends
 - Previous reverse transfers
 - Academic advisors

Implications

International Reverse Transfers

- Generally fall into the three types that was defined for domestic reverse transfers:
 - URTS --- experienced challenges in four-year universities, reverse transferred for a rescue. Many of them are strongly motivated and more academically prepared for transferring back to a four-year university.
 - TRTS --- learned benefits of taking community college courses (on-line and summer courses).
 - PRTS --- enrolled in community college for immigration status related issues.
- Provide more official and accurate information about community colleges to international students through multiple means: advisors, website links, international student organizations, etc.

Implications

International Students

- Use cautious when applying empirically proved theories and concepts

Example: upper-middle class students have more advantages economically, socially, culturally and academically.

- Challenging existed assumptions

Example: what course(s) can provide a relatively gentle start for an international freshmen?

A. Western Civilization B. Introduction to Gender Studies C. Statistics for Business

D. Writing and Rhetoric E. Elements of Calculus I

- The role of agencies

Implications

Reverse Transfers

- Community college professionals: reinforce the recognition about the three types of reverse transfers and their different needs
- Four-year professionals: the term “transfer students” may be broader than we imagine.
 - Vertical transfers
 - Lateral transfers
 - Previous reverse transfers
 - Swirling students

Questions

