

## ABSTRACT

### POLICY AWARENESS IN TEACHER EDUCATION: COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS VERSUS NON-TRANSFER STUDENTS

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Teacher preparation programs are critical to study given current teacher shortages, as well as concerns over teacher quality. Community colleges can provide additional teacher candidates in addition to broadening student diversity in four-year teaching programs. Incoming teacher candidates may find the numerous departmental and state policies bewildering. Thus, successful navigation of teaching programs is dependent upon understanding policy requirements that lead to graduation and certification.

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a significant difference in community college transfer student and university non-transfer student policy awareness in a teacher education program at a four-year university. This study is significant given the paucity of research regarding policy knowledge comparing transfer and non-transfer student knowledge. Moreover, it is unknown how policy awareness impacts how students maneuver through a teacher education program.

A causal-comparative (ex post facto), quantitative research design was used in this study. An on-line survey instrument was used to query perceptions on policy awareness, determine content knowledge of teacher education policy, and gather demographic information to profile students. The response rate was 46%. The study used

an expert panel and a pilot study group to determine face validity of the survey instrument. Cross's (1981) Barriers Theory and Perry's (1970, 1981) Schema of Intellectual Development were used to analyze short answer items.

Two-tailed independent *t*-tests and chi-square tests were used to analyze data at a significance level of 0.05. Results of the study demonstrated that there was not a significant difference between community college transfer students and non-transfer university students on overall policy awareness. Nonetheless, there were significant differences on individual items. Non-transfer students better understood the midtier experience, utilized counseling more often, were younger, and lived closer to campus than transfer students. Short answer findings indicated that although there were no significant differences in cognitive test scores between groups, over half of all participants experienced difficulty in interpreting policy. Emerging themes indicated areas of concern with advisement inconsistency, ineffective informational communication, and volume of policies.

The barriers and facilitators of policy awareness in teacher education found in this research provide university personnel with specific action items. Findings indicate that leaders in teacher education need to simplify and clarify program policies and update staff so students receive accurate information. Leaders could reduce policy confusion by taking a holistic, rather than an additive, approach to policy infusion resulting in a streamlined program. University administrators now have some assurance that information relayed to transfer students prepares them in a similar manner as university-based students. This knowledge may be of little solace to administrators, however, since all students had little knowledge of policies in several key areas.

